

The future of care:  
***A young person's  
Vision***



# About Action for Children

Action for Children is a charity for children and families in the UK. We provide lots of different services to help people who need it. We run residential homes and fostering services for vulnerable children and help thousands of families through our children's centres. We provide advice for families and help with money.

We also do research into important issues like child poverty. We work with government to share our ideas to create a better future for children.



# What is the Care Review?

In March 2021, the government set up a team of experts to look at the problems facing children in care. This team is called the "Independent Review of Children's Social Care". But most people just call it the "Care Review".

It is the job of the Care Review to speak to children with care experience and the adults and experts who care for them. Over the last year, it has been finding out what people think about care and has collected lots of ideas to improve the way things work.

Later this year, the Care Review team will release its final report. Their report will explain the best ideas they have heard to improve care and what they think the government should do next. The government will read the report and decide which of these ideas it would like to put in place.

Some of these ideas are likely to be small and the government can start right away. But some of the ideas may be big and might need the government to change the law or do some more research. This means it may take some time for all the changes to happen.

It is quite rare that the government does a big review of the care system. In the past, it has only happened once every ten or twenty years. So, it is very important that today's children and young people in care have their say.

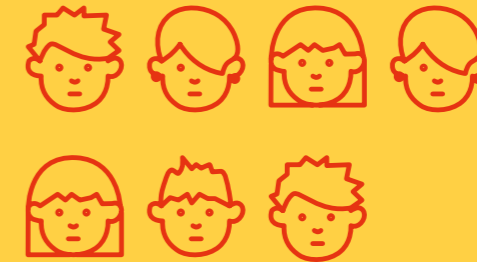
By the time the next Review happens, most of the children in care today will be grown up.

This is why we spoke to the children and young people that we work with to find out what matters to them, and what they think children's social care should look like.

# Some facts about children in care



In England, there are more than **80,000** children in care at any one time.



This means that in a school that has **1,000 children**, normally about **7 children** will be looked after by someone other than their parents.

Most children in care live with a foster carer. In some cases, the child might live with a family member like an Auntie or Uncle, or a family friend. However, in most cases, children in foster care live with carers they didn't already know.

Other children in care live in children's homes or are adopted by another family.

If we imagine the seven children in a secondary school that are in care:



five of them will live in foster care,



one will live in a children's home,



and one will be adopted.

# What we did

We wanted to make sure that the opinions and experiences of children in care, and those who have been in care, shape any changes made to the system. This is so that the care system works for the children and young people it will affect.

Since July 2021, we have been listening to children and young people talk about their experiences of growing up in care. We sent out a survey for young people to fill in, ran focus groups, and chatted 1 on 1 with care

experienced children across the UK. Some children also sent us drawings of what they wanted the future of care to look like.

To date, more than 50 young people (from 7-20 years) have participated in our care review consultation. Although the feedback we got was varied and very personal, some common themes shone through.

This is what young people said.

## We need to support young people through changes

When you are a child in the care system, your life is full of big changes. Every year, 1 in 3 children in care have to move home at least once, and many have to move multiple times. This can often lead to other changes, like having to move school, changing your social worker, or living in a totally different area away from your friends and family.

Young people have told us that we need to ensure young people are supported when going through these big life changes. Often young people feel like they are left out of the loop when their carers plan big changes for them, and don't receive enough support to help them adapt.



**“Near the end of my time in care, during my transition to adult social care, my social worker left, and I ended up with one who I never met and who didn't know me or what I liked. She didn't understand my needs. I met her face to face when I moved out into a house share and it failed, I was moved four times until I was in 24hr supported living. I did not receive the support I needed from her.”**

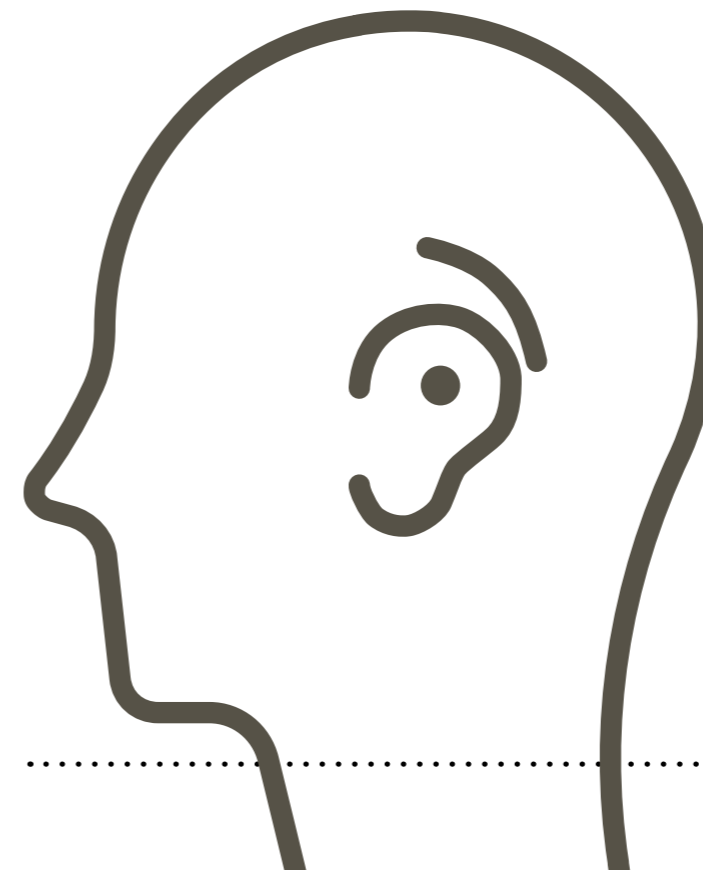
**“At the moment my PA hasn't contacted me and I'm unsure where I will be in the coming months.”**

**“My social worker doesn't get back to me we don't get on very well and I want a new one.”**

## We need to listen to young people in care

Children and young people in care have a right in law to express their opinions, and for their views to be taken seriously. But very often, children in care feel like they don't have a say in important decisions that affect them.

This matters most in big decisions like where they live or go to school. But in some cases, children in care feel like they are unable to do smaller things other children do all the time, like having a friend over for a sleepover or going to get a haircut. Not feeling free to do the things they want to do can leave many children in care feeling like they are different from other children, and that they aren't trusted. Most children in care just want to feel normal. As one young person put it, 'don't call me a case!'



**“Decisions were made without my choices being taken into consideration, my opinions and my foster carers opinions were ignored by my social worker – she kept saying she was in charge of me and she decides what's best for me.”**

**“There has been a lot of misunderstandings.”**

**“I sometimes feel like I have no say in where I want to be with my social worker it feels like he makes all the decisions for me.”**

**“The social worker I have now listens to me and is supportive. The social worker I had before was a bit difficult but it is fine now.”**



## We need to help young people in care stay in contact with their family

The most common thing for children who leave care is to go back to live with their families. This makes it very important that when most children go into care, they are able to stay in touch with their family. Many children told us that the time they spend with their family whilst in care was very important to them.

In many cases, children in care only get to spend an hour a week with their family, or even less. Often this contact happens in a public place like a park. But sometimes it happens in buildings called contact centres, where they are watched by social workers. This makes it hard to have a nice conversation.

Children have told us that it would help them build a relationship with their family if they were allowed more time to do fun things together. Young people told us this might mean going bowling or going to a McDonald's, whatever the child or young person wants. Children in care often understand the reasons why is difficult for them to see their family but feel like their carers prevent them from seeing the family members that they do have a good relationship with.



**“My family do not live in the UK. I cannot go see them and they cannot come here. I video call them but it isn't enough. No one mentions if I can visit or not.”**

**“I would like to spend more time with my mum and maybe stay overnight with her sometimes. I also want to see my siblings, lots more, as I hardly ever see them.”**

**What would you change to improve you care?**  
**“Longer visits with mum.”**

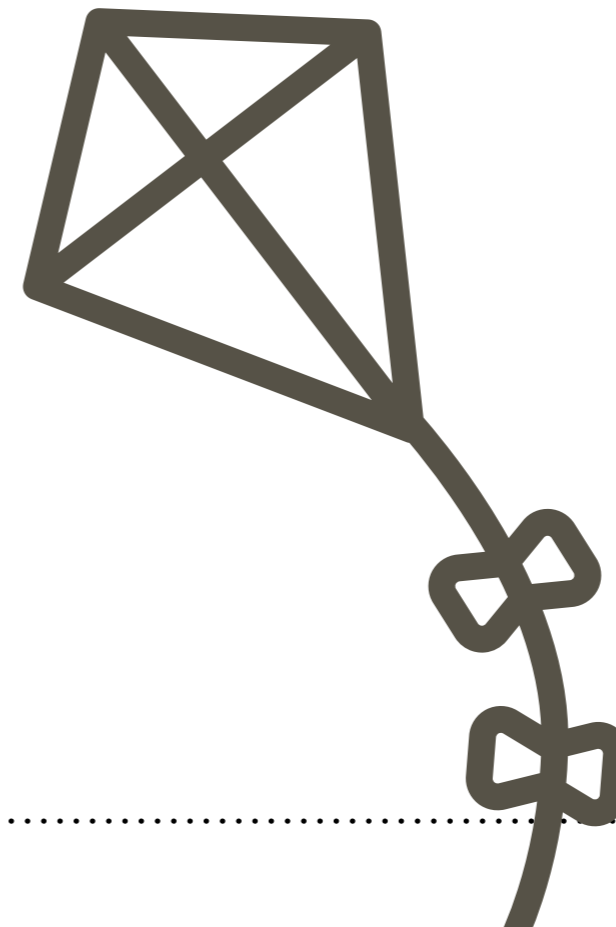
**What would you change to improve you care?**  
**“No supervised visits with family.”**

## We need to help children in care have fun and achieve their goals

When we asked children in care what changes would help people like them, one thing came up over and over again. Having fun!

All children need to have fun as they grow up. But this can be hard when you are living with different carers, or in an area where you didn't grow up. When a child goes into care, it is important that social care teams don't just find them a bed. They should also help them plan a life where they can be happy and feel fulfilled.

As children in care grow up, they develop goals and ambitions of their own. Like all young people, children in care need help from adults to reach their goals. But often it is hard to find this help when all the adults looking after you are busy in their job. Children who grow up in care tend to not do as well at school, and often find it harder to find a job when they grow up. We need to make sure we support children and young people in care to grow up into the kind of adults they want to be.



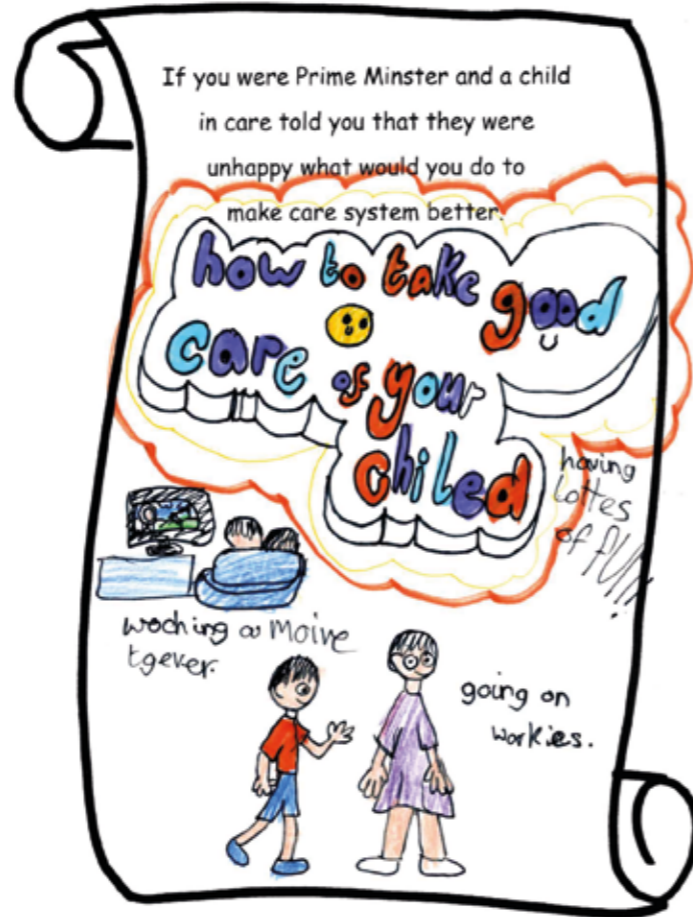
**What makes you feel supported?**  
**“I get to do hobbies that I want to do and see my friends.”**

**What makes you feel supported?**  
**“My foster parents always gave me the opportunity to see my friends, go on holidays, join in clubs. They helped me get a job at the garden centre which I loved so much; it was the best job ever but when I moved into adult social care I couldn't get there anymore; coronavirus also didn't help.”**

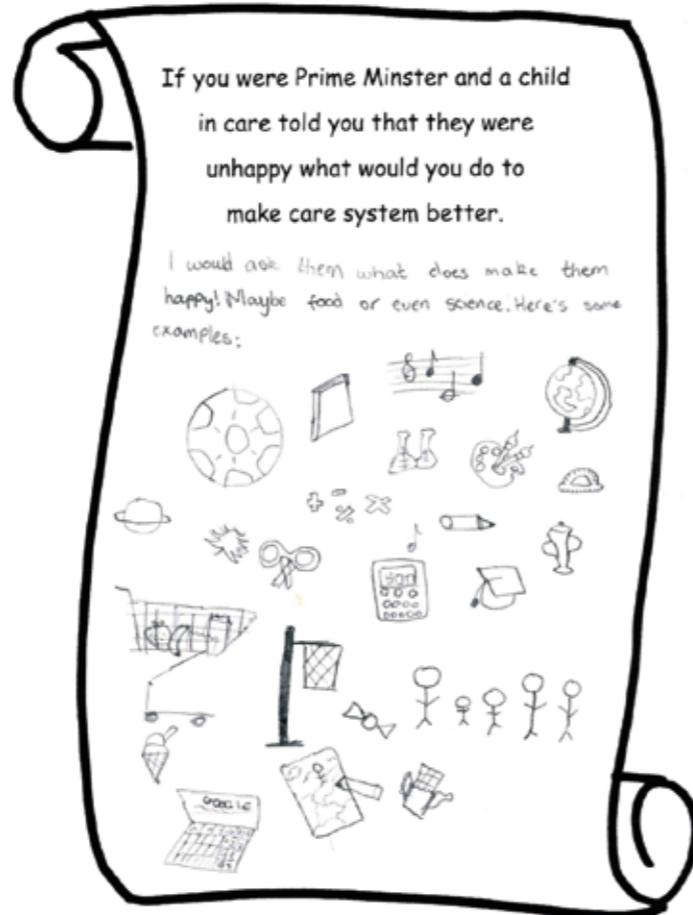
**What makes you feel supported?**  
**“They keep me on track with everything, they help with homework and I have passed my animal care course. I asked for extra support in maths and English and I got it. You guys (Action for Children) have helped me a lot.”**



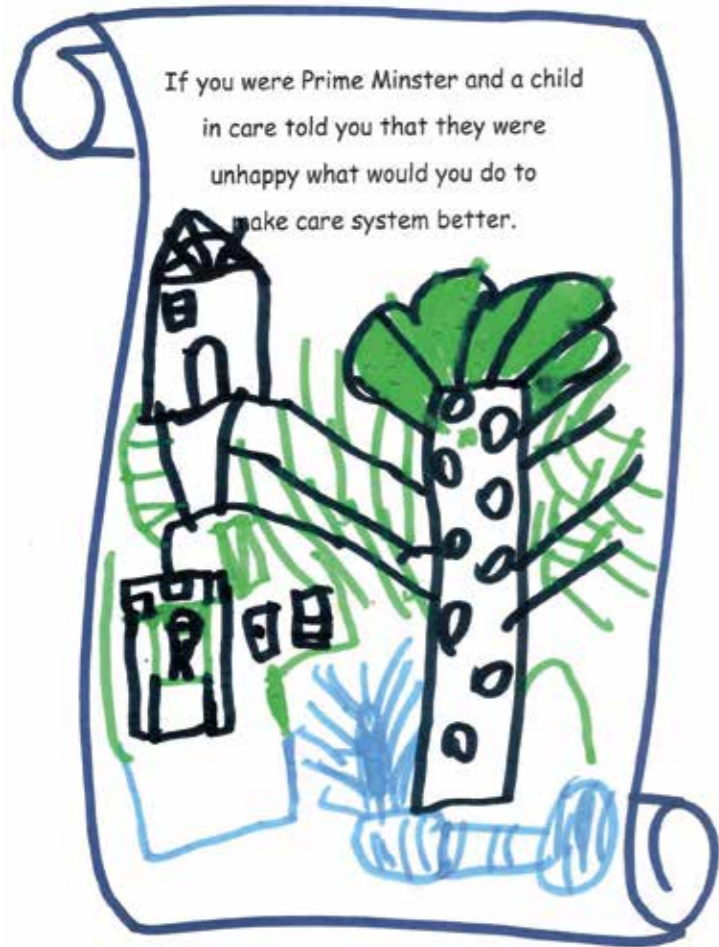
# What would our young people do if they were Prime Minister for the day?



C age 11



E age 11



L age 7  
wants a cosy bed and a story then to live in a tree house with a water fountain

## We urgently need to help children in care not born in the UK

As well as running residential homes and fostering services we also support young people who have come into the United Kingdom alone without their family. You may hear the term undocumented minors or asylum seekers being used. At our Independent Visitors service we support young people in these types of situations.

The experience of young people coming into care from abroad is very different to that of young people born in the UK. The fact they have had to leave their own country and family to travel alone at a young age to another country is traumatic. Often, these young people don't speak much English, and don't know much about British culture yet.

Unaccompanied care experienced young people told us that they do not experience the same level of care as those who were born in the UK.

The main problems that these young people identified were:

### 1. Communication

Young people in care who arrive in the UK often don't speak much English. This can make it much harder to communicate with social workers and other people who care for them.

### 2. No right to stay in the UK

Unaccompanied children in the care system that come from other countries don't have the same rights as children that are born here. When they turn 18, unaccompanied young people have to reapply to stay in the UK. Otherwise, they will be sent to their home country where they might be in danger or not have any family. This can be very stressful. What makes it worse is that there is no special support from the government to help them understand the process. Because they don't have the right to stay, they also can't get help from the government with money, or study in school or college.

**"I did not have a good relationship with my social worker. They found it difficult to communicate with me without an interpreter, it felt like they didn't care."**  
Young person aged 17

**"I tried to tell my social worker and college that I was having problems in class. I wanted to change classes but they didn't do anything about it. I have finished college now and they just haven't mentioned it."**  
Young person aged 16

**"I am not sure how long I will be in care for but I would like to know as I would like to plan for the future. At the moment I do not know what will happen to me once I am no longer in care. I am still waiting for my interview at the Home Office to see if I can stay in the UK as a UK resident. I don't know how long that will be."**  
Young person aged 20



### 3. Placing young people in unsuitable areas

Some unaccompanied young people told us that they felt they didn't have say where they live. Instead, they feel like are placed wherever is convenient for the person who has been assigned to their case. Because they don't arrive with family or friends that can support them, they sometimes have to live in areas where they don't feel like they fit in. When staff don't understand the young person's culture, it can make the problem worse.



**“My Mum and Dad passed away when I was 5 years old. I lived with my grandfather but then he passed away. I travelled by myself to the UK when I was 16 years old. I have no family to go to.”**

**Young person aged 16**

**“I am happy that they gave me something, but I don't think they care enough. The things they do are basic and not enough. I am not allowed to work or make my own money. It's like they want me to sell drugs or do crime to support myself. I have to wait 6-7 years for residency and I cant even study, without home office ID. It's not fair. I want to study but have been refused.”**

**Young person aged 18**

**“I would often go without food and sometimes only be given £5 for food daily.”**

**Young person aged 17**

**“I told my social worker I want to live with a foster family so I can learn to cook and have better things. I don't want to move from Leicester because I have friends. She said no because they will move me out of Leicester and I want to stay with my friends. Social Worker is trying to look for a family but I don't think she agrees. I am not sure yet.”**

**Young person aged 17**

## What can government do to help?

The government set up the Care Review because it saw that things needed to change for children and young people in care. It is a once in a generation opportunity to make a better future for children and young people in care.

As our young people told us, staying close with family and friends is very important. One thing that the Care Review is looking at is how to help families manage problems and stay together, without the child needing to go into care. This is called early help, or family help. Sometimes it is also called 'early intervention'.

It is very important that government continues to provide funding for these early help services, as well as services for children who are leaving care to go back to living with their families. These services can prevent many children coming to further harm and can save money in the long run. Over the last few years, there has been less spending on services like these. This means we have to spend more to help children in crisis.

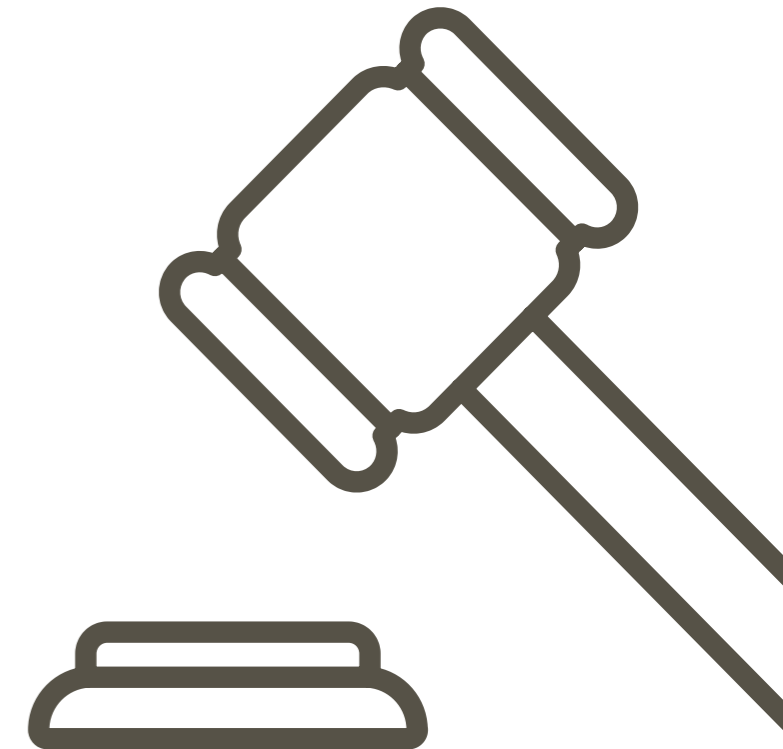
Another theme that children and young people told us about is making sure they are listened to and have a say about big decisions that happen to them. This can start in government. Government can commit to making sure they speak to children and young people with care experience every time they pass laws or make big decisions that affect them.

It is also important that government makes sure there are enough carers, social workers, and support workers to help every child in care. When social care staff have to help too many children at once, problems can be missed, and life for children in care can get worse.

For children who aren't born in the UK, the government should make sure that they are given the right support from the moment they arrive in the UK. This means making sure they have access to translators and experts to help them fit in. It also means making sure they have the right support as they transition to adulthood and apply to stay in the UK permanently.

The UK government could follow what the Scottish government has done and appoint 'legal guardians' for every unaccompanied child in care. These guardians are there to help the child through their journey in the care system, to help them with their future, and to stand up for what the child wants.

If you would like to find out more about what government can do to support children and young people in the care system, you can get in touch with us at [policyandcampaigns@actionforchildren.org.uk](mailto:policyandcampaigns@actionforchildren.org.uk)



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