

Written evidence submitted by The Who Cares? Trust

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Who Cares? Trust is the leading national charity for children in care in England. We are a voice and a champion for children and young people living in care. We inform and support thousands of children in care through our magazines and publications designed specifically for them and we influence improvements in policy and practice by ensuring their views and experiences are heard at the highest level. We also develop innovative, collaborative projects which pilot new ways of working, disseminate best practice and encourage more joined up working across the care system.
- 1.2. Our evidence is based on what we know through our direct work with children, and ideas and the italicised quotes have been taken from our vision document, [Principles of Care](#) which sets out what we want to see for the care system in England.
- 1.3. In our evidence, we set out what children and young people tell us about their experience of care, in order to help influence policy and practice in Jersey.

2. Listening to children

“Young people should be listened to because it’s their lives; no-one knows it better than they do.”¹

- 2.1. Being taken into care can be a passive act. It is done to a child, rather than a child being an active part of the process. The children will have varying degrees of understanding about what is happening. This will continue while they are part of the care system. However, by truly listening to children in care, this will give children a feeling of power and control over their lives. Listening to children and young people about what they want and don’t want, will help those who are involved in their care to understand how best meet their needs.
- 2.2. However, listening takes time, empathy and action, as well as lots of trust between adults and children. In addition, adults and children understand the act of listening differently. Children and young people need to see action in order to feel listened to, while many professionals see that respectful listening is enough.² This can cause conflict, and can mean that children feel that they have not been listened to.
- 2.3. Children must be listened to, and they must be believed. They must have an independent way of reporting their concerns and threats to their safety, ensuring that their rights are upheld. Independent advocacy that is provided separately from the state body that is responsible for the child’s care is vital to ensure that children and young people are able to be kept safe and have their rights upheld.
- 2.4. Listening to children and young people can also help to shape services, recruit staff, and develop new ways of working. Children live in a different world to adults, one that adults cannot fully access as their views will be clouded by their adult perspective.³ Similarly, what

¹ Young person from The Who Cares? Trust’s participation group’s as part of the response to Ofsted’s 2013 consultation on the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, cited in The Who Cares? Trust, *Principles of Care*, London: The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p. 13.

² Mcleod A, ‘Respect or empowerment? Alternative understandings of ‘listening’ in childcare social work,’ *Adoption & Fostering*, 30(4), 2006, pp.4 -52, cited in The Who Cares? Trust, *Principles of Care*, London: The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p. 60.

³ Rixon A, ‘Learning together’, in Foley P and Rixon A (eds.), *Changing children’s services working and learning together*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2014, cited in The Who Cares? Trust, *Principles of Care*, London: The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p. 12.

is important to adults can differ from what is important to children, as children live their lives in the present, much more than adults who tend to focus on outcomes.⁴ By listening to children, it can ensure that professionals are meeting the priorities and needs of the children, rather than focusing too heavily on administration or things that are not important to young people.

3. Relationships

“Some young people want to build a relationship first - if we’ve got no relationship and you [a professional] text me on a Saturday you’re not getting a reply from me!”⁵

- 3.1. Young people tell us that relationships are critical, that high quality relationships matter more than anything else for children in care. They are important because they help children to build attachments, to feel secure and to build resilience.⁶ However, often when children are in care, their old relationships are broken when they move to new carers, even though many young people grow up managing complicated family relationships.⁷ Rather than helping to build a network of support for young people, this teaches them that relationships end.
- 3.2. Maintaining contact with people that are important to them is really important to teach children about relationships, and also make care less scary. Children may miss pets and siblings and friends, not just parents or former carers. Contact can also create uncertainty in a child’s life, and they should be supported through any difficulties, rather than the solution being to stop contact. At a recent meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Children in Care and Care Leavers, young people spoke about feeling that contact was not high on professionals’ agendas, or that it was a tick-box activity and spoke about how they want contact to be meaningful, rather than just in fast food restaurants every few weeks. People spoke about how these are childhood memories that are being made. One young person spoke about how sometimes separated siblings need to be helped to be siblings together, as it can be difficult if children don’t live together.⁸
- 3.3. Similarly, strong, consistent relationships with professionals are important to young people. They need to be strong so that children and young people are able to trust those who are there to support them, so that problems can be shared, and achievements celebrated. However, young people report that one of the barriers to this is not having enough time to spend with the professionals who work with them. This can be due to high caseloads, having an impact on being able to spend quality time with the young people they are working with.

4. Recovery from trauma

⁴ Mason J, ‘A Children’s Standpoint: Needs in Out-of-Home Care’, *Children & Society* (22), 2008, pp. 358–369, cited in The Who Cares? Trust, *Principles of Care*, London: The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p. 12.

⁵ Young person at a The Who Cares? Trust training session for social work students on 9th December 2013, cited in The Who Cares? Trust, *Principles of Care*, London: The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p. 10.

⁶ The Care Inquiry, *Making not breaking, findings and recommendations of The Care Inquiry*, London: The Care Inquiry, 2013, pp.8-9.

⁷ Ibid. p. 9.

⁸ Young people at the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, October 2015, summary minutes available:

http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/APPG_April14_Summary.pdfhttp://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/APPG_Summary_October2015.pdf

“Emotional support should be unlimited, not stopped at 21. Emotions can reoccur.”⁹

- 4.1. In line with article 39 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children in care and care leavers should be supported to recover from the effects of pre-care trauma. Left unaddressed, these traumatic experiences have a severe and lasting impact over a child’s lifetime, and can affect the ability of a child to form relationships, further affecting their education, mental health and wellbeing into adulthood.
- 4.2. Children in care should have access to a range of mental health therapies, available whenever they need them, and for as long as they need them. In England, we hear of young people that they may be offered six sessions of counselling or therapy, but after those six sessions the support stops. Given that this is just enough time to build up trust, this cannot be enough time to help support children deal with trauma and deal with problems. It is not enough time to provide adequate support to complicated problems and vulnerable young people. Support should not be time limited.
- 4.3. Young people also tell us that they would value low level mental health and emotional wellbeing support, through mentoring schemes and other ways to maintain and build resilience and learn coping strategies. Not all services, interventions and therapies will work for all young people, which is why it is crucial that children and young people have access to a range of therapies, throughout their time as children in care and care leavers.

5. Leaving care

“It is really stressful when you have to make decisions about leaving care. A 16 year old thinks about ‘freedom,’ but not loneliness, stress and lack of motivation. Care leavers need to be given the chance to try out independence and come back to foster placement if they need to.”¹⁰

- 5.1. While a child may legally become an adult when they turn 18, it does not make them suddenly ready to live alone and cope with all of the pressures of adulthood. A good parent would not expect their child to move out on their 18th birthday – in fact a good parent would support their child and let them return to the family home when they need to. Society currently expects its most vulnerable children to live without direct support from their parents at a much earlier age than most other young people, and indeed much earlier than UK parents expect their children to move out.¹¹
- 5.2. When a young person is 16, 17 and 18, they are coping with adolescence and completing their education and making decisions about their future. It is not necessarily the best time for a young person to move out and live alone. Care leavers often report that their biggest concern about leaving care is loneliness,¹² and need to have a support network in place to

⁹ Young person from The Who Cares? Trust’s participation group’s as part of the response to Ofsted’s 2013 consultation on the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, cited in The Who Cares? Trust, *Principles of Care*, London: The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p. 78.

¹⁰ Young person at the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, October 2011, minutes available: <http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/pages/26102011-leaving-care.html>, cited in The Who Cares? Trust, *Principles of Care*, London: The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p. 44.

¹¹ The Who Cares? Trust, *Principles of Care*, London: The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p.38.

¹² Centre for Social Justice, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2014, pp.48-49; Morgan R and Lindsay M, *Young People’s Views on Leaving Care: What young people in, and formerly in, residential and foster care think*

ensure that they have people to help with the practical support, and the emotional support. Feeling lonely doesn't only happen during the working day; it can happen at any time, and young people need to feel that they have people to turn to if they need help at any point of the day or night.

6. Conclusion

"I think a reasonable parent stays in your life for life."¹³

- 6.1. Children who are brought up by the state are the state's children. The state has intervened in their lives in the most acute way possible. Children in care should be brought up by a good parent – and the state must take that role. It should be ambitious for its children; it should give them access to opportunities to play, to learn, to make friends and to have a childhood. It should prepare them for adulthood, but above all, it should care for them.

about leaving care, Newcastle: Commission for Social Care Inspection, 2006, cited in The Who Cares? Trust, *Principles of Care*, London: The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p. 39.

¹³ Young person from The Who Cares? Trust's participation group's as part of the response to Ofsted's 2013 consultation on the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, cited in The Who Cares? Trust, *Principles of Care*, London: The Who Cares? Trust, 2015, p. 81.