

BECOME.

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

Submission to the call for evidence for the Lords COVID-19 Committee 'Life beyond COVID' inquiry

August 2020

Become is the national charity for children in care and young care leavers. We provide help, support and advice to make sure care-experienced young people can unleash their potential and take control of their lives. We help make the care system work better by ensuring that young people's voices and perspectives shape policy and service provision.

Introduction

Become welcomes this opportunity to submit evidence to the Lords COVID-19 Committee's 'Life beyond COVID' inquiry. We're particularly grateful for the efforts of the Committee to make the call for evidence accessible to as many individuals and organisations as possible, welcoming submissions in written form as well as creative outputs shared via social media.

The basis for our submission is a conversation held with our advisory group of care-experienced young adults, facilitated using the discussion pack for adult groups provided on the Committee website. The advisory group at Become is a small team of care-experienced young adults from across England who play a vital role in our work and ensure we and other organisations are listening to lived experience in the most meaningful ways. We're incredibly grateful for their insights and expertise which are shared directly below.

Become, in collaboration with Barnardo's, Children England, The Children's Society, Coram BAAF, Just for Kids Law, the National Children's Bureau and NSPCC, has also submitted a ['Recovery plan for children in care and care leavers'](#) as evidence to the inquiry. This plan recommends that government protect the rights and entitlements of care-experienced young people, ensures they can access education, support their mental health and wellbeing, be ambitious for and supportive of the needs of care leavers, and put children's interests, wishes and experiences at the heart of the Care Review.

Our submission

1. Are there any positives you would take from this pandemic?

- 1.1. Responses to this question were mixed. All members of the group noted aspects of their own and others' lives – particularly other care-experienced young people – which had been negatively impacted by COVID-19.
- 1.2. A few members noted finding a positive in the slower pace of life and having more time available than they did beforehand to do or try new things.
 - *"The speed of life before was difficult to keep up with. Everyone's slowed down."*
 - *"Time. You have time to do more things. I've done things that I've wanted to do when before I haven't had the time to do them."*
 - *"Trying to learn a new skill. Going back to opportunities I wouldn't have done otherwise."*
 - *"It's been a blessing in a way because I've got quite a few big decisions to make. My life is going to change very soon really quickly. It's helpful to have the extra time to slow down and diagnose everything. I know I'm going to make mistakes and it's going to be difficult, but now you've created every scenario, so you're prepared."*
- 1.3. Others had found the opportunity to appreciate things or people they may not have done as consistently beforehand.
 - *"Lockdown has made me appreciate simple things in my life. I've learned to appreciate things a bit more."*

- *“Being able to appreciate your family a bit more. I haven’t been able to see them for a while, so it’s been good to check on my family and friendship network a bit more than I usually would.”*

1.4. Finally, a couple of members highlighted that the focus on supporting those who might need a bit more help than others at this time has helped to make things more inclusive and accessible – particularly for those with disabilities, for example,

- *“As a disabled person, I’ve noticed the extra effort paid to making things accessible. I could do a lot more during lockdown than before as everyone else was stuck in their house too. Some of the opportunities have only come about because of COVID-19.”*

2. What are the things that you are most worried about?

2.1. The group were all concerned about the unequal impacts that the pandemic has had and will continue to have on different communities and people in society – including children in care and care leavers.

- *“What does this mean for social services. What does this mean for us?”*
- *“Unpredictability. That is exactly what our trauma is. This situation is going to be triggering as hell for care leavers.”*
- *“Social workers still need to be more active – they’re not as engaged since lockdown happened. We have online sessions available but social workers don’t utilise them.”*
- *“Mental health provision should be paramount for care leavers at this time.”*
- *“It’ll be important to understanding coronavirus itself and how it interacts with SEND. It’s a new normal which those children won’t be used to adjusting to, and they’re already not used to our current normal.”*

2.2. Members were worried about who and what would be prioritised in recovery, and how easy it would be for individuals and communities who don’t often get their voices heard to be listened to and their wishes considered by government.

- *“I’m worried care leavers are going to fall through the cracks.”*
- *“These cracks are going to be bigger. It’s going to be worse than before because there’s no money about. If there’s money about, the problem’s easy to deal with. All you’ve got is your mouth.”*

2.3. The group highlighted problems with continuing to learn or work from home and the disruption this has on their and others’ ability to study or work well, in addition to how things like university or college will work if teaching and socialising can’t go ahead as normal.

- *“Your home is your space and is where you relax, but now it’s also my office. It’s my uni. I come in my bedroom, but then I see my laptop and all I think about work.”*
- *“I’m going back to uni and it’s going to be online. I didn’t sign up to this online learning.”*

- *“My sister is supposed to be starting university but there’s nobody she can reach out to when she starts there. There must be a backlog of soon-to-be uni students not knowing where to go and if they should proceed. There’s going to be a lot of drop-outs.”*

2.4. Some of the group shared their concerns about feeling overwhelmed by a quick and abrupt transition back to the way things used to be, and how we might not take the learnings from this period through into what comes next. There was a worry about returning back to normal or the ‘status quo’.

- *“I’m worried about things getting back to normal. I feel like I’m just tired all the time right now. I don’t want it to become where I end up doing nothing because I’m so used to doing nothing.”*
- *“I’m worried about being overwhelmed at returning back to work. For the first week back I’m going to be exhausted. I’m not used to the daily commute.”*
- *“I’m worried that we’re going to go back to how it was before COVID. There’s so much you can get from it, the working, the flexibility. I’m worried nobody’s learnt from this and they’ll go back to their old ways.”*

2.5. Others had concerns about delays and changes to important things such as access to health services, noting the backlogs of appointments and things which have been upheld.

- *“It’s going to take so long for my hospital referral. I’m going to wait a very long time.”*
- *“All the pubs are open, but I still can’t go and see my pain specialist and it’s really frustrating.”*

2.6. Finally, the group shared their worries about some of the wider economic impacts that the pandemic will have and how this is going to impact on their lives and the country as a whole.

- *“I’m more worried about the sustainability of this situation and the balance economically. This is the stone being thrown into the river. It’s going to take years. We’ve borrowed a tonne of money and the economy will suffer. Now there are local lockdowns. It’s finding a balance between safety and keeping ourselves afloat.”*
- *“My favourite art café has closed down. People would go and do classes and play board games. It was a charity too. Economically everything’s going to keep on really struggling.”*
- *“There are going to be fewer opportunities for those who are lower down the pay grade.”*

3. What do you most hope changes for the better?

3.1. The group had hopes that we would take some of the learnings from this period forward – particularly around flexible working and engaging with services in new ways.

- *“I’ve just actually had some therapy and it’s been done over the phone. It’s the best I’ve ever had. I felt more protected over the phone than you do when you’re with someone. I hope they might continue offering this.”*

- *“Before it was all like ‘actually it’s not possible to make this adjustment, it’s not possible for you to work from home’, but then suddenly it was possible. It makes things much better for people with disabilities.”*

3.2. Despite the concerns around education noted above, there was some hope that new online teaching and learning methods could help increase the number of people accessing courses who couldn’t beforehand, including care leavers, by making it cheaper and easy to access.

- *“Being a distance learner at a proper accredited university should be way more available.”*
- *“It should be cheaper too... university should be free for care leavers.”*

3.3. Finally, the group hoped that there would be better recognition of groups such as care leavers and the challenges they face. There was a hope for some kind of ending – one which celebrated achievements and success during a particularly difficult time.

- *“We all deserve a bit of closure. They need to be crystal clear. They need to be out there.”*
- *“I hope they appreciate us more. We all need to applaud ourselves, for doing this by ourselves. We should get recognised. I hope they say, ‘you did this well’. Some appreciation would be nice.”*

4. What’s going to change for you and for society?

4.1. Some of the group thought the pandemic and experience of lockdown had changed their thinking or plans for the future (such as living arrangements), but not all.

- *“I don’t know it’s real if that makes sense – I saw the statistics where I live. I feel like it’s not real for us. I don’t see it. I’ve not been ill. I don’t know anyone who’s been ill. I don’t fear it in the same way that others might do.”*
- *“It’s made me think I want to move out.”*
- *“Lockdown has made me want to live with other people. I can’t deal on my own.”*
- *“It’s made me want to venture out again.”*
- *“Hopefully I’ll be fit and healthy in my own place. I’m going to be one of those spontaneous people. I’ve always been so cautious, got everything planned. I want to be able to go away for the weekend.”*

4.2. There were mixed opinions from the group on how they thought the pandemic had impacted on wider society – particularly around social relationships. Some felt it would have impacts on how we communicated and interacted with each other.

- *“We’re going to be a bunch of robots - being in tune to put our face mask on, take our temperature, keep two metres difference. I think it’s scared people. I think people are more wary of people now.”*
- *“It’s going to change social relationships.”*
- *“Kids are going to grow up thinking differently.”*

4.3. However, others felt that these changes might only be short-lived and we're more likely to return to the way things were before.

- *"I don't see anything changing. I see changes taking place with more online learning and jobs being virtual, but I don't see any changes in the way of being more conscious."*
- *"As soon as we know we're clear, we're going to be celebrating the fact we're able to be. A year or two of this isn't going to change anything. It's in our DNA."*
- *"We can't change that social being in us. No matter how much we try. No matter what happens we're always going to go back to our roots."*

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