

Summary of NCAS consultation response on the draft national minimum standards (NMS) on adoption, fostering and children's homes - Dec 2009

This month saw the end of the consultation on national minimum standards for adoption, fostering and children's homes (NMS). NCAS submitted a response centred around support for young people's transition from care, which was developed with the young people we work with through our regional forums - representing five local authorities in West Midlands and eight in Yorkshire and Humberside. We focussed specifically on the standards around the child and more particularly Standard 12 - "Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care."

Summary

The Care Matters agenda has put a greater emphasis on **corporate parenting**, which stresses that we should have the same aspirations for, and commitment to, young people in and from care as parents do for their own children. This principle needs to be explicit in the NMS.

The centrality of **relationships** and the importance of feeling cared for was one of the key messages from our 'What makes the difference' peer research project - and this should be reflected in the NMS general principles. Similarly, alongside the importance of positive relationships and **stability** the young people we consulted highlighted the importance of **trust**. The Yorkshire and Humber forum said that:

"there should be more trust given to young people in care as this will improve the relationships the young people have with their carers and give the young people a sense of independence".

The West Midlands young people's forum highlighted the importance of **not criminalising young people** for incidents in foster placements or care homes. For example, young people are still being charged with criminal damage for breaking property, whereas this is very unlikely to happen to young people living with their birth families.

We would like further stress on **introducing young people to new activities** - which mirror the parental role in broadening horizons and through the experience developing new potential interests. Young people in Yorkshire and Humberside stressed that:

"more leisure activities should be available to young people in care not just football and gym. There should be other things available as it gives young people the opportunity to try something new and to meet new and different people"

We also highlighted workers'/carers' role in **raising aspirations** and to help young people recognise the relevance of their studies to their future career and life roles and incorporate ongoing self-assessment for young people addressing their skills, strengths and aspirations. The young people we consulted suggested that:

“workers/carers should use their own learning experiences to encourage young people in care to do something with their life and give the dreams and aspirations.” This will be essential to the successful implementation of the From Care2Work programme.

We discussed how this can be encouraged among carers who may themselves not have many educational qualifications. Both groups highlighted the need for ongoing training for carers and suggested that **joint learning opportunities** where young people can take part alongside carers can help raise the aspirations of both groups and improve relationships. This could be short courses such as cookery courses or first aid or courses with formal qualifications, e.g. NVQs.

The forums stressed the importance of having access to the **internet at home** and for this to be readily available (i.e. more than one computer in a children's home). This was felt to be an essential resource for education, learning and leisure, but also to be able to research information about services, resources and entitlements for young people - many of which are increasingly web-based. One group requested:

“Individual computers for children in care as this will give them the chance to use it for both educational and entertainment purposes, which will improve their quality of life and giving them an individual computer gives the young person a sense of privacy and responsibility.

Care must be taken with the language of Standard 12. It should focus on **'transitions'** from care rather than 'leaving' care, reflecting the Care Matters agenda. The outcomes expected in the draft standards also differ between fostering and children's homes. Both the fostering and children's homes NMS should reflect the highest possible aspirations for young people and that two settings should have the **same expectations** placed on them.

“There should be no distinction between living in foster care and living in a children's home - the young people believe that services should be the same for everyone in care.”

The standards should **align with the upcoming guidance and regulations** relating to young people in and from care that are being consulted on or developed at the moment. This should include the care planning guidance and regulations and the guidance and regulations around young people's transitions from care. For the standards to stand the test of time they must also align with the findings of current **Care Matters pilots**, such as Staying Put and Right2BCared4. As we are still awaiting the evaluations from these pilots the local authorities involved in the pilots may need to be consulted directly.