



INTRODUCTION

All children and young people have the right to say what they want and have this taken seriously when people are making decisions that affect their lives.

The Children's Commissioner (NICCY) wanted to find out if children and young people in care are getting the chance to do this, so we conducted this review.

HOW DID WE DO THIS?



We sent questionnaires to:

- The people in charge of the Trusts;
- Children and young people from foster and residential care in 3 different Trusts;
- Their birth parents;
- Their foster carers; and
- Staff from their residential units.

We then met with groups of children and young people, foster carers and social workers.

WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

- Nearly everyone who took part in this review agreed that children and young people should be involved in decisions about their lives.
- Most also thought that as young people get older/more mature they should have more say in what happens to them.
- Most 5 to 11 year olds were quite happy with how much their social worker involves them in decisions about their lives.
- Young people aged 12 and over were generally less happy, especially those living in residential care.
- Two-thirds (66%) of 12 to 18 year olds said they would like to have more say in decisions about their lives.
- Areas that children and young people wanted to have more say in were:
 - Contact with family and friends;
 - Where they live; and
 - How much independence they have.

- There are lots of different things that make it difficult for children and young people to be involved in decisions about their lives. These include:

- Frequent changes in social worker:

"I've had 3 social workers. I would like to keep the same social worker all the time" (girl age 10)

- Social workers being too busy (doing paperwork etc.) to spend a lot of time with them.
- Lots of different people (social workers; parents; carers; lawyers) wanting different things for a child
- Adults not encouraging children and young people to speak out:

"It is not actively promoted that they have a voice" (foster carer)

- Children not being confident enough to speak out or not being sure about what they want.

➤ Both young people and adults told us that they did not like the current LAC review system. They said reviews are:

- More for adults than young people;
- At the wrong time and in the wrong place;
- Too focused on what young people do wrong;
- Too big and sometimes full of strangers.



➤ Both young people and adults had lots of great ideas about how things could be made better. Their ideas for improving LAC reviews included:

- Making them more positive and informal;
- New preparation and feedback forms;
- Social worker and LAC Chair always preparing young people for reviews;
- Letting young people choose when the review should happen, where it should be and who should come;
- Inviting people to come to part of the review instead of all of it.

➤ Other more general points include:

- The need for professionals to spend more time with young people, getting to know them and finding out what they want and need.
- Realising that not all young people, or even all professionals, feel comfortable going to LAC reviews and finding other ways to involve young people that is more suitable for them.
- Making sure every young person has someone who they feel comfortable with, whose main job is that of looking out for the young person.

WHAT NOW?

Children and young people, their carers and Trust staff all told us the same thing: some things are ok, but many others need to change.



NICCY is asking the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to set up a Working Group as soon as possible to review the current situation and take on board the experiences and suggestions shared in this work.

If you have any questions, get in touch with us:

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Young People's Involvement In Decisions About Their Care

