

Barnardo's Scotland briefing for Scottish Government debate on: Improving the Care Experience for Looked after Children

20th December 2016

Key Points

- **Taking a broad view of the care system** – the forthcoming review of the care system needs to look across the whole system rather than looking at any one element in isolation.
- **Involving people throughout the system** - it is important that voices from throughout the system are heard, including professionals.
- **Developing a person-centred care system** - which responds to young people based on their individual needs and background and focuses on building positive relationships.
- **Beyond the care system** – experiences which lead a young person to be part of the care system have implications much wider than their involvement in 'the system' itself.

Introduction

Barnardo's is the UK and Scotland's largest children's charity. Barnardo's Scotland works with more than 26,500 children and young people in over 130 specialised services every year. Our services work with many looked after children and young people as well as care leavers.

Taking a broad view of the care system

As an organisation working across the care system, we are acutely aware of the connections (and disconnections) between different parts of the system. We would therefore encourage the Scottish Government to use the recently-announced root and branch review of the care system to look **across the whole system** rather than looking at any one aspect in isolation.

It is essential to include **children on the edge of care** within the remit of this review. In particular, the review should consider how children and young people enter the care system, and whether more could be done to support children, young people and their families so that they do **not end up 'part of the system'** in the first place.

This should include an examination of whether the thresholds for involvement in the care system are increasing, and what support is available to children who would previously have become part of the care system but now are not.

Involving people from throughout the system

We work with children and young people who interact in many different ways with the care system; it is important that **voices from throughout the system are heard**, from young people on

different stages of their journeys. This includes hearing from children and young people who have had **positive experiences of care**.

Whilst it is right for the review to have children and young people with experience of care at its heart, staff who have worked in the care system (often for many years) also have valuable knowledge and insight to contribute and we would very much encourage the Scottish Government to support **professionals working within the care system** to contribute to this review.

Developing a person-centred care system

Our aspiration for the care review is to develop a system which responds to young people **based on their individual needs and background**, not their chronological age or their particular looked after status. Our 2015 report with CELCIS 'Overseen but Often Overlooked' found, for example, that there is a tendency among professionals to view children and young people looked after at home as requiring a lower level of support than those in residential care, although their needs are often similar.

In particular, we would like to see much greater acknowledgement of, and support for, the **impact of trauma, bereavement and loss** and the pivotal role these experiences can play in the trajectory of a young person's life.

Children and young people should have access to the **right kind of support for them**. Key to this decision making is ensuring that we have a care system which allows children and young people to **develop positive, supportive relationships** with the adults in their lives so that they are able to make the decisions which are right for that child or young person.

Many processes within the care system are designed by adults, and do not make it easy for children and young people to engage. The review should consider ways in which processes and systems could be amended to allow for better engagement with children and young people who face a range of challenges; as one of the young people we support said in relation to employment support for care leavers **"Don't give up on young people....even if they don't turn up. Keep giving them support."**

Beyond the care system

The experiences which lead a young person to be part of the care system have implications much wider than their involvement in 'the system' itself. We would like to see the review acknowledge this, in particular:

- **Mental health** is a key issue for young-people with experience of care; we should find ways to support them for this through their interaction with care and support services, rather than relying on CAMHS.
- Young people in care acting out their distress often end up part of the **justice system**, and this can have a major impact.
- Young people who are looked after are often disenfranchised and can have poor role models with regard to employment – they would benefit from **specialist employability support**.

Contact

Kirsten Hogg- Head of Policy, Barnardo's Scotland, Kirsten.Hogg@barnardos.org.uk