



Speaking Out

How does the care system need to change so that young people get the childhood and chances they deserve?

An Open Space event for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young people in, or having left, care.

PURE, Manchester
2 June 2010

Supported by





Thanks to all those who helped in producing the Speaking Out event and this report

The success of the Speaking Out event is down to the hard work and support of many different people and partners. A very big thank you goes to all the members of our steering group, who generously shared their time, views and ideas with us in preparing for this event: Florida Atangui, Ij Ike, Sharif Mohammedi, Jane Mungai, Issa Turay and Lidia Da Silva. Thanks also go to all those young people who shared their views with us in other ways throughout this project. We would like to thank The Tudor Trust for funding this project and for their support and advice. We are very grateful to Barnardo's Leaving Care Service in Manchester for their support of this event and especially to Simon Locke, Samantha Courtney and Charlotte Friday for all of their help leading up to and during the event. Thank you to all the delegates who attended and contributed their views, ideas and knowledge and to all the staff and volunteers who helped out during the event. Finally, thank you to Annette Zera, who provided expertise and advice in planning the event and who smoothly facilitated a successful day.

About the CLA

The Care Leavers' Association is a national charity, run by and for people who have lived in the care system as children. We work with care leavers of all ages, from 18 year olds to those in their eighties and beyond. We also aim to improve the lives of children currently in care by using care leavers' experiences to bring about positive change in national policy and practice. The Care Leavers' Association provides advice, information and signposting, co-ordinates a worldwide network of care leavers, provides care leaver-led training and assessment and also campaigns for change to the current care system and to services for adult care leavers.

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Speaking Out is a CLA project aimed at young people in and leaving care (aged 15 – 25) from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. To ensure that the project is as young-person-led as possible a steering group of BAME young people has been formed to oversee the progress of the project and the views of young people have been sought wherever possible.

Speaking Out aims to give young people the opportunity to voice their views about how the care system could be changed for the better to improve their lives. To improve the services offered to this group of young people it is crucial that their voices are heard and that practitioners and policy makers make the concerns of BAME young people in, and leaving care, their concerns – otherwise improvements in delivery of services will be much slower and will certainly be less well thought through.

As a part of this process, with the help of our steering group, we organised an ‘Open Space’ event in Manchester in June 2010. Over 80 people, from all across the UK, attended the event, the overwhelming majority being young people from the care system. Representatives of statutory and voluntary agencies also attended. This is a report of the proceedings of the event.

The purpose of the event was to discover what young people thought were the problems with the current care system and to hear their recommendations for change. It was also an opportunity for young people to meet others from care and for everyone to share their thoughts and ideas. The event included a lot of discussion and the recommendations that came out of those discussions are recorded verbatim in the following pages. Many of the issues for young people in care from BAME backgrounds are the same as those for children and young people from White or other backgrounds but there are a significant number of issues which are culture specific. This is why we thought it was important to have this project, which focuses on young people from certain backgrounds in order to provide a space for voices which may otherwise get lost in more general participation work.

The ‘Concluding Remarks’ section at the end of this report shows that overall the Speaking Out event was felt to be very positive. The event was the first of its kind and there are many lessons to learn from it. This project is an important first step in beginning to give a voice to young people in care from BAME backgrounds and in beginning to tackle the issues they face. The next step is to take forward some of the key issues raised on the day with a focus group of young people. Those involved in the focus group will decide in what way they want to work on these issues.

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Delegates created an agenda for the conference in relation to the question:

How does the care system need to change so that young people get the childhood and chances they deserve?

32 topics were posted and discussed in groups, their recommendations are recorded below.

The numbers in brackets reflect the priority attached to different recommendations by delegates at the end of the conference.





Foster Carers and Placements

Fostering

Votes

- Foster carers should be aware of cultural, religious and dietary needs as the child could be from a totally different world (4)
- £50 is not enough for children who are living independently after the age of 16 (9)
- Culture of foster carers
- Limits on how people are placed, choice of place to stay
- Foster carers of the same culture, race and religion/ treat as equals (2)
- Decisions need to be organized not emergency decisions with snap decisions/review meetings with sibling together (6)
- Foster carers should not keep money to themselves instead of spending it on foster children (3)

Foster Placements

Votes

- We think young people should have a support worker they can speak to about their foster placement, so they don't have to speak about their placement issues in front of foster carers (5)
- Spot checks on quality of foster carers and houses – equal in unannounced drop ins.
- Introduce safe houses, half way houses for older children (1)
- Foster carers need to respect the rights of young people, in relation to culture, food and to be able to socialise (4)





Support from carers

Votes

- More support from carers/train carers to know when a child is depressed (4)
- Provide foster carers who speak the same language as the young person/
Give equality no matter what race or gender
- Have good knowledge about culture and religion (2)
- Provide someone to talk to about emotional issues (3)
- Be listened to and know when your stressed (1)
- Better communication between carers, birth parents, social workers and children (1)
- Social workers should do regular checks on child and carer with one- to- one sessions (1)
- Give extra emotional support such as treating young people in care as part of the family
- Provide supporting guidance through the choices the young person makes, don't judge
(foster carers) (1)
- Regular training for carers about how to deal with children and emotional needs





Standards of Care

Votes

- We need emotional support because we are missing our family/post-traumatic stress disorder (3)
- We need medical support and counselling
- Some of us are left in isolation. We need to have a good connection with our community and our culture. (15)

Inconsistency and unfairness

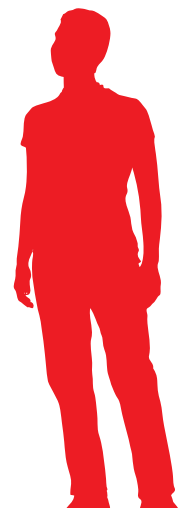
Votes (1)

- The services given should all be the same (13)
- Extend the age of support (15)
- Proper support even when turned into adults (4)

Age Assessment

Votes (2)

- More training for professionals who come into contact with young people (e.g. police, social workers) (1)
- More legal aid available to young people when challenged about age
- All young people to have access to medical record if they wish (2)
- Lady Hale judgement about age assessment (Nov 2009) – all young people who have been assessed before November 2009 have rights to be heard under new rule (2)
- All professionals should be informed and trained (4)
- Courts should not make the decision about age eligibility (1)
- Trust young people in the first place (10)
- Use professional interpreters (1)





Future of the care system in light of the shortage of carers

Votes

- Standardised care across the public and private sector (7)
- Consistency of placements (5)
- Young people from care should be more involved in training foster carers and residential staff (6)
- Invest in better residential care (4)
- Train and pay carers and residential staff better (7)

Too many placement moves

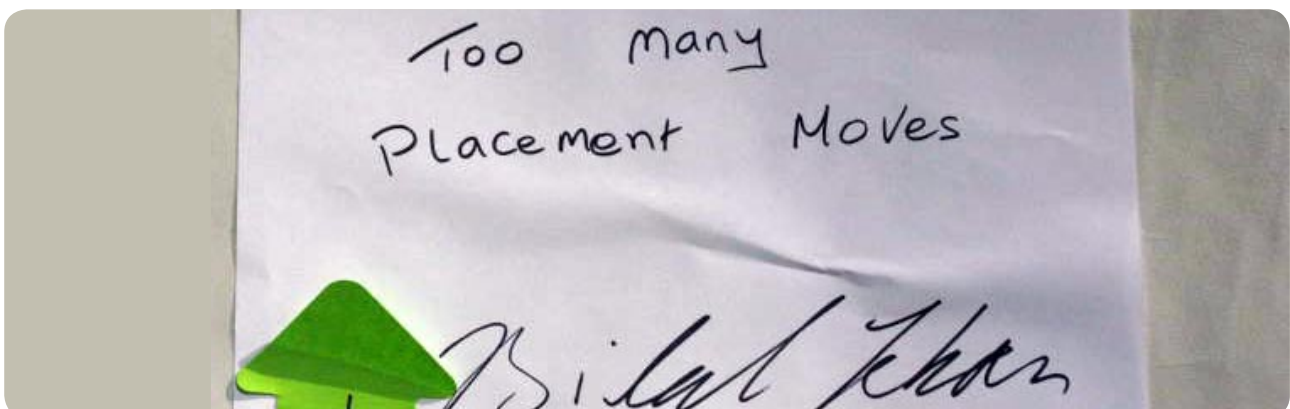
Votes

- Visit the child frequently/no point being a worker if you don't know the child well/give choice to the young person (3)
- If you know there's going to be a lot of moving around ask the child what they want/recommend them to a family house long term (7)

Repairing the damage

Votes

- Better foster placements/residential placements/experience. Provide trained, caring staff and provide more information re: what is available to young people, i.e. advocacy services, Barnardo's and leaving care service and do more life story work (3)
- Minimum care standards for children in care/ensure all health care checks and education needs are met/provide counselling and mentoring re: bereavement and education issues (2)
- Better foster placements/residential placements/experience trained caring staff/provide more information re: what is available to young people i.e. advocacy services Barnardos and leaving care service/more life story work (6)
- Cohesion between the services/deal with stigma of leaving care/positive role models/famous people who have been in care/Raise aspirations for young people in care (6)
- Describe/state what a normal childhood an individual has missed and state the effects/point out survival skills/access to leaving care files support and help (2)
- Develop character of individuals in care i.e. respect, manners, resilience, assertiveness/extend education/help individuals to catch up where they have had training/CAMHS service more freely available and child friendly (3)





Social Workers

Votes (1)

- All social workers should respect young people and understand their feelings and how to deal with them.
- Before social worker change they should talk about it first and if they won't change they should not become social workers of young people.
- All social workers should do their jobs properly and have fewer young people to look after (1)
- Social workers' skills should be checked and they should ask young people what they need (2)
- Different attitudes towards young people
- Specific training around young people's emotions and problems and how to deal with them
- Less moving around of young people from home to home (3)
- Less constant changing of social workers
- Young people should be involved in training social workers, i.e. the design and delivery of their training (7)

Get more involved in your Care Plan

Votes (1)

- Have a say before review (2)
- More frequent reviews about care plan (not just every 6 months) (1)
- Explain what a care plan is to young people (4)
- More feedback (4)
- More say on who attends your review (2)
- Explain a lot more about what's happening
- Put plan into action in a timescale (5)

Social Services

Votes

- Age assessor should be fully trained and should have an independent observer (2)





Information and support for care leavers

Financial Support – What are we really entitled to?

Votes

- We need to work on getting information out/ depends on which area you live in/should be the same for everyone (8)
- Sometimes they tell but don't give/How can you ask if you don't know?/
Leaflet about what money is available for everyone, it should be standard for everyone (14)
- There should be no secrecy/open and honest website, online page (15)

Support post-21

Votes (1)

- Support all care leavers in higher education from all ages without restriction – make sure all care leavers are aware of grants and services they should receive (10)
- Support even if not in higher education (7)
- Send information to all young people in care and care leavers about grants and support available. (8)

Life skills for young people before they leave foster care.

Votes

- Self esteem building /Self awareness (3)
- Career Advice/course advice (1)
- Equal Opportunities (2)
- Supporting people with special or individual requirements (0)
- Life skills e.g., family parenting craft (2)
- Budgeting and money skills/Health and personal hygiene (7)
- Domestic skills/Training for foster parents on life skills/peer mentoring (6)
- Classes for young people and foster carers together/social and communication skills/sexual health awareness/assertive and confidence skills (2)





Help young people to choose their Careers

Votes (1)

- More summer school to help young people decide what to do next
- Careers and connexions
- Action plan required for education
- Do something you're good at and liking what you do (3 – covers all above points)
- Encourage young people to do what they like but are not good at
- Encourage young people to do what they are good at but don't like doing (6 for both above)

More support for care leavers

Votes

- Support until 25 for education (2)
- Housing support with forms and options for housing
- Information services for young people
- Workshops for young people and professionals to help foster carers and social workers (4)
- Carers need training to help young people to become independent – training from young people who have had the experience of being in care (3)
- Foster carers should know young peoples' rights and offer correct advice to children and young people (don't skirt around the issues!) (1)
- 16+ is great to teach skills to young people (mostly available in London) (3)
- There should be the same standards around the country for all young people (3)
- 16+ should be moved to 21+ (2)
- Let children know what they have available to them from a younger age e.g. 10-11 so you can look forward to the future (3)
- Give a settled routine to young people rather than move them about too much
- Support for studying should be available no matter what age (1)





Education and training for young people

Education after 21

Votes

- Greater financial guidance and support, i.e. young parents and asylum seekers (4)
- Clearer information from LAs about funding – are all social services giving the same information/how can we get information directly to the care leaver rather than through several agencies and partners where information gets lost and young people lose out for example a website information pack (3)
- Mentors to guide care leavers through the education system/progression planning needs to happen for everyone/reviewing officer standards?/information needs to focus on the future not just the present/pathway planning needs to be more holistic and look to the future. It seems this is happening in some LAs and not others (4)
- Clear information about funding and entitlement/supporting getting a trade before university so that when care leavers leave the system they have skills to fall back on (1)

Access to the Internet to improve English Language

Votes

- To get in touch with friends and improve our English (1)
- Access to news in native languages as well as English
- Access to downloading music and movies from internet at all days (1)
- Access to additional educational support (2)

Stay with Pathways at least until aged 21

Votes (4)

- The need for financial practical and emotional support
- Support to continue education or apprenticeship training after 21 (3)
- Unaccompanied young people are not entitled to EMA – this needs to be changed (4)
- Remove the pressure to go onto JSA until opportunity has been had to complete ESOL training/apprenticeship course that would make the transition to work easier (4)





Housing

Delay in support/false promises

Votes (2)

- Keep your promises – be on time (9)
- Deal with accommodation issues sooner (2)
- Be more genuine and more real – more talk and time with us (5)

Not enough stepping stone placements for young people

Votes

- There should be more available accommodation (1)
- There needs to be better understanding of financial entitlements
- Not everybody wants to live independently
- Career advisor should be linked to Connexions and Leaving Care (7)

Housing

Votes

- Prioritising reasons why people should be getting a house for example with a child or a disability (4)
- Different people get different amounts of money when moving (3)
- Need preparation when leaving for independent housing. Support is not always available (1)





Home Office regulations

Home Office and Asylum

Votes (1)

- Fewer questions from the HO/less time in between interviews/More polite interviews/training, training, training, training so that HO workers can interview vulnerable young people without making us feel frightened. They treat us like criminals not people (2)
- Too long waiting for immigration decisions: Fast delivery of paperwork/immigration papers for ID so that we can get a bank account. Time limit on making decisions about asylum claims – we are in limbo. (5)
- Better treatment at the Home Office: Provide water, less intrusive and less emotionally harmful questions (11)

Immigration

Votes

- Quick and precise decision about cases because waiting causes depression and anxiety (4)
- Social worker should get special training in order to understand culture, religions and emotional needs and better understanding of children's needs (6)
- Fostering is not a business and should be used as emotional, physical and educational support (8)





Get my passport to start living

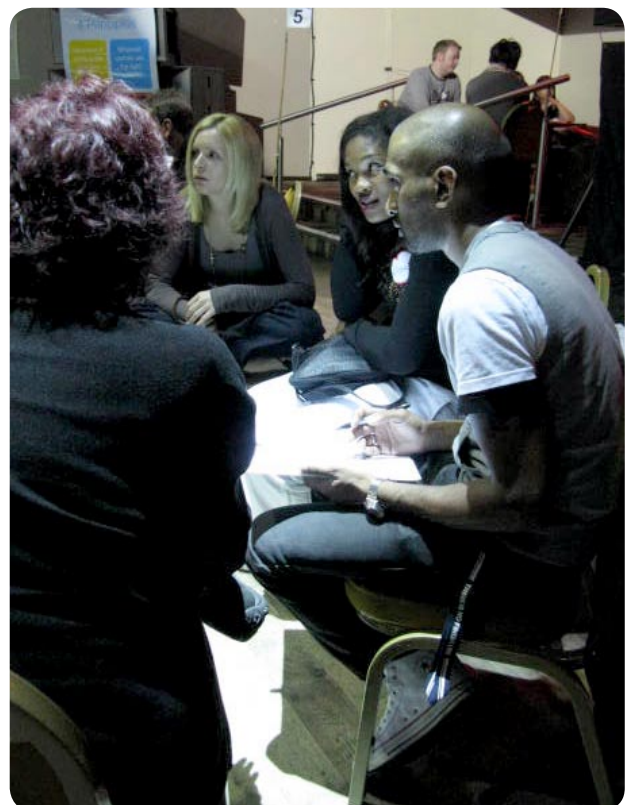
Votes (5)

- Each person should have a legal advocate (3)
- Home office should make a very quick decision after interview because waiting is stressful for children (5)
- Social workers should extend care time for looked after children who are awaiting a decision from the Home Office i.e. support them after 18 as much as they did before they were 18 (7)

Passports

Votes

- Make it a policy that all young people must be helped in getting a passport before they leave care. This should be discussed in every review as a standard item (5)
- Young people should be involved in decision making. Consult them and ask them what they think and implement it in policy (4)
- Compulsory training of social care workers – up to date – so they know facts, laws and policies etc and can share this with young people etc (4)
- Information for young people to keep them informed and up to date on their rights, laws, policies about passports via website and leaflets available in different languages (2)
- Apply for passport as soon as a young person comes into care. Request parent for this/inform young people they can complain if they are not happy about services or delays etc (1)
- Inform young people how they can challenge parents legally or give parental responsibility to another adult if the parent doesn't co-operate





Young people and the Criminal Justice System

Improving outcomes for young people leaving custody

Votes

- Pathway plans need to be kept up to date once the young person goes into custody (1)
- Joined up release plans across the agencies (1)
- Gender specific support required (1)
- Identify key worker to keep in contact with young person whilst in custody
- Identify accommodation for young person pre-release (2)

Young people leaving care and the criminal justice system

Votes

- There needs to be consideration of young people's individual needs (medicine, emotional health, religion, background, location) (1)
- We need to monitor the Rehabilitation of Offender's Act (1)
- We should pay young offenders to offer the gate peer mentoring (4)
- We should support young people who are trying (4)
- We need to provide avenues for people to change (1)
- Young people need continuity – i.e. not 40 different social workers leading to problems of attainment
- We need more workshops whereby we can learn of consequences of crime – led by young offenders (5)





Conferences

Race discrimination

Votes

- The conference could have been facilitated by the BME community as it appears to be a conference to address or seek their opinions of a life in care as a minority (11)
- Isolation and mis-education for example an absence of a balance or presence of BME in education (5)
- The assumption that a child of dual heritage needs to be in a black family can be felt by the child as reverse discrimination/there has been little knowledge gained by having specialists in this area (11)
- A missed opportunity – could have had reps from police to listen to what it is like to be oppressed as a minority and to feel afraid (7)

Young people led

Votes (1)

- Positive role models (1)
- Conferences – more creative, visual, more colourful. Venue too dark
- Services accredited by young people (3)
- Need more interpreters (1)
- Young people to influence local authorities by steering groups to bring change (1)
- Young people to have one-to-one tutoring
- Workshops run by young people sharing experiences to support one another
- Young people to be paid/food (1)





CONCLUDING REMARKS



Nice to see so many young people raising issues and influencing change

Really proud of young people attending and having their views heard

Thanks for listening to us. We need more help

Thanks for giving us the opportunity to understand our rights

Thanks it was really good

Shared experiences

Knowledge is power in sharing ideas

Fantastic day

Thanks from my generation to your generation. Remember.

One hand can't clap. Work together.

We need more of a celebration day, to celebrate successes.

Nice to have an open circle. I hope we go forward. Networks needs to keep in touch.
We will help you to move forward.

Pleasure being here, a pleasure being heard.

Make this an annual event to help change the system.

It is the first time someone has listened. Put forward more ideas. Always strive for more.

We need to see change as a care leaver, we need to believe change is possible.

We need to believe ethnic minorities can change

Thanks to everyone coming and take part.





IF YOU COULD
CHANGE ONE
THING ABOUT THE
CARE SYSTEM WHAT
WOULD IT BE?



EMOTIONAL
SUPPORT FROM
FOSTER
CARERS

5

Neelam





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