

Charity welcomes government's 'expertise by experience' focus in its once-in-a-generation review of the failing care system – but warns not to forget young people leaving care

National charity for children in care and young care leavers, Become, has warned that the Government's long-awaited review of children's social care must result in an overhaul of the broken care system for the thousands of young people it is failing. The government committed to a review of the care system in the 2019 Conservative Manifesto, which it said would be 'bold and broad'.

In particular the charity is warning that the scope of the review must extend to support for the increasing number of young people leaving care and moving into adulthood. Any review which seeks to understand and address the causes of poor experiences and outcomes for care-experienced adults cannot ignore the thousands of young people who experience a 'care cliff' each year.

While the newly announced terms of reference rightly specify a focus on value for money and the use of resources, Become implores the new reviewer, Josh MacAlister, to avoid simply labelling children in the care system as a cost to reduce. The review cannot ignore the significant impact of years of continued cuts to local authority children's social care budgets and the accompanying removal of early family support services which has led to a growing number of children in the care system.

Become welcomes the review's commitment to begin with a focus on the expertise of young people and the promise that the views of children, young people and adults with direct experience of children's social care are to be "fully embedded in the review's work". This was one of the key asks made by the charity and 26 other children's rights organisations in its [letter to the Secretary of State](#) last year.

Responding to today's announcement from the Department for Education, Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive of Become, the national charity for children in care and young care leavers said:

"This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that we have been calling for to listen to, and act on, the experiences of care-experienced people. We can and must deliver radical reform of a system that is routinely failing children with consequences lasting throughout their lifetime.

"We look forward to working with Josh MacAlister and to connecting him with young people whose perspectives are key to transforming the future experiences and life chances of all the children and young people supported by the care system.

"We hope he will be completely open to what they have to say, with an independent focus and the time and resource to properly understand how to ensure all children are guaranteed the loving, nurturing relationships and support they deserve."

Recently released figures have shown increased numbers of children looked after by the care system, often in their teens and facing isolation, face a lack of stability and risks to their safety and wellbeing. Louisa, a young person working with Become, entered the care system at 15. She spent a total of 90 days in unregulated accommodation – including a caravan and a hotel. With every move, Louisa didn't know what was happening to her and was never consulted during the decision-making

process. Thankfully, a local children's home offered to look after her before she was moved far away from her local area.

Now aged 17, Louisa faces what Become calls the care cliff: she will soon be moved out of her home and into an independent living arrangement, despite Louisa and her support team at the children's home fighting for her to stay. Louisa has a history of mental health issues and has come a long way since experiencing the disruption and instability of unregulated accommodation but being pushed out of the care system so abruptly on her 18th birthday puts her at risk.

The charity says that Louisa's case is all too familiar to the staff answering calls from care experienced people and professionals to its helpline, and that the care system is failing to provide too many children and young people with the safety, security and support that they need and deserve.

The charity's Advisory Group – a group of care experienced young people who campaign for change – have called for the independent reviewer to actively seek the views of care-experienced people to inform the review:

“We've seen how the care system works first-hand and, more than anyone, know how much it needs to improve so it doesn't repeat the same mistakes for other young people.

“The reviewer must involve people with lived experience at all stages and put our experiences and knowledge at the heart of this important review. The review must address the postcode lottery of care we've all experienced, reaching out and listening to those who struggle most to have their voices heard.”

To inform the review, the charity is today announcing that the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, for which Become acts as secretariat, is launching its Spotlight inquiry, bringing together care-experienced young people and the professionals supporting them to share their expertise and solutions to inform the review.

Through a series of regional online events and a call for evidence sponsored by a cross-party group of MPs, the inquiry will explore everyday experiences of care to shine a light on common issues as well as innovative practice and ideas emerging across the country. It will provide a report of its findings to the independent reviewer Josh MacAlister.

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Become is the national charity for children in care and young care leavers in England.

www.becomecharity.org.uk

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For more information or to discuss Become's young spokespeople and case studies, please contact:

Amy Grant, Communications Manager

Amy.Grant@becomecharity.org.uk

07951155367