

My Education Report 2018

MAY 2018

Voices From Care
45 The Parade
Roath
Cardiff CF24 3AB



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1. Project Brief

Voices From Care travelled across Wales to hear from care experienced young people on their educational experiences. Voices From Care hosted and facilitated five education workshops in Llangrannog, Cardiff, Cwmbran, Swansea and Deeside for young people aged 12-22. These sessions provided a platform to meaningfully contribute to the Welsh Governments strategy 'Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales'.

- Voices From Care to facilitate consultation sessions with groups of young people who were asked the same set of statements across Wales – to compare similarities and differences in experiences.
- The consultation sessions to be guided by the key themes shown in Voices From Care's previous report around 'What it means to be me' which formed a series of statements to discuss.
- The groups were supported by Voices From Care and some supporting staff from the authorities in each region.
- CASCADE of Cardiff University attended several of the sessions to discuss 'messages to schools' the education charter. For the groups CASCADE could not attend, Voices From Care presented the charter.

2. Understanding of being in care

Statements Discussed:

- **Teachers show an understanding of what it is like being in care;**
- **Teachers to be supported to understand how it feels to be looked after;**
- **The Looked After Children Education Co-coordinator (LACE) shows an understanding of what it is like being in care;**

The term 'understanding' can be interpreted differently for all young people; young people primarily saw those who understand as people who empathize and promote positive aspirations. Young people presented a mix of feelings for the above statements, with the majority of young people suggesting that teachers should have more training around supporting young people and positive relationships, and that there should be more awareness around looked after education coordinators and how they can support young people who face stigma as a barrier to education.

2.1 Educational Relationships

"Teachers should be someone who understands, who can communicate easy, someone who you can trust, understand our rights and not to single people out."

The majority of young people felt that teachers should be supporting young people, especially those who are care experienced, to reach their goals and ambitions; along with championing the rights of young people across the board in education – so that young people are aware of

how they should be treated and what rights they have. *“Yes, I agree but I don’t think they are going to be able to understand fully.”*

Young people felt that they should have the opportunity to decide who they have professional relationships with – young people felt that they would rather decide who could be their support teacher rather than being given a designated teacher in school. *“I had a teaching assistant, who helped me in subjects, she was a nice person and I could go and see her and talk to her about anything. She would help me with everything.” “I used to knock the staff room door and someone would help me.”*

2.2 Training

“Teachers often say the wrong thing, or don’t know what is right to say. They aren’t to blame but should have an idea, they often sympathise for us ‘Looked After Children’ but we shouldn’t be targeted.”

Young people felt that teachers should have focused training during their teacher training, to raise awareness on what it means to be looked after. *“I think that all teachers should have that support or awareness before they become a teacher”, “They need to be experienced enough to support young people”.*

“Teachers should have training on how kids in care feel. Kids who have been in care should do the training”.

Most young people felt that care experienced young people should be the ones co-delivering training to these professionals, so that they have a better understanding from someone who has this experience.

“No, they shouldn’t treat us differently because we are all the same.”

Although the majority of young people who we consulted with felt that young people should be supported, some young people also felt that teachers shouldn’t have training around care experienced young people in education; they felt that with teachers having this training, that teachers would ‘single out’ care experienced young people more than they would have done without training. Young people want to feel equal.

2.3 Stigma

“Some teachers think Looked After Children are naughty, but we aren’t, so with the right understanding off us, or off our carers they will learn basic skills.”

Young people referred to the stigma which they feel is linked to care experience. They believe that training should be provided to help challenge this stigma and to prevent it, especially within education. The possibility of learning from foster carers, to hear from them as well as young people on why it is important to be aware of how living situations can effect behavior in education

and what can be done to prevent this in schools. *“They should have the opportunity to see and feel what we individuals feel.”*

“They always use it as an excuse to have me as an outcast, not in a bad way. But they make it bold that I am a looked after child within their college.” Some young people didn’t agree with feeling singled out because of the teacher knowing that they are in care. Young people thought that this could be done more discreetly, such as a thumbs up in the corridor with a teacher (looking at conversation through positive body language created with the young people; for the young person to decide how to communicate with them in a setting with their peers).

Young people think that teachers treat them differently because of being care experienced. The majority felt that they are noticed more, and that they have been given lower ambitions to meet because of this. *“Treat you differently, like a three year old, give us different (more challenging) work”.*

“I am not in school at the moment because of the bullying”, “I don’t feel like teachers help or give advice to anyone about being in care, because I’ve never heard a teacher give advice.”

Young people described their experiences as being quite similar, with bullying taking place in schools because of having a care identity. More work around children’s rights could possibly be done. Some felt that the school did not know how to respond to bullying towards a looked after child however could respond to a bullying case with a young person who had not been looked after; some young people felt that teachers did not know what to say.

2.4 Life in Care

“When I have review meetings, they are asking where I have been and they ask you in front of the class.”

Many of the young people explained that they are spoken to in front of their class about leaving lessons for their reviews etc. Young people feel that this is confidential and should not be shared with the classroom, building up on stigma. *“Teachers treat you differently, taking you out of lessons.”*

“Schools never seem to know what to do when I’m upset or distressed and put it down to me having a disturbed upbringing or being in the care system.” “They are always asking why I was leaving, why I wouldn’t participate in mother and father’s day activities – one of my teachers said I was in a ‘special family’.”

Young people mentioned that it would be a good idea for teachers to feel confident that they know how to respond to emotions and behaviors of young people when they need support the

most. Young people mentioned that they were often asked questions in front of the class about why they were leaving – as reviews were often carried out in school times taking them away from class. One young person also did not want to take part in a family activity and was asked in class why; the young person felt that they should have been supported rather than ‘targeted’.

Some young people thought that teachers aren’t understanding enough, and need to understand more around underlying issues to a young persons’ behavior. *“You get blamed for things that aren’t even your fault, so you just walk out of lessons” “Understanding why my behavior might change”.*

Recommendations:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers to have training around experiences of young people, co-delivered with young people.• Schools should offer flexible support to meet the emotional and wellbeing needs of care experienced young people. |
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3 Support

Statements Discussed:

- **My foster carer supports me and is involved in my education;**
- **I know what my PEP is, why I have a PEP and whether I am involved in my PEP;**

Support can be interpreted differently for all young people; young people primarily saw support as something that helps them to achieve. Young people expressed that their carers support them and their foster siblings; with the majority feeling that foster and residential carers are supportive to young people when they need it. The majority of young people expressed that they are not aware of a Personal Education Plan and how it can support them in their education to reach their goals and ambitions.

3.1 Foster Carers or Residential Staff Support

“Yes, my foster carer supports me in many ways; they also support me in my education by believing in me and help me when I struggle.” Young people thought that this is the way foster carers should support them, providing them with as much support as possible when needed. Although one young person mentioned that their foster carers are finding it difficult with supporting them ‘Sort of, they try to, but they are struggling at the moment because the bullying in school has gone worse. They say that they don’t know what to do anymore’.

“Yes they support me whenever they need to; with GCSEs or things that are on after school.” “They supported me, provided me with different educational resources, ideas and ways of improving my abilities in work, exams, work experience and my future plans.” “Yeah my foster carers help me

when I don't know a questions; they help with school work and are kind to me."

The majority of young people said that their carers supported them with additional activities after school and throughout school. *"My foster carers take me to fencing and football after school, and my social worker takes me out to the skate park". "I was given extra tuition for a predicted subject I was going to fail."* Young people shared that their carers were very positive and engaging with them when they needed help with school, finding out more information on something and helping them to plan for the future. Young people felt that having this support in the home setting is very important and promotes better learning.

"Yes but not in the right way." "I don't need help from my carers." Some young people thought that the support from carers was too much at times. One young person felt confident with their education and did not feel that they wanted or needed help from their carers. Although this was the case for this young person, it's important to ensure that foster carers are supported to support young people with their learning if the young person feels like they need some guidance.

3.2 Personal Education Plan

The majority of young people were not aware of a PEP and how the PEP is there to support young people. Young people were not aware that they could be involved in their Personal Education Plan or to have meetings around their PEP and progression in education. Some young people said that knowing this information would have been extremely useful and that young people should be made aware of it.

Throughout running the session the majority of young people had never heard of a PEP – Personal Education Plan and were not aware of what it is. Although some young people have heard of PEP's being mentioned, they have not been involved in their personal PEP. *"Never heard of a PEP, never been explained to me about a PEP and never been involved in a PEP"* *"I know what it is – it helps you plan your future in education, but that's it."*

Within the consultation sessions and peer discussions young people learned from one another about a Personal Education Plan; in most cases young people referred to their own experiences with their PEP which supported other young people who weren't sure they understood what they are and how they are there to support young people.

3.3 Looked After Children Education Coordinators

"I'm not sure what this is; I've never heard of one."

The majority of young people were not aware of what a LACE coordinator is or how they support young people. However, some young people did say that they have a designated teacher in school who helps at times. Although young people also thought that having a designated teacher singles them out – so they see the teachers on their breaks when they want to be with their friends etc.

“Yes, but I didn’t go to mine in school because she wasn’t needed, however she was very supportive and helpful in school.” “I would of like to of had my worker until year 10 in school – I had her less as of year 8” (less support as young person got older).

Some young people who were aware of LACE coordinators who supported them found it helpful, although some young people had different experiences with them feeling that they were singled out. *“I think if an issue comes up, they deal with you and not support you”*. One young person also felt that the support should not have decreased from the LACE worker as they got older due to still needing that support.

“In year 7 I had a personal support worker who helped me with Math and English.”

One young person had a good experience with a personal support worker in school who helped them with the subjects they found to be difficult at times. Some young people thought that the LACE coordinator should be a person who you look to for support, so that young people have a choice of who supports them in their education. Building better links between young people and the support which they receive may result in better learning for young people.

Recommendations:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensuring young people clearly understand what Personal Education Plans are and how they support young people.• Personal Education Plans to be fully inclusive so that care experienced young people feel able to actively participate.• Young people friendly distinctions between how Looked After Children Education Coordinators and designated teachers support care experienced young people. |
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4. Educational Confidence

Statements Discussed:

- How confident do you feel in your education?

Young people expressed mixed reactions to their current and previous confidence levels while in education. The majority of the young people showed signs of determination when explaining their future career ideas and how they can achieve this. However, many young people felt unsupported in education to reach their goals and ambitions and would have liked to have been encouraged.

4.1 My Plan

“I received after school lessons, support and mock papers to practice. I passed all of my GCSEs, then went on to sixth form and passed English, R.E and Sports. I surrounded myself with good

friends, family and that kept me grounded. I am now considering leisure management at University.”

Most young people had a plan of what they wanted to do after leaving school and going into new pathways of education, apprenticeships and employment.

“I want to join the Army. On a (confidence) scale, I feel 4 out of 10 about picking my option next year”.

This young person often mentioned that the unknown in education can sometimes cause them to feel nervous – such as what to expect when picking subjects for GCSE level and how it will impact on their future goals.

4.2 Feeling Confident

“I feel confident.” “I feel very confident in college and I understand things we do. I am currently doing employability level 2, and next year will be doing art in college.”

Young people expressed confidence in school and college, with some feeling happy with the choices of their subjects. Some young people had a set-out aim while being in education, mapping out the next steps in their further education.

“I feel happy at school, I love maths and challenges and other people at school are silly.”

This young person was put in a lower band in school, however felt that they would benefit from being in a higher band (set) to be surrounded by students who want to achieve.

4.3 Lacking Confidence

“I feel not so confident; not sure because I am getting bad test results and then good marks in my work.” “I feel nervous sometimes, but it depends where I am and who I am with.” “Not good, I don’t remember anything from school. “

A young person expressed that they would like teachers to champion different ways in which individuals learn, and that they did not feel that the teacher supported their way of learning when it came to exams. This could also link to stress of students in education, that some do better in class work such as coursework due to less pressure and limited exam conditions. Young people said that having good networks and friendships in school helped them perform better in their education. A young person mentioned that they were discouraged in school because they did not learn in the teaching style that was taught, however they would have liked to have been given a chance.

“I’m not confident in talking in front of the class. And when I don’t understand I’m scared my friends will take the ‘mick’ out of me”.

Some young people expressed that they are often scared to speak up in class, to ask or answer questions and to present their work. Young people felt that if they answered wrongly, or didn’t present their work in a certain way, or if they asked a ‘silly’ question then they would be judged by the class for doing so. Young people wanted more support in class to be able to not have these barriers in their education, for the class to feel non-judgmental.

Recommendations:

- For individual learning styles to be championed and supported in education.
- Schools, as Corporate Parents, should be aspirational for their care experienced young people and to pledge how they support care experienced young people.

“They supported me, provided me with different educational resources, ideas and ways of improving my abilities in work, exams, work experience and my future plans.”
(Young person)

