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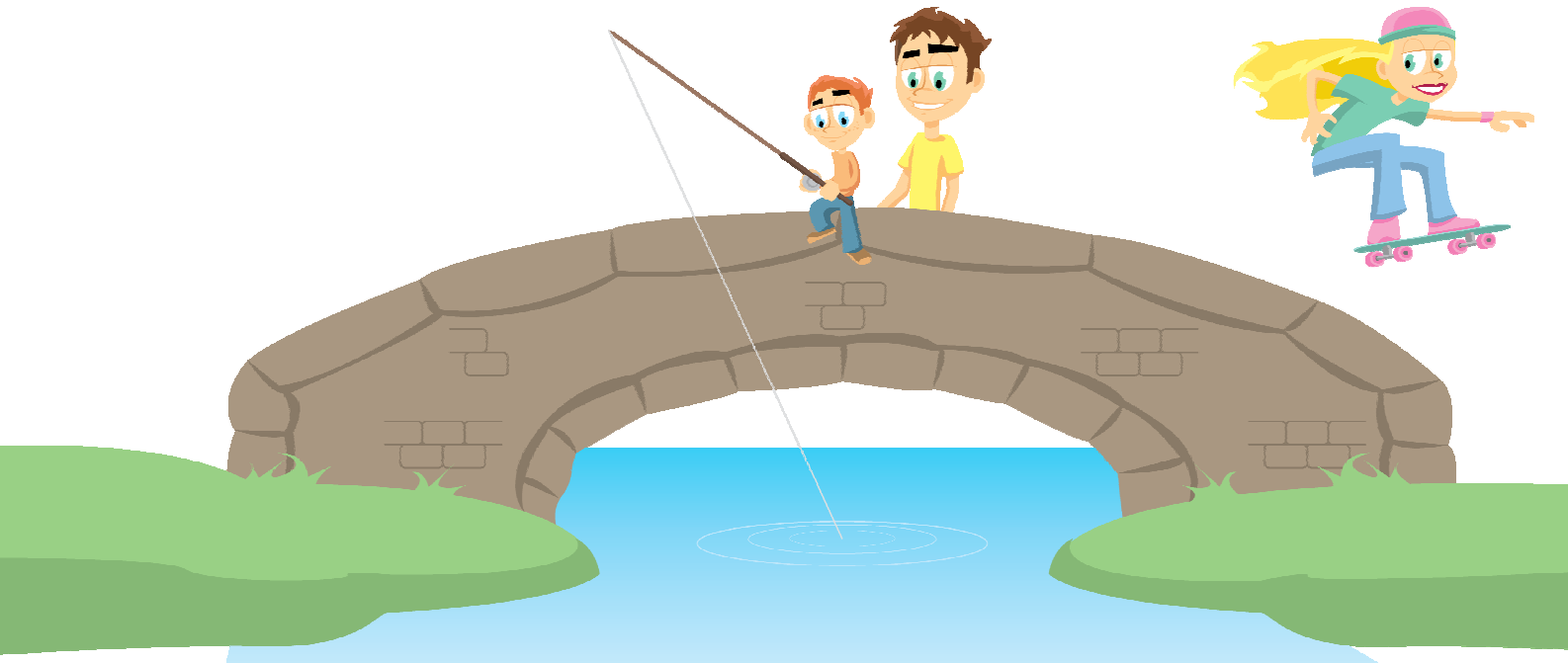
**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÁNNYSTRIE O

**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin
an Fowk Siccar**

YOUR GUIDE TO CARE MATTERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

A BRIDGE TO A BETTER FUTURE



This consultation document for children and young people has been produced by Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) on behalf of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

JUNE 2007

INTRODUCTION

Over the last number of years you have told us what its like to live in care and what you think could make it a more positive experience. The Government has listened to your views and has looked at ways of trying to make some of those changes you have suggested. These are set out in a report called "Care matters in Northern Ireland – a Bridge to a Better Future". The report is aimed at adults and is very long so in this guide we have rewritten it to make it easier for you to understand some of the big ideas for change in the care system.

In this guide there are lots of ideas for change but it all breaks down into 5 key issues;

- More support for families to try to stop children and young people coming into care.
- Making sure you get the placement that's right for you.
- More help with education.
- Having a life outside of care.
- Making sure you get all the help you need for adulthood.

It's very important that you have a chance to let the government know what you think about the ideas put forward in the guide, and they would really welcome any comments you have to make! If you have any questions or would like more information do not hesitate to get in touch.

There is a simple questionnaire at the back of this guide which you can use to write down your views. If you do not want to answer all the questions, just answer those that are important to you.

Be part of it!

THE NEW LOOK SOCIAL SERVICES

Social services here are run by organisations called 'Trusts', which provide services in particular areas of Northern Ireland. There are some new ideas about how social services should be organised, which are set out in the diagram below.



GATEWAY TEAMS

These teams will be the 1st point of contact for families and children looking for help and support.



FAMILY SUPPORT & INTERVENTION TEAMS

These will provide services to families whose children are at risk of coming into care.



SPECIALIST LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN TEAMS

These teams will work only with children and young people living in care.



THROUGH-CARE TRANSITION TEAMS

Transition teams will work with all young people aged 16+ in care and moving through care, but could work with young people to help them get skills for adulthood from the age of 13.

The report also suggests that each Trust should have a special Looked After Children (which is usually referred to by social services staff as LAC) **Education Team** to help children and young people who live in care with education and school issues.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Family Group Conferencing

If you can no longer live with your parents Family Group Conferencing is a way of finding out who in your extended family could look after you. A 'conference' is a meeting of your family and another person, not connected with social services, to discuss and try to help with your problems. Your parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents even your aunts and uncles can come to your family group conference.



The conference allows you and your family to talk about any difficulties or challenges, and how they can be handled best. It is also a chance for everyone to share their views, wishes and concerns. It is recognized that many young people prefer to live with close relatives if they cannot live with their parents. This is called kinship care. More support will be given to encourage more kinship care, although this will only happen when it is felt this is the right option for you.

Someone **independent** of social services will chair your conference and they will listen to your family's needs and will help your family to help you.

The Government wants to see Family Group Conferencing used much more to stop young people coming into the care system.

What difference will family group conference make to me?

- If your extended family can make their own 'Care Plan' that meets your needs, the Trust will support this.
- This means you could be placed with a family member instead of having to come into care with a stranger or into a residential children's home.
- The Trust must show the courts that they have looked at all possibilities of you staying with family before coming into care

COMING INTO CARE



If there is no family placement available for you and you have to come into care, you will stay in a specialist children's home or foster placement for six weeks.

During this time social services will try again to find family support for you, but they will also look at 'matching' you to the

right foster placement or children's home. More placement options will become available to ensure that you live somewhere that matches your particular needs. When you do move into a placement it should be planned and take place over time to help you get used to it.

You will also find out about your rights and what being in care will be like and how you will be involved in your care plan and LAC review (we talk and explain more about LAC Reviews and Care Plans later).

You will be able to complete a booklet or profile in which you can write down all your likes and dislikes, things you like to do, and the people and things that are important to you. This will help you to be matched to the foster carers or children's home that is right for you and also help the people who will be looking after you.

Once a placement has been found for you, you will have regular visits from your social worker. Some of these visits should involve outings and activities with you to help you and your social worker get to know each other and build a good relationship.

FOSTER CARE

Did you all know that there are about 2500 children and young people in care in Northern Ireland, and roughly 63% are in foster care? And although several hundred of you live with medium to long term foster families, a lot of you still end up with too many different placement changes. So this section will explain how the government want to help you have more secure placements.

What differences will the changes make to me?

- Your carers will be able to make more day-to-day decisions on your care. So instead of waiting on the Trust to decide if you can go on a holiday, spend an overnight with your friend, have your ears pierced or get your hair done, attendance on school trips, meetings in school and lots of other stuff, your foster carers will be able to make these decisions with you.
- More specialist family support (called therapeutic support) to help you, your family and foster family through tough times. This includes more evening and weekend support and an increase in the number of skilled staff like counsellors.
- More help and information will be given to foster carers to provide you with the necessary support for you to have contact with your family, if this is approved by social services.
- If you have been placed with a kinship carer for one year or more your statutory visits from your social worker will be reduced from one a month to every two months.

CONTACT

Some time ago, 160 young people in care were asked 'what are the big issues in care?' Over 33% said that family contact was *the* most important thing. This section explains how contact with family and friends may be supported.



What differences will the changes make to me?

- Unfortunately, children and young people are normally in care because of a range of family difficulties that often place them at risk from harm. This means sometimes contact with your parents isn't a good idea. If this is the case for you then it should be fully explained so you understand why.
- Not living at home with your family can be very difficult and scary. Social services will try and explain to you why you are not living with your family to help you understand it more.
- Some of you have said that contact with your brothers and sisters and other family members should be a separate decision from having contact with your parents so that you don't lose out on your other family relationships. These decisions will now be made separately.
- You should have time with your family outside of social services offices, so you can have fun and relaxing visits.
- You will get help for things like transport, to ensure you can see your family, if this is approved by social services.

EDUCATION



Education is different for everyone. Some people leave school at 16 and learn a trade, some go on to further education or training, and others go to university or college. Whatever you choose you should get the help and support you need.

Sometimes if you are going through a bit of a rough patch it can affect how well you do at school. When this happens you may need a bit more support, especially from school. It's important that your teachers know what's going on with you so they can understand what is going on in your life and help you out more when you're at school. However, it's also important that your privacy is respected when sharing information with your teachers.

What differences will the changes make to me?

- Care Matters states that you all should have a Personal Education Plan which sets out your hopes and dreams for your education, and also how to deal with any problems if they happen.
- It's important that everything is done to make sure you're at a school that's right for you. Let's not forget that just because you come into care and move away from home doesn't mean you have to move school as well. If you're happy and doing well in the school you're already in, if possible, you will remain there!

- Each Trust will now have a Looked After Children (LAC) education team. Each team will have a senior education welfare officer and 2 education welfare officers who will also have access to an educational psychologist.
- More will be done to ensure that your carers know how the education system works, for example, the difficult exams you have to sit. It is also important that your teachers have a good understanding of the care system, this will happen in their teaching training.
- While in care you can sometimes miss time at school because of some of the issues or problems in your life. It is really important that you get the help and support in getting you back into school and catching up with what you have missed.
- If you are undertaking Education Other Than At School (EOTAS), this can continue after you have turned 16.

LIFE OUTSIDE OF CARE

What's it all about? We know you're all thinking "a life outside of here, yeah right!!" but the government wants you to get out there, have some fun and have a happy normal move into adulthood. 'Care Matters' wants



you to get involved in new things, make new friends and enjoy life and it is the responsibility of your carers and the Trust to make sure you are able to do this. The government understands that you have the same dreams as many of your friends and they want to make sure, as much as possible, that these dreams can become a reality.

What differences will the changes make to me?

- Trusts will have to ensure that you have more positive experiences, and that you receive more information on the activities that you enjoy. The aim is to provide you with more access to activities outside of care, like youth clubs, sports clubs and opportunities for volunteering.
- When you are out having fun, it's very important to be safe and healthy and sometimes you need some extra support with this. One of the changes being made is that there should be a health professional, like a nurse, around to help you all stay safe and healthy.
- All staff and carers will receive training on how to support and advise you on sexual health, drinking and drugs. You will also have more opportunities to attend programmes outside of care on these issues as well.

CARE PLANNING/ REVIEWS



A Care Plan is a report written by social services which looks at the type of care and support you should get. The care plan includes things such as where you will live, education, health, activities, contact arrangements, culture, what sports you like and any other needs you have. Everybody's Care Plan is different but they should all highlight the positive activities which you like to take part in and your hopes and dreams for the future.

The new changes mean you will have a care plan that is right for you.

What Difference will the changes make to me?

- If you have taken care of your younger brothers and sisters before coming into care you should have a say on their care plan.
- Courts should not make a care order until you have a care plan.
- The Trust that looks after you must make sure you get the chance to explore all your goals and dreams for your future.
- Your carers must take into consideration your views and opinions when making decisions about your care.
- It will always be explained to you why decisions are made.
- An independent person will make sure that your care plan meets your needs and that your rights are being supported by your Trust.
- Your care plan is flexible so if things with you change then so can your care plan.



REVIEWS

Young people have often said that they find LAC Reviews very difficult because there are lots of people at them, it's hard to understand what is being discussed and often you don't feel listened to. This section takes a look at what will be done to make LAC reviews better for you.

What differences will these changes make to me?

- LAC Forms and all the papers used at reviews will be re-designed to make sure you get the opportunity to record the things that are important to you so you can be involved in your decisions and plans.
- When you first come into care you should get information on LAC reviews and care planning.
- You should be given the chance to spend time with your key worker or social worker to chat about and plan your review.
- You should be asked about who will come to your LAC Review and where it should be.
- You should be given the help and support to make sure you feel comfortable to speak at your review.
- Your social worker will talk about decisions and plans made with you.
- Someone Independent of social services will chair your LAC Review.
- You should get the chance to discuss your school and education at your LAC Review.
- An education progress report will be presented at your LAC Review talking about how you are getting on in school.

INDEPENDENT ADVISERS

Most of your friends will probably have lots of adults in their lives who are important to them, like parents, family members or friends who act as role models or mentors. Some young people in care perhaps do not have these relationships and the government believes that you should. Indeed, they think that every young people in care should have access to an independent person who will offer befriending, support and advice to you. This person will have no connection to the care system (i.e. independent).



What differences will changes make to me?

- You will have access to an independent adviser to offer befriending, advice and support.
- The role of the adviser will depend on you. You decide what role the adviser plays in your lives, from short-term to a longer-term relationship.
- You should also have access to an advocate if you want to.

RESIDENTIAL CARE

Children in care have said that residential care is difficult because you live with lots of people and you have a number of staff looking after you. This section of the report looks at how to try and improve it for you.



You have also said that one of the most difficult things about being in care is that you have to move placements a lot, which can cause difficulties and can affect many things in your life, like your education. 'Care Matters' wants Trusts to improve placements by making them more permanent, secure and normal so that you can get the best in life.

With the new changes you will get the best possible placement in residential care.

What differences will changes make to me?

- If you are moving into residential care it should be planned and you should move in gradually.
- There will be more help given to residential homes to help young people who have been in trouble with the police.
- Residential units should be developed for young people aged 16-17 to help you moving into adulthood.
- The number of children and young people living in most children's home will be reduced to a maximum of four children per home.
- You should be able to contact an advocate to make sure that you have the opportunity and support to make a complaint if you need to and put your views across.
- Your key worker should be able to sign your permission slips for school.

- Your key worker should support you with your education.
- Your residential unit should make sure that you have the right space for your education.
- You should have access to a computer.
- You should have the chance to get involved in activities outside your unit.

TRANSITIONS INTO ADULTHOOD

Young people from care often say that they find it difficult managing a home, thinking about employment/education and making relationships.

Moving into adulthood can be difficult so it's really important that you have the right help and support. This section looks at how you can be supported.



What are the changes?

Leaving and After Care Teams will be renamed 'Throughcare Transition Teams'. These teams will continue to work with young people aged 16+ but they will also help young people aged from 13 to prepare them for adulthood, for instance budgeting or learning how to cook. This will ensure that you are ready for adult life. Transition teams will also work with young people aged up to 25 if they have difficult problems and require help and support.

Wraparound Services:

There will be new 'Wraparound' services. These services will offer activities to assist young people to build and keep important relationships and activities outside of care and are based on your own particular needs. The development of community based Wraparound care and support services will help young people who need a bit more help and maybe need to stay in a stable placement by providing;

- Peer education schemes
- Volunteering opportunities
- Mental Health Specialists

The new changes will hopefully make the move into adulthood easier for you all.

What differences will these changes make to me?

- Your Pathway Plan should include the support and resources that will help you to keep up family contact.
- The age of Residence Orders will rise to 18.
- Support services, including specialist and transition support, should be available to you and your carer.
- Social services will work with other agencies to be certain you receive personal development training, life skills or independent training that will help you move onto adulthood.
- The number of care leavers in education and training and employment at age 19 will double within 15 years.
- You will keep in contact with health professionals including those who work in mental health after you leave care.
- It may be possible for you to stay with your foster carers after you have turned 18, depending on your, and their, circumstances.
- You should get the chance to attend mentoring / peer education programmes that are designed to help you with your self-esteem and life skills.
- The Trust will ensure extra money goes to the Child Trust Fund accounts of young people in care. This means that an extra £100 per year will go into a young person's Child Trust Fund account for every year they are in care. This money will be used to help you make the move to independent living.

How to Respond

If you want to tell us what you think about the ideas in 'Care Matters', please complete and return the response form, which may be found at the back of this booklet or may be downloaded from the E-consultations section on this website:

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

When responding, it would be helpful if your reply by email, fax or letter could include your name, age and postal or email address. It would also help if replies could be emailed to us at:

carematters@dhsspsni.gov.uk.

Or, you may post your reply to:

Care Matters Consultation
Child Care Policy Directorate
Room C3.23
Castle Buildings
Stormont
BT4 3SQ

Or faxed to: (028) 90522500

Closing date

Please send your comments by:

3rd September 2007.



Freedom of Information

Any information you give us in your reply will come under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This is a law which allows the public to see certain information held by Government Departments and agencies. This does not necessarily mean that your reply will be made available to the public as we can refuse to do so in some cases, for example, where information was given in confidence or information that might be protected by the Data Protection Act 1998. If you would like us to keep your reply confidential, please tell us but you should be aware that this may not prevent your reply being made available, if requested. We have to decide if we should release information, whether the confidential box is ticked or not.

For further information about confidentiality of responses, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office

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If you have questions about this consultation or would like more copies please telephone:

Fergal Bradley on 028 9052 2792; or

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Or you can email: carematters@dhsspsni.gov.uk.

Thank you for reading this guide to 'Care Matters'. We look forward to receiving your views.



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