

Young people in care groups

The Rights for Young People Group was formed in September 1992 following participation of six young people from Cleveland in a national Conference organised by the National Association of Young People in Care (NAYPIC). The Conference took place at Skegness and involved young people who were either in care or had recently left care, and provided them with an opportunity to talk about their experiences of life within the care system.

Upon return, five of the us who had attended as delegates from Cleveland, decided that we wished to form our own local group in order to advocate and campaign for the rights of young people in care. However, since its inception the membership of the group has changed and has variously involved six other young people.

We tend to meet at least once a month, but do meet more often when the group is particularly busy. It has now become common practice for our group to meet with the Director of Social Services at six-monthly intervals, to consider ways in which children/young people might contribute to improving the quality and delivery of services.

Involvements

Our group has been particularly active in its work and organised its own regional Conference which was held at the University of Durham. The theme of this Conference was 'Experiences and Expectations of Care' and in preparation for it, the Rights for Young People Group produced both a video and a Statement of Expectations (see Appendix 1). The Residential Conference took place between 25 and 29 July 1993, which led up to a one-day Conference on 28 July 1993. This was attended by approximately 120 young people and social work staff from across the

The authors asked not be identified. However, both have had experience of being in care in the north of England and are currently active members of the Rights for Young People Group in Cleveland. Both are also undertaking studies in child care.

North East. The Statement of Expectations, which was based upon young people's experience of the care system, has continued to prove influential in shaping child care policy and practice in Cleveland.

On a national level, the Rights for Young People Group have been involved in supporting the *Who Cares? Trust* in its recent survey of children and young people in care, which led to the publication of 'Not Just a Name'.

Members of the Rights for Young People Group are acting as consultants for the National Children's Bureau to help identify common themes of good practice in residential child care, as part of a nationwide project.

The Rights for Young People Group have been involved in staff recruitment, on behalf of the Children's society.

The Rights for Young People Group produces and circulates newsletters informing other young people in care about issues concerning their rights and about events which may be of interest to them. This is done by using a direct mailing system which has been set up by Cleveland Children's Rights Service and Cleveland Social Services Department. This proved a reliable method of widening the involvement of other young people and promoting an awareness amongst them of some of their rights.

We feel that it is important that there is support for local groups for children/young people in care and care-leavers, especially as it would appear that NAYPIC is not assured of its future role or funding.

The Rights for Young People Group have recently been commissioned by Cleveland Social Services Department to consult the views of children/young people about the future structure for residential child care services in Cleveland.

The following is the Statement of Expectations developed by the Rights for Young People Group.

APPENDIX 1

STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS

This Statement of Expectations was produced by:

The Rights for Young People's Residential Conference

and presented at their one-day Conference at:

St. Aidan's College,
University of Durham,
on Wednesday, 28th July, 1993.

General Statement

The Rights for Young People Group recognises that it will not always be possible for the Social Services Department to meet in full all of these expectations, in all circumstances, or on all occasions. Much will depend upon available resources, considerations of welfare and each young person's ability to exercise their rights responsibly.

This Statement of Expectations is produced in the spirit of informing politicians, managers, social workers and carers about the actual views of young people and their expectations of the services which they receive. It is hoped that this Statement of Expectations will have an appropriate impact upon the development of Cleveland's child care policy, planning and practice.

Access to information/files

WE EXPECT:-

- 1) To be able to have access to departmental files within 28 days of a request.
- 2) To be informed that the Social Services Department area office and our carers keep files on us.
- 3) To be able to read the log book which is updated daily in our homes and comment on it.
- 4) To be given information about all services which are available to us.
- 5) That third parties should only be given access to information about a young person with their informed consent, where they are able to give this.

Involving young people

WE EXPECT:-

- 1) All young people to be present at their reviews. However, if a young person chooses not to attend, then we do expect that a representative of their choice be present to speak on their behalf.
- 2) That all young people should be given some say in who is invited to their reviews/planning meetings, etc. Similarly, if a young person requests that someone should not attend, then that request should be respected also.
- 3) That all young people should be able to choose which issues to discuss at their reviews/planning meetings and be involved in planning the agenda.
- 4) That all young people should be able to discuss issues with their social worker before their reviews/planning meetings.
- 5) That young people should be involved, at some stage, in staff selection.
- 6) That young people should be able to express their opinions on the length of time temporary staff are employed in their homes.
- 7) That all young people should be involved and consulted about the general running of the home, i.e. menu planning, appropriate bed-times, etc.
- 8) That young people already living in the home should have the right to a valid opinion about new admissions.

Complaints

WE EXPECT:-

- 1) That, on coming into care, complaints procedures are fully explained and simplified for all young people.
- 2) All young people to be able to submit a complaint without the consent or consultation of:-
 - a) a member of staff employed at the home,
 - b) or a foster parent.
- 3) An independent person to be available to all young people to support and guide them throughout the complaints procedure (ie, from filling in the complaints form until the complaint has been satisfactorily resolved).
- 4) All young people should be able to express a confidential complaint verbally to an independent person.
- 5) All complaints to be dealt with, in accordance with legal requirements.
- 6) All complaints to be taken seriously, dealt with seriously and have a satisfactory outcome.
- 7) That after a young person submits a complaint, they be kept fully up-to-date of all new developments.
- 8) That young people should not be discouraged from using the complaints procedure for whatever reason.
- 9) That after a young person has made a complaint, or after being involved in an incident of any sort, carers do not treat them differently from how they treated them before.
- 10) That all staff and carers acknowledge and encourage children and young people to use the complaints procedure.
- 11) That we should not have to make complaints about everyday matters or problems which could be resolved by common sense.

Leaving care/After care

WE EXPECT:-

- 1) That all young people leaving care are offered support, advice and guidance necessary to enable them to live independently.
- 2) All young people to be given help in coping with problems when leaving care, e.g. loneliness, employment, education, budgeting, etc.
- 3) The Social Services Department to provide an independent 'drop-in centre' for young people to be able to have a coffee, chat and request any advice and support.
- 4) That on leaving care young people are given the opportunity to continue contact and support.
- 5) That all young people, in residential homes or foster homes, should be able to have a properly and appropriately planned leaving care plan and for them to be involved and consulted in the drawing up of this plan.
- 6) That young people should not be forced to leave care where they feel they are not ready to do so.
- 7) That all young people are provided with a home until they are 21 years of age, if they choose and feel the need to be accommodated.
- 8) Every Social Services Department to have an After Care Support Team, totally committed to young people leaving care.
- 9) That when a young person feels they are ready to leave care, they have the choice to move into the type of accommodation best suited to their needs.
- 10) That when a young person leaves care they are entitled to a leaving care grant according to departmental policy and criteria.
- 11) All young people to be able to be involved and encouraged in some redecoration and maintenance of their rooms, ie, redecorating bedroom, changing plugs on hairdryers, etc.
- 12) That after a young person has left care, they are encouraged to return to the residential or foster home where they were resident, for visits, support, advice and general information.
- 13) That young people leaving care should be supported in maintaining important relationships which they have made with carers and residents.
- 14) That whilst we are preparing for leaving care (residential or foster) we are treated appropriately according to our age. We should be given the space to be able to exercise our responsibilities.

Identity, confidentiality & privacy

WE EXPECT:-

- 1) That all young people in care should have their own bedroom.
- 2) Every young person in residential care has a key to their own room and staff and carers to have a master key to be used in emergencies.
- 3) That all bathrooms and toilets have appropriate locks.
- 4) All staff and carers to knock on bedroom doors and then wait for an invitation to enter.
- 5) All young people to have access to a 24 hour telephone and be able to hold a conversation in private.
- 6) Carers accept young people for the way they are and not try to change them into something they would like them to be.
- 7) Carers to trust young people, i.e. when we sleep at friend's houses.
- 8) That all young people should be able to speak confidentially to all staff and carers and confide in their key worker.
- 9) All information about young people to be kept strictly confidential from other residents.
- 10) All young people to be treated fairly according to their age and maturity.
- 11) That we should not be subject to prejudice and discrimination on the grounds of our 'care status' and, only treated in ways which would be considered fair for any other young person or group of young people.

Education/Further education

WE EXPECT:-

- 1) That all young people receive a proper and fair education.
- 2) All young people to be treated as a pupil not as a 'child in care'.
- 3) All young people to receive more support and encouragement with homework, help and advice in staying in education, and encouraged to achieve.
- 4) All young people to be provided with adequate study facilities.
- 5) That all young people in care are not labelled by teachers and not used as a scapegoat.
- 6) That there should be a Care Liaison Officer provided in every School.
- 7) All young people to receive the encouragement and financial support of the Social Services Department to go onto higher education.
- 8) All young people to receive proper support and advice regarding further education.
- 9) All young people to be treated the same as other pupils and not over-protected by teachers just because they are in care.
- 10) Young people in care to receive the same type of punishment as other pupils.
- 11) That carers attend all parents evenings and show an interest in young people's education.
- 12) Special programmes to be provided to assist young people's gradual return to full-time education.
- 13) Young people not to have to change schools solely as a consequence of coming into care or changing a placement.