



## Minutes of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015  
5.00pm – 7.00pm  
Committee Room 10, Palace of Westminster

Chair: Craig Whittaker MP, Chair of the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Panel: Dr Maggie Atkinson, Children's Commissioner for England  
Naomi Gilchrist, young person, NYAS  
Cathy Gleeson, Independent Mental Health Advocate, NYAS  
Frank Lowe, Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist and the Head of Social Work, Specialist Adolescent and Adults Mental Health Services at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
Professor Mike Stein, Research Professor, University of York

Present: The Earl of Listowel (Vice-Chair)  
Baroness Howarth  
Steve McCabe MP

Apologies: Bill Esterson MP (Vice-Chair)  
Emma Lewell-Buck MP  
Baroness Massey  
Ivor Frank

Topic: 'What can we do to help young people develop good mental health and emotional wellbeing in the face of emotional and psychological challenges they face in their transition to independence?'

### Introduction from the Chair

Craig Whittaker MP welcomed the 110 children, young people and professionals attending the meeting. He announced that the [Care Monitor](#) was running again and urged young people to participate. He said this would be Maggie's last meeting as she was stepping down as Children's Commissioner for England at the end of February. Additionally he announced that following feedback APPG invitations would now be circulated four weeks in advance of the meetings.

### Panel comments on the ways we can ensure young people develop good mental health and emotional wellbeing:

- Mike Stein said young people must be settled and not constantly moved around; they should be able to stay with their carers until they are ready to leave; and should be supported to set up home.
- Frank Lowe said a secure attachment was crucial and arrangements needed to be made to ensure young people have the support they need. Mental health services have far too high thresholds for referrals and young people often need to be severely ill to get access to support. Mental health services need to be



supported and monitored. He said professionals, particularly personal advisors, need training on mental health and emotional wellbeing.

- Maggie Atkinson said training should extend beyond personal advisors (PAs), to teachers, youth workers, police officers and the whole community. Young people need to be supported by adults.
- Cathy spoke about the experience of a young person she worked with and highlighted the importance of listening to young people and providing advocacy.
- Naomi Gilchrist said care is nothing like Tracy Beaker and said often when young people are transitioning to independence they are also transitioning in many other ways. She said you can feel isolated and abandoned and it's therefore important to have a key person that stays the same who you can turn to. Information between services needs to be shared and staff need to be more available to young people when they need them.

## **Discussion (the floor was opened to questions)**

### **Key themes:**

#### **i. Stability and availability**

Mike said young people need to feel settled and should have the option to stay with carers until they feel ready to leave. Frank agreed, adding that secure attachments were essential to ensure positive outcomes for care leavers. Naomi said many young people have attachment disorders so it is important for them to have secure attachments and a stable base. She highlighted the importance of having someone to turn to for support. She said she'd had a leak in her roof and didn't know who to turn to which had made her feel isolated and abandoned. Naomi said trying to get hold of someone for even the most basic needs can be exhausting for young people and often there is a two to three year waiting list for access to support such as talking therapies. Services vary by local authority so the support you receive is often a postcode lottery. Naomi said she was very lucky as her CAMHS worker was consistently there for her. One young person said she found her teenage years very difficult as she was moved from pillar to post. Her support worker did not ever come to see her and children's services were not available in the evening. She was told to contact the police when she was in crisis. Maggie said young people should always have someone to call and this should not just be one person but a whole team of people. One young person suggested a drop-in centre for children in care and care leavers. A professional suggested implementing a qualification for young people to complete before they leave care (see appendix).

#### **ii. Staff training**

Frank said support from personal advisors is absolutely critical, however many professionals have not had any kind of training around the emotional and mental health needs of the young people they support. Maggie agreed, saying training needed to be extended to all professionals who work with young people. Linda Dixon, from NIACE said there had been a report on the role of PAs in supporting young people into education and employment and said there needed to be better training around the emotional and mental health needs of young people. She said there needed to be recognition of the importance of the PA role.



### iii. A 'clinical gap'

There was a discussion on the transition of young people from children's services to adult services. Mike said there is a 'clinical gap' between leaving children's services and entering adult services and many young people fall through this gap, usually when they are coping with major changes. One young person said at the age of 18 she was treated as though she was 30 or 40 years old by medical professionals and told she was too old for children's services. Another young person said at the age of 17½ she tried to commit suicide. She was not allowed to stay on an adult hospital ward as she was deemed too young but was turned away from the children's ward for being too old. She ended up sleeping at a police station while social services tried to sort out an assessment so she could live elsewhere.

One young person asked 'If you're serious about mental health issues, why is the government cutting funds?' Craig said access to mental health services was often a postcode lottery. He said he'd met with peers to discuss the issue that week and said there was more work to be done to push this up the agenda. Maggie commented on this saying there has been far too much focus on adult mental health services and not enough on children's services. She said currently 12% of NHS money is spent on adult mental health services compared to just 6% on children's mental health services.

There was a discussion on setting up mental health services specifically for young people between the age of 16 -25. The majority of the room agreed there should be a service in place specifically for 16-25s year olds (see appendix). One young person said she was over 25 and in full time education. She said there is too much focus on age and asked what support there was for care leavers over 25. Mike said services should not be reduced to an age as the legacy of care can last a life time and he said this needs to be addressed. He said support needs to be available over a lifetime. Naomi suggested a 16+ service but stressed the importance of services being statutory, available nationwide and not fragmented. Craig said he would write to the ministers for children and health about the issues raised at this meeting.

### iv. Empower and listen to young people

Cathy Gleeson highlighted the importance of empowering and listening to young people so professionals understand the issues and work alongside young people to ensure that they get the services they need. A number of young people agreed that they often asked for things and were ignored. One young person said she had mental health issues in her late teens and requested help but was ignored for six months. Another said they had a traumatic experience going into care but was not taken seriously by her social worker or foster carer. She said "no one has recognised that I need help". Cathy emphasised the importance of advocacy and ensuring young people know they are entitled to advocacy. Maggie emphasised the importance of young people knowing about their rights.

### **Closing remarks from the Chair**

Craig Whittaker MP thanked everyone for coming and thanked Maggie for her undying commitment and passion for young people over the past five years. He said she has been a fantastic advocate. Craig awarded prizes to the youngest person in the room and the group that had travelled the furthest.

### **Appendix: votes – there were three votes held during the meeting.**

1. Should there be a mental health service for care-experienced young people between the age of 16 and 25? Everyone voted yes apart from two people.



2. Should there be a qualification to complete before you leave care? Approximately 60% said no, 40% said yes.
3. Should there be a stage programme for young people to complete before they can leave care? Approximately 90% said yes, 10% said no.