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# About Social Workers

A Children's Views Report

Dr Roger Morgan OBE  
*Children's Rights Director*

July 2006

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# About the Children's Rights Director

My legal duties as Children's Rights Director for England are set out in the Commission for Social Care Inspection (Children's Rights Director) Regulations 2004. One of my main jobs, with my team in the Office of the Children's Rights Director, is to ask young people for their views about the social care services they receive from their local Councils. I then tell the Government, as well as the Commission for Social Care Inspection (which does inspections to check on social care services) what young people think, and about any concerns they have



about social care services or about the kinds of establishments they are living in. "Children's Views" reports of what children and young people have told me are published for everyone to read. You can find copies of all my Children's Views reports on our children's rights website [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org)

The children and young people I ask for their views are those living away from home in England (in children's homes, foster care, adoption placements, boarding schools, residential special schools, residential further education colleges, or residential family centres), those who are getting help of any sort from the children's social care services of their local council, and care leavers.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Morgan', written in a cursive style.

**Roger Morgan**  
**Children's Rights Director**

July 2006

# About this report

When we meet groups of children or young people, we are usually asking for their views about a subject that we have already chosen – perhaps from things we have heard children think are important, or about changes that someone (like the government) is proposing to make to the way children and young people are looked after. Very often, though, children and young people we meet want to talk about other things, as well as what we had come to ask them about. Time and time again, the one subject children and young people getting social care services from their Councils want to tell us about is – social workers.

So this report is about social workers, because that is what children and young people wanted to tell us about. We used two main ways of finding out what children and young people think about social workers. Firstly, we have kept and gathered together all our notes of what children and young people told us about social workers when we met them to talk about other subjects. Secondly, we did a special survey about social workers, where we sent out sets of question cards (not a great long questionnaire!) to children and young people getting help from children’s social care services, or living away from home in children’s homes or residential special schools or in foster care. This report, like all our Children’s Views reports, says exactly what the children and young people told us about social workers in those groups and on those question cards. We have not added our own adult or professional views, and we have not selected what we might ourselves agree with, nor left out what we ourselves might disagree with.

As well as these main ways of asking children and young people for their views about social

workers, we have included in this report the views sent us by children and young people on our “BeHeard” young people’s panel. This is a panel of young people across the country who have volunteered to receive a weekly question from us by a text message on their mobile phones, or sometimes by email. We have also included some views sent to us by a young person who was not in any of these sets of young people, but who wrote to us about his concerns and views in his particular case, and who wanted us to make use of his thoughts wherever we thought it might be useful.

As in all our reports, we have added together the views given to us by children and young people, but have not identified who said what. Where someone said or wrote something we thought summed up well what many others said, or said something in a group that the other young people in the group strongly agreed with, we have put those words in the report as a “quote”.

The report is being sent to Government Ministers, key people in Parliament, officials at the Department for Education and Skills, to key people in the Commission for Social Care Inspection, to each of the UK Children’s Commissioners, and to all children’s social care authorities in England.

My thanks go to all the children and young people who gave us their views about social workers, both in our various meetings around the country, and by sending in their views on our question cards. My thanks too to the staff of the children’s social care services who helped give out our question cards to the children and young people, and who brought children and young people to our discussion groups.

## The children and young people we asked about social workers

In this report, we have included the views of 13 different groups of children and young people that we met during various visits or group meetings we held about other subjects. The average size of these groups was just over seven children or young people in each group. When we meet groups like this, these are not groups of children or young people who already meet together and who have already formed their views about things, perhaps with the help of an advocate or other adult. They are groups we have invited just for the one time we meet them, and we choose at random which places we are going to invite children and young people from, so that the people we meet are as representative as possible of children and young people who are getting children's social care services or living away from home. We ask children and young people for their views without their own staff being in the room with them.

To get the views of a larger number of children and young people, we made up our question cards with a set of questions designed to find out what children and young people, of many different ages, thought about social workers. 502 children and young people filled in and sent their cards back to us.

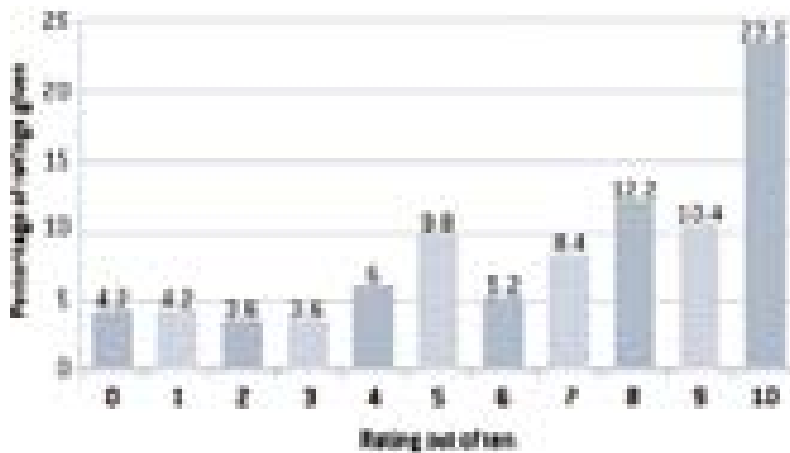
The youngest child who sent question cards back to us was only 4 (they filled in their question cards with some adult help), and the oldest was a care leaver aged 21. The middle age in the age range who filled in question cards for us was 14. One in ten of the children who sent in question cards were aged under 10, and one in seven were aged over 16. Very slightly more question cards came back from girls than from boys, though there was not much difference (54% were from girls).

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Children and young people who sent us back question cards were living in a wide range of different places. Most were living in foster care, children's homes, or with their own parents. About a third (34%) were living with foster carers, and another third (33%) were living in children's homes. One in five (21%) were living at home with their own parents, where they were getting help of one sort or another from children's social care services. The others were living in many different places, including in their own homes, with parents who were adopting them, in a residential special school, a secure children's home, residential family centre or a further education college, in a hostel, or with relatives other than their parents.

We know from what many children and young people have told us, that social workers are important people when you have been placed

## How social workers rate



somewhere a long way from your home part of the country. It is therefore important to say that **just over a third (36%) of the children and young people who sent in their question cards told us that they were living out of the area where they had normally lived before.**

## How do children and young people rate their social workers?

On our question cards, we asked children and young people to give their current social worker a rating out of ten for how good the child or young person thought they were. A score of 10 was best, 0 worst.

The graph shows how social workers were rated by the children and young people (the percentages don't quite add up to 100%, because not everyone wrote down a rating).

**The middle rating for how good children and young people thought their social workers were was 8 out of 10.** But as the graph shows, social workers were given a wide range of ratings. Nearly a quarter of all the children and young people gave their social workers top marks, with a rating of 10 out of 10. One in five

(22%) rated theirs less than 5 out of 10, and 21 children and young people (4%) gave their social worker a rating of 0 out of 10. 7% didn't give any rating at all, and 12 children (2%) told us they couldn't give us a rating because they hadn't got a social worker, or had never met their social worker; *"I don't know who my social worker is at the minute, it would be nice to have a permanent one"*.

## The best and worst about social workers

In both our discussion groups, and what people wrote to us on their question cards, we heard both good and bad things about social workers. Clearly, some thought they had a good social worker, others didn't. Some people told us that they would like a social worker, but their council hadn't been able to give them one; *"but I did not have a social worker for over 11 months"*.

Here are some of the **good things we heard about social workers** from people who thought theirs was good:

*"she was kind and nice"*

*"someone to talk to"*

*"looked after me"*

*"mine's alright"*

*"no-one's perfect, but she's close enough!"*

*"you feel as if you can say anything and they will understand"*

*"I'm happy as it is. She's great!"*

*"they have helped me for what I have asked for"*

*"my social worker is great. She knows lots about children with disabilities like me"*

*"my social worker found me a good school"*

*"got me out of a hell-hole"*.



We heard that a good social worker is **someone you can contact easily and who then takes action on things**. A good social worker is one who while you are still at home with your family, **can spot when you are crying out for help**, and give that help before you have to be taken into care 6 or 8 months later. It is important that social workers should **act on the child's concerns** that something might happen, or that something isn't working out, and **not wait until the worst has happened before taking action** for you. A good social worker will *"act on early signs of problems"*.

Another important part of being a good social worker was that they would **concentrate on what was good for the child**. **Poor social workers would often concentrate on what was best for the adult**, such as the child's parent or carer. **A poor social worker would have a tendency to speak to, and usually believe, what adults such as carers told them**, rather than wanting to ask and listen to the child or young person directly; *"tend to speak to carers about you rather than to you – carers' aims and your aims aren't always the same and do clash"*. **A good social worker makes sure that the child or young person knows that their social worker is on their side**, even if that means not always agreeing with things the government might want; *"I'd rather talk to someone I feel comfortable with, who keeps in mind they are working on your behalf, rather than side with the government who they work for"*.

In our discussion groups, we found out what sorts of things children and young people liked and disliked about social workers. Many told us that sometimes they didn't like **rules that social workers had to impose on children and**

**young people**, that didn't seem fair or necessary. One person told us *"social workers are too keen on the word 'no'"*.

A very common example of a disliked rule was that **some social workers told foster carers, or staff in children's homes, not to let children and young people stay overnight with friends**, or go on holiday with their carers, without special permission from the Council first.<sup>1</sup> We were told that social workers could perhaps *"get permission so my carers are allowed to sign any consent forms for trips etc"*, otherwise **you missed out on things that other young people went on, just because you were looked after by the council**.

Some children and young people told us that they thought their **social workers did not let them take even reasonable risks that many other people were allowed to take**. One example was the young person who told us that their foster carer wanted to let them go horse riding and to use a motorcycle, but permission was not given by the social worker as these things seemed too risky – *"if one kid falls off a horse, no other kids can go on a horse"*.

Another very common criticism of their social workers by children and young people in our discussion groups was that **social workers do not always do what they promise they will do**. Many said that keeping their promises to do things for you was the main thing about social workers that needed to change; *"not make promises they're not going to keep"*. It is also important that social workers **give promised help quickly enough**; *"it takes ages for a social worker to help"*.

Some other criticisms of their social workers that we were told about in our discussion

<sup>1</sup> There is clear guidance from the government on letting children and young people in children's homes or foster homes go to stay overnight with friends. This was issued following some of our earlier consultations with children and young people, and you can find information about this on our children's website, [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org)

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groups were that social workers **often turn up late** for meetings or visits. One person in one of our discussion groups gave us their advice for all social workers; *“always be on time, and ring if you’re not going to be”*.

**One of the most important things social workers do for children and young people is find them placements** to stay in – and many of the children and young people in our groups thought social workers needed to be able to do much better at this. Many told us that they had **lived in too many placements**, and that there **should be better matching up between children and young people on the one hand, and placements like children’s homes or foster carers on the other hand.**

We were told how important it is that children and young people should have a real **choice when it comes to decisions about where they are going to live, and who is going to look after them.** It is down to their social workers to

make sure they get this choice. Very many children and young people told us that it is important that social workers should always **fully discuss important choices** like changing placements with the young person before deciding anything; *“talk to the young person to get it right first time rather than getting shunted every which way”*.

When a placement is working well, we also heard how important it is that the child or young person’s social worker shouldn’t move them out of that placement – some told us that **their social worker had moved them when they were just settling down** in their placement. The same applied to your schooling – social workers **shouldn’t decide to move you from a school you were doing well in.** Some children and young people told us how they thought their social workers **shouldn’t have stopped their contact with their own birth families, or split them up from their friends.**

All in all, many children and young people we met told us about how much **power social workers have** over their lives, that they seem to be able to make all the major decisions about you, and that sometimes children and young people resented this; *“they try to rule your life – they shouldn’t”*. We heard that some young people felt that social workers were able to change things that affected your future, but that they thought social workers shouldn’t make decisions about you without telling you first, and shouldn’t tell you these things only at the last minute.<sup>2</sup>

We were given many examples of important decisions made by social workers for children and young people. Most of those we spoke to told us that they wanted social workers to **ask and listen to the individual child or young person before making any major decision**. Sometimes, children and young people thought that they should be able to **make some key decisions for themselves**; *“should be able to decide whether you need a medical appointment”*, social workers should *“not tell you what classes to choose, but push you to go to lessons”*.

Some young people were very clear that social workers **should not ignore the views and feelings of even very young children**. Even if a child is too young to make a decision, or to understand fully what is involved in it, they will still have feelings about it and social workers should take notice of these before making a decision for someone. One young person was concerned that social workers need to **take a lot of notice about whether even a very young child feels comfortable in a placement the social worker has chosen for them**; *“if the child is too small, you should be selective about their care and not allow them to live*

*there if the child feels uncomfortable around family or don’t like them”*.

A big issue in many discussion groups was that **social workers keep changing**. *“I have had around 30 social workers in 10 years”*. We heard from many young people how important it is not to keep having new social workers. Many people told us that they felt that as soon as they got used to a new social worker, they left and you had to try to get used to someone else. *“You get to know one then they leave.”*

One group also told us that **social workers who were leaving were not good at passing information on to whoever was going to take you on**, so you had to start from scratch with your new social worker. We heard that some new social workers visited children for the first time before they had read the case notes, so asked very basic questions the young people thought they should know already, like *“why are you in care?”*. (One young person told us they had answered this with their own question – *“so why are you a social worker?”*). Very many told us that they had had times when they didn’t have a social worker at all, and that sometimes they had needed help with problems in those times.

It was **important how well you got on with your social worker**, and that there was a way for you to get a change of social worker if you were not getting on with each other. This might happen if you felt your social worker was overpowering you, or if you didn’t feel they were listening to your views, worries or feelings. We were told that it helps greatly if you like your social worker and they like you. Part of getting on with your social worker is that **they treat you as an individual person**, and not just as one of lots of people in care or on a caseload. They need to know you as you, and not stereotype you as ‘someone in care’. It is also important that they

<sup>2</sup> The law in fact says that if you are looked after by a council, the council must try to ask you for your views and feelings on any decision about you, and must take what you say and feel into account before it makes the decision.

**speak to you in language that you understand**, without using long words or explanations you can't always follow. Some young people told us that there were difficulties in understanding things when they and their social workers were used to speaking different languages.

**A poor social worker was one who didn't listen properly to a young person** they were working with; *"don't listen to a word I say"*. Social workers should think about the young person they are working with, and not compare them with other young people – we were told about some social workers who make **comparisons between their own children and the children or young people they are working with** – as one young person said, *"I'm me and he's him"*.

Some people had mixed feelings about their social worker – one person told us how their social worker was someone they definitely wanted there to discuss things with, but that they didn't seem to be able to change things much; *"someone to talk to, even if they do nothing."*

Often, children and young people found themselves comparing notes about their social workers when they were in our discussion groups. *"Mine's grumpy, I just sit and listen but don't talk to him" ... "mine's alright"*.

One young person told us that they thought most people were not keen on their social worker; *"my social worker doesn't bother with me and I don't like her"*. The same person said that the ideal social worker is someone that most people are going to like, and who can be seen as a friend. **A good social worker is usually someone with things in common with their clients**. To help this to happen, their group suggested that **children and young people should always take part in interviews for new social workers**, and candidates for jobs as social workers should accompany a

social worker on some of their visits to see if the job is really the right one for them before they get appointed.

We heard in our discussion groups about how important it is to many children and young people that their social workers are the sort of **people you can rely on to back you up**. To do this, they needed, for example, always to be at your reviews, and never to miss these unless it was impossible for them to come – and when they were at your review, **to speak up for your views and concerns**.

We also heard that there needed to be **careful matching up to get the right social worker for each child**, too. Those young people who proposed this said that they had not had any choice at all about who was going to be their social worker, even though getting on with and trusting who you got was vitally important to you. One young person told us *"if I had a social worker I would prefer a choice of two people, I would talk to them about everyday things, something I'm really worried about, someone to help, support and understand me, someone who would be there if I needed them, someone who would maybe go for a coffee, just like one of my old social workers"*.

One young person said they were concerned that in some authorities, many of the social workers are in fact temporary staff – locums. These arrive and leave again quite quickly and are not able to get to know you as well as longer term social work staff, and so not able to help you with plans for the future, or advise you when things were tough. They thought that **too many locums** meant a bad social work service.

The point was also made to us that local councils get "stars" awarded by inspectors to show how good they are – but that **you can still not get a good social worker for your needs, even if your council has got the top "three stars" rating**.

In our discussion groups, we learned that something that was disliked by many children and young people was **if they thought their social worker did not tell them the whole truth** about things, especially if this was to do with what plans they had for your future. One person simply said social workers “*shouldn’t lie*”, and another said “*they could tell you the truth and if it is bad, talk about it*”. We heard that one way social workers didn’t always keep you up to date with the truth was that **sometimes social workers told you about leaving where you were living on the day you were going**, instead of preparing and arranging this with you beforehand.

**Young people recognised that social workers are often working in difficult situations that limit what they can do.** We heard about how social workers are often given different rules to follow in different councils, or sometimes in different teams in the same council, so that they are not able to make the same decisions about things like payments to young people for travel. This can seem very unfair when young people are brought together from different areas and find that they have been given very different levels of support or payment for the same things. One young person summarised this by telling us “*their managers stop them doing things as well as they could*”, “*they have budgets and systems to follow*”. One young person said their social worker too often had to say “*I’ll put it through to my team manager*” and couldn’t decide things when the young person thought they needed to.

Another young person was very clear that it was **important for top managers to set good examples of how young people should be supported**, which social workers would then be expected to follow; “*if top people set good examples, everything would filter down*”. Some young people thought another thing stopping some good social workers from doing their

very best for each young person might be simply the amount of work they have to do; “*big case loads might stop them doing as well as they could*.”

Many young people however told us of good things that their social workers had done for them. Sometimes these were to do with **moving them out of places or placements that they couldn’t cope with**; “*got me out of my last place*”. Sometimes social workers had managed to get **practical help or funding** for a young person who needed it; “*helped me with money for college books*”, “*help me sort out finance packages and helped me get deals to get stuff cheaper when I got my flat*”.

Sometimes, a young person remembered a social worker helping them by **making the right decision for them when they were too young to understand things** for themselves; “*let me see my mum less, but not because they listened to me, because I was too small*”.

Many children and young people we spoke to in our groups thought **social workers had a difficult job, and that in general they were overworked, not paid very well, and often stressed**. Some young people told us they thought social workers try hard, but that there are simply not enough of them and they all needed smaller caseloads. Most people had had social workers they thought were good, and ones they thought were bad – like the person who told us “*I’ve had two good social workers, now I’ve got two crap ones*”.

All in all, we heard both good and bad things about social workers from many children and young people across the country. One young person summed all this up by telling us;

**“social workers are like young people – you have your good and bad ones”.**

## The sort of people social workers should be

We asked our discussion groups to advise us on the people they thought were the right sort of people to recruit to be social workers.

We were told that they should be **outgoing, not stuck up, people who get on with children and young people** – which might be more likely if they were not too old themselves, and people who are **able to keep promises**. Some young people told us it was easier to talk to **younger social workers**, who would be more likely to be in tune with young people, but a few said it really didn't matter how old a social worker is – what matters is that they are the right sort of person. A social worker who has been in care themselves, if they are the right sort of person for the job, would probably be able to have a special understanding of what young people are going through.

It is important to be **approachable, easy to talk to, a good listener, to have a thick skin, and to have a sense of humour**. To be a good social worker, a person needs to **understand children and young people** – as one young person texted us, they need to *“be able 2 understnd the ways and thoughts of kids”*. They need to be the sort of people who are **good at calming other people down when they are upset**. They need to be the sort of people who can **both listen and be bothered**. People who are too formal don't make good social workers, as they can seem unapproachable. A good social worker is **someone who doesn't judge people**, but tries to listen and understand.

Good social workers should be people who are **good at planning, and who can keep pushing to get things done** for their young people, rather than being people who prefer to say *“we can't do that”*. Social workers should be people who *“genuinely want to help, not just paid to help”*, and who are **likely to stay in the job**

rather than leave again after a few months so that there is a change again for all the children and young people they are working with.

One young person told us that to be a social worker you need *“first and foremost, **patience**”*. Another said that to be a social worker you need to be **someone practical** and in tune with children and young people; *“down to earth and knows what you like”*.

A number of young people sent us their summary of the ideal person to be a social worker. Here are some of the summaries that were sent in to us from our “Be Heard” panel:

*“the qualities my ideal social worker would have are – to be friendly and compassionate, to listen to what I want and what ways I can go around things to get it, to always be there for me, not to nag at me when I don't know what to do for my future”*

*“my ideal social worker would be a good listener, caring, reliable, punctual, understanding, and would help me to have a say in reviews”*

*“Would be kind, down 2 earth, sociable, be there more 4 me than staff, would listen 2 wot I had 2 say, if I knew smething was right 4 me then they would listen more”*

*“they would not only listen to what we want but act on it and make sure that things we are unhappy with change”*.

## Keeping in touch with social workers

We used our question cards to ask a set of questions about how social workers kept in contact with children and young people, and about getting visits from your social worker.

The **main ways social workers kept in contact were by visits and the telephone**. Just over

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half (53%) the 499 people who answered these questions told us their social workers kept in contact by both visiting them and on the telephone. **Being able to telephone your social worker was something many young people told us was important** to them; *“if something is wrong, you should be able to ring them”*, *“every social worker could have an emergency care phone so you could ring the number”*. Some said though that they **wanted to get through more often to their social worker personally** – it was not enough for other people to say they’d pass on messages, or that the social worker would ring back sometime – this rarely worked. Some young people also didn’t like having to leave very personal messages on social workers’ answerphones.

Another three out of ten (31%) said their social worker visited them rather than phoning them. Only 1 in 16 said their social worker phoned them rather than visiting them. In our discussion groups though, some children and

young people said they **wished their social workers would phone them regularly to check that they were OK**. Many would prefer their social workers to do this, without waiting for the young person to try to phone their social worker when there was something important that needed discussing. Social workers should also **keep you up to date with things concerning you** - *“ring me and tell me what’s going on”*.

In a few cases, social workers kept in touch in other ways. Some children told us that their social workers do not keep directly in touch with them, but keep **in touch with their parents or their staff instead**. A few were **visited by their social worker at school**. A few more went to **visit their social worker at social services offices** or a family contact centre. 13 children and young people said their social worker usually **kept in touch by letter**. Only 4 children and young people told us their social worker **keeps in touch with them by email** (and nobody said their social worker

texted them on their mobiles). Around **one in twenty (5%) said they didn't have any sort of regular contact with a social worker**; *“my carer has to constantly phone and email the office, appointments are made and then cancelled half an hour before, case worker has done one visit and nothing else in 14 months”*.

In one of our discussion groups, a young person told us they simply wanted their social worker to *“visit often”* – once a month if possible. **Social workers need to be in touch often if children and young people are to get to know them**; *“I thought you were meant to get a working relationship with social workers, but it's like I don't even know her”*. **Being able to get in touch with your social worker when you needed them was though more important for many people than how often they visited you**. Some young people even thought their social workers in fact visited them too often, but the problem was that they were still difficult to get hold of if you needed to talk about something between visits.

Some people in our groups rated their social workers poorly because they were **difficult to get hold of**. Sometimes, we heard, it seemed that their social worker was always out, or at least not answering their phone, messages left for social workers often did not result in a call back, and one person said their social worker always took holidays in school half terms when they needed to contact them most. Some said they found it hard to answer our questions about their social workers because they had not met them very often; *“four visits a year is not a great deal (or) enough to answer these questions”*, *“not sure, I have only met her once”*, *“we don't speak or meet up very often”*. One group thought every social worker should be equipped with a **mobile phone especially for contact with the children and young people on their caseload**.

One young person spoke for many about the need to be able to get hold of a social worker for help or advice when you needed it, rather than only when they were free and in the office – you needed to be told **“where to get help from when the office closes”**.

Some of the young people told us that they wanted their social workers to **think about what was going on in the lives of the young people they were working with and to plan their contacts with this in mind**. Sometimes young people were at a stage when they needed a lot of contact and help. But at other times they needed to be left to get on with something without lots of contact. A major problem for some young people was that their social workers hadn't planned things enough to **avoid major changes happening at the same time as school or college exams**, when the young person was less likely to be able to cope with them, or might do badly in their exams because other major changes were being made to happen in their lives; *“they kept calling me during my final A level exams, telling me I had to move out and had to fill in an application form. This caused me a lot of upheaval and they shouldn't have been bothering me around this stressful time.”* As one person on our Be Heard panel put it, they wanted their social worker *“to come and c u when I want and not when they can and listen to wat I got to say”*.

We heard from many young people how important it is that social workers plan things well and in good time. **Good forward planning can avoid unnecessary stress for the young person**, and can sometimes avoid bad decisions or rushed moves from one place to another. Poor planning can cause major problems – one young person told us how they had ended up being charged extra money for something that would have been avoided by earlier planning by the social worker, and another told us that money for



their carers to take them on holidays and trips never came in time, so that their carers always ended up out of pocket.

There is a lot of discussion nowadays about **having social workers based in schools** for closer contact with children and young people they need to work with. Some people in our discussion groups agreed with this, because your social worker would be close by and **easy to contact**. Others, though, were very worried about this, because there could be a **lack of privacy and confidentiality** at school – “*people can hear through doors*”. They were worried that other children would know you were seeing a social worker and start winding you up about it.

## Social worker visits

We used our question cards to ask more about getting visited by a social worker. This was important, because visits had turned out to be the most usual way for social workers to keep in touch.

The first question we asked about visits was to find out who actually decided when the social worker would visit. Whoever decided this would also of course usually be deciding how routine visits happened.

**Over half the children and young people (57%) said that their social worker is the one who decides when to visit.** Only one in fifty (2%) said that it was the child or young person that decided when their social worker should visit them. Interestingly though, **nearly one in four (38%) said that they and their social worker decided together when the social worker should visit** – it was a joint decision.

Something that had been said in many of our discussion groups about social workers was that they are bad at turning up anywhere on time. We checked this out in our question

cards, by asking “does your social worker turn up on time for visits?” **Nearly one in four (38%) told us that their social worker turns up on time every time – but almost as many (over a third; 35%) told us theirs “never” or “sometimes” turned up on time for visits.**

Just under a quarter (23%) said their social worker “often” arrived on time.

It is of course essential that your social worker is able to visit you. One person in one of our discussion groups told us theirs couldn’t visit them because they didn’t have a driving licence, and another said theirs couldn’t visit very much because she couldn’t drive at night so could only visit in the daylight. In one of our discussion groups, **young people stressed how important it is that your social worker does still regularly visit you if you are placed a long way from your home authority.**

If social worker visits are the main way of keeping in touch, it is important that they actually take place when planned. Again, in our discussion groups, we had heard from children and young people who told us that their social workers often didn’t keep promises to visit them. So we checked this out in our question cards too, by asking “how often does your social worker cancel a visit with you?” **Almost half (47%) the children and young people told us that their social worker had never cancelled a visit to them. One in four (24%) said their social worker “sometimes” cancelled visits** to see them. One in twelve (8%) told us their social worker cancelled their visits “often” or “every time”.

Sometimes of course, the young person may want to cancel a visit from their social worker. We asked how easy it was to cancel a visit from their social worker if the child or young person wanted to do that. **Nearly six out of ten (59%) said they were able to cancel a visit if they had to. One in six (18%) said they could not cancel social worker visits.** Another 16% said they could

“sometimes” cancel a visit. Only 12 children and young people (2%) told us they had never needed to try to cancel a visit from their social worker.

How much notice you get before your social worker arrives to visit you is another important issue. Again, we used our question cards to ask about this. **Just over one in four children and young people usually got more than a week’s notice before their social worker visited them. Another third (34%) got just a week’s notice.** One in 7 though (14%) told us they got only a day’s or a few hours’ notice that their social worker was going to visit them. 22 (4%) told us they usually got no notice at all – their social worker just turned up.

By far the **most usual place for children and young people to meet with and talk things over with their social worker was at the place they were living.** This was the case for nearly 9 out of 10 children and young people (87%). Some of the other places used for meetings with social workers were a social services office, at school, at an after school club, or (less usually) a café or fast food restaurant.

Many children and young people have told us that it is **important to be able to talk to your social worker alone**, so that you can put your own views across without someone else listening in or disagreeing, and so that you can tell your social worker about any serious worries you have or anything unpleasant that might be happening to you. **We heard from young people how difficult it is to tell the truth about your concerns if your social worker visits you where the problems are** – you need to go to neutral territory to have a talk with your social worker. This might mean going to a fast food restaurant or to a café for a coffee, where although there are other members of the public around, it is still easier to have a private conversation.

When we were writing another of our reports and we met with children and young people in private foster homes,<sup>3</sup> being able to meet and talk to your visiting social worker alone was one of the most important requests made. After we reported that to the Government, they changed the law they were proposing about private fostering to make this something social workers had to do when visiting private foster children.

**Just over a third (37%) of the 499 children and young people who sent in answers to this question card told us they usually meet their social worker alone when they get a visit. Nearly half the children and young people (49%) usually had someone else with them when they spoke to their social worker during a visit.** One in 8 (13%) were sometimes on their own to talk to their social worker, sometimes with someone else. **One in seven (15%) told us that their social worker often took them out for a meal** when they visited.

The most usual person to be with a child or young person when they spoke to their social worker was their foster carer. **Nearly a quarter (24%) of all the children and young people who sent their question cards in about this told us they had a foster carer or other carer with them when their social worker met them;** *“with my carer, because she never talks to me by herself”*. We know that a third of the children and young people who sent us question cards were in foster care, so these figures mean that well over two thirds (we estimate about 70%) of foster children have their foster carer with them when they meet their social worker to tell them how things are going and when their social workers are checking on whether they have any concerns about how they are looked after. *“Carer usually and it’s hard because sometimes I wish to talk to her on my own”*.

<sup>3</sup> Children who were placed in their foster home by their own families rather than by the local social services department. Our report was called “Private Fostering”, and is on our website [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org).

Children and young people told us in other discussions (such as those about private fostering) that it is very difficult to tell your social worker about something serious about your foster home if your foster carer is sitting in the room at the time. It was also **difficult to talk privately if lots of other people were in the house, even if not actually in the room with you**; *“everyone in the house and I’m not happy with that”*. You needed to *“go places instead of being at home feeling uncomfortable because family is around”*.

Children had **praise for social workers who made sure they could easily talk together alone if you wanted to**; *“when I want to be alone I can, when I want my foster carers, they come with me”*, *“she makes time to talk to me on my own”*. One group of young people suggested that a form should be sent to each young person when social services send them mail (like medical forms), asking them if they would like to meet with a social worker on their own. The young person could then send this form back to ask a social worker to visit for a private talk, somewhere outside the place they are living. Another group suggested that young people and social workers should agree special words or phrases that a child or young person could use as a signal that they wanted to discuss something with their social worker on their own, and not in front of their carer.

We heard about other people who were sometimes present when social workers visited and talked with children and young people. **For around one in 7 (15%), one or both of their parents were usually with them**; *“sometimes my Mum stays – I would prefer this not to happen”*. In a few cases, there were other members of the family, brothers or sisters, or a teacher. It was **rare for staff of a home to be present with the child when they spoke to their social worker** – only 12 children (2.4%) said that a member of staff was usually with them. It was even more rare to have an interpreter with you,

or an advocate, or for your social worker to bring another social worker with them.

We wanted to find out what social workers usually talked about with the children or young people when they visited, so we asked about this through our question cards. **Two thirds (66%) of the children and young people said they had a discussion about general things, and just under two thirds (64%) said they discussed any problems the child or young person had. Over half (58%) said they discussed the child or young person’s family, and the same number (58%) told us they discussed plans for the child or young person’s future.** It is important to say, though, that nearly 4 out of 10 children and young people (39%) told us that they did not usually discuss plans for their future with their social worker during visits, and a third (33%) said that they did not usually discuss problems they were having.

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To see what else children and young people wanted to happen when they had visits from their social worker, we asked the question on our cards “what other things would you like to do during visits with your social worker?” We did not make any suggestions about the possible answers. We received 172 suggestions from children and young people.

The two most frequent suggestions, each sent in by about one in ten children and young people, were:

**Go to an activity with my social worker**, such as the cinema or shopping together

**Go out for meals or drinks with my social worker.**

Going out more often with your social worker was something that very many in our discussion groups had told us would be a welcome change in the way social workers’ visits went. One person, speaking for many others, said they just wanted to “*talk freely about everything, go out for a meal and talk about things*”.

Here is the complete list of other suggestions, starting with the ones made most often (and with the number of times each suggestion was made in brackets):

Talk about my problems and how to deal with them (17)

Talk about my future more (11)

To plan contacting my family (7)

To go somewhere less formal to talk together (5)

To go somewhere with my social worker alone (4)

Talk to me rather than my parent or carer (3)

Discuss positive things I have done, rather than only what has gone wrong (3)

Help with my education (3)

To stay in rather than go out (2)

To spend more time with my social worker (2)

Not to meet at school (2)

To fill in my paperwork together (2)

To build a good working relationship together (2)

Suggestions each made by only one person were: to call me to keep me up to date with things; to discuss medical problems; and to have a laugh together.

## Taking children and young people seriously

The law requires children’s social care services to ask children for their views and feelings, and to take these properly into account when making decisions affecting the child or young person. Because your social worker is the person you usually meet from the Council that looks after you, who takes a big part in decisions about you, and who is the person most likely to do the job of finding out your views and feelings, we wanted to hear from children and young people whether they thought their social workers take them seriously. We therefore chose this as one of the questions for our question cards.

Just over 4 out of 10 children and young people (44%) said they thought their social worker took them seriously all of the time. Another 1 in 6 (18%) said their social worker took them seriously “most of the time”, making **just over 6 out of 10 (62%) who believed their social worker took them seriously all or most of the time.**

But nearly 1 in 10 children and young people (9%) told us they thought their social worker didn’t take them seriously at all. In all, **1 in 6 children and young people (16%) told us that**

they felt their social worker took them seriously “not at all” or “not very often”. 18% said their social worker “sometimes” took them seriously.

In our discussion groups, children and young people told us how they **wanted social workers not only to ask their views, but really to try to act according to what the child or young person wanted**. Some told us they thought their social workers asked their opinions, but then seemed always to go against what the child or young person wanted anyway. Some told us their social workers listened to what the child wanted if it agreed with what the social worker thought was best anyway, but not so much if the child disagreed with something; *“social workers shouldn’t have selective hearing.”*

Sometimes **as you grew older or had fewer problems, you had less to do with your social worker and this meant your views were not asked about so much** as they used to be; *“I’m not being listened to because I’m too old and sensible for supervised contact”*.

Many in our groups **wanted their social workers to ask them questions about their views and worries**, and to help get to know them. This was especially important when you got a new social worker. Some others though thought that they already got asked too many questions by social workers, and one social worker should pass the information on to someone taking their place as your social worker.

One young person, very much supported by the others in their discussion group, summed up for many how social workers should take the young person’s views and wishes seriously wherever they could: *“social workers should make what you want happen – compromising within reason – about what you want to do with reason”*.

## The help children and young people want

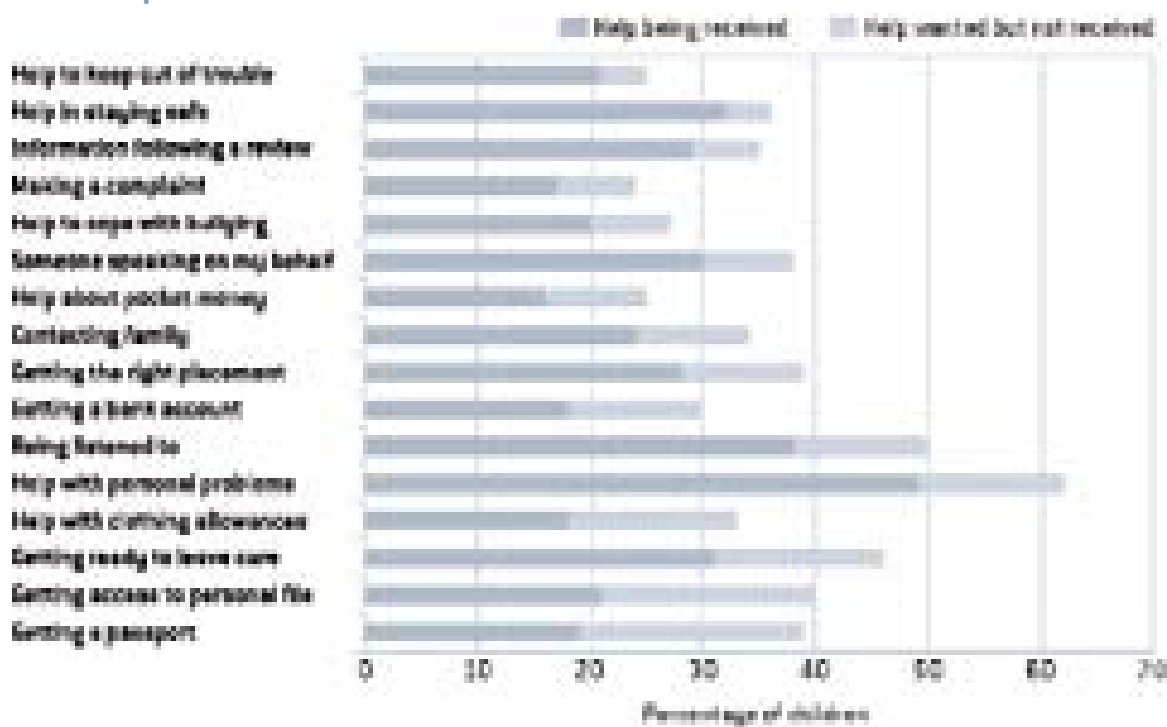
Thinking more widely than just social worker visits, we asked on our question cards what sort of help children and young people wanted. We asked about some sorts of help children and young people had told us they needed when we met them in discussion groups, and we also asked on our question cards for any other sorts of help children and young people needed at the time they were writing back to us, without suggesting anything else ourselves.

Some young people told us what they thought social workers were for. One young person summed it up by saying that, for them, a social worker is someone to *“take over responsibility of parents and share responsibility with carers”*.

Here is the list of different sorts of help we asked about, in order of how many children and young people told us they were getting each kind of help at the moment (the most frequent sort of help is listed first, and the percentage of children and young people getting each sort of help is given in brackets):

- Help with personal problems (49%)
- Being listened to (38%)
- Help in staying safe (32%)
- Getting ready to leave care (31%)
- Someone speaking on my behalf (30%)
- Information following a review (29%)
- Getting the right placement to live in (28%)
- Contacting family (25%)
- Help to keep out of trouble (21%)
- Getting access to personal file (21%)
- Help to cope with bullying (20%)
- Getting a passport (19%)

## The help children want



Help with clothing allowances (18%)

Getting a bank account (18%)

Making a complaint (17%)

Help about pocket money (16%)

Here is the list again, but this time in order of how many children and young people told us they needed each sort of help but were not getting that help at the moment. This time, the list tells us what help children want but are not getting – what professionals usually call “**unmet need**” (with the biggest unmet need for help first – again in brackets is the percentage of children and young people saying they wanted, but were not getting, each kind of help):

Getting a passport (20%)

Getting access to personal file (19%)

Getting ready to leave care (15%)

Help with clothing allowances (15%)

Help with personal problems (13%)

Being listened to (12%)

Getting a bank account (12%)

Getting the right placement to live in (11%)

Contacting family (10%)

Help about pocket money (9%)

Someone speaking on my behalf (8%)

Help to cope with bullying (7%)

Making a complaint (7%)

Information following a review (6%)

Help in staying safe (4%)

Help to keep out of trouble (4%)

The graph clearly brings out the gaps between getting – and not getting – help. The length of each bar on the graph shows the percentage of children and young people who told us they needed each sort of help, with those actually getting each sort of help shown in dark blue and the ones who want that sort of help but

are not getting it in light blue. The bigger the light blue section, the more unmet need there is for that sort of help, according to children and young people themselves.

As the graph shows, **the two biggest wishes about help from social workers and social services generally are to have help with personal problems, and to be listened to. Social workers are doing a lot to help with both of these – but there is still a lot of unmet need for both sorts of help.** One of the most striking unmet needs is for more people to be helped with **getting ready to leave care.**<sup>4</sup> Very many children and young people have told us they are **receiving good help from their social workers in getting them the right placement to live in and in keeping in contact with their birth families, but there are still many who are asking for further help with both these** major areas of their lives. One person told us they needed help to get their parents back.

Many people told us about exactly the sort of **help they wanted with personal problems;** *“bullying at school and getting over my Dad’s death”, “coping with anger and stress ... catching up with school work”, “smoking cannabis”, “my anger management issues”, “counselling”, “getting friends”, “understanding my sexuality”, “more advice on how to handle a difficult situation”, “I need help because I need to learn to shut my mouth and listen”.*

Many also told us about the **help they wanted in order to keep in touch with their families;** *“getting back with my family” “I want to see more of my brother, but his new Mummy won’t let me”, “I need help to see my Dad. I am not getting much help ‘cause my social worker is ill at the*

*moment”.* Some just wanted their social worker to **keep them informed about other members of their family;** *“information on how my brother is”, “what’s going on with my sisters?”.*

Some told us **details of the help they needed in leaving care;** *“about my future”, “how to look after myself”, “moving on when I leave school”, “what I am entitled to in a plain and easy way to understand, and support getting it”<sup>5</sup>, “what I need to do whilst living alone. I need to know where I’ll be living when I leave my current placement. How do I get a job?”, “try and find me a flat for when I move out”, “a definite placement for when I turn 16”.*

We were told that for many young people, what is needed from a leaving care worker is very different from what is needed from other social workers. **On leaving care, you need practical information and assistance, someone checking up on how you are doing, and still being there in the background to help and support you if you need any assistance.** It was important that you had someone who knew you to contact when you needed to – one person who had recently left care told us *“after 18 years you usually lose your social worker, even though you need them and find it difficult. You have a duty officer and when you call to make an appointment you never speak to the same one twice as they change every day”.*

Some areas of help are getting through to most (though still not all) who need that help – such as **help in staying safe, and help in keeping out of trouble.** This included things like *“how to stay away from bad people”.* These are both major issues for children and young people, and are things that social workers spend much time upon.

<sup>4</sup> We have recently published a report of Young Peoples’ Views on Leaving Care, which is on our children’s rights website [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org), and which sets out the sorts of help people leaving care have told us they need.

<sup>5</sup> We have put a guide for young people on our website ([www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org)) on what help there should be on leaving care.

Children and young people are also clearly asking for more of them to get some very **practical sorts of help** – in getting a passport, how to get access to their personal files, sorting out clothing allowances and costs, and getting a bank account (*“I really need to get a bank account now”*).

When we asked children and young people to tell us on their question cards what **other areas they needed help with** at the moment, but were not getting help with, on top of those we had suggested, we received 91 answers giving additional sorts of help needed from social workers. The ten sorts of help most often needed were (the number of children and young people needing each one is in brackets):

Help with education (including practical things like equipment and uniforms, as well as help with school work) (16)

Visits and help to get back to my birth family (12)

Help with living independently (including help dealing with housing and benefits) (12)

Help with mental health problems (including anger management and self harm) (11)

Financial assistance (8)

Support that is available as soon as it is needed (6)

Advice on getting a job (6)

Public transport (5)

Help to cope with what I look like (3)

Help with communication skills (3)

In our discussion groups with children and young people, we heard more about other sorts of help that they would like from their social workers. Many wanted **social workers who were simply there when you needed them, who you could contact easily when you**

**wanted them, and who would contact you back or visit you when you asked them to.**

Examples of times when you needed to call on your social worker included times when you needed advice on personal problems you were finding it hard to cope with, and if you were living in a placement a long way away from where you had lived before, especially if this was outside your own council area.

Some told us of things they needed their social workers to arrange for them – we heard about **passports** for holidays on the question cards, but other things we heard about in our groups included getting hold of **computers** that were needed for school or college work – and getting these at the time you needed them. When social workers managed this, they were praised by the young person they had helped in this sort of way. **Getting you into a suitable school** was also something some children and young people told us they wanted their social workers to do for them. Another was **practical help in keeping in touch with your birth family**, like arranging family trips. Another practical help needed by some of the older young people was help organising **learning to drive**.

Some more of the things people said they wanted social workers to help them with were **getting a holiday with a family who could take someone with special needs**, coping with bills, rent arrears and **money generally**, **getting a job**, and **moving to live in the area you wanted to live in**. Some told us they had some very special practical needs their social worker needed to sort out for them; one example was *“I want my savings back from my previous foster carer”*. Others wanted their social worker to give them information or guide them towards places they could find things out for themselves; *“useful numbers, advice, guidance”*.



**Some told us that they got the help they needed from their carers or care staff, and therefore did not need that much from their social workers at the moment;** *“all my needs are met in my home”*. **Some others said that they got all the help they needed from their carer and their social worker who worked together for them;** *“I get all the support and help off my foster carer and my social worker”*.

Sometimes there was a point at which you **needed the help of someone who had known you for a long time**, and this did not happen if you didn't have a long term social worker; *“I need a good social worker, one or two people at my local office to help and be there for me at this moment in time. I need someone who could be there as a character witness, but social workers have said no because I don't have one”*.

Some young people told us that it was **important that social workers understood your particular problem** if they were going to be able to help you with it; *“my social worker did not know what a gay man was, which was no help to me”*.

In many of our discussion groups, children and young people said they wanted their social workers to **work faster in sorting things out** for them once they had agreed to do something. Long delays could be very difficult to cope with.

Another issue raised was that the help social workers can give you, and the things they can get or arrange for you, seem to be **very different from one council to another, and even between different areas in the same council**. This didn't seem fair, and meant that some people were less likely to get their needs met, depending on where they were.

Children told us that they do need their social workers to get things done – *“accomplish something and make decisions”*. We were told that a good social worker does a lot of things

on your behalf, but keeps you informed of what they are doing – *“do more things behind the scenes, but not behind your back”*.

Sometimes, we heard, it is **important that social workers don't go too far and get concerned about things that happen to all children and young people anyway**; *“sometimes when I do something silly they always seem to think it needs investigating because something is wrong or there is a negative reason for it. I am 11 years old and can be quite silly at times, just the same as my friends but they don't get investigated. This should not happen because it makes me feel sad, as though I were different to others my age and I am not”*.

It is also important that **social workers aren't just for negative things**, problems and changes, but that they *“discuss the positive things that I have done rather than the negatives all the time”*.

## What information do children and young people need from their social workers?

As well as getting help, we wanted to know what extra information children and young people would find helpful to have from their social workers, on top of any help and information they were already getting.

We asked this question on our question cards, without giving any suggestions ourselves. We received 83 suggestions. The top ten most frequent suggestions sent in were (with the number of children and young people suggesting each one in brackets):

More information about leaving care (17)

More information on people to turn to for friendly advice and help on different topics (14)

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Being kept in touch more with what is happening in my birth family, to help move back there one day (13)

Information to be available whenever I ask for it (9)

More information on training and jobs (8)

Information on entitlements (6)

More information to keep me up to date with what is happening that affects me (5)

Information on counselling (3)

Some young people simply **wanted to know much more about their own families and backgrounds**; *“information on why I’m in care and why I can’t see my Dad”*.

One point made in our discussion groups was that children and young people wanted their social workers to keep them informed about things that were happening that involved them, and **not to tell other people important things**

**without telling the child or young person themselves:** *“listening to me and not telling my mother”*. Social workers **shouldn’t keep secrets** – for example not telling the child or young person what they had said to that person’s parents about them. They should also **keep confidences** – not asking the child or young person to tell them very personal things and then passing these on to other people like foster carers, children’s home staff, or adoptive parents; *“I should have the right to say whether my parents know about issues, but instead that decision went to management”*. In one group, we were told that sometimes children in a home end up finding out confidential information about each other because their social workers aren’t good at keeping confidences; *“social workers tell each other about us and then we all get to know each others’ business through out social workers because we all live together”*. One young person said that social workers should **“stop discussing your problems in reception areas because there’s a privacy issue”**.

## Training social workers

Because social workers are so important to children and young people getting social care or living away from home, we asked what children thought should be in the training for all social workers. Through our question cards we asked about a list of suggestions we had put together from earlier discussions with groups of children and young people, and we asked for any other suggestions that we hadn't put on the list.

These were the numbers of children and young people confirming that they thought the items on our list should be included in the **training for all social workers** (the percentages of those confirming each item is in brackets):

Knowledge of young people's issues (81%)

Children's Rights (76%)

Young people living away from home (73%)

Education issues (67%)

Leaving care (64%)

Young people's mental health (57%)

Drug and alcohol abuse (54%)

Personal and sexual health issues (53%)

Other health issues (23%)

We received 111 **suggestions on our question cards of things that should be included in training for social workers**. Here are the most frequently suggested, with the number of children and young people suggesting each one in brackets:

How young people are likely to feel about things (21)

Training generally in how to deal well with young people (20)

Family and contact issues for those living away from home (14)

Staying healthy and good diet (9)

How to be friendly and approachable to young people (8)

Disabilities and the needs of children with disabilities (6)

Activities for young people (3)

Not to make a young person talk to you if they don't want to (3)

Housing and benefits (3)

As well as these proposals for training social workers, some children and young people were clear in some other recommendations about how a well-trained social worker should be able to work with young people. These included **making sure that they found out, and took into account, what individual children and young people's preferences, likes and dislikes are, what their individual needs are, and information about the individual child or young person's past** that social workers might need to know if they are to help them properly. One person summed much of this up when they said *"they need to know what I like and what I don't like. They need to know how to not talk about things I do not want to talk about"*.

One thing mentioned to us in one group was that social workers should be taught what they should do and not do while they were with children – for example, **not to smoke while they were visiting children**. Some thought **how social workers dress matters**, and should be considered in their training.

In one of our discussion groups, we were told that the main thing social workers needed to be, as well as getting the training they needed, was to be **kind and caring**. They need to be able *"to listen to kids, have a laugh, easy going"*. Another group stressed that it is important that proper checks are done on social workers to make sure none of them

have criminal records – including for serious driving offences, as they often carry children in their cars.

Here is a list of direct quotes from children and young people about things they each need their social workers to know:

*“how to talk to young people without patronising people”*

*“places for me to go so I meet others – I need lots of support as I have learning disabilities”*

*“what is safe and wouldn’t place the child in any danger”*

*“that children need their families”*

*“that if children don’t want to talk about their issues they don’t have to!”*

*“how to deal with illness”*

*“about AIDS, tuberculosis, hygiene etc”*

*“what can make people self harm. They need to know that it is a coping strategy”*

*“disability law and rights”*

*“ALL issues relating to special needs”*

*“information on prison life”*

*“how to deal with bullying”*

*“relationships and sexual issues”*

*“how to apply for benefits”*

*“good knowledge of local housing”*

*“young people’s culture”*

*“culture and religion”*

*“they need to understand that every child is different and may see things in different ways”*

*“what it’s like to live in foster care and what it’s like to be adopted”*

*“what it’s like to live with your Mum and Dad and brothers that you don’t get on with”*

*“information about young Mums”*

*“about staying out of trouble and staying on the right track after care”*

*“how young people feel and how they cope with problems”*

*“how the teens / child’s emotions change through puberty and different situations”*

*“how to be fair to children and understand where we want to stay”*

*“feelings and how to deal with them”*

*“what children like to do to calm them down”*

*“the difference between sad and depressed”*

*“that children are boring to work with”*

*“children are individual people”.*

Three last quotes give overall sound advice from young people to all social workers and the people training or employing them:

*“they need to understand more from a child’s perspective about any situation as not all children have the ability or maturity to understand fully what the social worker is saying or see from an adult’s perspective”*

*“understanding of a person’s feelings and to understand all children are different. Some are more independent than others but some require more help and attention than others. They also need to understand age isn’t the issue – it’s personality, behaviour and way of thinking. Children have the right to live as freely as an adult”*

*“they need to know and understand that we are human beings, we do have feelings and needs. We can come across angry, unfriendly etc, but with time they will see a person, a nice person”.*

## How helpful are social workers compared to other people?

Social workers are trained and paid to help people, but any one child or young person, just like anyone else, is likely to have various, and sometimes many, other people who help them. We wanted to know exactly where children and young people would place their social workers in the list of the main sorts of people who had been the most helpful to them where they were living at the moment. The last of our questions on the question cards was therefore to ask who have been the most helpful people to each child or young person whilst they were living where they were at the moment.

Here is the list of the people children and young people told us had been the most helpful (percentages in brackets):

A foster carer (36%)

A member of staff in a home or school (34%)

A birth parent (32%)

A social worker (31%)

A friend (28%)

A teacher (24%)

A brother or sister (23%)

Someone else not on our list (16%)

Another relative (15%)

The results here are very **positive about social workers – 1 in 3 children and young people saw them as one of their most helpful people, and they were seen as the most helpful sort of person after the carers or staff who were looking after you every day and after your own parents.**

It is interesting that although over a quarter of children and young people said their friends were amongst their most helpful people, **friends did not score quite as highly as social workers** did.

16% had told us that someone we had not put on our list was a “most helpful person” to them. The sort of person most frequently added to our list was a professional from a voluntary organisation who worked with the child or young person. Others were special mentors at school, advocates, counsellors, an older young person’s own partner, and foster carers’ own children. Lawyers, YOT workers, adult friends of the family, the parents of one’s own friends, and therapists were nominated as a most helpful person by 2 children or young people each. Health professionals, drug misuse workers, local children’s rights officers, and Connexions workers each only got nominated by one person each.

One young person told us that after running away, they had lost contact with social workers and learned to rely on their friends; *“my friends helped me through the streets where my life and my friends were my family and that’s how it is for so many children now in the care system”*.

It was worrying that a small number of young people (19 people, making up 4% of those who answered this question) wrote on their question card that there was no-one that they had found a most helpful person to them.

# Conclusion

One care leaver told us their view of social workers, looking back on their time in care:

*“with children in care, they need to always know they have someone they can turn to and talk to. I never felt that. I ended up in and out of prison and felt like I had no support. The longest I had a social worker was 3 months, then from there I’ve had 14 different social workers. It’s hard because you get to know and trust one and it leaves.”*

One person still in care summed up what they needed from a social worker in their own words, clearly underlining how important it is to have someone there just for you when you need them:

*“It’s not rocket science! Kids just want to be wanted because when you in care you feel like no-one wants you. You just want people to listen, understand and be there on a regular basis so you know that you’ve always got something to hang on to. It’s not too much to ask!”*

The last word goes to a young person’s summary of what they wanted from their ideal social worker:

*“support, advice, friend, someone I can trust, someone I know really cares about me, not just a number or a client who they really don’t care about, someone who has life experience with teenagers, not just someone who just read the textbook.”*

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If you have any comments regarding this report please send them to:

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We particularly welcome feedback from children and young people.

**Children's Website [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org)**

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