



The independent review of children's social care

Dear Children and Young People,

My name is Josh MacAlister. The government asked me to help make some services better for children, and I'm writing to you to tell you what I've asked them to do.

These services are often called children's social care and they are provided by your local authority (sometimes known as a 'council'). They are there to keep you safe and to help you stay healthy. Sometimes it might be a teacher who does that, a police officer, a nurse or it could be a social worker. Today, I have sent the government a report that tells them some things I think they could do better for you. You are the people this whole review has been about and it is the job of adults to keep you safe and healthy and make sure you are loved.

Sometimes though, adults might find it difficult to do that as well as they should, especially if they are having some problems. When that happens, I want you and the adults in your lives to get more help at the point you need it. This could be helping the adults you live with money problems, to be happier or healthier, or to help relationships at home. I also want services to give more help to your aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers and sisters to help you to stay safe and healthy, if you need it. And finally, I want the government and your local authorities (councils) to make some changes to the way they keep children and young people safe when you're outside your home including at school, and in your neighbourhood.

I know some of you have already had some of this help or maybe have a social worker. If you do, you can ask them to tell you more about the report I've written and what it means for you. Or you could ask a teacher, a parent or another adult that you trust. To help them we have created a special children and young people's version of the report [here](#).

If you are worried about your safety or health now and you don't have an adult you know and trust to talk to about it, you can call the NSPCC for free on 0800 1111.


To our children in care

I have heard from many children living in care in the last year. Some of you I know are healthy, happy and doing well at school. But for some of you, I know you are not feeling as loved, cared for or as happy as you could be and I want to change that.

So, I have asked that changes are made to improve the care system. First, I want to make sure that every child growing up spending time in care has adults in their lives who love and care for them. That means that adults need to make decisions, with and for you, that mean you can keep in touch with safe adults and family members that you care about and love the most. That includes being close to, or living with, your brothers and sisters – where that is the right thing for you.

Some of you have told us that there are too many professionals in your life and that it is hard having to talk to lots of people. So we've split up some of the functions of, for example, Independent Reviewing Officers and Regulation 44 visitors. Social workers are there to make sure decisions are made in your best interests and so we want senior social workers to take more responsibility for checking if your care plan is what you want, need and is being followed. It is also important that someone is there to champion your wishes, feelings and views.





I want to make that happen by asking government to promise that you have an Advocate. An Advocate is an adult who works for you – whose job it is to tell the other adults in your life what you want and need, in your own words, if you need help with that. I want the government to promise that you are given one without having to ask.

Second, I want the government to find more foster carers. This would mean you would have more choice about where you live, who you live with and that you could live closer to your friends, family and school – if that is the right thing for you. I want you to be able to meet foster carers and their families before you move in with them. While that's not always possible if there is an emergency, before going to live somewhere for a longer time you should be able to have more choice and more of a say in where and who it is you live with.

Third, I want local authorities (councils) to work together more to make sure there are better children's homes, in the right places around the country, that are closer to where you are from. If living in a children's home is the right thing for you, I want to make sure that you can live in one that is closer to places and people that you know and love.

Some of you might have other family, like grandparents, aunts and uncles that you would rather live with than be in care. So I also want the government to change the law so that social workers have to ask your family, and you, if there is a safe place you could live with family or friends. And if so, your social worker will do some work with you and your family to make sure it is safe and the right thing for you. I have told government that your family needs money and other help to make that happen.


Finally, I also want government and your local authorities (councils) to listen to your views more, and for those views to be treated with respect. I have asked them to make some changes to how they work which includes asking you, your brothers and sisters, and your families about how well they are caring for you and keeping you safe. I want them to use your views and opinions to make changes to the way they work to make them better.


The government will need to think hard about my report and write a response, which will take a few months. But until then, you already have the legal right to ask to have an advocate. You can ask your social worker who should give you all the information you need.

To care leavers

While many of the changes I am asking government to make to care, if made, will come too late for you – I'm also asking government to put much more money and support in place for you as you leave care and enter adulthood.

I am recommending five missions (or tasks) for government, local authorities and wider society to support care leavers and care-experienced people. These missions are:

1. No young person should leave care without at least two loving relationships.
 2. Double the proportion of care experienced people going to university, with a particular focus on some of the best universities.
 3. Create at least 3,500 well paid jobs and apprenticeships each year for care experienced people.
 4. Reduce care experience homelessness now, before ending it entirely.
 5. To make sure you can live long, healthy lives, by narrowing health inequalities with the wider population.
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More children in care and care leavers will have an independent visitor – a person to build a long-term relationship with as you leave care and start young adulthood.

I want young people to be able to have a better choice when you leave care whether Staying Put with a foster carer, choosing to Stay Close with a children's home or move to supported lodgings. I have asked the government to make more money available for these things, including asking them to extend funding for those until you are 23 years old.

I also want the government to change the law in three key ways:

1. To create something called a lifelong guardianship order, which would be a bit like adult adoption. So if you have built a relationship with an adult who loves you and you want to become a more formal part of their family, you could make that bond official and recognised in law. This might be with a foster carer or the parents of your best friend.
2. To make the care experience a protected characteristic. This means it will be against the law to discriminate against someone because they are, or have been, in care. It will mean you would have the same protections from discrimination as the other nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
3. To make a broader set of organisations corporate parents for children in care and care leavers. This should include schools, colleges and universities, as well as the NHS and many more organisations which have the ability to do more than they currently do to improve the lives of those that have grown up in the care system.

Doing this work, and making these recommendations to government, has only been possible because so many children, young people and care experienced adults shared their thoughts and experiences with me. I am so grateful to you all. While I might not have recommended all the changes you personally would want to make, I hope you can see that they reflect the experiences that lots of children and young people shared with the review.

You can read the final report on our website here <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk> alongside supporting documents which include more information on the recommendations, a children and young people's version of the report and a children's rights impact statement.



Josh MacAlister

Chair of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care

