





## Table of contents

<b>Who are we?</b>	<b>p. 4</b>
<b>1) Research objectives</b>	<b>p. 5</b>
<b>2) Overview</b>	<b>p. 7</b>
<b>3) Young people's perceptions of social workers specifically and children's social care services generally</b>	<b>p. 9</b>
<b>4) Children and young people's experiences of being looked after</b>	<b>p. 11</b>
<b>5) What young people felt was important</b>	<b>p. 15</b>
<b>6) The changes children and young people recommend</b>	<b>p. 24</b>
<b>7) A final thought</b>	<b>p. 27</b>



## Who are we?

**11 MILLION is a national organisation led by the Children's Commissioner for England, Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green. The Children's Commissioner is a position created by the Children Act 2004.**

### **The Children Act 2004**

The Children Act requires the Children's Commissioner for England to be concerned with the five aspects of well-being covered in *Every Child Matters* – the national government initiative aimed at improving outcomes for all children. It also requires us to have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC underpins our work and informs which areas and issues our efforts are focused on.

### **Our vision**

Children and young people will actively be involved in shaping all decisions that affect their lives, are supported to achieve their full potential through the provision of appropriate services, and will live in homes and communities where their rights are respected and they are loved, safe and enjoy life.

### **Our mission**

We will use our powers and independence to ensure that the views of children and young people are routinely asked for, listened to and that outcomes for children improve over time. We will do this in partnership with others, by bringing children and young people into the heart of the decision-making process to increase understanding of their best interests.

### **Our long-term goals**

1. Children and young people see significant improvements in their wellbeing and can freely enjoy their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
2. Children and young people are more highly valued by adult society.

### **For more information**

Visit our website for everything you need to know about 11 MILLION:  
[www.11MILLION.org.uk](http://www.11MILLION.org.uk)

### **Easy to read**

We aim to make our publications easy to read for people without specialist knowledge. The final section of this document contains a list of words and abbreviations that might need further explanation.

# 1 Research objectives



**In line with its statutory duty to promote the views of children, 11 MILLION supported by Sherbert Research is delighted to be assisting Lord Laming with his safeguarding report by providing detailed qualitative information based on some children's lived experiences of children's social care services.**

The research purpose was three-fold: to show the importance of gaining feedback from children and young people who have had the experience of interacting with children's social care; to elicit ideas from children and young people about the types of interventions/activities that would improve the experiences of children who need to be safeguarded; and to show that it is possible to listened to and to gain the views of children in such a complex and sensitive area.

## 1.1 Research dates and locations

- Research was carried out between 8 and 15 January 2009
- Research was carried out in London, the South and the Midlands

## 1.2 Research sample and methodology

- Research was carried out with 15 young people aged between 10 and 16 years. They were a mix of boys and girls and included some who live with foster families, members of an advocacy group and young people in a young offenders institution
- All the young people who participated, plus the relevant social workers and foster carers, gave informed consent
- Research took the form of 12, one hour depths (one to one discussions)
- In addition, there was a single one and a half hour mini group session with three young males aged 16-17 in a young offenders institution

## 1.3 Confidentiality and child protection

In order to maintain confidentiality, verbatim quotations are labelled either 'boy' or 'girl' and their age. No location of where the young people live will be offered in this document, with the exception of, in some instances, highlighting that the view was expressed by a young person from a young offenders institution.

One child protection referral was made as a result of information shared during this research. The local authority concerned has taken appropriate action.

## 1.4 Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks to Sherbert Research, particularly Nicki Karet and

Marnie Freeman, and all the children and young people who took part in this research and shared their thoughts and ideas.

Thanks to the Association of Directors of Children Services and the directors of children's services in the relevant local authorities for their support with this research.

Thanks to the staff from the young offenders institution and the other voluntary and statutory organisations for facilitating meetings with children and young people.

## 2 Overview



**This research aimed to understand young people’s lived experiences of child protection and being in care. It was not within the scope of this research to explore causes of being in care or to represent the perspective of social workers. Therefore, none were consulted. This paper will give voice to a small sample of children and young people with extensive experience of the children’s social care system.**

The children and young people who took part in this research shared their opinions willingly and openly, despite the sensitive nature of the discussions and offered valuable insights based upon their experiences.

For all the children and young people in this sample, being in care was seen as a necessity rather than a choice. This brings with it a host of negative emotions and insecurities, locating the starting point for any evaluation in hurt, frustration and blame:



**“When you go away from your family it can’t feel that it’s good”**  
(Boy 11)

**“It’s alright if you’re a baby because then you get adopted, when you’re older you only get fostered”** (Boy 14)

This needs to be taken into consideration when reading the findings, remembering the vulnerability of the children and young people whilst acknowledging the weight of their comments. The researchers endeavoured to take the young people on a journey to encourage them to be constructive and suggest changes they would make to the social care system to help benefit other young people. These ideas are represented later in this document.

The children and young people who contributed to this piece of research came from a range of backgrounds with a variety of experiences of being looked after. Some shared that they had been in care since they were under five, others from primary school age and others since they were of secondary school age.

The majority (14 out of 15 young people) of the children and young people were safeguarded under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989, with one young person safeguarded under Section 20.

The range of ‘looked after’ experiences young people reported included staying in a number of different foster care homes, living in children’s residential units, secure units or staying with extended family.

All 15 young people in this sample understood that the role of a social worker in children's social care services was primarily to protect the safety of children and young people. Most seemed to recognise and value this role in their lives, the lives of their families and other people they knew in care.

This research revealed that children and young people in this sample regarded their social workers as a cause of some frustration as well as a vehicle through which to channel their frustration and anger.

However, in this research the majority (13 out of 15) of the children and young people revealed that not only is it important to feel protected but that they also needed to feel cared about. All 15 of the young people felt that social workers could improve how they engaged with and listened to young people.

### 3 Young people's perceptions of social workers specifically and children's social care services generally



This research showed that, in children and young people's minds, their social worker and children's social care service generally are the same entity. To them, the social worker represents the system and if the social worker disappoints or fails them in any way then the system as a whole has done the same. Likewise, if they feel supported by their social worker then they perceive the system as having looked after them.

This research revealed that the social worker could be seen as being in an invidious position, because, in the eyes of children and young people in this sample, the system also manifests itself through the social worker. For example, if the law or local authority has a certain position on an issue regarding the safety of a child and that child disagrees but is in no position to challenge it, social workers are personally blamed. At best, in meetings children and young people may ignore their social worker and play out their frustration and, at worst, can vilify their social worker and display aggressive behaviour.

These perceptions may not be too much of an issue if young people's overriding experiences of being in care and having a social worker was regarded by them as positive, consistent and in their best interests. From the perspectives of young people in this sample, it was not. According to all 15, children's social care services were not felt to always be acting in their best interests, which they felt manifested itself through their social worker's perceived attitudes and behaviours. For example, many expressed a strong sense of loyalty to family members and for those young people who had been in care for some time, they often felt their need for physical protection had reduced and that social workers were a barrier to them being in contact with their families.

The extent to which the children and young people in this research sample felt connected or disconnected from their social workers, and the extent to which this impacted on their perceptions of children's social care services overall, seemed to depend on the interplay of the following factors:

- Personality of young person
- Personal history and experiences before they were placed in care
- Entrance into being looked after: either voluntary (Section 20) or court ordered (Section 31)
- Age at which they went into care
- Current age of the young person
- Levels of contact and relationship with their family/extended family

- Relationship within their children's residential unit/foster home
- Number of different placements they have experienced
- Number of different social workers they have had assigned to them
- Personality and general manner of social worker – including reliability
- Auxiliary support such as advocacy workers, youth workers, key workers
- School support



## 4 Children and young people's experiences of being looked after

### 4.1 General



**“You just want to be treated the same and feel the same as everyone else”** (Boy 16)

This section explores children and young people's opinions of being in care and their overall relationship with the social care system. It emerged that all 15 respondents recognised the importance of care offering them protection, but they all wanted to feel cared about.

All 14 respondents looked after under Section 31 recognised that when they were initially placed in care, they were being protected from immediate harm and the State was responsible for their safety and physical security.

However, not everyone felt that this protection was maintained as their sense of security depended on where they were placed and with whom. For example, one person remarked that living in children's residential units kept children and young people at risk. He was 17 years old and had been in care since he was 10; he had never been fostered but had always lived in children's residential units. As he developed through his teens he reported becoming more aggressive and violent, so was moved into a secure unit. He felt his living conditions exacerbated his behaviour, as he didn't like being housed with other children who were extremely vulnerable and needy. He felt particularly uncomfortable around children who self-harm and children who had been sexually abused. He acknowledged that his extremely aggressive behaviour toward them impacted on the safety of the other children and his own well being:



**“They should know your care order and respond in the right way, don't put me in with other kids who are 'slashers' and going for suicide, I will bully them and get into more trouble...I'm in here now as I got more and more violent”** (Boy 17, at a young offenders institution)

The young person who was safeguarded under Section 20 of the Children Act and had been in care since he was 10 did not feel protected; he focused on the rejection from his family that placed him in care:



**“It’s (being in care and then in a secure unit) better than the other option, being homeless”** (Boy 17, young offenders institution)

Ten out of the 15 young people were aware of the process for formal meetings but had mixed feelings about their effectiveness. For example, they seemed to know when their looked after children (LAC) review was taking place and what they needed to do for it. Nine of the 15 had been to or were going to their personal education plan (PEP) meetings at school. Some of the others were not attending school either through being excluded (three young people) or in prison (three young people).



**“I knew when my LAC review was as my social worker dropped in a booklet for me to fill in about a week before the meeting”** (Girl 12)

**“I had my PEP meeting at school. My teacher, social worker and foster carer was there”** (Boy 10)

The young people at the young offenders institution seemed less clear about the process and status of their review meetings since entering prison.

However, as a result of listening to their frustrations and concerns, it appears that all the young people in this sample felt that their emotional needs were not wholly being met by their social workers and the social care system as a whole.

All 15 young people felt that they were not being fully listened to, respected, and trusted, and that there was a lack of empathy from their social worker and an absence of real dialogue.



**“It hurts that people don’t care”** (Boy, 16)

At this critical point in their lives, the adult who stepped in to safeguard the young person tended, in their mind, to become central to their world and in most cases (13 of the 15) this was reported as being their social worker.

From the young people’s perspective, this person had responsibility for their emotional well being as well as their physical protection, as they seemed to need to hold on to someone who they hoped was going to care about them. They wanted an emotional connection with this person to help them to deal with their traumatic family experiences on an on-going basis. For example, one girl had been a young carer who had

been looking after her parents both of whom were drug addicts. When her father died she went into care as her mother subsequently could not look after her.

Without feeling an emotional connection, young people seemed not to feel supported or 'looked after', instead they continued feeling vulnerable and let down by the system and the individual worker.

It is important to note that a minority of children and young people in this sample, four out of 15, reported having had a positive relationship with either a current social worker or someone previously assigned to them. The recollection by these young people regarding these social workers informed some insights into how some of their emotional needs may be able to be met.



**“She’s (social worker) 95% kind and 5 % OK”** (Boy 11)

**“Some are alright, really helpful”** (Boy 16)

**“There are good ones out there who would intervene for you”** (Boy 14)

**“They’ve taken me on days out to keep me out of trouble!”** (Girl 15)

## 4.2 Fostering

All 15 children and young people reported that they had been assigned a number of different social workers during the course of their care and had had contact with a range of other key workers such as foster carers, youth workers and advocacy workers.

The range of 'looked after' experiences young people reported included staying in a number of different foster care homes, living in children's residential units, secure units or staying with extended family.



**“I’m one of the lucky ones I have the BEST foster parent possible”** (Boy 16)

**“I’ve moved to a few foster homes and didn’t like them. I was always really unhappy, just wanted to be with my family. Now I’m alright though as I’m with a really nice couple and they love me like their own”** (Boy 14)

**“I’ve never been fostered, always been at units, children’s units around the country and got moved around, I ran away loads, escaped and went to my cousins. Kept getting in trouble for violent disorder and conduct and ended in a secure unit, I hated it**

**and got even more violent and now I'm here"** (Boy 17, from a young offenders institution)

**"My (foster home) experience is not that bad, but some can be"**  
(Boy 11)

## 5 What young people felt was important

This section highlights what the children and young people in this sample felt was important to them in relation to being in care and their relationship with their social workers.



These are:

- Relaxed and enjoyable reviews and meetings
- Communication: feeling as though someone is listening
- Contact with birth families
- Trust and respect

### 5.1 Relaxed and enjoyable reviews and meetings

All young people in this sample seemed to accept that a part of being in care meant that they were invited to attend meetings about their support over the course of a year. About 10 of the 15 knew about their LAC review and their PEP meetings. There were five young people who did not seem to know about these meetings. The 10 young people who had attended their LAC reviews or PEP meetings seemed to have mixed feelings about them. On the one hand they knew the meetings offered them a chance to make changes to their care plan. But on the other, at least eight out of 10 of them did not feel confident about expressing themselves in the meetings. The children and young people also felt that the meetings were too formal and they felt excluded from them.

About four of the older respondents did not feel that the adults would make the changes they had suggested as they did not believe they were interested in the young person:



**“I let them do the talking and just reply to what they say” (Boy 11)**

**“The meetings are really boring, they’re just blah, blah and bye, bye. You get a talk, say what you’re doing, sit there and listen to them blabber. They’re talking between each other and you’re waiting to talk, it feels like forever” (Boy 11)**

**“She’s too full of herself and doesn’t seem to like listening, in my review meeting she just sat there twiddling her hair” (Girl 15)**

**“In the PEP, they chat for ages, stop, start, stop, start, get to the point!” (Girl 15)**

**“They ask the same questions at meetings, a teensy bit more communication would be better” (Boy 11)**

**“It’s my reviewing officer who makes decisions so I can ignore my social worker in the meetings” (Boy 14)**

Two of the older young people (14+) who do not attend mainstream school reported feeling frustrated by meeting times and meeting attendees. From discussions with these two in particular, it seems that they would like to have more control over when the meetings take place and ensure that can bring someone with them to help them feel supported:



**“They organise the meetings at the wrong time, then they tell us it can’t be changed, no wonder we don’t turn up” (Boy 16)**

**“I had my LAC meeting and there was no one there for me. I wanted to show that I’d changed through going to this centre and they sent me to boot camp, saying I was trouble, I was, but I’d changed. They didn’t want to know” (Girl 15)**

All 15 young people in this sample believed that their meetings with their social workers could be better. The younger children in this sample (under 14 years old) felt that the social worker could come to their foster home and play games, watch TV and relax with them. It seems that this would signal that the social worker values the young person and wants to get to know them. One girl, aged 12, recalled her first social worker doing this and she really appreciated it. Subsequently, none of the others have done this and she really misses that attention and input:



**“My first social worker was lovely, she was kind and played games with me, she even bought me presents, things I really liked. I think she liked me” (Girl 12)**

Other young people said:



**“They could come and play games, instead of being stuck up” (Boy 11)**

**“If there’s something wrong she’ll come to see me” (Boy 14)**

**“We could do more clubs and activities with our social worker so they get to know us” (Boy 11)**

**“When she comes over, we sit around, talk about things in the booklet. Other people do the talking, I’m shy” (Girl 12)**

**“Come and do something with me that I enjoy doing” (Boy 14)**

The young people aged over 14 also wanted to have an informal relationship with their social worker and feel as though their time together was affirming and worthwhile:



**“Why don’t they take me out to eat or go for a walk, why do they have to sit in front of me with a list and circle the things I haven’t done and tick the things I have” (Girl 15)**

**“If you put a red circle round something I haven’t done, I ain’t gonna do it” (Boy 16)**

**“Mine’s alright, we share a joke” (Boy 17, young offenders institution)**

Another important part of the meeting process for all 15 young people in this sample was receiving timely feedback after their meetings. This would help them know that their social worker was looking out for them and taking on board issues they had raised:



**“Make it a better experience, give an update of what we’ve talked about quickly, so then I might think there’s a point going to the next meeting” (Boy 11)**

**“Stop holding meetings and writing notes... do something about it to make life better. It takes too long to action things” (Boy 16)**

**“I think our information gets lost, we’re not important enough” (Boy 16)**

## **5.2 Communication: feeling as though someone is listening**

All 15 young people in this research sample mentioned the importance of being listened to and receiving empathy. Feeling as though they were not listened to emerged as a cause of real frustration and disappointment, and impacted on the way children and young people felt they were cared for and how they wanted to further engage with their social workers.



**“I don’t really like mine (social worker) she don’t listen” (Boy 11)**

**“When I was 12 and in foster care, my carer didn’t pay me any**

**attention, I was treated differently from everyone else. I thought, should I tell (my social worker) and be moved or should I stay and put up with it. I could be even worse off. Don't children deserve better than that?" (Boy 14)**

The desire to be listened to emerged on a number of levels. For example, just over half of the sample (eight children and young people) wanted their social worker to care about their day to day well being:



**"Every child should be listened to, no matter how difficult they are to talk to" (Girl 15)**

**"Mine (social worker) never asks how I feel" (Girl 15)**

**"They ask superficial questions, it's easier for them" (Girl 15)**

Many (12 children and young people) wanted to have better communication with their social workers. They reported feeling the conversations were stilted and formal, and that their social workers asked only official questions and kept a professional distance.

These young people would prefer to share flowing dialogue and familiar conversation. Young people in this sample seemed to crave indicators to show that they are important to their social worker and informal conversations may be one way to signal they are valued:



**"Don't tell me not to lash out, ask why I am" (Girl 16)**

**"If I can't say what I think, I find it annoying" (Boy 12)**

**"She spoke to me like a young child, slow, and nods and smiles. Why doesn't she talk more, I told her that" (Boy 17)**

**"I'm not that impressed they could involve us a bit more" (Boy 14)**

**"Stop demanding things and ask" (Boy 16)**

**"It's nice to get to know them, especially when you've had them for longer" (Girl 12)**

**"I've been in 18 different foster placements, a secure unit for drugs, in court and had so many different social workers. No one sat me down and asked what was going on" (Girl 16)**

**"With little kids who can't talk, look at the back ground of the mum and ask some more questions, I'm seeing what happened with us,**

**happen again with my nephew” (Girl, 16)**

**“She does things by text book, she don’t know me as a person”  
(Girl, 16)**

One young person felt that she was not listened to because she was “just a kid and had been loads of trouble in the past” (Girl 16). Nine young people in his sample knew they had displayed challenging behaviour towards their social workers; however they still wanted to feel included and taken seriously if they had matters of concern. Furthermore five of the older young people, aged 14 +, felt annoyed that young people appear to not be taken seriously and believed that the carers value adults’ opinions over their own:



**“My sister has a baby and I know full well that she can’t take care of it properly as she’s on heroin. He’s not being looked after, he’s got bruises and I want to protect him. I’ve told social services, they won’t listen to me, as I’m a kid and she’s an adult, but I know he’s not OK. Does it have to get extreme before they notice?” (Girl 16)**

**“They stick to the rules too much, I had a wedding I wanted to go to and she wouldn’t let me go. I told her to (expletive) as it felt like a punishment; I knew it’d be OK if I went” (Boy 16)**

### 5.3 Contact with birth families

Over half of this sample (nine out of 15 children and young people) spontaneously mentioned that they were not adequately listened to when it came to matters concerning being in contact with and seeing their families. This appeared as one of their loudest causes for anxiety, and an area in which they felt their social workers could listen more and be more constructive in finding solutions. About half of this sample expressed how they missed their families and find it really hard not being near them and seeing them. Therefore, they felt it was important for the social worker to show they understood this and were supporting them with their sadness and frustrations:



**“They asked what changes I wanted, I said I wanted to see my family, it didn’t happen” (Boy 11)**

**“I’d run off and go and see my family, tough, it’s my family, don’t violate me by restricting contact” (Boy 17, young offenders institution)**

**“In meetings I’d like her to be a bit more open, I say I want to see my mum, she says I can’t. And that’s that. I want her to say, ‘We**

**can't do that at the moment, but how about thinking about this, or that, what would you like to happen?' It gets me annoyed; I just think they can't be bothered"** (Boy 14)

#### 5.4 Trust and respect

Unsurprisingly, trust emerged as a serious issue across this sample of respondents. All young people consulted within this research wanted reassurance that they could trust their social worker and that he/she was acting in their best interests. The lack of trust seemed to emerge through a few routes: as a result of their background and experiences before being in care; the high turnover of social workers in their lives and their reliability and the seeing positive outcomes as a result of meetings with their social workers. The eight older young people (aged 14+) who had been in care since early childhood were the most mistrustful among the 15 people in the sample:



**"It takes ages to trust, we went through stuff - but they've gotta give it to receive it"** (Girl 15)

**"Need to get social workers that respect us and aren't gonna be false to young people. If they trust us we'll trust them"** (Boy 17, young offenders institution)

**"Respect is a two way thing"** (Girl 15)

Part of this mistrust seems to come from the young people being assigned to a range of social workers and not having had opportunities to form bonds with one person in particular. It seemed that many craved a constant relationship with an adult:



**"I've gone through so many social workers, think I've had seven in two years!"** (Girl, 15)

Young people's mistrust also came from feeling let down by their social workers, particularly when they felt their social worker was unreliable. Being late or disorganised seems to signal to the young people that they are not very important to the social worker, so they had been left out/ignored/rushed. Twelve out of 15 recalled their social workers had been late or cancelled at the last minute:



**"My last one was nice, this one feels like she leaves me 'til the last minute and then leaves her notes in the car"** (Girl 12)

**“My social worker was late, not just 10 minutes, five hours later, left me waiting outside (the coffee shop) all day and didn’t phone. Then I get in trouble if I don’t turn up” (Girl 15)**

**“This one I had was (expletive), he said he’d do things and didn’t, he was always late and sometimes just wouldn’t turn up, and so I’d be late back to my unit and it’d come back on me” (Girl 15)**

**“They (social workers) mess you about” (Girl 15)**

**“Mine doubled book me - did he get in trouble?” (Girl 15)**

Over half of this sample of young people (nine out of the 15 young people) expressed that much of their mistrust and negative feelings about their social workers evolves from the belief that their social workers were not acting with their best interests at heart. They felt let down and frustrated. This links back to the above point where they would like their social worker to be reliable. They seemed to believe that this perception could change and trust could be built if they saw positive outcomes from their meetings as this would help them to believe their social worker was working on their behalf:



**“I’m waiting for them to get my birth certificate; I’ve asked so many times” (Girl 15)**

**“You have to push for what you want” (Girl 15)**

**“She’s not doing her job now (since being in prison) I’m not getting any of my money” (Boy 16, young offenders institution)**

**“My social worker before this one did a lot. But this one is oblivious; I want to feel looked out for” (Girl 15)**

**“They need to be there for you” (Boy 14)**

**“If there’s a problem they should help you sort it out” (Girl 15)**

**“No one tried to get through, they should have come back and pushed the door down and seen the state we were living in” (Girl 16)**

**“You should see the things I’ve had to do to get what I need, I’ve had to make sure things mess up. My social worker should sort things out for me but they’re not interested” (Girl 16)**

**“(Social workers) should do what needs to be done” (Boy 16, young offenders institution)**

Much of their mistrust came from feeling judged by their social workers. Five of the older young people (aged 14+) expressed that they found it really difficult to spend time with their social workers as they seemed judgmental and unsupportive. This goes against the type of relationship they would like to have with their social workers, one that is non-judgemental, supportive and respectful:



**“My social worker calls me a liar, my foster mum believes me, but she doesn’t. If you’re going to be a social worker, don’t call your kids a liar. Respect them” (Girl 15)**

**“Don’t blame me, my family were wrong” (Girl 16)**

**“What was going on when my social worker thought it was ok to take me to a Boot Camp without telling me, told me I was going on an outing. That’s not being upfront” (Girl 15)**

One young person in this sample had stopped all communications with his home social worker since being arrested and convicted, as he felt she was responsible for his arrest and incarceration:



**“She put me in here, said I was too aggressive and that” (Boy 17)**

## 5.5 The ideal social worker

Having reflected on all their experiences, positive and frustrating, the researchers invited the 15 children and young people to imagine their ideal social worker.

The list below captures all their comments and highlights points made earlier about children and young people wanting emotional security from their social workers:

- Listener - to how they feel and what they want
- Make them feel important / valued
- Kind
- Talkative
- Friendly
- Lovely
- Outgoing
- Happy to get involved
- Understand you
- Know what you’ve been through
- Get to know them as people, beyond family history.
- Not bossy/doesn’t say I have to do it/doesn’t demand
- Flexible (need to make allowances)

- Relaxed
- Helpful
- Reliable and on time
- Feeds back in an age appropriate way why decisions have been made/delayed
- Respectful
- Organised
- Proactive
- Acknowledge positive change they notice in the young person
- Have a laugh

## 6 The changes children and young people recommend



One of the questions we asked the children and young people at the end of the research discussion was: “If you could pass on any message to the people in charge of children’s care and support what would it be?” We noticed them all smile spontaneously in response to this question.

At least 11 of them were able to offer some strategic recommendations that they think could be taken to help children and young people in care feel cared about. They are outlined below:

### 6.1 External communications

De-stigmatise being in care: communicate that children and young people in care aren’t different.



**“We are outcasts to everyone around”** (Girl 16)

**“It’s embarrassing, if I want to sleep over (at my friends) my social worker has to inspect the house, I feel bad”** (Boy 11)

### 6.2 Placements

Rethink children’s residential units/secure units: prevent the mix of seriously vulnerable and weak young people living with those who have serious anger management issues.



**“Put the violent with the violent and the slashers with each other and don’t make us go on trips together”** (Boy 17, young offenders institution)

Ensure the foster families are committed to the young person in their care and that good matching takes place.



**“Put them with a family that understands”** (Boy 14)

### 6.3 Monitoring and evaluation

Revise the review booklet: include specific space to evaluate their social workers.



**“They ask (in the booklet) about how you feel your foster carer is treating you, your relationship with your parents and how life’s going, they could put a space where they ask you about your social worker and how that’s going” (Boy 14)**

**“The form filling gets annoying. At the back the one is anything you want to say, they should say, ‘about your social worker.’” (Boy 11)**

Social workers should be accountable to children and young people as well as the local authority targets.



**“It seems like they have to do all this form filling, their bosses’ bosses make them do it, but it makes them forget about us” (Boy 16)**

#### **6.4 Recruitment and retention of social workers**

Recruit more social workers.



**“More people need to get involved and not be too proper” (Girl 16)**

All social workers should like and want to develop and nurture a relationship with children and young people.



**“I had a nice one, she had a baby, then I had another one, she was OK and had a baby, then I had one who didn’t stay long and now I’ve got a new one who I don’t know yet” (Girl, 12)**

Young people to be part of the selection process and participate when local authorities are recruiting social workers.



**“I think we should be involved in selecting who we like, see if they’re good with young people and whether we’d want them to be**

**with us. Maybe we could choose our own” (Boy 14)**

### **6.5 Social workers’ training**

Give social workers intensive communications training so they communicate with young people naturally, connecting with them and valuing them as people.



**“Train them to be more chatty and relaxed with, ask us personal stuff, like about what we’re into, not just about our life in care” (Girl 15)**

**“Talk to us the age we are” (Boy 17, young offenders institution)**

Ensure social workers are prepared for meetings and give timely feedback.



**“Read your notes so young person doesn’t have to repeat story” (Boy 14)**

Ensure social workers have skills to deal with more challenging cases.



**“People put on a good front to keep you away as they don’t like dealing with social workers... Listen and take in what kids are saying, don’t believe the adults” (Girl 16)**

## 8 A final thought

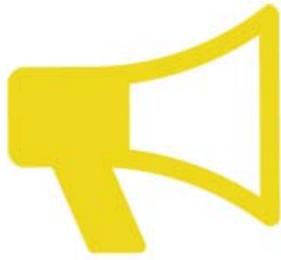


**At the end of this session, we invited all the young people in the sample to feedback on how they felt the session went.**

Feedback was positive, with 11 of the 15 saying that they enjoyed the discussions and having an opportunity to share their ideas and be listened to in a non-judgemental way.

All children and young people in this sample reflected that being asked for their opinion and giving feedback helped them to feel valued. In addition, their sense of self worth seems to have been enhanced when they received specific feedback for their contribution e.g. the researchers saying, “Thank you, I’ll pass that experience on as it really helps to answer that question about...”.

At least half of the young people said that whilst they enjoy sharing their opinions and giving feedback, they tend to only want to give it when they think it is worthwhile. They said that if there is some reason for them to believe that there is little point contributing their thoughts or feelings, they will retreat from the conversation, shrug shoulders and become monosyllabic. They all really hoped their input into this research will help other young people in care and will therefore be worthwhile.



**“The 11 MILLION children  
and young people in  
England have a voice”**

Children’s Commissioner for  
England, Professor Sir Albert  
Aynsley-Green



**MILLION**

11 MILLION, 1 London Bridge, London, SE1 9BG  
Telephone: 0844 800 9113 Fax: 020 7357 8329  
Email: [info.request@11MILLION.org.uk](mailto:info.request@11MILLION.org.uk)  
[www.11MILLION.org.uk](http://www.11MILLION.org.uk)  
R02/09