

# BECOME.

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE  
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

## Become submission to the Government consultation: 'Revisions to the National Standards and Statutory Guidance for the Provision of Children's and Young People's Advocacy Services'

December 2023

**About Become** - Become is the national charity for children in care and young care leavers. Our vision is that care-experienced people have the same chances as everyone else to live happy, fulfilled lives. Our mission is to help children in care and young care leavers to believe in themselves and to heal, grow and unleash their potential. We work alongside them to make the care system the best it can be.

### Introduction

To inform our response to this consultation we heard from 8 care-experienced young people across two sessions to gather insight about their experiences with advocacy services and what currently works well for them, what should be improved and any changes they would like to see.

Our response also builds upon previous engagement with care-experienced young people and insights gathered by our services team; at Become, we offer a range of support services for care-experienced young people, including our Care Advice Line – a helpline for children in care and care leavers. While we do not provide advocacy services, we do refer and signpost care-experienced children and young people to advocacy services.

## Key messages:

- We broadly agree with the proposed changes to the standards and guidance and welcome the direction of these changes and commitments. We emphasise the importance of sufficient and meaningful implementation in practice.
- On the issue of children and young people being at the heart of advocacy, we have highlighted the current lack of awareness among care-experienced children and young people concerning their right to advocacy, particularly prior to requiring it. And suggest it is better explicitly set out within the standards.
- We welcome the increased focus in standards 4-6 in ensuring professionals champion children and young people through targeted training and skills development to understand the needs of the children and young people entitled to advocacy. It is essential that this is sufficiently implemented and aided by adequate funding to advocacy services from local authorities in order to actualise this update.
- While there is an increased focus on transparency in the proposed standard changes from 7-10, there is no notable change in the feedback and complaints procedure, which is insufficient. Through our services work, and from hearing directly from care-experienced young people, more often than not, young people were not given an opportunity to provide feedback after using advocacy services and/or the process to do so was “*not at all easy*”.
- We agree with the expansion of the standards to include children and young people in residential settings; children and young people in secure settings; and children and young people requiring support into adulthood – however, we think that guidance and standards should be expanded to also include young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation.

## Consultation response

### 1. Would you like us to keep your responses confidential? (required)

a. Yes b. **No**

### 2. In sharing findings from this consultation, may we quote from your response? (required)

a. Yes – anonymously b. **Yes – attribute to my organisation** c. No

### 3. This question is only for adults over the age of 18, or organisations. May we contact you if we have any follow-up questions about your response?

a. **Yes** b. No

### 4. What is your name?

Simone Connolly

### 5. What is your email address

[simone.connolly@becomecharity.org.uk](mailto:simone.connolly@becomecharity.org.uk)

**We want to hear from children in care and care leavers, as well as others in this consultation. Are you: (required)**

- a. A child or young person, under 18, or care leaver up to age 25
- b. An adult
- c. An organisation

**7. If responding on behalf of an organisation, what is the name of your organisation?**

Become charity.

**8. To help us analyse our responses, could you please tell us in what capacity you are responding to this consultation? (required)**

Charity.

**9. If you chose 'Other' or wish to clarify your response, please describe your role:**

**10. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, what is your role within that organisation?**

- a. Front line practitioner
- b. Manager
- c. Senior leader (Director, Chief Executive)
- d. Corporate / Administrative
- e. Other

**Questions:**

When answering the following questions, if you have comments on specific standards, please note which standard you are referring to.

**11. To what extent do you agree that standards 1 to 3 put children and young people at the heart of advocacy? (required)**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Somewhat agree
- c. Neither agree/disagree
- d. Somewhat disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**12. Do you think there is anything missing from standards 1 to 3? (required)**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Don't know

**13. Please tell us the reasons for your answer: (required)**

At Become, we offer a range of support services for care-experienced young people, including our Care Advice Line – a helpline for children in care and care leavers. We know from the young people who engage with our helpline, as well as other direct engagement with care-experienced young people on this issue, that there is a prominent lack of awareness around their right to advocacy. Many care-experienced young people have a shared experience whereby they were not made aware of their rights to advocacy at any stage in their care journey by any professional within the care system, unless they themselves sought out advocacy and information surrounding advocacy.

We know that knowledge surrounding rights and entitlements is an important issue for care-experienced children and young people across the board. Children and young people should be aware of their rights and entitlements concerning advocacy services.

In our sessions with care-experienced young people in relation to this consultation, some young people flagged that when entering care there can be overwhelming amount of information and professionals assigned to you, and that it can be difficult to meaningfully retain all this information. It is important to ensure that care-experienced children and young people are all made aware of their right to advocacy. This should be done periodically throughout a young person's time in care, at times that are appropriate and manageable in the child/young person's care journey, and should be proactively led by the local authority, rather than reactively to the child or young person's circumstances or conversation initiation.

One young person said: *'It's quite hard to ask for help. You're scared if something fails, and the issues are not addressed you could be homeless. So, it's not easy asking for help.'*

A significant point to be made is that children and young people should be made aware to their rights to advocacy proactively, prior to the point of requiring such services. This issue is noted in the *'reasons for change'* to this standard, however, it is not explicitly or implicitly set out in the standards 1-3. This should also be set out equally clearly and actively in the guidance for local authorities to ensure that the children and young people under their care are aware of the breadth of their rights and entitlements, including to advocacy. There are many ways that local authorities could proactively make care-experienced young people aware of their rights to advocacy, such as through a leaflet provided to them, or a conversation with their social worker, personal adviser, foster carer or staff that work with them in children's homes.

**14.To what extent do you agree that standards 4 to 6 ensure advocates are professionals who champion children and young people? (required)**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Somewhat agree
- c. Neither agree/disagree
- d. Somewhat disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**15.Is there anything missing from standards 4 to 6? (required)**

- a. Yes
- b. No

c. Don't know

**16. Please tell us the reasons for your answer: (required)**

The care-experienced children and young people that we work with have told us that it is important to them that the professionals they work with, including advocates, have targeted training, knowledge, and skills surrounding the care system and working with care-experienced children and young people. It is essential that advocates have a full understanding of care-experience and the ways in which it intersects with race, class, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, faith and disability; standards 5 and 6 address this.

To the point 5.4 of standard 5 (*Advocates are supported by a suitably experienced and trained line manager*) care-experienced young people would like to see a care-experienced professional involved in this training process. We suggest this could be a priority under suitable experience where manageable.

It is critical that this training is sufficiently implemented and aided by adequate funding to advocacy services from local authorities. And in the event of failure to adhere, checks and measures must be in place; advocacy services who fail to follow the standards and guidance should be held accountable.

**17. To what extent do you agree that standards 7 to 10 ensure advocacy services are independent, high quality and managed well? (required)**

a. Strongly agree

b. Somewhat agree

c. Neither agree/disagree

d. Somewhat disagree

e. Strongly disagree

**18. Is there anything missing from standards 7 to 10? (required)**

a. Yes

b. No

c. Don't know

**19. Please tell us the reasons for your answer: (required)**

While there is an increased focus on transparency in the proposed standard changes from 7-10, there is no notable change in the feedback and complaints procedure, which we feel is not sufficient. Through our services work, we are not aware of any advocacy services that routinely or actively seek children's and young people's views to ensure they are providing the best possible help. Furthermore, several care-experienced children and young people who have had previous experience of advocacy informed us that they were not given an opportunity to provide feedback afterwards and/or the process to do so was "not at all easy".

According to the Children's Commissioner's [2019 Advocacy for Children report](#) found that 49% of referrals to advocacy services for children's social care were taken forward, which indicates that the

duty may not be being fulfilled. There should be a proactive commitment to follow up with those who did take their referrals forward as well as those who did not, to account for that gap. This gap can also be attributed to insufficiency and staffing shortages – a continued barrier to children and young people exercising their right to advocacy. We know that care-experienced young people often wait several weeks or months to be allocated an advocate and it's crucial that barriers such as these are addressed. Advocacy services must be well-staffed to meet the needs and demand of children and young people seeking advocacy.

**20. Do you agree with the proposed additional groups of children and young people being brought in scope of the standards? (required)**

a. Strongly agree

b. Somewhat agree

c. Neither agree/ disagree

d. Somewhat disagree

e. Strongly disagree

**21. Do you have any other feedback about the proposed groups in scope of the standards?**

We agree with the expansion of the standards to include children and young people in residential settings; children and young people in secure settings; and children and young people requiring support into adulthood. Several of the care-experienced young people we engaged with to inform our response to this consultation highlighted that advocacy entitlements and access to services is particularly significant for children and young people in secure settings – one young person said those in secure settings “*need an advocate the most*”.

In accordance with the current and proposed standards and guidance, the standards would not apply to young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation, though they would be entitled to an independent advocate. The scope of the proposed standards and guidance should be expanded to young people who may be experiencing homelessness and/or require accommodation, and this entitlement should be proactively communicated to them in the same manner as we have expressed in question 13. The Children’s Commissioner’s [2019 report on Advocacy for Children](#), highlights that organisations that provide advocacy services, say that housing and homelessness is one of the common reasons for which children and young people seek (or are referred for) advocacy support.

We strongly believe that advocacy is most effective when it is delivered independently from local authorities. This reduces the risk of a conflict of interest where the advocate is supposed to represent the views of the young person but is employed by the local authority. Similarly, young people are more likely to have more confidence and trust in advocacy that is provided independently of their local authority.

**Questions:**

**22. To what extent do you agree with the proposed updates to the guidance?**

**(required)**

a. Strongly agree

b. Somewhat agree

c. Neither agree/ disagree

d. Somewhat disagree

e. Strongly disagree

**23. Please tell us the reasons for your answer: (required)**

We fully support a child-centred approach which prioritises co-production with children and young people. The Social Care Institute for Excellence [explains](#): *‘Co-production of health and care services with children and young people will help them to feel more independent and in control of the services they use. Their involvement will develop and deliver better care services’.*

We also welcome the updated guidance reflecting that advocacy is an option available to children and young people whenever they want advocacy support in asking them to represent them in meetings and not just when they want to make a formal complaint.

**24. Is there anything missing from the updated guidance? (required)**

a. Yes

b. No

c. Don't know

**25. Please tell us the reasons for your answer: (required)**

To reaffirm our support for the expansion of the guidance to apply to children and young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation when engaging with an independent advocate, as set out in question 21.