

The Care Experienced Movement

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OUR RESPONSE TO "CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE: STABLE HOMES, BUILT ON LOVE"

Introduction

We are a movement of and for our Care Experienced community. We are a force of Care Experienced people coming together to take back ownership over what it means to be Care Experienced. We are a growing movement, who aim to raise the Care Experienced community up to the platform it rightfully deserves to be on.

We believe the Care Experienced community has not yet had its movement to push for real change and support each other in doing so, and that is why we believe this is a civil rights issue.

Our first response is that while many things in the initial response are encouraging, the proposed implementation plan is lacking the urgent action and investment that the care system is in dire need of. We are disappointed that the Government isn't putting the needs of their corporate children first.

We believe the government needs to actively do more to listen to care experienced people, and actively work with us to enact the change the system we grew up in needs.

This report has been written by Isabelle Kirkham and Rose Regan after a month of finding solutions with members of our community.



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Our Thanks

Our Process

As a movement we wanted to form a collective Care Experience response, one that challenges but also highlights the good in the strategy the government has set out.

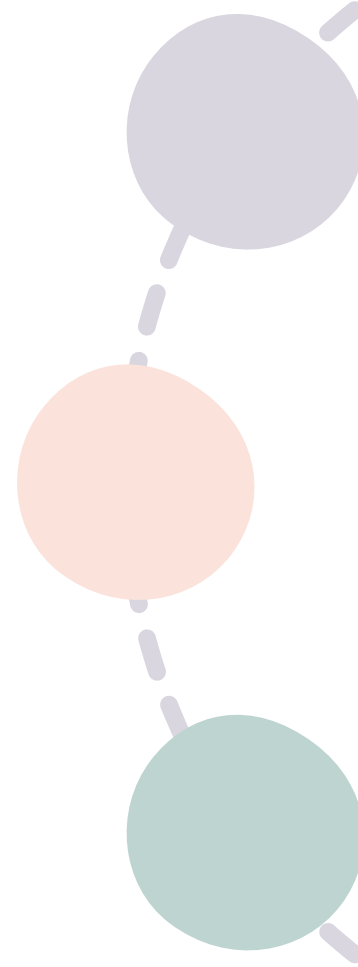
In order to do this we invited all Care Experienced people to virtual and in person events to explore and develop a response with us, in the form of a written report.

We know for lots of Care Experienced people these changes happen too quickly and may not be managed well. We also know that Care Experienced people have experiences about things that worked for them, or ideas about how things could work better. We believe its important that the people making the changes, listen to the people who have experienced the system, directly.

We hope that this has the aim of offering the government our very own solutions from the true lived experience of growing up in the care system in the UK.

Overall we worked with 40 Care Experienced people aged between 13-27 to develop this response. We hope over the next year we can reach out to more members of our community and develop an in-depth report, with solutions directly from our community. Everyone who worked with us was paid for their time and resources.

We have included direct quotes from the care experienced people we worked with and have summarised the thoughts and views that were shared with us.



Independent Review of Children's Social Care



In May 2022 the independent review of children's social care published its final report on the children's social care system in England. The Government commissioned the review in 2019 and started work in 2021. Evidence was collected from public engagement, evidence-gathering exercises, and visits to local areas, with the core aim of pushing for bold recommendations for the English Care System.

The aim of the review was to put forth recommendations for a system that:

- provides intensive help to families in crisis
- acts decisively in response to abuse
- unlocks the potential of wider family networks to raise children
- puts lifelong loving relationships at the heart of the care system
- lays the foundations for a good life for those who have been in care

The final report and supporting evidence were published in May 2022. Findings were divided into the following nine sections

- Reset children's social care
- A revolution in Family Help
- A just and decisive child protection system
- Unlocking the potential of family networks
- Transforming care
- The care experience
- Realising the potential of the workforce
- A system focused on children and families
- Implementation

The final report can be read via the government website - <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care>

Summary of the Government's plans to reform children's social care in England

On February, 2nd, 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) formally announced its response to the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England.

The initial response to the care Review has been titled Stable Homes, built on love: implementation strategy and consultation and they have invited feedback and responses by the 11th of May.

The implementation strategy sets out the government's long-term plan to transform children's social care. The plan of reform is backed by £200 million over the next two years and will result in changes across the entire children's social care sector. It identifies six "pillars" which form the basis of its approach to children's social care reform.

- Mission 1: By 2027, every care-experienced child and young person will feel they have strong, loving relationships in place.
- Mission 2: By 2027, we will see an increase of high-quality, stable and loving homes available for every child in care, local to where they are from.
- Mission 3: By 2027, we will strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers across the public sector.
- Mission 4: By 2027, we will see an improvement in the education, employment and training outcomes of children in care and care leavers.
- Mission 5: By 2027, we will see an increase in the number of care leavers in safe, suitable accommodation and a reduction in care leaver homelessness.
- Mission 6: We will work closely with health partners to reduce the disparities in long-term mental and physical health outcomes and improve wellbeing for care-experienced people.

The full response can be read here -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/childrens-social-care-stable-homes-built-on-love>



**Our Response to
Government's plans
to reform children's
social care in
England**



Family Help

- Make sure all children and families get the correct help no matter what help is needed.
- Make it easier to access help for children and families.
- Test a new way to help families in 12 different parts of the country.
- Employ more professionals to help – not necessarily social workers.
- Review the law and make changes on how disabled children get help.
- Make sure Family Help works for all walks of life.
- Give more help to families that are having problems due to poverty.

What Care Experienced people told us

"Offer Family support to all families at the onset rather than referring when safeguarding issues have been identified. Making early intervention redundant. - A Sure Start type of system"

"The right support is already not there. The government are not facilitating the situation properly"

"I think they should review the law not just for disabled children but also children in care as there is many serious case studies"

"I'm pleased the government will help families and children in poverty"

"12 parts of the country, this will further the already existing postcode lottery"

"Is the funding being increased and criteria lessened so that families can receive the Correct help?"

"The professionals they're looking to recruit should have increased training and trauma informed training"

"No matter how much family help the system may offer, children we always need to go into care. What support is being put in place to help care experienced families?"

The Government's Role in Providing Support to Families

The Government plays a crucial role in providing support to families. Some people feel that the government is not doing enough to provide the support that families need, while others are more optimistic about the government's efforts. However, there is no denying that there are concerns about the support that is available to families, particularly those who are Care Experienced.

Postcode Lottery

One of the main concerns about the support that is available to families is the postcode lottery. This refers to the fact that the level of support that Care Experienced people receive can vary depending on where they live. This can be due to differences in funding, resources, and the availability of trained professionals.

This postcode lottery can have a significant impact on Care Experienced people, especially those who are already vulnerable. It can mean that some families/Care Experienced people receive less support than others, leading to unequal outcomes and potentially exacerbating existing inequalities.

Funding and Training for Professionals

Another concern is the need for increased funding and training for professionals who work with families. Many professionals, such as social workers, teachers, and healthcare workers, play a vital role in supporting families. However, they often face significant challenges due to limited funding and resources.

This can lead to a lack of training and support for professionals, which can impact the quality of care that Care Experienced people/families receive. Investing in training and resources for these professionals could help to improve outcomes for families and ensure that they receive the support they need.

Support for Care Experienced Families

Finally, there are questions about the support that is available to Care Experienced families/people. These are families who have been involved in the care system, either as children or parents. They often face significant challenges, including trauma, mental health issues, and poverty. It is essential that these families receive the support they need to overcome these challenges and thrive. This can include access to mental health services, financial support, and support with parenting skills.

Overall, it is clear that more needs to be done to address the issue of family support and to ensure that families have access to the help they need. This includes addressing the postcode lottery, increasing funding, and training for professionals, and providing support to Care Experienced families. By working together, we can create a society where all types of families have access to the support they need to thrive.

Keeping Children Safe

- Test a new way of keeping children safe in the same parts we are testing Family Help.
- Make sure social workers with lots of experience and training, work to keep them safe.
- Be clearer on how teachers, doctors and the police work together to keep children safe.
- Encourage adults who work in social care to make sure they listen to children.
- Help the adults close to children to understand what's needed to keep them safe.
- Make changes so that children are kept safe from things that can hurt them outside of their home.
- Think about how teachers might have more of a role in keeping children safe.
- Improve family courts work that the decisions about children's lives are made quickly, and making sure the courts work well with parents.

What Care Experienced people told us



"Unregulated accommodation needs to stop all together"

"Case Reviews are needed for children being trafficked"

"Teach Care Experienced people about our rights, so we can challenge the system we are in! And employ us to help Care Experienced young people on how to be heard!!!"

"Needs to be clearer on how teachers, doctors & the police will work together to keep children safe"

"More Care Experienced Professionals"

"STOP SENDING US HOME WITHOUT SUPPORT"

"Make sure children are apart of safeguarding meetings. So they understand why certain safeguarding actions are being taken"

"The family courts need to work better with the children they are protecting. it our lives being spoken about in court. Why aren't we there or at the very least know what is happening?"

Unregulated Accommodation

Unregulated accommodation is a significant problem for children and Care Experienced people. These individuals are often placed in accommodation that is not properly regulated, leaving them vulnerable to neglect, abuse, and exploitation.

To address this issue, we need to ensure that all accommodation for children and Care Experienced people is adequately regulated and monitored. This can include regular inspections and checks to ensure that standards are being met and that individuals are being appropriately cared for.

Case Reviews for Trafficked Children

Trafficked children are particularly vulnerable and require specialised support and protection. Case reviews can help to identify any gaps in the system and ensure that these children receive the support they need.

Empowering Care Experienced People

Care Experienced people must be empowered to challenge the system and advocate for their rights. This can include education on their rights and opportunities for employment within the care system, allowing them to use their experiences to help others.

Improved Communication Between Professionals

Communication between professionals, such as teachers, doctors, and police officers, is essential in keeping children safe. Clear guidelines and protocols should be established to ensure that information is shared effectively and efficiently.

More Care Experienced Professionals

Having more Care Experienced professionals working in the care system can bring valuable insights and perspectives. These individuals can help to improve the quality of care and support for care-experienced people.

Support for Care-Experienced People

Care Experienced people should not be sent home without support. Adequate support, including mental health services and financial assistance, should be provided to ensure that Care Experienced people can thrive.

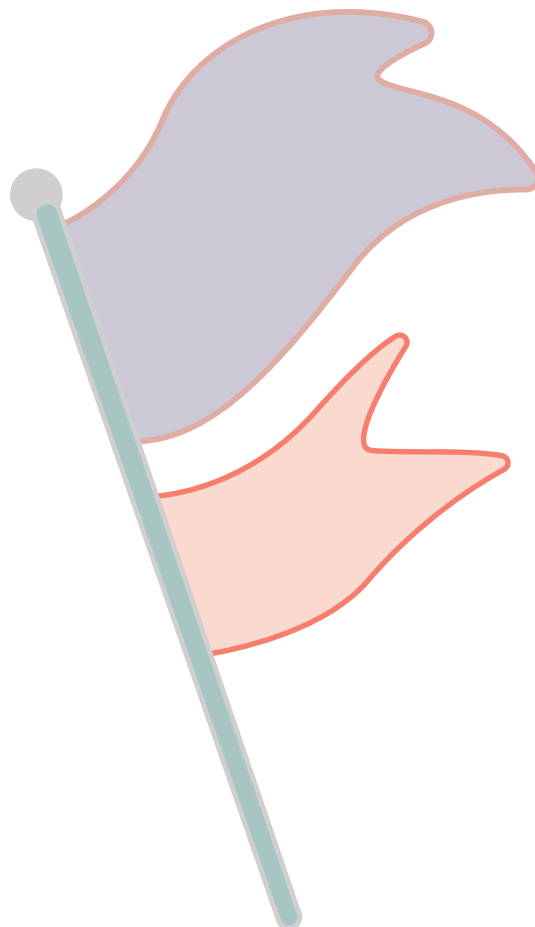
Involving Children in Safeguarding Meetings

Children should be included in safeguarding meetings to ensure that they understand the reasons behind safeguarding actions. This can help to empower children and ensure that their voices are heard.

Transparency in Family Court

Family courts should work better to ensure that children are involved in court proceedings and that they understand what is happening. This can include providing clear and accessible information and opportunities for children to express their views.

In conclusion, the welfare of vulnerable individuals, including children and Care Experienced people, is a critical issue that requires significant changes in the way we support and protect them. The solutions outlined above can help to address the concerns raised and ensure that these individuals receive the care and support they need to thrive.



Supporting Families to help children

- Tell Local Authorities that its important to stay with family first if it's safe.
- Tell Local Authorities to find and support families so that children are safe when needed.
- Ask children who can't live parents, if they know anyone they want to live with.
- Ask Local Authorities to use money to support kinship carers and children.
- Use a 'Family Network Support Package' in 19 parts of the country to help kinship carers – like building a new bedroom or extra money for things the children need.
- Offer training and help to all kinship carers in the country.
- Create a new 'kinship strategy' about how families are supported to help children.

What Care Experienced people told us

"I'm happy with this ambition."

"Safe is too bold a statement"

"I would have been happier for a kinship option"

"Support the relationships between siblings who go into foster care and kinship more."

"My grandparents needed more support to give me the emotional support I needed. It caused us to have a relationship breakdown. This support would have helped them and me so much"

"Nothing about keeping siblings together"

"Why again is only part of the country being supported? Its just going to further the postcode lottery!!!"

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Concerns About Ambitions and Language

There are concerns about the ambitions being set for children. While some people are satisfied with the goals being set, others have concerns about the language used or the focus of the ambitions. It is important that the ambitions are clear and achievable, and that they prioritise the well-being and development of the child/young person.

Language is also an important consideration. The way an ambition is phrased can have a significant impact on how it is perceived and achieved. It is important that the language used is inclusive and empowering, so that children/young people feel supported and encouraged to achieve their goals.

Supporting Relationships and Keeping Siblings Together

Another concern is the need to support relationships and keep siblings together. For many children, their siblings are their closest and most important relationships. It is essential that we prioritise keeping siblings together, as this can have a significant impact on their well-being and development.

In addition to supporting relationships between siblings, it is also important to support relationships between children and their caregivers. Children who have strong and positive relationships with their caregivers are more likely to thrive and succeed.

The Need for Support Across the Country

Finally, there is a concern about the availability of support for children across the country. It is essential that support is available to all children, regardless of where they live. This includes access to healthcare, education, and other essential services.

In order to ensure that support is available across the country, we need to invest in infrastructure and resources that can support children in different areas. This includes investing in healthcare facilities, schools, and community centres that can provide essential services to children and their families.

Overall, it is clear that more needs to be done to ensure that children receive the care and support they need to thrive. We need to prioritise the well-being and development of children and invest in infrastructure and resources that can support them in different areas. By doing so, we can help to ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential and contribute to society.

Make care better for children in care and care leavers



- Created missions to improve aspects of life for Care Experienced people.
- Professionals make sure children spend time with the people who care for them.
- Want more organisations to act like, or be, corporate parents.
- Increase the number of foster homes and residential homes so children don't have to move far from home.
- Help Care Experienced people do well in school and get jobs
- Create more jobs and training.
- Increase money for those completing apprenticeships and the Care Leaver Covenant.
- Offer more support in schools, colleges and universities for Care Experienced people.
- Help Care Experienced people stay with their foster carers in 'staying put'.
- Support Care Experienced people with their physical and mental health.

What Care Experienced people told us

"Physical and Mental health support should always be there"

"There needs to be support when we leave care. Being in Care is traumatic and there needs to be more support in coping with that"

"More educational financial support is needed"

"increasing number of foster homes needs home grants to place. Many people cant afford the upfront costs"

"Need more of a range in the accommodation options offers. More supported lodgings for example"

"More Trauma-Informed training for schools."

"Give us rights. Why isn't making Care Experience a protected characteristic here?"

"How are these mission being actioned?"

"There needs to be more on supporting us beyond 25."

"Nothing about supporting our existing relationships in care. I dont want to be friends with my social worker."

Physical and Mental Health Support

Physical and mental health support should always be available to Care Experienced people. This can include access to counselling and therapy, as well as regular health check-ups and treatment for any existing conditions.

Support When Leaving Care

Leaving care can be a traumatic experience, and Care Experienced people need support to cope with this transition. This can include access to housing, financial assistance, and educational support.

Educational Financial Support

More financial support is needed to ensure that Care Experienced people can access education. This can include scholarships, bursaries, and grants to cover the costs of tuition, books, and other educational expenses.

Grants for Foster Homes

Increasing the number of foster homes is essential, but many people cannot afford the upfront costs associated with becoming a foster carer. Providing home grants can help to make it more accessible for people to become foster carers and provide a stable home for children in care.

Range of Accommodation Options

There needs to be a more extensive range of accommodation options available to Care Experienced people. This can include supported lodgings, which provide a more stable and supportive environment for young people.

Trauma-Informed Training for Schools

More trauma-informed training is needed for schools to ensure that they can support Care Experienced children effectively. This training can help teachers to understand the impact of trauma on children and provide appropriate support.

Rights for Care-Experienced People

Care Experienced people should have the same rights as everyone else. Making Care Experience a protected characteristic can help to ensure that Care Experienced people are not discriminated against and have access to the same opportunities as their peers. This needs to be fully debated with Care Experienced to see if it is truly wanted.

Mission Action

It is essential to ensure that the missions to support Care Experienced people are being actioned. This can include regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure that progress is being made and that Care Experienced people are receiving the support they need.

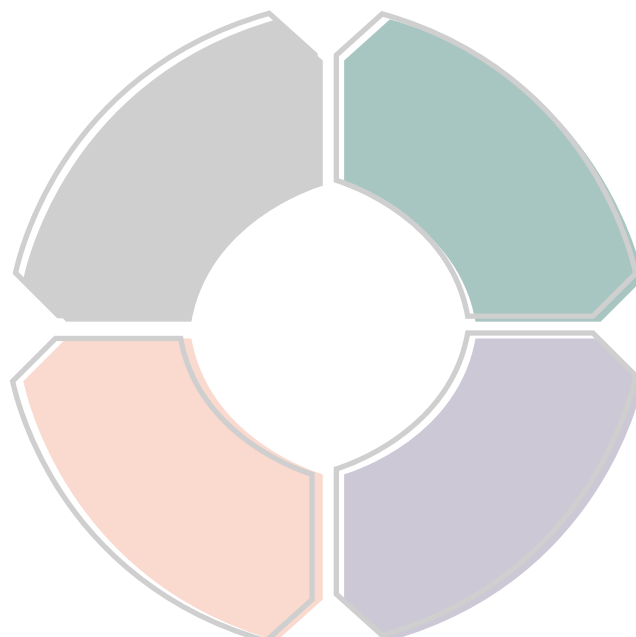
Support Beyond 25

Support for Care Experienced people should not stop at the age of 25. There needs to be ongoing support available to help care-experienced people transition into adulthood and live independent and fulfilling lives.

Supporting Existing Relationships

It is essential to support existing relationships in care, including relationships with social workers. Care Experienced people should have the opportunity to form meaningful connections with the people who support them, and these relationships should be respected and nurtured.

In conclusion, there is a clear need for improved support for Care Experienced people, both during and after their time in care. Adequate physical and mental health support, educational financial support, and a range of accommodation options are just some of the ways in which care-experienced people can be better supported. By working together, we can create a society where care-experienced people can thrive and live fulfilling lives. Care Experienced people want real rights and access to how to advocate for them to.



Children have great social workers

- Want to increase the amount of social workers.
- Keep social workers in their jobs so children don't have lots of social workers.
- Reduce office time for social workers so they can spend time with children and families.
- Give social workers more and better training.
- Celebrate social workers doing a good job.

What Care Experienced people told us

"Reduce office time so they can spend more time with children and families"

"Social workers need to stop telling us how many cases they have. I don't need to know that"

"How is any of this possible with the amount of case loads they have?"

"Social workers need more support - Give them trauma informed support. they do a very difficult job"

"Pay them better, and work on the negative image of being a social worker"

"The BSC social worker degree needs to be improved to reflect the real reality of social work"

"Match care experienced people up with social workers"

"Train them in what care experience actually is"

"Encourage them to explore what is best for the child, and not them"

"Sort out the funding opportunities in becoming a social worker, so people can choose the profession to begin with"

"Its important to not force a "close" SW and child relationship"

Reducing Office Time

Social workers should spend more time with children and families, and less time in the office. This can be achieved by reducing administrative tasks and providing support staff to take care of paperwork and other non-essential tasks.

Case Loads

Social workers often have high caseloads, which can make it challenging to provide adequate support to each family. To address this issue, more social workers could be hired, or support staff could be provided to take care of non-essential tasks.

Trauma-Informed Support

Social workers need trauma-informed support to help them deal with the challenging situations they face on a daily basis. This can include regular debriefs, access to counselling and therapy, and other forms of support.

Pay and Image of Social Work

Social workers should be paid a fair wage for the important work that they do. Additionally, efforts should be made to improve the image of social work and promote it as a rewarding and vital profession.

Improving Social Work Education

The BSC social work degree should be improved to reflect the real reality of social work, including practical training and experience working with families and children.

Matching Care-Experienced People with Social Workers

Care Experienced people can benefit from being matched with social workers who have similar experiences. This can help to build rapport and trust between the social worker and the child or young person.

Training on Care Experience

Social workers should receive training on Care Experience to help them understand the unique challenges faced by Care Experienced people and provide appropriate support.

Encouraging Child-Centered Approaches

Social workers should be encouraged to explore what is best for the child, rather than what is best for them or the system. This can be achieved through training and support, as well as changes to the way social work is structured.

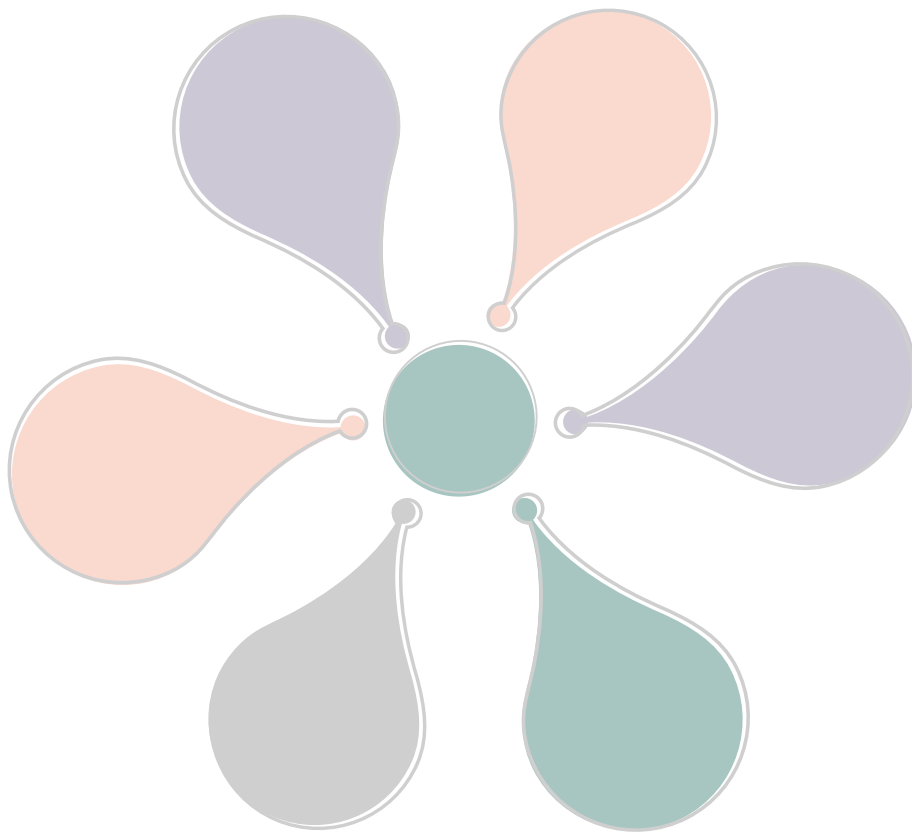
Funding Opportunities for Social Work

Funding opportunities for social work should be improved to make it a more accessible profession for those who want to pursue it. This can include scholarships, bursaries, and other forms of financial support.

Building Relationships

It is important not to force a "close" relationship between a social worker and a child. Instead, social workers should focus on building strong, positive relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

The concerns highlighted the need for improvements in support for social workers and changes to the social work profession. By reducing office time, providing trauma-informed support, improving social work education, and matching Care Experienced people with social workers, we can create a system where families and children receive the support they need to thrive. Additionally, improving funding opportunities for social work and promoting it as a rewarding and vital profession can help to attract and retain talented individuals in the field.



Improving the whole system for children and families

- Create new guides for those working with families and children on how to help.
- Listen more to children and young people.
- Listen more to those who love the children being helped.
- Collect better information about how social care help children.
- Make sure services improve quickly when they aren't good.
- Make sure money given to Local Authorities is matching the needs of those living there.

What Care Experienced people told us

"Make sure children know they can have an impact on their Care Experience by using their own voice. But also that the young people are taught how to efficiently fight their case. Not just being told "your voice matters" "

"Teach Care Experienced people how to be their own advocates while in care. Actually tell us what are rights are. Its not good enough."

"Better communication between all parties is needed. And better information sharing is needed. Maybe a nationally used technology for all?"

"Will the information be national or local? how will the people the information is about be able to access it? Will it be redacted like our care files?"

"Its all too vague"

"Actual fund the system the way it needs to function. £200 millon is not enough."

"Encourage and support Care Experienced people into social work"

"Align the system more with UNCRC"

Empowering Care-Experienced People

Care Experienced people should be empowered to use their own voice and know that they can have an impact on their Care Experience. They should also be taught how to efficiently fight their case and advocate for themselves. This can be achieved through education and training, as well as providing support and guidance on their rights.

Better Communication and Information Sharing

Communication between all parties involved in a child's care, including social workers, teachers, and healthcare professionals, is critical in ensuring that the child receives the support they need. Better information sharing can be achieved through the use of nationally used technology that allows for easy and secure sharing of information. It is important to consider how the people the information is about will be able to access it, and if it will be redacted like care files.

Adequate Funding

The care system requires adequate funding to function effectively. The current funding of £200 million is not enough to provide the level of support that is necessary for Care Experienced people, let alone the system itself. Adequate funding can help to ensure that Care Experienced people receive the support they need to thrive.

Empowering Care-Experienced People in Social Work

Care Experienced people can bring valuable insights and perspectives to social work. Encouraging and supporting Care Experienced people to pursue a career in social work can help to improve the quality of care and support provided to Care Experienced people.

Aligning with UNCRC

The care system should be aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This can help to ensure that the rights of Care Experienced people are protected and that they receive the support they need to thrive.

Overall, there is a clear need for improved communication, education, and funding in the care system. Empowering Care Experienced people and aligning the system with UNCRC can help to ensure that the rights of Care Experienced people are protected and that they receive the support they need to thrive. By providing adequate funding, better communication and information sharing, and empowering Care Experienced people in social work, we can create a system that provides the highest quality of care and support possible.

Thank you to the following

Blagrove for providing us with the funding to reach into our community, to enable our voices to be heard, in a collective and powerful space.

Wolverhampton and Brighton participation teams for working with us and wanting to empower the Care Experienced people in your communities.

To the Care Experienced People we worked with; thank you for sharing your experiences in such open and powerful ways. We learned so much from you all and the utter power that comes with collective standing together to spark and push for change.

