

# Care Matters: Ministerial Stocktake Report 2009

Young Person's version



department for  
children, schools and families

## If you're in care, this booklet is specially for you

If you're a young person in care, or you've been in care recently, then this booklet is for you.

It's about how the care system is changing, why it's changing and how we are going to keep making care better in the future.

Take some time to read it. It'll tell you what's going on, and how you can play your part in making sure you get what you need - in care and at school.

### Contents

The story so far	3
Caring <i>about</i> you, not just <i>for</i> you	4
Helping families stay together	6
Making placements better for you	7
There for you at school	8
Being healthy, feeling good	9
Making sure you're ready to leave care	10
Now what?	11

## The story so far

Everyone needs love, care and stability when they're growing up. But we know that many young people in care haven't always had this support.

In 2007 we wrote a report called *Care Matters*, about how we wanted to make things better for young people in the care system. We said they should have the same things as anyone else: a good education, good health care, and support from grown-ups looking after them.

We promised to write an update each year to say what we've done and what's happening next. This is our 2009 update, written specially for you if you're in care.

### You said...

'Just because we're in care, doesn't make us different from any other child.'

## Working and listening

Since *Care Matters* we've been working with local councils to make care better everywhere. We've also listened hard to what you've told us: what you want and what you need.

Things are definitely getting better, but they need to change more – and faster.



## Caring *about* you, not just *for* you

When you're in care, your local council must act like a good parent – your local council and children's home or carer have a special responsibility for you.

In *Care Matters* we said that young people in care should be cared *about*, not just cared *for*. We meant that local councils and carers should look out for you and do their very best for you, like parents.

We made new rules to make sure your views are listened to more, such as getting you independent help if you want to make a complaint about your care.

And we said that councils have to *show* they're listening.

### Your say

We've asked all local councils to set up something called a Children in Care Council. This is a regular meeting where young people can have their say and put their ideas to the people who make decisions about their lives.

#### Children in Care Councils have covered things like...

- freedom to go out
- body piercing
- making documents easier for young people to understand
- smoking at school
- suggestions for a newsletter
- getting ready to leave care.

Most local councils have already set up a Children in Care Council or are going to. We want them to be everywhere in the country by 2010.

In a survey, two thirds of young people going to Children in Care Councils said that it made 'some' or 'a lot of' difference to young people in their area. But another report said that the Councils were 'patchy', and that 'young people's involvement was not always meaningful'. So clearly there's still a lot of work to be done.

### You said...

'I think they should listen to me when I have something important to say.'

## Checking it out

Another thing we've done is make new rules so that children's services are checked regularly, to make sure they're doing their best for young people and meeting their needs. This includes talking to people who've recently left care.

### Have a think

What things would make you feel you had more of a say in decisions about your care? Do you know how to get in touch with your Children in Care Council?

## More is better

We've also improved the training that social workers get, to make them better at what they do. And we've now got more people becoming social workers, which means more people working to help young people sort out problems.

### Doing it for themselves

Young people in Hackney's Children in Care Council came up with a list of questions that they sent to young people in care, to get their views. They then asked for a meeting with the important people on their local council and presented the results and their ideas to them themselves.

## Helping families stay together

It's usually because of problems at home that a young person has to go into care. If those problems were fixed then many young people could stay with their families.

So we've been trying to help, by giving local councils money to help families to solve their problems.

### Making a difference

It's working. We've found that helping families like this has meant fewer young people going into care. We've also found that:

- problems at school have gone **down**
- problems with violence at home have gone **down**
- marks at school have gone **up**.

#### One dad said...

'I can't believe how quickly things have changed for the better.'

Now we know that supporting families works, we're going to make sure that councils everywhere are able to do it. We're also going to make it easier for young people who do have to go into care to keep in touch with their families and friends.

#### Helping out

In Hull the local council is helping families where a parent is in prison, so that the children can stay at home rather than going into care.

## Making placements better for you

Having too many placements can cause you problems. Moving around can mean leaving a carer just as you're getting to know them, and make it hard to do well at school. And a placement that doesn't work can be horrible.

That's why in *Care Matters* we told local councils to make sure that:

- young people in care are not moved so often or so far away
- they have more choice where they go
- care homes, adoption and fostering are all good quality, and focus on making good relationships with the young person.

### You said...

'You should get a choice – not just one placement and that's it!'

## Are things getting better?

Yes, because young people are being moved less than before.

But there are still too many young people being moved three or more times in a year. And some parts of the country are just not improving fast enough, so we've got to keep pushing for more change.

### Did you know?

In a survey last year, young people in children's homes said the most important thing for them – more important than friends – was the staff and carers.

## There for you at school

School can be hard for anyone, but if you're in care it can be even harder. So this is what we're doing to help:

- We've changed the rules so that young people in care go to the front of the queue when it comes to choosing a school that's right for them
- We've arranged for every school to have a teacher who's there specially to help and support you
- We've fixed it so that all schools will be soon able to give extra teaching – one-to-one – if you start to fall behind.

### You said...

'It really annoys me that people think that because I'm in care I must be stupid. I try really hard, and I achieve.'

### Could do better...

Young people in care are already doing better at school these days, with more getting five A\*–C grades at GCSE than ever before.

But if you're in care you're still much less likely to get those grades than someone who isn't – and that's not fair.

That's why we're going to keep pushing with *Care Matters* until all young people have the same education chances – whether or not they're in care and wherever they live.

### Extra time

Extra one-to-one teaching at a school in Cornwall helped one young person in care turn their expected grade D in Science into a grade A. Other young people there used their funding to learn a musical instrument, or take Stagecoach lessons outside school.

## Being healthy, feeling good

We all want to be healthy, right? Well, in *Care Matters* we said that local councils, schools and everyone else must work together to make sure that young people in care are as healthy as possible.

And we've made new rules for them to follow.

### So, how's it going?

Some things are definitely getting better. For example, more young people in care are:

- having jobs to stop them getting ill
- going to the dentist for a check-up
- having a health-check every year.

But some other things still need to improve. Like, the health care you get still depends where you live – which it shouldn't.

#### Survey spot

In a survey, 117 of you said how you thought your local council was doing at keeping you and other young people in care healthy: **6%** said 'very well', **26%** said 'well', **34%** said 'just about OK', **21%** said 'poorly', **13%** said 'very poorly'

### Making it better

We're going to keep pushing everyone to improve the health of young people in care, including their mental and emotional health. For example, we're telling councils to:

- work together more closely
- take special action for young people in care, including on mental health issues
- get all young people registered with doctors and dentists
- train foster carers in health matters.

#### Have a think

How do you feel about the health care you get? Are there things that would help you be healthier, like more exercise or a better diet?

## Making sure you're ready to leave care

Everyone needs support making their way in the world. Young people leaving care are no different.

That's why in *Care Matters* we said that all care leavers should be given more help to become independent. We also said that leaving care should be gradual, not sudden.

### You said...

'Being a care leaver is the most pressure I've been under in my life.'

### Staying on?

We've been working with local councils in different areas, trying new ways of supporting care leavers. Right now we're testing a new scheme that gives you more say over whether you move out, or stay in care until 18. And in some areas we're testing whether things can be improved for some young people by staying with their foster family beyond 18.

We're also asking councils to do as much as they possible can to find flats and houses for when you leave your last placement. Although 90% of care leavers now find a good place to live, that means 10% are still missing out – which isn't good enough.

### Finding work

And when it comes to work our new scheme, From Care2Work, is really helping. We've got some of the country's biggest businesses – like O2 and Tesco – involved in making career opportunities for when you leave care.

### Survey spot

a survey, 138 care leavers rated the support they were getting:

**33%** said 'very good', **37%** said 'good', **20%** said 'just about OK', **6%** said 'bad', **4%** said 'very bad'

## Now what?

We're going to produce a booklet like this for young people in care once a year from now on, so you can see what's changing and what's going to happen next.

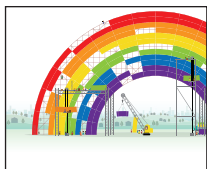
We'll be doing more work with families, to find out how we can stop young people having to go into care. And we'll be working with young people who have gone into care to see what we can do to make care better in future.

We want to hear your views about the care system, so we can make good decisions. We've asked the Children's Rights Director (see [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org)) to keep in regular contact with you.

And you can get more information online about the care system by going to [www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/safeguardingandsocialcare/childrenincare/](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/safeguardingandsocialcare/childrenincare/).

If you're in care and you want to talk about anything you've read about here, why not talk to your carer, your social worker or another grown-up. Everyone's there to help you.





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