

A CHARTER FOR

Looked After Children or Young People, and Care Leavers

Developed by the Care Forum
Wales Looked After Children
Network in conjunction with the
following partner organisations:

- Fostering Network
- AFA Cymru - Association for Fostering and Adoption
- Children in Wales ■ Voices from Care
- NSPCC ■ ADSS Cymru



Children in Wales
Plant yng Nghymru



Looked After Children Network
Rhwydwaith Plant Mewn Gofal

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FOREWORD

from **Professor Mark Drakeford AM**,
Minister for Health and Social Services

I warmly welcome this Charter which serves as a reminder to all those who work with or care for looked after children and young people and care leavers of their responsibilities and the importance of their roles.



I would like to thank the Care Forum Wales Looked After Children Network for leading on this piece of work and those organisations who contributed to its development in particular Voices from Care, Wrexham Young People's Forum and the Care Leavers Forum for Wales.

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The Charter sets out in a clear and concise way the rights and entitlements of this group of children and young people and the help and support they can expect to receive. Its focus is very much on securing positive outcomes for this group and is consistent with the principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Social Services National Outcomes Framework.

I hope that in addition to being a key reference tool for professionals the Charter will help to ensure that children and young people who are looked after have a real voice and control over the support and care they receive so that they are able to realise their full potential.

Mark Drakeford

AUGUST 2015

from **Sally Holland,** Children's Commissioner

Your views and needs should be at the heart of every decision made by the people who care for you and work for you.

This does not necessarily mean that you'll get everything you want, but people should be listening to you and explaining when decisions are made about you and that could affect you.

This charter explains what you should expect from those who care for you and work for you. Put simply, this document provides you with information about what people who look after you and work for you should make sure happens when you're in care or about to leave care. It also includes information about your rights.

Often when I speak about children's rights, I see puzzled faces looking back at me. Every child and young person in Wales, and across the world, have 42 rights; these are the basic things that you need to make you happy, healthy and safe. My job is to make sure that you get those rights, so if at any point you feel that perhaps you aren't then I have a team of people working for me who could listen and help. You'll find the contact details for my free advice and support service on Page 6.



AUGUST 2015



This Charter has been developed to support best practice and the delivery of improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

Whilst this Charter has no legal status, the purpose of this Charter is to reflect the rights and entitlements of all children and young people who are or have been looked after as set out in the Children Act 1989 and supporting regulations.

In particular, the Charter aims to support 'child centred' practice that gives effect to the rights of children and young people as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

It is a requirement of Article 3 that the best interests of the child/young person shall be of primary consideration in all actions concerning children. Corporate Parents and all other professionals involved in advising, caring, and supporting looked after children and care leavers are encouraged to use this Charter to inform best practice.

Consideration will need to be given to a child/young person's individual circumstances and any relevant risk assessments, recognising that in some circumstances not all of the principles can be fully achieved as the need to protect a child from harm will take priority. Therefore, it is accepted that each of these principles will need to be considered having regard to what is safe and appropriate for each child or young person.

The Charter aims to help children and young people who are looked after or leaving care to feel supported and empowered, to achieve stability and confidence in the support they can reasonably expect to receive.

* Reference to the appropriate regulations should be made to clarify the legal entitlements of looked after children and care leavers.



For additional support you can:-

- Speak to your Social Worker;
- Speak to your Independent Reviewing Officer;
- Speak to your Foster Carer or Residential Worker, Teacher or another adult you can trust;
- Speak to your Independent Visitor, if you have one;
- Speak to your parents or family members;
- Speak to your designated lead person for Looked After Children in School.
- Contact an Advocacy Service;
- Contact MEIC Advocacy and Advice helpline (080880 23456 or text free 84001);
- Contact your Children's Guardian at CAFCASS Cymru (if a court is involved in making decisions about your care);
- Contact the Children's Commissioner for Wales Investigation, Advice and Support Service (freephone 0808 801 1000 or text 80800 start your message with com);
- Contact Childline - 0800 11 11 (www.childline.org.uk) - this is a confidential service you can chat to about any issue at any time (and is open all day everyday).

Importantly this Charter has been developed in consultation with children and young people from Voices from Care; the Wrexham Young Person's Forum; and the Care Leavers Forum for Wales. Their contribution and feedback in helping shape this Charter has been invaluable.

Language used

The language used in this document is aimed at children and young people aged 10 years and above with a certain level of understanding. It is acknowledged that professionals will need to adapt the Charter for younger children and those with learning difficulties.

Looked After Children



a) To be Recognised as an Individual

You can expect to:-

- Understand what care and support is available to meet your needs;
- Receive encouragement and praise together with the support you need to achieve the things you want;
- Have individual time with the people you care about;
- Buy your own clothing and toiletries;
- Have your possessions treated with respect and kept in a safe place if you are not able to have them with you;
- Have your birthday and other events important to you, such as religious festivals acknowledged and celebrated;
- Have holidays and access to recreational/leisure activities;
- Be given the opportunity to practice your own religion and enjoy your own culture and language;
- Receive care, where it is practically possible, in the language of your choice, in a manner which is sensitive to your own religion and culture;
- Be involved in any discussions around changes to your living arrangements.

b) Physical and Emotional Well-being

You can expect to:-

- Receive support to maintain and improve your health and well-being (both physical and emotional);
- Be provided with information, support and advice to make informed healthy lifestyle choices;
- Have access to good healthy food and drinks;
- Have the opportunity to be involved in physical activities, regular exercise and play;
- Be encouraged to have a social life if you want to;
- Be encouraged to keep regular and agreed bed times to get enough rest and sleep;
- Receive help to find the answers to questions you have about being in care;
- Be offered counselling, if and when needed;
- Live in a smoke free environment;
- Be registered with a Doctor, Dentist and Optician and have regular check ups;
- Be given sufficient information to allow you to make informed decision, about having medical examinations and treatment;
- Receive health and sex education and information.

c) Protection from Abuse and Neglect

You can expect to:-

- Feel physically and emotionally safe and live in a safe environment which is free from abuse and neglect;
- Feel protected from all forms of bullying and discrimination;

- Be given information about safe relationships and to be supported in understanding risks, recognise inappropriate behaviours and be able to make safe choices;
- Be listened to, supported, and have your concerns investigated;
- Be properly cared for by people who have been trained and prepared to provide you with good care;
- Not be touched in an inappropriate way or in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable.

d) Education, Training and Employment

You can expect to:-

- Receive education, by attending school, college or other education settings appropriate to your needs;
- Be encouraged and empowered to learn and develop to achieve your full potential;
- Be praised when you do well or when you try your best and put in a lot of effort;
- Have the space, time and privacy to complete homework, be encouraged to do so, and to be given assistance and advice when you need it;
- Be supported to undertake further education, training or employment if you wish to;
- Receive help and advice to manage your personal finances;
- Receive careers guidance;
- Be supported at school and college events that are important to you e.g. parents evenings; school/college concerts; sports days etc.

e) Family and Personal Relationships

You can expect to:-

- Have your wishes and feelings listened to when decisions are made about contact arrangements;
- Have contact maintained with siblings and the people you regard as important to you irrespective of distance (where appropriate and safe for you to do so);
- Be encouraged to make new friends and keep in contact with old friends, where appropriate;
- Be supported in visiting your friends, where appropriate, or in making other social arrangements outside the place where you live;
- Not have home visits withdrawn or cancelled as a punishment;
- Have changes to your living arrangements discussed with you, whenever possible;
- Be offered support and advice about seeing your family (if it is safe to do so);
- Not be unnecessarily separated from your brothers and sisters and to have your views about separation taken into consideration.

f) Contribution to Society

You can expect to:-

- Be encouraged and supported to become involved in the local community;
- Receive help and encouragement to participate in activities and recreational pursuits in the wider community.

g) To be Listened to, Consulted and Valued

You can expect to:-

- Have your rights and opinions respected;
- Be treated as an individual and treated with respect and dignity;
- Have any rules or decisions explained to you in a way that you understand;
- Be involved in decisions about what happens in the place where you live;
- Be involved in the planning of reviews including who is present and if practicable, where it is held;
- See reports for reviews and have the opportunity to speak at review meetings;
- Be involved in the writing of your Care Plan, Individual Education Plan and Pathway Plan;
- Have regular contact with your Social Worker;
- Have access to an independent advocate, someone who can speak up for you and help make sure your views and opinions are taken into consideration;
- Be able to make a complaint and to be supported in making that complaint if you feel something is unfair or makes you unhappy.

Care Leavers



The purpose of this section is to raise levels of expectation, aspiration and importantly understanding of what Care Leavers need and what they can reasonably expect from Local Authorities acting as good corporate parents.

a) Identify

You can expect to:-

- Receive support and respect for your identity and help in developing your beliefs and values;
- Be supported as an individual and encouraged to become a valued member of your community;
- Receive support in maintaining relationships important to you and help to manage changing relationships;
- Receive help to build and maintain relationships with family members (if you wish to and it is safe to do so) after you have left care.

b) A Belief in You

You can expect to:-

- Receive support and encouragement to help you build on your strengths and talents in order to achieve your aspirations and goals;

- Receive help and support to reduce or get over any limiting boundaries to help you to achieve your aspirations and goals;
- Receive help and support to build your independence by giving you the opportunity to try things for yourself.

c) To be Listened to, Consulted and Valued

You can expect to:-

- Be involved in any decisions made that affect you and know that your needs, wishes and feelings are core to these decisions and any planning around your future;
- Be listened to and respected as part of understanding your point of view;
- Have your rights and entitlements considered and respected;
- Be treated as an individual and treated with respect and dignity;
- Have any rules or decisions explained to you in a way that you understand;
- Be involved in any decisions made about the place where you live;
- Have your opinions respected;
- See reports for reviews and have the opportunity to speak at Review meetings;
- Be involved in the writing of your Care Plan; Individual Education Plan; Pathway Plan as applicable;
- Have regular contact with your Social Worker;
- Have access to an independent advocate, someone who can speak up for you and help you to make sure your views and opinions are taken into consideration;
- Be able to make a complaint and be supported in making that complaint if you feel something is unfair or makes you unhappy.

d) To Inform You

You can expect to:-

- Be supported in your journey from care to independent adulthood by being provided with, or directed to information you may find useful including on benefit entitlements and the services available to you;
- Know what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see and receive support to access this when you want it;
- Have the opportunity to stay living with former foster carers post 18;
- Be provided with information about possible Counselling Services in order to support you to manage your feelings;
- Receive assistance from your Social Worker or Personal Advisor.

e) To Support You

You can expect to:-

- Receive support as set out in current regulations and guidance for as long as you need it i.e. 21 or up to 25 if in education/training;
- Be advised about appropriate counselling services in order to receive on-going emotional support;
- Receive practical and financial support that meets that required by legislation;
- Receive support that allows you to access the services that you are entitled to;
- Receive assurance that your needs are understood and to find ways, including other services, to meet those needs;
- Receive, where possible, support at times that meet your needs, for example outside of college and work hours.

f) To Have On-going Support

You can expect to:-

- Receive support to contribute to the development of your pathway plan (if applicable) to ensure we accurately record your needs and, goals and aspirations and ensure these are considered and reflected in your overall action plan;
- Receive help to access and secure the services you need, including housing, benefits, further education, employment providers and health services to help you establish your independence within your chosen community;
- Be treated courteously and sensitively;
- Map out your support network so you know where and how to get help if you need it.

g) To Find a Home

You can expect to:-

- Be prepared for your move to independent living at a time when you are ready and not just because you are 16;
- Receive help and support to stay with foster carers after you reach 18 if that is what you both want to happen;
- Receive help in thinking about the choices available and to find accommodation suitable for you;
- Do everything possible to ensure you are happy and feel safe when you move to independent living;
- Receive support in your independent life until you are settled and no longer require it;
- Receive help and support to make links with other agencies who can help you establish your home within the community you wish to live in.

