



Transcript:

Looked After Children

Being Heard and Getting Support

Narrator: For looked after children life in care can be tougher than for those who grow up within their own families. But things don't have to be this way; the Social Care Institute for Excellence and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence have produced joint guidance on improving the physical and emotional health and wellbeing of looked after children and young people. This film will show how some of the principles set out in the guidance are working in practice, and improving outcomes.

In Staffordshire a Children in Care Council is giving a voice to the children and young people growing up within the authority.

In Yorkshire Action for Children supports foster carers, so young people can benefit from stability.

And in South Gloucestershire care leaver Jenny explains how settling into a long term foster placement has dramatically improved her prospects in adult life.

Enid Hendry – Head of Strategy and Development, Looked After Children, NSPCC:

There are about sixty-five thousand young people in care in England and Wales. Some children really thrive in care, however, if you look overall at the outcomes for children in care they are really not good at all, they are really quite worrying; only fourteen per cent of looked after children get five A-C GCSEs, compared with sixty-five per cent of the wider population. Around a quarter of the prison population have had care experiences in their past. If you look at the number of young people who are rough sleepers; a third to a half of those were in care at some time in their lives, so things clearly haven't worked out for those young people.

Narrator: But the care experience can, and does have positive outcomes. As the guidance recommends, one means of improving outcomes is to prioritise giving children and young people in care a voice.

Enid Hendry: Sometimes children tell us that they get very little time with their social workers. Social workers are really busy, so that quality of listening in their day to day lives is really important, and many young people in care say that that doesn't happen.

Narrator: Establishing a Children in Care Council, an initiative recommended by the SCIE and NICE, guidance can offer looked after children and young people the opportunity for their wishes to be heard within their authority. In Staffordshire the council provides a forum for its young members, here enjoying a barbeque and social event, to discuss and even influence policy.

Rachel Munday-Crates – Manager, The Children and Young People’s Voice Project, Staffordshire Council:

The Children in Care Council was set up probably about two and a half years ago now. It was originally set up from a group of young people coming together to look at a placement strategy for young people. So following on from this the young people felt that they had made a difference and their voices had been heard, and they felt they were then ready to create the Children in Care Council.

The age ranges from twelve up to eighteen. At the moment we currently have eight members - we can go up to twelve members. We also have a younger Children in Care Council that is from six right up to eleven; they meet in the holidays, and they currently have about five members. They feel that they have more of an impact, they can change things, improve things for the better, and perhaps things that could be improved now but will have a knock-on effect to those young people that are going to be in our future care system.

Council Member 1: Oh it’s great, you get to meet loads of new friends and stuff, and you get experience for work and school and everything. We have done interviews, just everything really.

Council Member 2: We have been to corporate parenting, we have done bike training and we have done ...

Council Member 1: We have raised the pocket money for everyone in care ...

Council Member 2: Yeah.

Council Member 2: ... so that was really good.

Council Member 3: I have been involved in the Council for a year. I actually started at their Christmas party last year; they had a Chinese, and they wanted me to go to meet everyone, and that is how I got involved. And since then I have just stayed in it and loved it, and it is really enjoyable.

Council Member 1: We meet about two ...

Council Member 2: Twice a month.

Council Member 1: Yeah, twice a month, and then we get some rewards and stuff, and that is really good as well.

Council Member 2: The rewards are every three months or ...

Council Member 1: Yeah. And even helping people is a reward, we don't need to have material things, it is just seeing a difference really.

Council Member 3: Usually I am just at home sitting around, but when I am there I can have a say in how to change other people's lives, so yeah.

Rachel Munday-Crates – Manager, The Children and Young People's Voice Project, Staffordshire Council:

So these are some of the items that the Children in Care Council have done; this is their first edition of their newsletter which they have produced. This is then sent to social workers, other professionals, as well as looked after young people.

This is a copy of the pledge that the young people have been involved in. So they met with other looked after young people to find out what they felt was the most important for them, as looked after young people, to be in the set of promises that the Council would make to looked after young people across the county.

Go, go, go ...

Today we have an event - which is the Children in Care Council Barbeque – this is where we have brought the two groups; the older Children in Care Council and the younger Children in Care Council together to do some sort of building of relationships.

I would say that we see our young people as our future, and they are an important part of our county and our remit, especially at the Children's' Voice Project, and we take on the corporate parenting role very seriously, in terms of making sure our young people achieve, making sure that they are happy and also, most importantly, they are safe where they live at the moment.

Narrator: Looked after children are now being listened to more than ever. Just a short time ago few would have paid much attention to what this group of young people, part of the lobbying charity Voice, had to say.

Male Speaker: *When I had my first one she didn't tell me about, oh you are meant to be getting this money and savings, until I had the second one.*

Narrator: Now they are advising on content for a new DVD being produced by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, about training for foster carers.

Wendy Banks – Senior Policy Advisor, Voice:

Our main aim is to empower children and young people that are in care, and to make sure children and young in care get the best service they can.

What we do is we identify what our key policy issues are, and we make sure that the experience of young people directly inform that. So this year we have identified three key themes for our policy. One

of them is particularly around the foster care experience, and that is the quality of foster care.

If you could change one thing about foster care, or your foster care experience, what would it be?

Female Speaker 1: *Sometimes foster carers don't motivate the young person as much as they motivate their own kids.*

Female Speaker 2: I feel that my voice is heard, and for those that can't voice their opinions, I think it is the way that I can help them.

Female Speaker 3: Being involved in Voice means that I have aim, I have a goal. If I do ever become something like a lawyer or a politician I know it's part of the law that I am passionate about, and that is probably children in care.

Female Speaker 1: I feel like we are helping change the care system for the better, and we are part of it because we are the ones who are in the system, and I think we are the ones who understand the system more than anyone else. And having the chance to change and improve it is quite good.

Narrator: A sense of stability is key for any young person to thrive. But some children remaining in a foster placement long enough to benefit from the stability can be a challenge in itself. In Yorkshire social worker Trish Jarvis is making her regular visit to Anna, one of eight specialist foster carers on her books.

Anna: *Hello.*

Trish Jarvis – Fostering Social Worker, Action for Children

Hello Anna.

Anna: *How are you?*

Trish Jarvis: *Nice to see you.*

Narrator: Trish works for Action for Children, on the frontline of the charity's fostering service, which provides and supports placements for the most difficult children. Anna began fostering a teenage girl three years ago.

Anna: *The main thing at the minute is the school's attitude to the bullying issues that we are having really.*

Margaret Davies – Fostering Service manager, Action for Children, Yorkshire:

We are providing foster care for children who are the most damaged children in the care system probably, and some of the most vulnerable. And we know that our foster carers have to be able to live with children who are very difficult to live with, in order to enable them to be contained and to settle for long enough to start recovering from the trauma and abuse they have experienced. It takes a long time because you have to undo the fear and the

distrust, and the need to control things themselves that have been built up over the years previously.

So we have developed a really good support package for foster carers, to enable them to deal with the challenges that get thrown up by these children.

Anna: *Our placement is experiencing some problems with a group of girls in science lesson.*

Margaret Davies : Each foster carer has their own supervising social worker, and we recruit those workers carefully to make sure that they have got the right skill set. And they will work very closely with the foster carer and their family.

Trish is known to be really willing to go over and above what is required of her, and has been known to pop round at weekends or in the evening.

Trish Jarvis: My caseload is eight families, and most of our carers, because of the challenging needs of our children, they are solo placements. Sometimes in daily contact with foster cares, depending on if there are crises or things like that. We have formal monthly supervisions, which are always booked in advance, we ensure that we see the children one monthly as a minimum as well. And we really do kind of do a team corporate parenting/fostering approach.

Margaret Davies: The fostering social worker will do whatever is required, but the mainstay of what their job is, is to offer really good quality supervision. And we see it as professional supervision, so the carers are encouraged to reflect, and to be honest and open about how things are going, and how they are coping with things; to learn from their mistakes as well as from the things that are going well. And the fostering social worker will be coaching them into new skills, if that is required, as well as boosting their confidence at times when maybe it feels like they are not getting anywhere.

Currently, across Yorkshire, we have got about twenty-five foster carers, we have got about twenty-two children in placement, and five social workers. It is so much more effective to intervene now, and to give these young people what they need now, in order to have a chance of leading independent lives in the future. And we know what the likelihood is if we don't provide these services.

Trish Jarvis: If you put them in with a well supported foster family, with professional foster carers who are treated as fellow professionals, it just can really make a massive change in a child's life. And I am just thinking about the young person today, didn't have her educational needs recognised because they just through, well she is not managing in school because she is jumping from placement and she is emotionally traumatised, but then they found out she actually has quite a significant learning disability. So then all the support could go in, and that just made one area of her life such a big difference, and then she wasn't getting excluded all the time. And then she starts making friends because she is not the weird little girl,

and then she gets the confidence to go to dance classes, and it just mushrooms.

Anna: Our placements outcomes now are quite rosy really, she will get plenty of support, she is going to go to college – she is determined to go to college – and determined to get a career, whereas two years ago I was told she would maybe only make a shop girl, whereas now she has taken GCSEs, she has a future, she has got plans. It has been tough but she will get there because we haven't given up and we won't give up.

Enid Hendry: Making sure there is at least one good continuing relationship for every young person in care is one of the things that we can do. It is the continuity of that relationship and the quality of that relationship, and having somebody who really cares about you, and to whom you feel you matter, and who you are important to. Having that kind of relationship can make all the difference to outcomes for a child.

Narrator: The SCIE and NICE guidance highlights the importance of supporting all carers of looked after children and young people, including residential workers and family and friends, so stable consistent relationships can be encouraged.

It was exactly that sort of bond with her foster carer which gave Jenny the confidence to thrive after leaving care less than a year ago. She experienced her first foster placement aged just seven, and then returned to care as a teenager, finally finding stability with her third foster family.

Jenny: They treated you like a family member, they didn't treat you just as a foster child, you were involved in everything; every rule you were involved in, and if one couldn't be given it, the other wasn't allowed it, it was very equal. And I think if we had more carers like I had, I think the system would be absolutely excellent.

Narrator: Jenny now lives with her partner Joe and works full time. She is convinced the stability of this placement has played a huge part in the success she has made of her life.

Jenny: I think because I felt settled I got on with school, then I started to go out with better people, and I didn't feel like I had to lie. I was quite open, and I never, ever came back drunk or anything like that, I respected their rules; I think that was the key thing, I respected them and they respected me. They just totally changed my life, and I think if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be here today.

[End of Recording]