



The Alliance for Children in Care & Care Leavers

The Vision – July 2019

In June 2016 the members of the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers signed up to *A New Vision*, to guide us in our work for children and young people in and leaving care. Since then, despite some big policy successes, many of the problems identified in that document still require our attention. The time is therefore right to refocus our efforts; this document is a joint statement of intent by the members of the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers, outlining our plans for 2019 and beyond.

Most children who come into care have experienced neglect or abuse. Left unaddressed, these traumatic experiences have a severe and lasting impact over a child's lifetime. Our efforts to ensure that every single child has the best possible chance to recover from the trauma and realise their potential focus on three key themes, each theme has its own sub-group:

- 1. The Mental Health and Well-being of Children in Care and Care Leavers**
Mental health and wellbeing have long been central to the Alliance's work. We have been successful in amending legislation to include specific arrangements for children in care and care leavers. The working group will lead the Alliance in working with policymakers to secure timely and tailored mental health support for all children from the moment they arrive into care. They will monitor the progress of existing government commitments and will seek to influence new policy in this area.
- 2. Stability**
The Alliance believes that stability is crucial to recovery from trauma, and that the gaps in the system that undermine stability must be addressed. Stability of care placement, stability in relationships and of educational setting are central to the well-being of children in care. For far too long, there has been insufficient focus on the idea of stability, to the detriment of helping looked after children and young people recover from the psychological impact of abuse and neglect. We welcome the new National Stability Forum set up by the Department for Education and look forward to contributing to the work it is doing. The working group will lead the Alliance in promoting stability as key to supporting the resilience and emotional wellbeing of all children in and leaving care.
- 3. Eighteen Plus and Care Leavers**
Some progress has been made by the Alliance and other organisations in making the case for softening the cliff-edge that sees children in care and



care leavers losing access to support services and having to leave care placements as soon as they turn eighteen. The working group will continue to push for better funding for Staying Put and will monitor and seek to influence developments including Staying Close.

The Alliance's Vision for Children in Care and Care Leavers

We aim to help build a care system that promotes recovery and healing from past harm, by prioritising stability, emotional wellbeing and long-term support for transition into adulthood and we seek to work with the Government to develop a holistic plan to make this happen.

Placement moves are a feature of the care system, sometimes the reason for these moves can be a lack of adequate support and training for carers and not with the primary aim of ensuring the wellbeing of the child. Over 3,000 children in care in 2016/17 experienced four or more placement moves over two years¹, a situation that is unacceptable and requires urgent change. Carers need to be equipped to support children to overcome the impact of past experiences and to nurture stable, safe and positive relationships with people who are important to the child, often including their birth family. Furthermore, foster carers and children's homes should be supported to offer a home for the children in their care up to the age of 21 or beyond. High quality support and the appropriate funding will help carers and key workers provide the stability that all children need to grow up secure and happy; it is also crucial to ensure a successful and stable return home, where this is the right decision for the child.

Currently the system itself can act against the promotion of stability; placement moves can go unchallenged, new policies such as Staying Put are not properly embedded. Stable and reliable high-quality care is fundamental for helping children negotiate the impact of experiences like severe neglect and for minimising the likelihood of mental health problems. Children in care in England are between four and five times more likely to develop a mental disorder than children in the general population, with abuse and neglect putting children at greater risk of poor mental health. The Alliance seeks to ensure clear pathways for accessing mental health support and sufficiency of provision. Mental and emotional stability are fundamental to stability of placement and visa versa; at the moment children and their carers frequently struggle to access suitable support.

Our concern to ensure stability and emotional well-being for children does not end when young people leave care whether that's to live independently or to return to their families. Care leavers should not be expected to become independent at a much younger age than their peers, and should be able to expect a stable transition, with support in managing ongoing and additional challenges. Currently, in response to campaigning by the Alliance, support from a personal advisor is being extended to

¹ Children's Commissioner Stability Index 2018



age 25 but too little is being done to advertise this to care leavers and take-up is low. Often, it is these young people that are most in need of stable relationships and ongoing support. This includes help with stable transition from children to adult's mental health services where gaps in support are common. Staying Put and the trialling of Staying Close are crucial to supporting care leavers at this important time, providing the stability and security that other young people expect to receive.

In pushing for improvements to the system, the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers seeks to ensure that relationships of all types – the vital golden thread in children's lives – are better supported to ensure the stability that is so foundational to helping children and young people to move on from the adversity they have faced. Current failings are too costly for children and society. We welcome the Government's recent focus on the care system and look forward to helping plan further vital improvements.

The Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers is the pre-eminent sector-wide organisation that represents all the main voluntary sector organisations that work to support children in care and care leavers. We share a commitment to improving the care system and outcomes of children and young people who spend time in care.

The Alliance is comprised of:

Action for Children

Article 39

Barnardo's

Become

British Association of Social Workers (BASW)

Catch22

Children's Commissioner for England

Children England

Children's Rights Alliance England

Coram BAAF

Coram Children's Legal Centre

Coram Voice

Drive Forward Foundation

Family Rights Group



Fostering Through Social Enterprise (FtSE)

Home for Good

Institute of Recovery from Childhood Trauma

Leap Confronting Conflict

Migrant and Refugee Children's Legal Unit

National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO)

National Children's Bureau (NCB)

NSPCC

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)

Social Care Institute for Excellence

TACT

The Care Leavers' Association

The Children's Society

The Fostering Network

The Prince's Trust

St Christophers Fellowship

Together Trust

Young Minds