

Children's Services Strategy Development

Listen Exercise



Report

May 2019

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Sample: 10 young people aged 12-18 from Bright Start Forum, 11 Plus Team and ARC. It is important to note that all areas within Children's Services were offered the opportunity to engage in the listening exercise.

Duration: Each focus group took 1 hour

Method: Semi structured discussion following a short introduction to children's rights – concept of rights, area covered - protection, provision and participation. Participants were asked to consider which rights children's services were good and then which one's did they need to improve upon including any ideas for improvement.

A Council Officer from the Communication Team then led a discussion with a focus on how the strategy should be made available to children and young people.

What is going well?

Some young people reported that they were supported to be physically healthy including encouragement to attend medical appointments, GP check-ups and visit the dentist.

'Sometimes I need reminding as I forget'

A number of young people felt that they were given the space to share their views and that worker's listen to them providing them with someone to talk too.

'My worker listens to me, she is someone I can talk too about anything'

Others went on to say that, they felt that their housing needs were met to some extent however there were some examples provided when this was not the case.

'I like where I live now but before I was in place full of drugs I hated it'

Some young people said that they like and appreciated their Personal Assistant (PA) but others reported not seeing their PA for some time and that they could be 'bossy' when they did.

'I like the PA I have now, she's lovely I know she cares'

Young people thought that Foster Carers were good and that they liked their experience although they clearly stated that there were more needed in Cardiff.

'My fosters family were lovely but there's not enough of them'

A number of young people felt that they were checked up on regularly and that this was important as many young people are vulnerable and have significant mental health issues.

'That's one thing they do well, they are always checking up on me, I need it as I get really low and have done stuff in the past'

Three young people felt that they were provided with a good standard of living although they did not have enough money to do what they needed and sometimes went without the things they needed.

'I've got a roof over my head and I am working but I am still skint all the time, it's hard'

When asked if they were involved in decisions that affected them? Young people from ARC and 11 plus team suggested that they were involved in the process and were happy with this. The participants who had left care said that this only happened on occasions.

'If I were to give them a grade like in schools I would give them a B for involving me in decisions'

'Sometimes they bother but other times I don't even know what's going on'

Nearly all participants stated that they get information in way that they wanted and in the right way.

'I like being told face to face, you understand stuff better that way'

'They contact me by phone, that's the way I like it, text or calling'

Areas for improvement:

Nearly all of the young people felt that young people did not know their rights and many of the adults in their life lack knowledge on children's rights. It was highlighted that parents need to be taught about children's rights.

'If I don't know my rights my parents definitely wouldn't, half the time they are the problem'

'Not sure if my worker has been trained in rights, they never mention it'

All of the young people who had left care stated that they are very rarely asked their views and when they do, it is not acted upon. This was one of the biggest issue raised during the focus group.

'It's a massive issue, it's not that they don't listen, they don't even ask'

School was highlighted as a struggle for most participants although some were provided with alternative curriculum programmes and found this positive.

'I hated school, they thought I was thick and didn't understand what I was going through'

'School put me on a special programme where I went off site and did different activities, it was wicked. Everyone should be offered that'

Some young people felt that they were trained in 'life skills' but most felt this needed to improve especially around independent living and financial management.

'I did some stuff in school but nobody really takes the time to explain how to do everyday stuff needed to live on your own'

Many participants felt that their PA did not understand their needs and at times were bossy and forced them to do things they did not want.

'I hardly see my and when I do she's bossy, it gets on my nerves'

'I like it when people talk calmly and take the time to explain things'

All of the young people said that they had issues with their emotional health and wellbeing and that they did not have people to turn to. They also reported that they did not know who or where to get help when needed.

'I think all of the people I know that have been in care have mental health issues'

'It's hard when you live on your own; you get lonely and have nobody to turn to'

They felt that staff around them – hostel workers, PA's and Social Workers needed more training on mental health issues.

'I just don't think that they understand what we are going through or how to help'

Three young people felt that their best interest was not taken into consideration and that they were not allowed to live with their family when they wanted to.

'I wanted to stay with my family, they didn't listen. They had made their mind up'

Most of the participants said that they did not do things socially as they did not have friends, money or opportunity to do so. Many of the group said that they were lonely and they would like to socialise and fun more.

'I have loads of pet because I get so lonely'

'Because I moved schools so many times I don't have a lot of friends'

Some of the group members shared their experience of getting involved in play and youth centres and the benefits that came with this but these are not available now and this was not good. A suggestion was to build relationships with organisations like the Rotary as they can help with programmes that give you fun and new experiences.

'When I was young I did outdoor pursuits, paid for by the Rotary. It was great and it helped me but now they have closed all the play and youth centres, it's wrong'

The group highlighted the inequality regarding the minimum wage. This variation relating to age hit younger people hard as they still get charged the same rent even though their incomes are lower.

'We don't get discount when we go in a shop or when we pay our rent, so it's not fair!'

Half of the focus group participants raised the issue around the lack of privacy in their lives and that professionals did not respect this enough.

'They wouldn't like people talking about their lives in that way, it happens all the time'

Some said that they lacked control in their lives even though they were an adult. Examples included rules in hostels/accommodation relating to being able to stay out for only 2 nights a week and a restriction on who you had to stay over in accommodation.

One young person gave the example of being reported missing even though it was less than 24 hours and people came to his workplace to sight him which was uncalled for and embarrassing.

'They went to my place of work, it was embarrassing. I went off!'

Accommodation was the joint most highlighted area to address, all the young people who had left care said that moving was very stressful and this should be kept to a minimum. There were examples given when young people are due to move in less than 2 weeks and they still did not know where they were going to live.

'Because they didn't win the contract I have to move out, it's in 2 weeks' time and I still don't know where I will be living. That's can't be right'

'I hate moving it stresses me right out'

The care experienced young people felt that there were enough hostel accommodation but the quality was not good enough. Some are in noisy areas and people struggled to sleep and get up for work the next day.

'The place is a mess, repairs never get done'

Others said they felt unsafe when people would use drugs and put people under pressure to get involved.

'I refused to sleep at one hostel; I was too scared because of the druggies'

Most of the accommodation did not feel homely and some did not get the repairs required.

'It doesn't feel like home, they never do'

Some group members liked the training flats but they were too small and other members felt that the temporary nature of these was not good as it meant even more moves, therefore more stress.

'I like the idea of a training flat but it means that you have to move even more and that stresses me out bad'

When asked about what makes a good worker responses included people who treated young people with respect, talked calmly. One respondent suggested the workers car was a mess.

'It's a right mess, stuff everywhere'

How workers presented themselves was highlighted as important and also being on time was important.

'He is always late'

'They should dress smart, make an effort'

Participants shared their views on how the strategy should be made available to children and young people. The most popular idea was to produce a short film that explained the key areas within the strategy.

This video should be short and to the point, however there were variety of views on how the film should be presented. Some young people felt that it should be animated while others felt that it should be presented by a young person.

It was suggested by some participants that there should be accessible paper versions available, possibly in the style of an infographic, which could displayed in Children's Services offices and community resources.