

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19
ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on
children and young people in Wales

COV 30
Ymateb gan: Voices From Care Cymru

COV 30
Response from: Voices From Care Cymru

Voices from Care Cymru, is Wales's leading charity upholding the rights of children and young people who are or have been looked after (Care Experienced).

By listening to care experienced young people from across Wales, we know that COVID-19 poses an unprecedented threat to the well-being of many vulnerable children and young adults. Care experience children and young people already face a wide range of social and financial inequalities when compared to their peers.

Though necessary, social distancing exacerbates the loneliness and isolation that is already felt by many of those who do not have the usual family support networks. However, we believe that during this crisis Wales can provide innovative support ensuring care experienced children and young people thrive not simply survive throughout the coronavirus crisis.

The messages that we are hearing from care experienced young people establish that;

- There is real and ever-increasing anxiety around the lack of interactions between care experienced children and young people, their support networks and peers. In many instances a lack of access to basic working technology such as laptops, the internet and mobile credit / data is exasperating these feelings.
- With Local Authority services under increased pressure, young people are struggling to contact their personal advisor / social worker or trusted individuals for the help and support they need.
- That social distancing is undermining current contact arrangements between the young person and their siblings and family, especially as many do not have access to social media or video messaging.

- Isolation is having a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of care experienced children and young people, who may have received childhood trauma and instability. For some, existing mental health support has significant disruption during this crisis.
- Care experienced young parents are presenting anxieties around who can provide them with the support they need, whilst others have concerns that any assessment period will be extended for parents who already have dates for court.

Our Messages:

We believe care experienced children and young people should have;

1) Importance of connections, support & relationships

- Clear communication on the points of contact for care experienced children and young people, providing support and advice when needed.
- Increased virtual contact from Personal Advisors services. Including a new active offer of support to care leavers up to the age of 25, to ensure those who are currently disengaged with their PA service can re-engage in this unprecedented time.
- Ensure that the Independent Visitor relationships can still take place virtually. Consideration for the creations of community 'buddy networks' providing safe and trusting relationships for young people digitally.
- For additional methods to be introduced to ensure that current parent and sibling contact arrangements are not disrupted.

2) Alleviate digital poverty

- For call care experienced children and young people to have technological support such as a laptop /or tablet, mobile phone credit and internet access to provide inclusive learning, social connections and wellbeing.
- Digital inclusion sessions for care experienced young people which aim to educate young people in safe online use and digital practices.

3) Corporate Parenting

- To ensure that any emergency legislation does not weaken the UNCRC and the rights of care experienced children and young people under The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.
- An approach to decisions based on the principals of 'if this were my child'. The largest family in Wales consists of care experienced children, their families and their corporate parents.
- Increased public messages of support from leading corporate parents, providing compassionate information about care leavers as a vulnerable group. With the view to encourage community support for this stigmatized group of young people.

4) Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Care experienced children and young people are a priority group. Therefore, the mental health and wellbeing provisions that children were receiving prior to COVID 19 lockdown should continue where possible or alternative bridging support provided.
- To ensure care experienced children and young people have readily available access to information and resources that promote positive wellbeing

5) Homelessness

- To ensure no care experienced young person is made homeless as a result of placement breakdowns during COVID 19.
- To ensure care leavers are supported by their housing provider in maintaining their tenancies during the crisis.

6) Care Experienced Young Parents under care proceeding

- For additional resources to be put in place to ensure that care experienced parents who are already isolated can access additional support throughout the lockdown period this includes, access to food shopping.
- That corporate parents should adapt methods of assessments where appropriate and continue to work within existing timeframes. COVID 19 should not increase anxiety for care experienced parents by prolonging parents' assessments any further than necessary