



Listening Event Report 2016



giving a voice to
children, young people
and vulnerable adults

rhoi llais i blant,
pobl ifanc ac oedollon
agored i niwed



Contents

	Page(s)
Introduction	3
Planning Committee	4
Event promotion	5
Day of event	6-16
Conclusion and Recommendations	17-19
Appendices	20-28

Introduction

The Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee commissioned NYAS to host an event for care leavers in receipt of services from Cardiff's 14+ Team. The Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee recognises that as a council it needs to engage with young people in receipt of its services and empower young people to be heard allowing them to have a say about the services they receive.

NYAS Cardiff is committed to empowering the voice of children and young people involved with Children's Services through the means of advocacy and participation work. NYAS facilitates a participation group for children and young people in receipt of care and support from social services and it is through this group that young people have been engaged in this piece of work.

We were delighted to work with the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee to plan and deliver the listening event and look forward to running similar youth engagement events again in the future.

Planning Committee

The planning committee was facilitated and supported by two participation workers from NYAS. Three sessions were held prior to the listening event.

Attendees of these sessions included,

- 2 people who had left care and living independently
- 2 young people ages 14+ who were still in care
- 2 facilitators from NYAS
- 1 member of staff from local authority
- 2 x residential Workers from Crosslands Children's Home

The sessions were held after school at Cardiff University School of Social Sciences. Throughout the sessions we drew up key themes for discussion at the listening event. It was decided that having a number of key themes would allow the event to have some structure and draw out discussion.

Young people from a residential home were also engaged in the planning process. They inputted their ideas through a suggestion box that one of the young people decided to make. Young people engaged well in these planning sessions which were interesting and many salient points were raised and discussed at length.

Some of the young people expressed how they felt disempowered and not listened too. At one stage they said that they felt that they are never listened too and that nothing ever changes. Facilitators assured them

that their voices will be heard and their views will be listened to. This highlights the need for Cardiff Children's Services to ensure participation and consultation with young people is imbedded into decision making processes rather than happening on an ad hoc basis

A key message from young people was they felt it was important that they and other attendees of the event are given feedback so that they can see what happens next following their involvement in the listening event.

Young people were engaged in all aspects of the planning the event. Including choosing venue, food, methods of participation and agreeing incentives for attendance.

Event promotion

The event was promoted widely across the Looked After 14+ team with all Social Workers and Personal Advisors being made aware of the event. We also had a poster inviting young people to attend the session. Members of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee were also invited to attend the session.

Day of the event

The listening event was held on the afternoon of Saturday 12th March 2016 at the Looked After 14+ Team offices, Suffolk House.



Attendees of the event were:

- 13 young people ages between 14-25
 - 3 Councillors from Cardiff Corporate Parenting Committee
 - Director of Social Services
 - Housing representatives
 - Operational manager of Children's Services
- Senior Manager of Education
 - Looked After Traineeship Coordinator
 - Personal Advisor
 - 2 Staff from Crosslands
 - 1 facilitator from NYAS

The event was opened with a lively game of Human Bingo. A getting to know you icebreaker where everyone was encouraged to meet and introduce each other.

We had two brief presentations at the event:

Representatives from housing talked about the new Youth Gateway Service and what it meant for young people in terms of accessing housing and support when leaving care.

We also had a representative talk about the When I am Ready Scheme which was introduced in April of this year under the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014.

The two main themes for discussion for the event were adequate support and money. We split into two groups so that young people could be encouraged to participate and feel comfortable in speaking in a smaller group. The key themes and messages within group discussions were:

Young people think 16 is too young to leave foster care and/or residential care. Young people expressed a concern around living alone at such a young age. They talked about the difficulties they face when living independently. Young people have said that they do not always have access to support when needed particularly during out of hours and during weekends when there are no workers available. Further discussion with young people outside of the event have also echoed this view young people have said that “having someone to talk to in crisis” was really important to them even if that person might not be able to resolve issues during out of hours. Whilst there are agencies such as the Meic Helpline that young people can access it is not widely promoted and not enough young people know about the service, who they are and what they do. Young people felt it was better to have a

direct link to the 14+ team out of hours even if it was just telephone based emotional and practical advice and support.

The general consensus of the group was that the When I am Ready Scheme will be positive for some young people but one young person enquired if the scheme was open to children and young people who live in residential care and if not what support is there going to be for young people who have turned 18 and are not ready to live on their own or semi independently.



It was expressed that Young people should not be put in private rented accommodation as one member said that it can be an economic trap. Private rented accommodation does not secure the futures of care leavers. It can often be a short term solution. Private rented accommodation does not always meet the same standards as council and housing association properties, with some taking longer than necessary to resolve matters that are the landlord's responsibility. It was also highlighted that landlords of private rented accommodation can increase rental charges substantially at any time and rental charges are significantly higher than council and housing association accommodation.

Tenants are expected to pay a bond which in some cases is not paid back. Also, young people living in private rented accommodation do not get the same tenancy support in terms of managing repairs, dealing with issues with neighbours. Some housing association properties offer tenancy support and have opportunities such as groups and activities however the same opportunities are not available to young people in private rented accommodation.

Young people said that they did not feel private rented accommodation offered them long term security. Housing benefit can only fund such accommodation until care leavers turn 21. Post 21 housing benefit will only offer benefit to a shared room rate (house share), this means that care leavers are required to make up the difference in benefit to cover their rent or move home. It was felt young people who are not in employment would struggle to cover these costs. Young people

enquired if the Council provided bonds and act as guarantor? It was confirmed at the meeting that the council can provide this assistance.

Young people also talked about the Youth Gateway Service and said that the 6 weeks intensive tenancy support package was an excellent idea. However, some expressed concern that not everyone works well in group based learning. They also said that some young people may not require this intensive support. It was noted that support for young people in tenancies should be ongoing until young people are settled in and ready for it to end. One young person suggested that all young people should have a trial period and have people on hand that they can call at any time. They said that young people should have a F###k up period because things do go wrong but if able to access support they could get the help they need quickly. It was also said that if a young person doesn't like living independently then they should be able to move back into foster care.



Young people said that the Housing Department should know how many care leavers they are going to need to find accommodation for in the future with an expectation that they will not be living in private rented accommodation. It was confirmed that the Youth Gateway Service will address some of these issues.

One young person asked if the Housing Department 'profile' areas of the city to make sure they are safe for vulnerable care leavers, It was expressed that some vulnerable young people were placed in areas or properties where they are not safe and encounter hostility. Young people wanted assurance that Housing Department look into potential dangers when accommodating care leavers.

Young people also highlighted that they need thorough assessments of their needs. In order to do this young people felt that they needed proper

quality time to sit down with their Social Worker. They said that meetings sometimes felt rushed and also the impact of having a change of Social Worker adversely affected their ability to work with their Social Workers and build up a trusting working relationship, especially within a context whereby some young people have been let down by previous Social Workers leaving with little or no notice. They felt strongly that staff changes are disruptive to relationships. Young people who have had a number of Social Workers, Personal Advisors, and Support Workers struggle with the inconsistency, they said that they cannot connect and lose faith in the service when Social Workers and other professionals leave without signing over their case to a new worker. They felt that endings are important to them and should be managed sensitively. It can be extremely difficult for a young person to connect with a new Social Worker during a short window of time when support needs to be consistent.

“The quality of the service provided by social workers and personal advisors is very important. They need to be trustworthy, give us time, available and consistent.”

Young people talked about their relationship with their Personal Advisor and Social Worker. They said that they felt it was important that they make time to see them. Some young people expressed concern about their Social Worker working part time. They felt that their Social Worker often does not have enough time to see them as when they are in work they are working with other young people and are not available. Social workers need more time to be with young people to get to know them better and build a stronger relationship with them. Young people said

that they felt that Cardiff needs more Social Workers and Personal Advisors so that they can spend more time working with young people.

Young people said that support post 18 is not always good enough. There should be a high level of support to 21, supporting young people to access education, employment and training. Young people who have been looked after require support of professionals with an understanding of their needs, difficulties they have faced and are able to support them emotionally and practically.

Young people felt they needed a practical preparation course. Young people suggested a practical preparation course that could potentially be delivered by young people for young people, sharing the skills that they have learnt living independently with other care leavers. They felt that this support would be most effective and would also help young people meet other young people and receive peer support.

Young people said that there should be training flats with support. It was confirmed that this is currently in place with some training flats available. Young people inquired if young people who had left care had been consulted about how best to provide these training flats to young people so services offered are relevant and based on the expertise of young people who have been through or going through the system. Young people said “We want to be noticed and recognised”

Young people also highlighted that they should have positive role models/mentors to work with them throughout leaving care.

Young people stressed that there needed to be more children's homes in Cardiff for young people who do not want to live in supported accommodation or with foster carers/supported lodgings as well as more supported accommodation specific to care leavers.

Finances were a major concern for young people. Young people said that they felt that their current allowance of £57.90 per week was not enough to live off. They said that they felt it was difficult to cover their bills, food, getting around and activities.

Young people talked about the difficulties in getting around the city when their money is limited. Some young people have bus passes but not all young people. The current rate for bus fare is £2.40 for a day to go. Being able to get around is really important for young people so they can visit friends and family.

One young person talked about the difficulties they faced with managing their money. They raised about their money being split into daily amounts of £8 per day. They expressed some frustration that they have to go to the Looked After 14+ Team office to collect their money on a daily basis. It was explained that it was much harder to manage with it being split over 5 days. This meant that they could not buy large items such as washing powder unless they had saved up over the course of a few days. It was also said that they have to catch a bus to collect their money daily.

Young people commented that when their money was paid into their bank account they could not withdraw the £7.50 from their bank and

could only withdraw it in multiples of 10 although some cash points do allow a 5 pound withdrawal.

Young people said that they felt that they should receive more money to cover day to day costs. In previous discussions young people said they felt that additional benefits such as access to free leisure and bus passes would help them significantly.

Young people highlighted a consequence of lack of money was that at times they couldn't get involved in things with their friends because they didn't have the money to do things such as go to cinema or go out for food.

A key message was that they would like their money to be more flexible and would like to have more support on managing their money. Young people would also like advice on avoiding debt, managing debt and what to do when things have gone wrong.

In addition to this young people said they would like to know what support they are entitled to if they wish to stay in or return to education.

Young people also commented that they would like support in preparing for interviews, training and managing conflict. It was discussed that young people do not always know what is appropriate for an employer to ask in an interview. Young people didn't always feel equipped to challenge and manage conflict with other workers and neighbours.

Lastly, young people talked about their experiences of advocacy. Some attendees had an Advocate and some didn't. Young people from

residential care said that they had all seen the Visiting Advocate who calls on a monthly basis. Young people felt that they would like Advocates to visit young people in hostels.



Conclusion and Key Recommendations

The event drew out many interesting points from young people. It was evident that they are happy with the service that they receive however a number of young people expressed concerns about aspects in relation to housing, Social Work/Personal Advisor support and finance. Young people talked positively about the traineeship program and how they enjoyed having opportunities to gain work experience. Young people also felt that peer support and more preparation for leaving care and living independently was something that they would benefit from.

Recommendations from report

- Young people would like advice and support services available out of hours to be widely promoted.
- Young people would like their weekly allowances to be increased.
- More council housing to be available to avoid reliance on the private rented sector
- More Children's Residential homes as an alternative to foster care and supported lodgings
- More training flats with support
- Young people would like the Council to consider additional benefits such as access to free sports and leisure facilities and bus passes.
- Young people leaving care would like to have a passport or some form of photographic ID when leaving care.
- Visiting Advocacy for hostels and supported accommodation.
- Better out of hours or on call Social Workers/Personal Advisors for young people.
- A preparation project for young people run by young people

- More Social Workers and Personal Advisors.
- A managed transition when a social worker is leaving the team for a new social worker to be allocated their case.
- More support for care leavers age 18 plus.
- Clear guidance on what care leavers are entitled to when leaving care and further education.
- Clear guidance for young people in residential care and the When I Am Ready Scheme.

APPENDICES (flipchart paper from planning and event)

SOCIAL WORKERS

- Having a relationship with my social worker is important

- Social Workers need to visit me and keep in touch and be on time

- Having lots of changes of social worker is chaotic, frustrating, stressful, irritating

- Social Workers need to be honest

- Social Workers are a waste of space and have made my life a living hell

- Social Workers need to show us respect

What we need

Phone ... Internet or access to internet... Credit to make calls

How to cook ...stay healthy ...how to store fresh food

WHERE TO SHOP? Consumer Rights? Getting around town

Understanding positive relationships and friendships and managing conflict.

Emotional support

Proper storage for our things when between homes

PASSPORT & BANK ACCOUNT

Information? How do I “change a plug” “Get help when locked out” “Change a fuse”

How do I wash clothes? How do I dry clothes properly?

What size am I?

How to make an appointment?

What does the doctor do? How to register?

How to read a bus timetable?

How to get a job. What appropriate questions in an interview.

THE FEARS OF YOUNG PEOPLE PREPARING TO LEAVE CARE

Budgeting

Scared of change and surviving on my own

Losing friends

How having enough money

Don't want to leave

Loneliness

Not getting a job

Dealing with neighbours

Missing appointments

Not having luxuries

Needing emotional support

Being groomed

Running out of food

Being alone



DO YOU THINK THAT:-

£57.90

PER WEEK IS ENOUGH

TO 'LIVE' ON.

WHAT ELSE COULD THE COUNCIL OFFER TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN?

A Champion

More money

Access to leisure

Bus Passes

Support for activities

Jobs

More training tenancies

We need to be given the opportunity to tell our own story to new social workers. So they don't base judgement on what is in our records.

Our files should be accurate and should reflect the truth about us.

There should be no mistakes on our files. We should know what is written about us and be able to challenge things that are untrue.

HOW WILL YOU
CHALLENGE THE
DISCRIMINATION OR
PRECONCEPTIONS OF
LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE THAT OTHER
STAFF WITHIN CHILDREN'S
SERVICES
MAY HAVE ABOUT CARE
LEAVERS?

HOW ARE YOU
GOING TO MAKE
SURE THAT YOUNG
PEOPLE ARE READY
TO LEAVE CARE?

WHAT SHOULD

Clothes?

Water?

£5.00

PAY FOR WHEN

Electric?

Gas?

YOU ARE 17?

Food?

Service charges?

“ How can I maintain friendships if I can't afford to do the same things as my friends?”