



Summary of the key themes discussed at the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Wednesday 11th June 2014

5.00pm – 7.00pm

Boothroyd Room, Portcullis House, Westminster

Chair: Shalyce Lawrence, care leaver, London Borough of Waltham Forest
Co-Chair: Ann Summerfield, young person, Essex Children in Care Council

Panel: David Akinsanya, broadcaster, journalist and campaigner
Krystal Carr, young person, children in care council, North Tyneside
Rebecca Palmer, Head of young people's engagement and participation, Greater London Authority
Luke Rodgers, founder of Foster Focus
Edward Timpson MP, Minister for Children and Families

Present: Craig Whittaker MP, Calder Valley & Chair of the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers
The Earl of Listowel, Vice Chair of the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Bill Esterson MP, Sefton Central & Co-Vice Chair of the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Richard Benyon MP, Newbury

Topic: 'How should young people be involved in improving services for children in care and care leavers?'

120 children, young people, professionals and carers attended the meeting.

1. Introduction from the Chair

Shalyce Lawrence and Ann Summerfield started the meeting by welcoming those present and introduced the panel members. There was a viewing of a short film created by children in care and care leavers edited by Kevani Kanda, care leaver.

2. Panel comments

Shalyce asked the panel members to give a brief comment on the topic for discussion.

3. Discussion

Ann asked the audience to respond to four statements:

- i) *I have been involved in improving services for children in care and care leavers.*

Two young people in the room said they had not been involved.



- ii) *I want to be involved in improving services for children in care and care leavers.*

Everyone in the room said they would like to be involved.

- iii) *Young people should be involved at every stage of recruiting and training social workers, personal advisors and managers.*

Only two young people in the room said they should not be involved at every stage.

- iv) *I have been involved in recruiting or training staff.*

Five young people in the room said they had not been involved.

One young person said there was no need to get involved in the recruitment of staff as current social workers were great at their jobs.

Another young person from Hackney said 'I had no idea I could get involved'.

The floor was then opened to questions.

Summary of the key themes:

i. Barriers to involvement

One of the main issues raised at the meeting was the barriers children and young people face which prevent them from becoming actively involved in improving children's services.

Engagement:

David Akinsanya commented on this, noting that young people often face a lot of difficulties in their personal life which can act as barriers preventing them from engaging with services. Luke Rodgers agreed, adding that young people often do not feel that their voices are respected. He stressed the importance of local authorities acknowledging that all young people have knowledge and are all able to share experiences. He noted, however, the importance for those who are involved to look beyond their own personal experiences and try to represent other young people as well as themselves. Luke also suggested financial incentives as a way of encouraging young people to get involved. Rebecca Palmer said involving young people in service design was absolutely essential but said financial incentives are not always necessary, sometimes the knowledge that their work is creating change is enough.

One professional asked 'how much of a barrier is the desire of young people to be treated 'normally' and not treated as children in care or care leavers?' Luke Rodgers agreed this can sometimes act as a barrier. Rebecca Palmer said there are different ways of engaging with young people and professionals need to acknowledge this and ensure all young people are treated as individuals and feel involved in some way.

Local authorities:



David said local authorities need to do more to ensure young people are aware of the ways in which they can get involved in improving services. Shalyce said often social services forget that young people are the future and it is essential to involve them and invest in them and give young people the right tools to make a difference. Luke said another issue is that not enough funding goes into facilitating the involvement of young people in services and it can often become a superficial tick box exercise rather than involving young people at all stages.

ii. Involvement of young people with disabilities

One young person raised the importance of getting young disabled people involved in services. Rebecca said accessible friendly spaces are important but this takes time and investment. Edward Timpson said it is essential to involve and talk to young people at a very early stage of designing services. He noted that before producing the SEN reforms the first step the government took was to speak with young people with disabilities and offer them the opportunity to discuss what they felt was wrong and right about current system. He said only recipients know if services are working. A young person commented on this and suggested appointing one disabled young person on every CICC to represent the group as this could be a very powerful way to understand the challenges they face.

iii. Involvement in residential children's homes

There was a discussion on residential homes, how they can be improved. It was noted that relationship building is essential to ensure children grow up and feel they are part of something and feel valued. One young person agreed and said it is difficult to build relationships growing up in a residential home as staff have to be professional and are not allowed to comfort or cuddle the young people they support. They finish their shift and go home but often do not realise that what they call work is a young person's home. He added, if he wants to go out he often has to be back by 2pm so his residential worker has time to do the necessary paperwork before their shift ends at 3pm. David agreed that this is an issue, noting that staff are paid too little and their shifts are often designed around the staff and not the young people. He added, if the workers are trusted to work in a residential home they should be trusted to give a cuddle.

Lord Listowel noted the importance of a qualified work force in residential homes, pointing to countries such as Belgium and France where qualifications of residential workers are much higher. A care leaver disagreed, saying that being book smart does not necessarily make you good with relationship building. The most important thing is to have a natural passion for your job.

One young person said councils often ship children out to private residential homes which put profit above all else. He said he arrived at a home which had not finished being built. He said he kicked off because 'I wanted a hug'. He said safeguarding is too politically correct. Matthew Brazier, HMI, Ofsted, responded to this and noted the importance of relationships and skilled experienced staff. He said Ofsted does not see inspecting residential homes as a tick box exercise and aimed to ensure the rules reflected what is best for the young people.

Edward Timpson said the government was seeking to make residential care better and discussed the importance of combining education and care and



making homes safe and secure. He pointed to Bradford's children in care council which had been involved in influencing the design and scope of a residential home in their local authority.

A young person from East Sussex County Council commented on her involvement in improving children's services, saying she was able to attend a budget meeting in her local authority and was able to put forward her views on a residential home which was being shut down.

iv. Involvement in children's services

David Akinsanya suggested that local authorities use 'nepotism' to help children and young people get valuable work experience and jobs. He said many parents use their contacts to secure work experience and jobs for their children and local authorities should do the same as the corporate parent, particularly as local authorities are such large employers.

A participation worker from south Gloucestershire said they wanted young people to be involved in staff professional development and target setting and asked if any other local authorities had done this already and how. Edward Timpson commented on some of the work councils are doing to include young people in services. He said young people in Hampshire are involved in training foster carers and social workers. In Hartlepool and Sheffield they are involved in recruiting staff and in Derbyshire changes have been made to the way review meetings are conducted so young people can be involved in the entire process. He suggested South Gloucestershire get in touch with NCB. Shalyce noted that in Waltham Forest young people are involved in an award scheme for social services where they set targets for staff and teams are awarded prizes dependent on their results.

A care experienced professional said older care leavers should have the opportunity to work with younger care leavers.

4. Care experienced young person performs rap

Shalyce performed a rap about the care system

5. Craig Whittaker MP, launches "Entitlements Inquiry: one year on"

Craig Whittaker MP thanked the young people for organising the meeting and recognised the chairs' excellent work. He launched the 'The Entitlements Inquiry – one year on.' To find out more about this and how to get involved please see our [website](#).

6. Motivational comment – David Akinsanya

David said he was grateful to have been born in the UK as many countries do not have a care system, however he said the care system was not perfect and stressed the importance of young people continuing to get involved in pushing for positive change, by coming to the APPG, talking to politicians and ensuring improvements are made. He said workers need to encourage young people to get involved and bring them to events like the APPG meetings.



7. Closing remarks from the Chair

Shalyce thanked everyone for coming and Edward Timpson gave out prizes to the youngest person in the room, the person who had travelled the farthest and the group of young people who have done the most things to improve services in care. Young people were asked at the meeting to write down a list of things they have done in their local authority to help improve the care system. To see a list of some of the things they have been doing see our website.