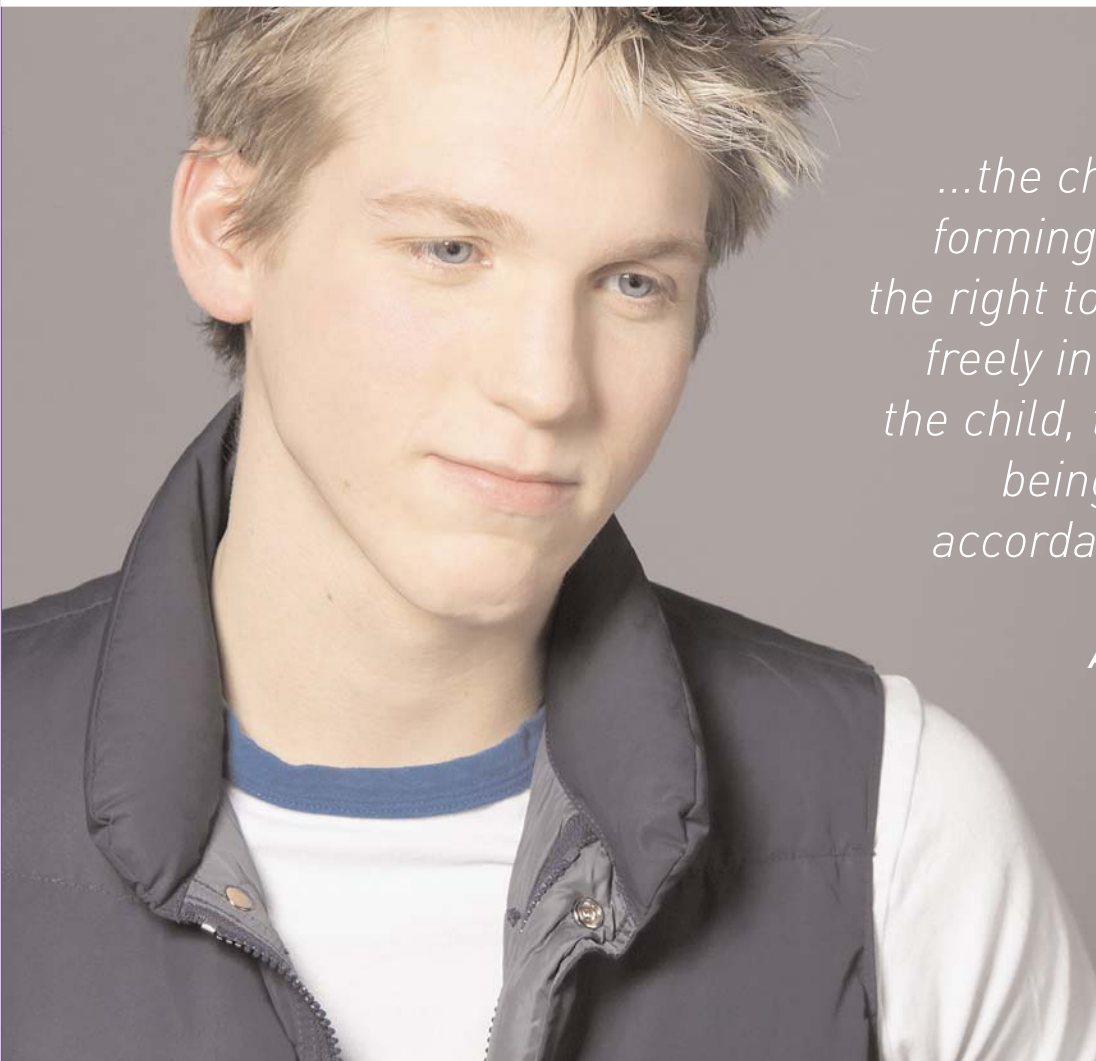


LILAC

leading improvements
for looked-after children



...the child who is capable of forming his or her view (has) the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

the fostering network
the voice of foster care





The development of this project has taken place within the context of a Government commitment to improving the life chances of all children as set out in *Every Child Matters* with its aims of ensuring all children:

- *be healthy*
- *stay safe*
- *enjoy and achieve in life*
- *make a positive contribution*
- *achieve economic wellbeing.*

However, as stated by Alan Johnson in his foreword to *Care Matters: transforming the lives of children and young people in care* (October 2006): 'Unfortunately, at the moment our care system fails to enable most children who enter it to achieve these aspirations. This is despite the efforts of so many committed people and the determination and resilience of children themselves.'

The proposals for change as set out in *Care Matters* address how the state can be a better corporate parent for those in, or leaving, the care system. Being more ambitious for children and young people is welcome, as are many of the aims set, including fewer placement moves; receiving a first class education; access to social work support around the clock; enhanced opportunities for leisure activities; and enabling young people to move on from care in a gradual and well-prepared way. However, to make it happen is another matter and children and young people have much to contribute, if only given the opportunity. Some local authorities already provide opportunities for children and young people to have a voice but others have a long way to go. The measures proposed in *Care Matters* include various ways in which they can have a voice through the new Children in Care Councils and the development of the local authority Pledge and better opportunities to contribute to their individual care planning.

The development of LILAC is both timely and highly relevant as it is the ultimate form of participation, with care-experienced young people being fully involved in inspecting services that they have experienced – **experts by experience.**



the project

LILAC was initiated by A National Voice, managed in partnership with the Fostering Network and the National Leaving Care Advisory Service, supported and funded by SCIE and CSCI but developed and delivered by care-experienced young people.

The key purpose of LILAC is to draw upon the experiences and expertise of care-experienced young people to improve the policy and practice of local authorities in how they involve and consult with looked-after children and care leavers.

It will do this by working with young people to:

- *Develop a quality framework for involvement policy and practice targeting young people in, and leaving, care.*
- *Use this framework to carry out assessments of local authority or agency services.*
- *Provide each local authority with a report, recommendations and advice that will help local authorities further improve their policy and practice.*
- *Seek to influence national policy and practice by publishing an evaluation of the project and encouraging more widespread use of the quality standards and assessment process.*

The standards and criteria developed cover three key areas of participation:

- *The involvement of service users in the planning and evaluation of services.*
- *The involvement of service users in tailoring individual packages of care.*
- *The effectiveness of mechanisms to handle complaints.*



the team

The team, led by a care-experienced project co-ordinator, encapsulates a wide range of expertise and care experience (adoption, fostering, residential care, kinship care). Some are working, others at university, some married and another a parent.

'I've always seen my role as being part of the team but, more importantly, to facilitate and be there for the young people as support which is key for the day-to-day functioning of a team.' (Lucy, project leader)

the work

Undertaken in only 10 months the work has included:

- *Recruitment of the team.*
- *Training weekends and days, including training as inspectors.*
- *Developing and refining standards and criteria.*
- *Compiling the LILAC manual.*
- *Piloting the work in two local authorities.*
- *Evaluation and dissemination.*

the standards

Shared values

The local authority adopts shared values that enable children and young people to be actively involved in services that directly affect them, including honesty about what can and cannot be changed and any limitations due to the organisation's responsibilities.

Style of leadership

Senior managers and elected members adopt a style of leadership that champions and promotes the involvement of young people at all levels of the local authority. They demonstrate the need to work in partnership with young people.

Structures

Structures are in place that ensure that young people are involved in:

- *the planning and evaluation of services*
- *developing and reviewing individual packages of care*
- *mechanisms to handle complaints and provide advocacy.*

These structures are flexible; do not rely on the involvement of a small group of articulate young people and take account of everyone's different abilities.

Staff

Staff support and contribute to practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people in services that affect them.

Recruitment and selection

Young people should be involved in the recruitment and selection of all staff and carers who will work with them or be responsible for them.

Care planning and review

Children and young people should feel involved in the decision making that affects their lives and all decisions about them should be fully explained. All decision making, planning and review processes should be easily understood.

Complaints and advocacy

Children and young people should know what to do if they are not happy with the way they are being treated and feel that their complaint will be listened to and treated seriously. The local authority complaints procedure should comply with all statutory regulations and have had young people involved in its drafting. Young people should have access to an advocate if they wish.

the messages: what have we learnt?

- *The value of the subtle and intricate observations and judgements that care-experienced young people can make because they are **experts by experience**.*
- *Looked-after children and young people are more willing to open up and share truths with care-experienced inspectors.*
- *You need a culture, willingness and confidence on the part of a local authority, especially senior managers, to be open and willing to adopt a care experience-led approach to reviewing their policies and practices in relation to the services they provide for children and young people.*
- *The same culture needs to be adopted in the training, supervision and attitude of staff who work directly with care-experienced young people.*
- *The opportunity has given the pilot inspectors new, transferable skills and a new found confidence that should be made available to other young people.*
- *LILAC can stand alone, but it also has a unique contribution to make to the development and work of other key inspector bodies such as OFSTED.*

the way forward

Future developments planned in the next two years, while under the management of NLCAS, include:

- *Seeking further funding to continue the good work.*
- *Appointing a care-experienced project worker three days a week to lead on LILAC, which will complement the two day per week secondment to LILAC/ANV from the Fostering Network's 'Leading Our Lives' project.*
- *Reviewing and revising the LILAC standards and criteria.*
- *Reviewing and revising LILAC methodology.*
- *Recruiting and training more care-experienced LILAC inspectors.*
- *Developing an accreditation framework for care-experienced inspectors.*
- *Undertaking more pilots in local authorities.*
- *Drafting and piloting amended standards and criteria so they are applicable to different agencies, eg independent fostering providers, residential homes and secure units.*
- *Developing the LILAC kite mark, including establishing benchmarks for the awarding of the kite mark.*
- *Considering working alongside OFSTED to facilitate the routine involvement of LILAC inspectors in the development and delivery of OFSTED inspections.*

The ultimate aim of LILAC is to become a self-financing, profit-making consultation, training and inspection service managed by A National Voice.



what they said...

Nice to have care-experienced young people coming to interview us, rather than people in suits (young person interviewed by LILAC team)

A positive step in ensuring young people are at the forefront of service delivery (participation worker, pilot local authority)

LILAC has helped put participation back at the centre of our work (service manager, pilot local authority)

It has been a refreshing experience to discuss key aspects of our looked-after children services and work with this team of young, enthusiastic and well-informed inspectors (service manager, pilot local authority)

The fact that the LILAC team are all former care adults themselves gives the process greater credibility (service manager, pilot local authority)

acknowledgements

Thanks to:

All the young people interviewed by the LILAC inspectors, without whose willingness and openness this project would not have been possible and successful.

West Sussex County Council and York City Council, for agreeing to become pilots, making the teams welcome and being prepared to work together with LILAC so that valuable lessons could be learnt for the future.

CSCI and SCIE, whose interest, commitment and funding made possible this innovative and exciting project.

The advisory group, for sharing their experiences and expertise with such enthusiasm that helped so crucially with the development and implementation of LILAC.

Ian Dickson, expert inspector, friend and fellow care leaver, who gave so generously of his time and experience.

Bill Badham, for his support in the development of the standards and criteria.

David Conn (The Guardian), for his interest, enthusiasm and spreading the word so eloquently.

And finally...

the LILAC team – Lucy, Deisha, Daniel, Sara, Sarah, Smiles (Sarah), Jonny, Chris, Carolin, Louise, Augusta, Martin, Si, and Ena.



The Fostering Network is the UK's leading charity for all those involved in foster care

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VAT registration no. 231 6335 90 Registered office London address

