



A new vision

It is time to re-focus our vision for children and young people in and leaving care. The care system continues to fail too many children and young people, despite the evidence that care can be the right option and can provide the security, stability and love that children need.

Removing children from harmful situations is of utmost importance, but our efforts must not end there. It is well known that most children who come into care have been seriously neglected or abused, physically, emotionally or sexually. Left unaddressed, these traumatic experiences have a severe and lasting impact over a child's lifetime.

And yet for too long, there has been insufficient focus on helping looked-after children and young people recover from the psychological impact of abuse and neglect, and on promoting their resilience and emotional wellbeing. As a result, the primary importance of providing looked-after children with stable, warm and affectionate relationships with trustworthy adults is undermined – despite being fundamental to children's development and for achieving their potential.

The Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers calls for a clearer framework on what care should be aiming to achieve and for the gaps in the system to be addressed. We would like to see:

A statement in law that the principal aim of the care system for children and young people who spend significant time in care is to achieve recovery and healing from past harm, and to promote resilience and emotional wellbeing.

A new child-led outcomes framework for looked after children so that meeting the principal aim is properly assessed and judged.

These specific measures would support improvements in the system where they are most needed:

- **Greater support and training for primary carers.** Carers need to be equipped to support children to overcome the impact of past experiences and to nurture safe, positive relationships with people who are important to the child, often including their birth family. High quality support will mean

foster carers and key workers in children's homes are better able to provide the stability children need to grow up safe and happy; it is also crucial to ensure a successful return home, where this is the right decision for the child'.

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- **Mechanisms for assessing 'good quality care' from the child's perspective and robust accountability** when a child's progress from entry into care is undermined. Currently the system itself can act against children's welfare; placement moves can go unchallenged, and children and young people are not always listened to or do not have their wishes and feelings taken into account.
- **Robust assessment and measurement of children's wellbeing** and progress through their care experience, rather than one-off outcomes, so that we understand when children are doing well and when they need more support.
- **Care that meets the day-to-day emotional needs of children supported by specialist mental health support if needed.** High quality care is fundamental for helping children negotiate the impact of experiences like severe neglect and for preventing mental health problems. Timely access to mental health services must also improve so that the right support is available when required.
- **Continuing to provide care and support when young people leave care,** including for families when children return home. Care leavers should not be expected to become independent much younger than their peers, and should be supported to manage ongoing and additional challenges.

Most importantly, these changes will ensure that relationships – the vital golden thread in children's lives – are better supported and help children and young people to move on from the adversity they have faced. Current failings are too costly for children and society. This must change.

Organisations that make up the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers:

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| A National Voice | NSPCC |
| Action for Children | National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) |
| British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) | Office of the Children's Commissioner |
| Barnardo's | TACT |
| British Association of Social Workers (BASW) | The Care Leavers' Association |
| Children England | The Children's Society |
| Coram Voice | The Fostering Network |
| Family Rights Group | The Prince's Trust |
| Institute of Recovery from Childhood Trauma | The Who Cares? Trust |
| National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO) | Together Trust |
| National Children's Bureau (NCB) | Young Minds |

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