



# 1,000 VOICES CYMRU

## **CREATING A CARE EXPERIENCED LEGACY FOR WALES**

Dear Future First Minister, we are care experienced children and young people and are members of Welsh charity Voices From Care Cymru. As First Minister you will be our chief corporate parent. You might know us as children looked after and care leavers, as defined under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 but we prefer being called care experienced. There are currently 6,846 of us in care, with another 5,400 adopted children; who are also part of our care experienced community. There are many reasons why we are in care but we have all experienced trauma in our childhood. Many of us live in foster care (3,520 children) and residential care (470 children) but we also live in kinship care; with a family member (1,348 children). We are regularly made to feel different and stigmatised because we 'don't live with a birth parent'. We want Wales to lead the way, provide us with the care that enables us to thrive, feel secure and like we belong. We believe that you and your government have the opportunity to do this. All we ask is to be listened to and heard.

### **Your Commitment**

As First Minister we are seeking your commitment to listen to 1,000 care experienced children and young people from across Wales to co-produce a care system built on aspirations and relationships.

### **Care experienced children and young people priorities**

We have informed Voices From Care Cymru; the only independent charity dedicated solely to improve the lives of care experienced children & young people in Wales, on the areas that matter the most to us. They are;

- Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Sibling Relationships
- Being loved
- Breaking the Stigma
- Stability

We want to see a care system that provides all children and young people with the stability, support and love they need to thrive. The care system can achieve this. However, we know for too many children and young people the system creates instability which compounds the trauma they have already experienced. Voices From Care Cymru and our young person's Advisory Group are calling for a series of proactive changes ahead of the May 2021 elections.



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## **OUR KEY ASKS**

### **1) Legislation to ensure excellence in Corporate Parenting.**

By an extension of Corporate Parenting duties in legislation to all public bodies in Wales. This support for care experienced children and young people must be enshrined in legislation. All Corporate Parenting bodies should develop a strategy which outlines how they will better understand, assess the needs, promote the interests and provide opportunities for care experienced children and young people. There should be a commitment by cabinet through the creation of a children and young people minister; who will act as a key defender of care experienced children's rights up to the age of 25.

### **2) To provide the missing middle in mental health and wellbeing services.**

Reform of Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing services for care experienced young people is required. Care experienced children have a right to mental health support, many care experienced children are let down by not being provided the right mental health support at the right time. Corporate Parents such as health, social services and education should be working together to provide a joined-up approach to emotional and mental health services for care experienced children and young people. Reforming how we assess the wellbeing of care experienced children throughout their care journey. Having professionals confident in understanding trauma informed approaches. Earlier intervention is key to stopping young people bouncing from service to service, resulting in their issues never being fully addressed and therefore escalating into adulthood. For those most in need, dedicated CAHMS resources for care experienced children and young people. Wales needs a comprehensive mental health and wellbeing service that plug the current missing middle; whilst meeting the needs of our most vulnerable children.

### **3) Lasting Loving Relationships should be at the centre of a child's journey.**

Relationships should be a key consideration in all decisions made with about a young person's care, providing consistency throughout childhood and into adulthood. Strong relationships provide young people with a sense of stability, identity and belonging. These relationships can include individuals from statutory agencies, past and present foster carers, family members and friends. A young person's care review should be empowering, allowing children and young people to identify who are important to them. Ensuring life journey work provides a young person with a sense of their whole identify; not simply family. Most importantly no young person should be separated from their siblings, only in exceptional circumstances and 'contact' with siblings should be afforded the same importance as with birth parents.



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## OUR KEY ASKS + YOUR COMMITMENT

### 4) Creation of a Care Leavers Commitment Cymru.

A national commitment led by the First Minister to our care leavers up to the age of 25. Drawing on support from Local and National Governments, private sector and the voluntary sector to create a benchmarked series of commitments to our care leavers, regardless of where they live in Wales. This includes greater transitional support into independent living, work experience, paid employment, innovative opportunities to broaden care leavers horizons, the offer of quality housing, so no care leaver is placed in unsuitable or unregulated accommodation. The expansion of 'When I Am Ready' provision and any costs of participating in education, training and employment.

### 5) Profit Free Placements.

Remove the profit-making element in a care experienced child's placement. Young people tell us they feel upset, angry and commercialised when conversations on the costs of placements become a factor in their life. Removing incentives of accruing profit can ensure that every penny is spent on building stable, supportive and sustainable placements, instead of being diverted to distant shareholders. This could be a not-for-profit or full cost recovery approach. Any approach should be phased in to ensure existing placements are not disrupted.

### Next Steps

We are Voices From Care Cymru's young person's Advisory Group, we and our wider membership of care experienced young people would like to talk to you about our manifesto and assist in informing your vision for care experienced children and young people in Wales. In the coming months Voices From Care Cymru will be releasing more details on how we can achieve our asks outlined above, creating a care system built on stability, aspirations and loving relationships. However, we have one final ask.....

### Your Commitment to Wales Care Experienced Community.

If elected First Minister, I will commit to and oversee a national conversation, between my Government and 1,000 care experienced people, by March 2024.

Thank you for reading

Voices From Care Cymru's National Advisory Group