



Coming into Care & Moving Placements



Introduction

The Young People's Organising and Campaigning (YPOC) Group is a group of looked after young people aged 12+ and care leavers, who campaign to make things better for other looked after children and young people.

We have been exploring the whole issue of coming into care and moving placement. This is always a difficult time for all children and young people.

Even where we knew it was the right decision it is still a big change for us. We are separated from our family, we have to get used to living with new people, and we sometimes have to go to a different school. These are big changes.

We have all had direct experience of this and many of us have moved more than once. We have looked at our own experience of what helped and what made things harder. Then we sent out a questionnaire and got back 25 replies from children and young people aged from 6-17 who have been looked after away from home from between 5 months and 5 years.

We have put all this together into a report for all the people who support us in our lives so in future you will know how best to help children come into care and move placement.

So here's what we think helped us in our moves and what has made things harder.



Communication

Good communication is very important to us. The more we know what is going to happen and when, the better it is for us. We need to feel that we are listened to and that our views are taken into account.

We need to understand why we are going into care and what the plans are for us, especially for contact with our family. Where we have a close relationship with our family we need to be able to talk to them on the phone and know when we are going to see them. That's especially true when we are separated from our brothers and sisters. Getting separated from our brothers and sisters is a big worry for us and if that happens we need to know that they are okay.

"It helped visiting the place before moving there, knowing who you're staying with, understanding what is going on, having people to support you."

"It was hard not knowing if you're going to see your family, if your friends would understand."

We have found it helpful when we have had a chance to visit and meet the carers, especially if we have been able to have a say in whether it's the right placement for us. Then it is less like we are moving in with strangers and we can get the chance to know the rules and routines of the placement.

If we get on with the carers and their families this really helps us to fit in and settle down. It is very hard for us if our move into care or between placements is sudden with no warning and no preparation.

"Moving over two weeks and meeting foster carers first helped."

"It was hard trying to understand why I'm here."

It's scary not knowing where you are going or who the people are that you're moving in with, especially if you don't really understand why you are having to move.

It can often feel like we don't have any say and that social workers have gone behind our back. If we don't have a trusting relationship with our social worker we often have no one to talk to about how we are feeling. Sometimes you want them to listen and they talk about other stuff. That's hard too.

"It's hard not having a good Social Worker to help you if needed."

Many of us have found it very hard to leave our families and we missed them a lot. Not just the people but our pets too. We often lose our friends as well and have to make friends all over again. Sometimes we lose our activities too and sometimes we lose our belongings including our treasured possessions.

**"Missed playing Xbox, missed my family, didn't know when I would see my family, missed my pets."
"Leaving my best friend was hard."**

Feelings

Having to come into care or having to move placements means a lot of change and that creates a lot of feelings for us. For some it is a relief to be getting away from bad things, for others it's a wrench to move away from our families or from carers we liked and had a relationship with.

“Finding out where I was going next helped and because I knew the carer and my sister lived there.”

It makes it easier for us if we feel we are listened to and have some choice in things. It is important that no one judges us, whether in our placement, our school or the community. We all have our own story. We need people to accept our difference.

Some of us had to be brave for our brothers and sisters, especially if they are younger than us.

Some of us found it helped if we went to placements with animals, because we could go and see/speak to them. “Plus they don't answer back.”

For many of us it was hard having to live with strangers, and some found them “scary people” at first. It was especially hard if you didn't really know what was happening and you had no one to talk to about how you are feeling. Some of us found that there was nobody looking out for us emotionally and felt that people didn't understand what we were going through and thought it was okay to treat us differently from others.

**“There was a lot of pressure put on me all at one time.
There was a lot of change and meeting new people.
The hardest part was probably meeting new people.”**

Some of us had to move without our belongings and that was hard. Others have spoken about not being able to say goodbye to their carers and one young person told us they went to school then got moved after school.

**“Not having my belongings was hard.
I also liked the carers I was with even though it was only for five days.
I went to school that day and wasn't able to see them.”**

Some just want to get away from their past but find that people keep bringing it up. Others commented that it is very difficult when you have to move lots of times. All these feelings get multiplied.

**THAT'S NOT
RIGHT**



Placement

We have already talked about how important it is for us to visit or at least know about where we are going to be living before we move. Some young people have told us how important it was for their parents to come and visit too.

However having a really good placement, whether in foster care or in a children's home or residential school is also very important. Things like getting our own pocket money, making new friends and having our own space made it easier for many of us.

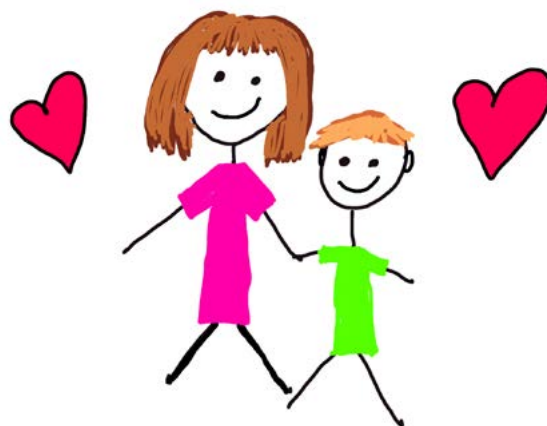
Where the placement is long-term or permanent then we mostly have good things to say about it and are happy to be settled till we grow up.

The kind of things that make it more difficult is having to get used to new rules and routines. Some of us have struggled with not having the same bed, and when our sleeping patterns have changed we can find it difficult to sleep.

“Meeting new friends. Staying with a great family and people who love me.”

We often also have to get used to different food and some of us have found there is a lack of privacy in our placement. And some young people feel that their carers expect them to be perfect which can be hard to live up to.

**“Came here and not moved.”
“I’m very happy in my placement.”**



It is also difficult if our placement is a long way away from our home. We then have to travel long distances to keep in touch with our family and friends.

“It’s harder to hold feelings in when you have to travel 2 hours”

Above all we need to experience our placement as better than where we’ve come from, especially those of us who have been placed from home. Many of us do see that things are better for us when we come into care, but some of us feel that things got worse.

“It was hard moving into a worse place than home-carers with a lot of problems and having to move again.”

School/college

School can be very important to us for now and into the future. All looked after children and young people should be in school and should never have to do without education. Most of us found it easier when we didn't have to move schools at the same time as coming into care or moving placements. It's enough to make one change at a time.

If we stay at our school we can keep our friends and the teachers that we know. We have mostly found them really supportive. Sometimes we can see our brothers and sisters if they go to the same school.

“It's good being at a great school and good teachers.”

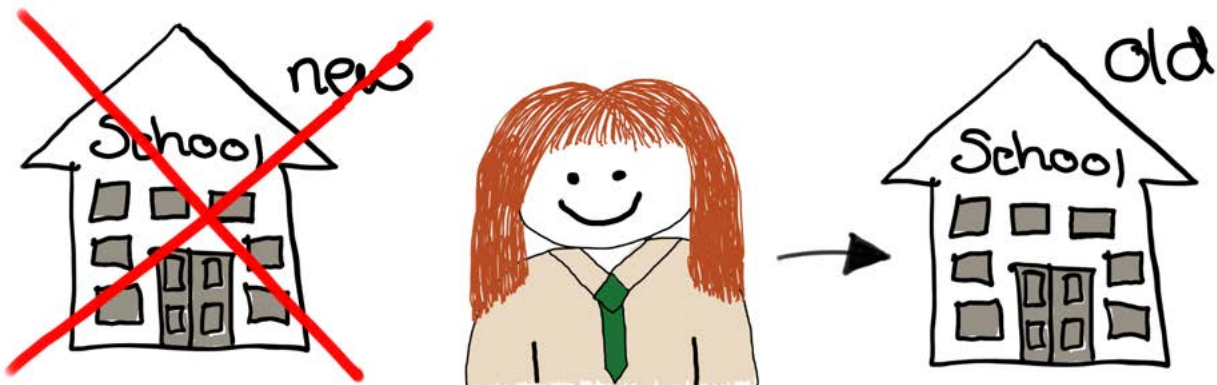
“The children's home not being too far away from home. Getting to stay at my Academy.”

If we have to move schools it means that we need to get used to another new set of rules. We have to get to know new teachers and we have to make new friends. Sometimes we can't get the subjects that we want. Some of us got no preparation for the move of schools and a number of us have experienced bullying in school as well.

“No preparation at school, getting bullied, not having a school to go to.”

Some of us ended up with no school for a period of time and one of us has experience of their school records not being transported to the new school. Many of us find it hard to have to come out of school for meetings. It means that we can miss classwork and it also leaves us having to answer our classmates' questions about where we have been.

“Moving school made things harder”



The people

The people around us are very important in supporting us when we have to move placements or come into care. There are lots of people who have a very important role. They are our social workers, our carers, our parents and family, our school staff, our friends, children's rights officers and the people that come to our meetings, like Panel Members.

**"It helped having met my Social Worker before the move, having my own room, having my teddies, having my own clothes."
"The fact that I knew who I was moving in with well"**

The more that people understand what we are going through and the more they are able to listen to us and make us part of our plan, the better they can support us. We need carers who are friendly and welcoming and have experience of caring for children. We need staff who we can talk to.

We need Panel Members who are caring and who listen to what we have to say. We need a good social worker who listens to us and who we feel we can get on with. We need friends who understand our situation.

"Not having a good Social Worker to help you if needed is hard."

It helps if there are other young people in the placement that we can make friends with and talk things over with. And we need to be able to meet with a children's rights officer if we want to.

"It was hard not seeing my friends, not seeing my Mum, Granny, Cousins and Aunts and Uncles."

It is hard if we don't get on with our social worker or don't have one at the time. Some of us feel that social workers make assumptions about us by reading our file. We would like them to get to know us first.

We think that social workers need to visit us very quickly after we move to make sure that we are okay and to let us know the plans, like for contact with our families.

Because our families are very important to lots of us we need to know when we will see them. It's hard when we're not allowed to see our parents and it's even harder if our parents refuse to see us.

"It's hard if your parents refuse to see you after you're taken away and all you want is them."

It's sad when we have to say goodbye to our close friends too. Some of us had to leave carers that we were close to and that's hard as well.

"Missing my old staff."

It's also hard to know what to tell people when you come into care and move placement. We sometimes need help with that.



So how can you make things better for us when we come into care and move placement?

Before the move

- We should only have to move or come into care if it's absolutely necessary. We shouldn't have to have lots of moves.
- We need good social workers that understand our needs and concerns. If we are unhappy with our social worker we should be able to ask for a change.
- Social workers need to recognise the effect that these moves can have on us. We should get as much preparation as possible. Social workers should come and tell us why we are coming into care or moving placement. They should explain it fully to us and we should be able to say what we think about it and be listened to.
- They should find out what are our likes and dislikes and, for example, whether we are able to live with animals or not. Some of us like animals but some of us can be allergic or scared of animals.
- We should have good quality, well assessed foster carers that will meet our needs. Care experienced young people should be involved in the recruitment and training of foster carers.
- All foster carers should have a book with pictures of their house, family and any pets, and local schools or better still a short video, so that we have some idea where we are going to live and who will be there. This needs to be regularly updated.
- If we are moving to a children's homes or residential unit, people need to make sure that these places will be able to meet our needs.
- All children's homes and residential units should provide a photo book or a video that we can see before we move there so that we know what to expect. This needs to be regularly updated.
- We shouldn't have to move into a placement we don't know.
- We should be able to visit first to meet everyone and to get to know where we will be living.
- Every effort should be made to ensure we don't have to move school at the same time as moving into care.
- If possible we should get a placement near our home area so that we don't have to move schools.
- However even if we stay at the same school the staff need to know about our situation so there needs to be good communication between ourselves, our carers, social work and the school.
- If we do have to move school we should know this well in advance so that we have time to say goodbye to our friends and to work out if and how we can stay in touch.
- Proper arrangements should be put in place between our schools and involving ourselves, both schools and social work. There needs to be good communication between everyone. Everything should be put in place at our new schools before we get there. If possible we should get to visit first.
- We should always know what the plan is for us, especially the plan for contact with our family where that is important to us.

During the move

- We should always have the chance to speak to and say goodbye to the people we are leaving, whether that is our family or other carers.
- If we want to, we should be supported to stay in touch by visits, text or phone calls.
- We should always be able to take our belongings with us – especially the things that are precious to us. Social workers should make sure of that. If we can't take them at the time, social workers should make sure we can get them as soon as possible.
- We should know when we will get to see our family and what the plans are for that. This should be organised from the word go.
- We should know when we will see our social worker again. They should make sure they visit us in the first few days to see how we are coping and to answer any questions we might have. We should have their contact details so that we can call or message them when we need to.

After the move

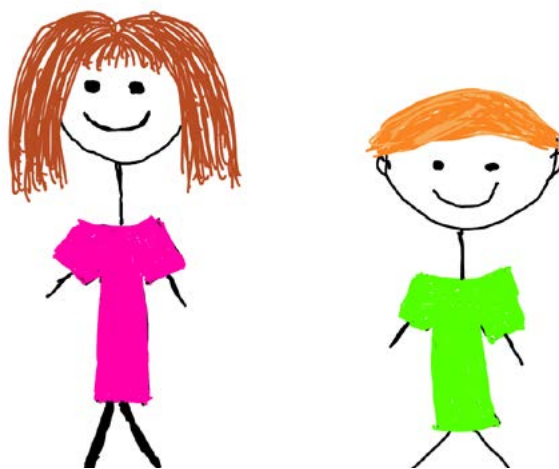
- We need the chance to settle in to our placements and the space to relax. Our carers should help us to understand the rules of the house. They should take the time to get to know us properly and not to judge us by the feelings that might overwhelm us when we first come into their care. Our social worker and their link worker should make sure that our carers have everything that we need.
- Carers and social workers need to be able to know and understand our stories without judging us. They may need to help us to find a way to explain our situation to people who don't know us, in a way that we are comfortable with.
- It's not okay for carers to treat us differently from other children in the placement. We should all have the same rules.
- Our privacy should be respected unless there is a risk and that should be explained to us. Not everyone gets along with everyone else. If we have to move in with other young people, carers and social workers should help us to get to know each other.
- If we are not happy with the rules there should be a chance to discuss them with the carers or our social worker and try and change them or come to an agreement.
- We should have people we can talk to about how we feel, especially when we miss people.
- We should be told about the Children's Rights Service and the Who Cares? worker as soon as possible and the Children's Rights Officers should be told of our move as soon as we become looked after or move placement.
- Our social workers should be there to support us emotionally once we are in a placement.
- They should visit us within a few days of our move and then regularly after that to check out how we are and what they can do. They should agree with us when it's best to visit, and work around school times if that's best for us.

- Social workers need to take the time to get to know us and build a trusting relationship with us. We need social workers who will listen. They should give us the chance to say what we like/dislike about our placement and help us to sort out any problems.
- Sometimes we just need to do fun things with them to get to know them better.
- We should be supported to have contact with our family, whether that's our parents or our brothers and sisters if we are not placed together. There should be a proper contact plan put in place as soon as we are placed. This should include phone calls as well as face to face contact.
- There should also be a plan for us to keep in contact with important friends, maybe through phone or text contact or on-line if we can't have face to face contact.
- When we have meetings social workers should check with us when is best to have them. If they are held during school time we often have to answer questions from our classmates about where we are going.

The key things we want to happen

1. Care experienced young people should be involved in the recruitment and training of social workers and family support workers.
2. Care experienced young people should be involved in the recruitment and training of foster carers.
3. All foster carers should have a book with pictures of their house, family and any pets, and local schools or better still a short video, so that we have some idea where we are going to live and who will be there.
4. All children's homes and residential units should provide a photo book or a video that we can see before we move there so that we know what to expect.
5. There should be a checklist of all the things that social workers should do before we come into care or move placement based on this report. This should include :
 - having a proper plan in place that everyone is clear about
 - preparing us for a move by keeping us involved, helping us to understand, and listening to what we have to say
 - making sure we have our belongings, or can get them very quickly
 - making sure we get to say proper goodbyes
 - making sure we know where we will be going to school keeping us at the same school if possible
 - or putting proper plans in place if we need to move schools to make sure the new school has all our information

- having a plan in place from the word go for contact with family, friends and previous carers– face to face/phone or other
 - visiting us within a few days of our placement
 - making sure we know about Children’s Rights and Who Cares? and letting Children’s Rights know about our move.
6. There should be checklist for foster carers and care workers to help us settle into our placements. We can help put these together.
 7. Social workers and other staff should follow our Guide to Meetings when arranging LAC reviews and other meetings.



Above all, everyone should

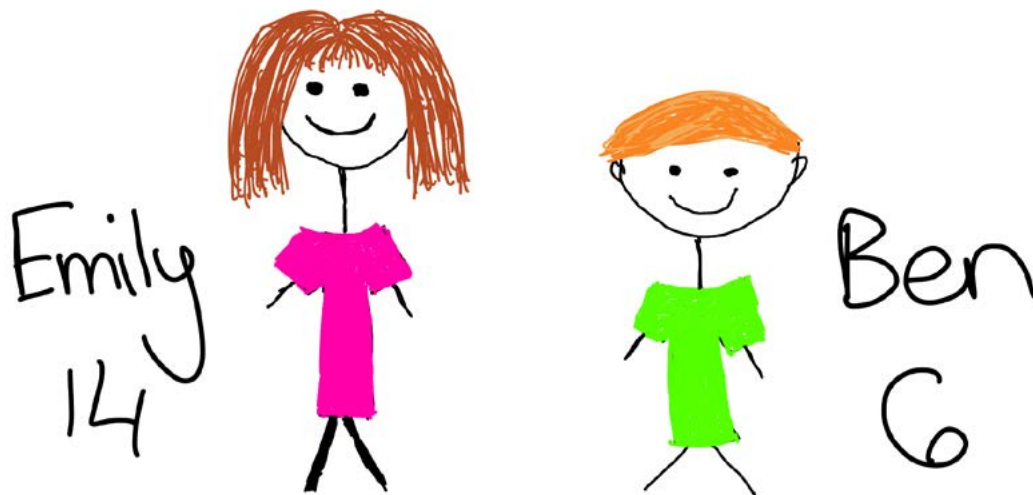
LISTEN

to children and young people

and put us at the

CENTRE.

Coming into Care & Moving Placements **getting it right**



All illustrations by Fiona Webster