

Young people's experience of Leaving Care

Report – November 2016

Introduction

In the autumn of 2016, SRYP's Healthwatch Youth Worker ran a series of focus groups meeting with young people based at Burton's Orchard in Taunton. The aims of the focus groups were to explore young people's experience of leaving care and to involve them in starting to plan their own consultation with other care leavers. 7 young people took part, four of whom were male and three of whom were female.

Background to young people involved in focus groups.

As part of the focus groups, and to set some context, young people have shared some of their personal stories. These have been anonymised.

Female – 21 years old

This young woman was in care from the age of 9 months old due to both her parents being drug addicts and later passing away. She has found parts of her life in care very difficult. She was placed in a foster placement but when she turned 18 she was automatically turned into a lodger. She claimed she had no information on this and was asked to start paying money. At this point in her life she had no idea about the benefits she was entitled to. She became a young mum at the age of 18. She found this very difficult and felt she didn't have the right support for this change in her life. She would have liked more support around the realities of becoming a parent. She has recently had her daughter taken into care and believes if she had been better supported this may have not been the outcome. This has had led to her mental getting worse and her struggling with day to day life.

Male – 17 years old

This young man has been in care for 16 years. Over the last two-year period, he's had 15 different placements. This includes 3 children's homes and 12 foster placements. He feels he did not have the right help and support for his education. He has attended 8 different schools, before finishing at Sky College. He found mainstream school hard to cope with and his behaviour escalated. He said he didn't have much support with independent living before moving to Burtons Orchard and has had to teach himself these skills. He has now been accepted for a traineeship with Somerset County Council within the in-care council participation network.

Male – 21 years old

This young man has been in care since being a baby. He believes his promise mentor is the best support he has.

Female – 17 years old

This young woman has been in care for 6 years. She is now in a stepping stones placement (independent living). She finds this very lonely at times but has settled and feels happy with the support from her leaving care worker. However, felt she was rushed in the leaving care

process. She didn't have the right information. Throughout schooling she was Travelling from Tiverton to Wiveliscombe every day in a taxi. She felt this was unfair and far too much travelling each day. This meant she struggled with her social group being so far away and she was left feeling isolated.

Female - 18 years old

This young woman has been in care for 2 years; within this time, she has had 2 placements. She feels she did not have enough support with living independently and would benefit from more help around cooking and budgeting.

Positives and Negatives

As part of the focus groups, young people were asked to think about the positives and negatives of the leaving care process. The answers were as follows:

Positives:

- The Leaving Care group (Tag) was a place where they could see their friends
- Attending Somerset In Care Council and Somerset Leaving Care Council
- Getting looked after
- Burtons Orchard and the staff
- The support that you get from professionals
- One young person could not find any positives.

Negatives

- Not being listened to
- No holidays
- No decent birthdays or Christmases
- Not a fair chance at education
- Feeling lonely
- Mental health getting worse and no support
- Staff break confidentiality around small issues
- Don't always listen, don't always take problems seriously
- Being bullied
- Not having the same opportunities as other young people
- Being a young person in care means it's harder to get a job

Young people's issues discussed.

The group said how they all struggle living on their personal allowance. One young person is under 18 therefore gets his personal allowance straight from leaving care. His weekly allowance is £54 a week with £10 automatically coming out and towards his accommodation. The rest of the group have said they get a similar amount but as they are over 18 this comes from the job centre. All young people said this often leaves them without eating for at least a few days a week at times. They understand this allowance can provide them with enough food for the week however some weeks they need to spend money elsewhere. This also limits their opportunities they have with friends and often leaves them with nothing to do throughout the week.

The group also said they would like more of a choice on the gender of their social worker. Two females within the group said they have felt uneasy with a male social worker and this has affected their relationship with social services. This has also left them feeling unable to approach their social worker with some issues. Unsure of exact numbers the group have all said they feel they have had to many social workers and at times they are unsure on who to contact at what times. One young person said she was not told she would be changing social workers, until she was introduced in a car park. Half of the group said they have found it very difficult at times to get hold of their social worker.

The group explained that up until recently they attended Somerset In Care Council and Somerset Leaving Care Council. They have said this group helps them having their voices heard and help make changes for them. However, the lead worker has been off sick so this group has not been running and is due to start up again next year. This has left the young people very disappointed.

Leaving care provide a weekly job club for all young people. However, the group have said they do not attend due to it not being very useful. They feel it's the same actives each week and they don't teach them the skills they feel they need. They have all said they would like more skills around interviews, gaining qualifications and helping with planning their future.

The group feel they would like more support with

- Gaining employment or training
- Budgeting, cooking and other independent skills
- Moving on from leaving care
- Support when cases are to be closed with social services
- Parenting skills
- Someone else to talk to other the social services

Report by Charlotte Bligh – December 2016.