

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg**  
**Children, Young People, and Education Committee**

**18 Ionawr 2023**

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[1] **Jayne Bryant:** Thank you so much for coming in this morning. We really, really do appreciate it. It's nice to see you all. It's an informal session. We're really grateful for you coming in, just to get as much information as you can share with us; we're really, really grateful. It will help shape our work that we're doing on such a really important subject.

[2] I should say that I'm Jayne Bryant, a Member of the Senedd for Newport West and Chair of the Children, Young People, and Education Committee. Perhaps we can ask Sioned Williams—

[3] **Sioned Williams:** I'm Sioned Williams and I'm a Member of the Senedd for South Wales West. That's Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend county areas.

[4] **Jayne Bryant:** James.

[5] **James Evans:** I'm James Evans and I'm the Member of the Senedd for Brecon and Radnor, and it's basically as it says on the tin.

[6] **Jayne Bryant:** And we've got Ken online.

[7] **Ken Skates:** I am Ken Skates. I'm Member of the Senedd for Clwyd South.

[8] **Jayne Bryant:** So, you've got a bit of a spread around Wales. We've had apologies, just for you to know, from Laura Anne Jones and Buffy Williams this morning, so there are a couple more of us. Rosie, would you like to introduce yourself?

[9] **Rosie:** Hello, I'm Rosie. I was an ambassador for the Voices from Care summit. I'm also on the Voices advisory team, and I represent Voices from Care on the Welsh Youth Parliament.

[10] **Jayne Bryant:** Lovely. And Helen.

[11] **Helen Mary Jones:** I'm Helen Mary Jones, and I'm just here to support Rosie. I'm the head of policy and communications for Voices from Care Cymru.

[12] **Jayne Bryant:** Lovely. And Elisa.

[13] **Elisa:** I'm Elisa. I am a solicitor, and I'm care experienced myself.

[14] **Jayne Bryant:** Brilliant. Thanks again. As I say, we'll make sure you're kept informed about our inquiry as we go along as well. It's really informal. I don't know, Rosie and Elisa, if you want to say anything at the start, if there's anything you'd like to outline at the start, before perhaps Members have got some questions. You're okay.

[15] Perhaps, just to get an idea, really, about what you would like to tell us, perhaps good and bad things, about the time you spent in care, or perhaps the experiences. I know, Rosie, you've spoken to other young people as well. Just some of those experiences that you've picked up from other young people about their time in care that you're aware of.

[16] **Rosie:** I got put in kinship care, and I did genuinely get the best care I could have. I moved in with my grandparents and they did their best to make sure I didn't get treated any differently to anyone else. I know, speaking to other young people, it's really helpful to have groups like Voices, for example, and also I go to Roots Foundation Wales, so this makes a close network for you and other care-experienced young children, and it's really nice to know that you're not alone in that sense.

[17] And then, bad: I think one of the things that has been highlighted by so many people is just the lack of consistency, whether that be with social workers, them changing all the time, and unfortunately, the lack of communication with the child. Decisions are being made around you, but you don't necessarily know why that's happened or what is going to happen next. So, the lack of knowing as well.

[18] **Jayne Bryant:** Sorry, we've got a bit of feedback there, haven't we, while you were speaking. That's really helpful. Elisa, is there anything you'd like to add?

[19] **Elisa:** I think quite similar. I think I was quite lucky in terms of my—. So, I was in care from 18 months until I was five, and I had really loving foster

parents before I went through adoption proceedings. But I think between moving to those foster carers I had already been placed with two other foster carers, a prospective family, which failed, and then a new family. So I think the amount of foster parents people have is a big issue. I know of a family recently where someone has had numerous foster parents with a child that's very young and had numerous social workers as well. When you're in such a vulnerable position I think your relationship with the social worker is probably one of the most important relationships you can have—for that to be something that is inconsistent I think is a big problem. But one of the positives is I had a great foster family and a speedy adoption process, and that's worked out well for me.

[20] **Jayne Bryant:** Thank you—thank you both for sharing that. Has anybody got any questions? Sioned.

[21] **Sioned Williams:** I wonder if I could ask about—. I'm sure we'll come back to the social worker aspect of things, but obviously the other place that young people and children are most often at is school and educational settings, so I just wanted to know about your experiences in those settings. Did you have any support or understanding or not from school? What was done well and what could have been done better, I suppose, in that aspect of your lives?

[22] **Elisa:** Shall I start? I think for me personally, when I was in care, I think the local authority identified that I, at that age, was quite switched on—I've slowed down now—so I was put into a private nursery whilst in care, and then when I was adopted I was put into a Welsh school. But I think it was assumed by most teachers, because my situation wasn't discussed too much by them—[*Inaudible.*]—and that they should just treat me like anyone else, but it actually then came out when I was in the first year of university that I was actually someone who really struggled with exams, and I should have been having extra time the entire time, but no-one had identified it, because they were too nervous to touch on it with me.

[23] And then on the other side of it, I know a lot of people where schools have assumed that because you've been in the care system, you must have a lot of troubles, and if there's any bad behaviour, instead of trying to help resolve it and put measures in place, they've kind of written the child off as not being a good pupil, and not able to achieve the grades that they want, or the apprenticeships that they want, when statistically a lot of the most successful people are actually people that have been in care. They've got the

drive and they want to achieve well. So I think there needs to be some kind of training or just information for teachers in general.

[24] **Sioned Williams:** Thank you. Rosie.

[25] **Rosie:** I think it's very similar to Elisa. Fortunately my experience was really good in education, but there were a lot of the things that Elisa just mentioned—so, for example, teachers not necessarily having that understanding. I know we mentioned throughout the summit training for teachers, and also, like you just said, bad behaviour. I think it's the stigma, and I think that is going to be a recurring theme to be honest. But just like you said, the bad behaviour isn't discussed—it's just assumed, with being in care. And throughout the summit as well we also discussed asylum seekers who come across who are care experienced as well, and even their lack of education. We've spoken to some young people who had three hours a week, and the language barrier was a major thing there, but it's what we can do around that.

[26] Then another major issue that we've heard from a few young people would be LAC meetings, looked-after child meetings, within school—more so if people come in in their uniforms. So, with their suits and their badges it just becomes obvious to all other children around you, and then is that what we want? Also, who we want to be there. So, are our teachers actually being informed? For me, I didn't have a LAC meeting with school until secondary school, so I didn't see social workers for that time, for example. But on the whole I think the experience was good, but just seeing that me and Elisa had similar experiences.

[27] **Sioned Williams:** So, things around awareness and things around stereotyping and stigma.

[28] **Rosie:** Yes, definitely, and the training, as we mentioned. So, regular training.

[29] **Elisa:** I think as well, other—. I think sometimes kids who have been adopted specifically as well can have—. I think teachers struggle sometimes with that, because I think they're told that they're meant to treat them as if they're no different to anyone else. So, they're kind of—. If the school deals with kids who've been in care really well, or kids who are currently in care really well, they kind of forget about the ones who have experienced it but might have a traditional stable family now, but it doesn't take away from

their experience or the help they might need. That's just a small note.

[30] **Jayne Bryant:** That's really helpful. James.

[31] **James Evans:** What helped you the most when you were in care? What services were provided that actually helped you? What things do you think could have been put in place to make it better when you were there?

[32] **Rosie:** Around education or in general?

[33] **James Evans:** In general.

[34] **Rosie:** I think, for me, the main one would be Roots. So, that's where I went since I was six, for example, and that provided great support because it meant that me and my siblings got a break from our carer, our carer got a break from us. But, unfortunately, I'd say that's it, and I think that is one of the priorities, because my grandparents didn't get any support—so, in terms of advice and stuff. Financially, I know that was different to a foster carer, for example, but just support on the whole was lacking for them, I feel.

[35] **Elisa:** Yes, similar. I didn't have any support. The only support I had was my foster family, so I would say that I only had a positive experience because I was lucky to find a really good foster family for a period of time. There was no other support during the time I was there. I also have an adopted sibling, so not biological. He was older—both of us technically old for adoption, and he was older. He had no support at all, and no support post adoption. He unfortunately was someone who had behavioural issues, and if you wanted help from social services or anything, all the local authority did was basically say you'd have to start as if the child have never been in care before, and start proceedings again.

[36] **James Evans:** So, what sort of support do you think could help? Because when we're going back to Government, we'd like to put some recommendations forward of what we actually think could help you. So, what sort of support would you like to see in place to help young people?

[37] **Rosie:** I think my priority would be for the carer, and I think it would be just regular check-ups. Unfortunately, like Elisa, my sister had ADHD, for example, and obviously that gets more challenging. Obviously, she had medication, but that didn't come around until later on. So, my grandparents, who weren't educated on the subject enough, unfortunately, had to work

with it, and they struggled, they really did struggle, and seeing the stress that struggling put on themselves was awful. So, I just think regular—. So, making sure that we see any problems earlier on so that it doesn't get to the point that, unfortunately, it did in my case.

[38] **Elisa:** I think something that I've seen, especially this year with some people that I know, is when there are transitional periods, there's a big lack of sitting down with the child and going through what a family looks like. Normally when they do go through that, they're like, 'Here's the mum, here's the dad', there's one about the single mother, especially if a child is coming from a mother-and-a-father situation, or from a single-parent situation and they're moving to having two parents or one parent, or same-sex parents, or something. There needs to be a consistent, I think, transitional period when going through that, so that the child can come to terms with it, because they do understand and it just needs to be broken down.

[39] I think there should be emotional support, and that should be carried through from the time you're in care to whenever you—even if you're adopted. I know counselling can sometimes have a stigma, but I think something like that, just to even talk about the process itself, and that it wasn't your fault, especially if you don't have a positive experience and you keep getting new foster parents or new social workers and stuff, because, obviously, those first few years of your life are the most important in terms of development and attachment and things.

[40] **Jayne Bryant:** So, do you think of something like a mentor or an advocate, something like that? Is that what you're thinking?

[41] **Elisa:** I'm not quite sure, because I've heard of a lot of people who have support workers, for example, and the support workers also change or rotate or leave, and that's the one person who they might have relied on the most. And something I did think about was whether or not some things such as an independent development plan, like you have for kids with additional learning needs, if something like that could be developed, because then it requires people who are looking after these children to review their file or review their well-being and put things in place that you actually take the child's wishes and feelings into consideration, and also the school gets copies and things like that.

[42] **Jayne Bryant:** That's really helpful. I think we're already getting some ideas of things to put in our recommendation. I'll just bring Ken in and then I'll go back to James, then.

[43] **Ken Skates:** Thanks, Chair. So, who did you consider to be your closest allies, who understood you the most, in the circumstances that you faced?

[44] **Jayne Bryant:** Who wants to go? Rosie?

[45] **Rosie:** So, I'd say Roots—I know I've mentioned them a lot—but just because, like I said, I've been going since I was six and I still go there now, so they are the most consistent—

[46] **Helen Mary Jones:** Rosie, tell the committee a bit about what Roots is.

[47] **Rosie:** Okay. The most consistent thing. So, Roots was a charity set up, and they—. They have youth groups for care-experienced young people, but they have so many more groups. They have groups of older age groups, they have groups for young parents, for example, and they now also, in their new building, offer assisted living, then. So, assisting people as they leave care. So, they currently have three flats, and right now they are full. So, as soon as you're 16, you can move into them, so that's most helpful. And, yes, so just having—. And most of the staff, from when I was six, were care experienced themselves. So, given that, I felt they knew the situation we were going through, for example, and, like I said earlier, creating that support network with other young people who have been through the same experiences was really helpful.

[48] **Jayne Bryant:** Elisa

[49] **Elisa:** I think, for me, during care, it was my foster parents—that was the only consistent, stable relationship I had at that age. And then, I think school was very much the safe haven for me. Throughout, even post adoption, there'd always be one teacher in every school who I was really close to or loved that they would know my situation. But, in care, I'd say it was the foster parents.

[50] **Jayne Bryant:** James.

[51] **James Evans:** You mentioned earlier about your siblings. Were you able to keep in touch with your birth family, or if it was safe to do so? Were you allowed to do that?

[52] **Rosie:** So, in my case, it was eventually. So, like I say, I had kinship care, so I was with my grandparents. So, later down the line, I got to see my parents. It started off being—. So, there would have to be social workers, for example, there at the beginning, but now I can see my father, for example, with no-one. That's just on my own accord. My mum I see with a member of staff still, but I'm also able to keep in touch, yes.

[53] **Elisa:** With me, whilst in care, I think I saw my biological mother until I was two, and then it was deemed to be just not in my best interests, so then, no contact. Then I was adopted at five, so no contact with any biological since.

[54] **Jayne Bryant:** Sioned.

[55] **Sioned Williams:** Can I ask—? You've both mentioned communication and things being explained to you, and that it was a little bit hit and miss. I mean, you both happened to have—. You said that you obviously had your grandparents, although you didn't feel they were properly supported either, and you, Elisa, were talking about that, because you had a number of foster families, and although they were loving, you felt that perhaps that support wasn't quite there for you either in regard to communication of—. You know, you were young. Did you ever feel it was or wasn't properly communicated to you what was happening to you while you were in care? You talked about the transition periods, didn't you, when you felt that that wasn't happening, Elisa? Do you feel that that kind of aspect could have been improved of your experience, or that of people that you know?

[56] **Elisa:** Yes. I think the problem people had with me was that I would talk about it from a really young age. I have always been really chatty about it, and really open, and my parents have always been really open, because they knew, when I came to them at about five, five and a half, that I knew what was going on. I've seen situations this year where social workers or foster parents haven't spoken to the child about their situation, because they assume that they're too young to know. I do think it should be filtered, obviously, too, to meet their understanding of their own situation, but I think there's a misconception that children can't understand what's happening, and I think in situations like this, where it's so out of our control, having that

knowledge is just a little bit of control that we can have, and it's quite important for us, I think. So, I think communicating with the child, even if it's step by step, like, 'This is what's happening next' and 'This is what it might look like' or 'This is what it might not look like', I think, would be really beneficial.

[57] **Sioned Williams:** And from your experience, that needs to be improved.

[58] **Elisa:** Yes.

[59] **Rosie:** I completely agree. So, a lack of communication. I remember that if social workers, for example, would be at the house, it would be when we were in school, and then if we'd come home and that was happening, we'd be asked to go out of the room, so we weren't even allowed in the room at the time. And I think, speaking to a lot of other young people, that was the same: decisions being made quickly and not explained at all. So, if they were moving placements or switching social workers, for example, they could switch and the next time you arranged to meet them, you wouldn't know you were seeing someone new. They would just turn up and be like, 'Hi', so we wouldn't even expect it in that sense. I was put under a special guardianship order quite quickly, so I don't know if that would affect that, but I'd like to emphasise that I don't think that that should be the case, because despite the fact that, yes, they were my grandparents and they were deemed fit, I think there should be support constantly. It felt almost as if, 'Yes, you're safe—we're moving on,' and I don't think that's fair on the young person or the carers.

[60] **Jayne Bryant:** James.

[61] **James Evans:** You hear sometimes, anecdotally, that the social worker knows best. I'd just like to know, do you think your views and opinions were taken into account, the older you got and the more able to think more independently and had your own voice and such? Do you think the social work system listened to what you had to say, or do you think it was very much, 'They know best'?

[62] **Rosie:** I suppose, when I was young—. Oh sorry, go on.

[63] **Elisa:** No, you can go.

[64] **James Evans:** Clearly, there's an interest in that one.

[65] **Rosie:** When I was young, I don't know if I experienced that as much, and obviously I understand that the adults would have known best then. I think, the only thing I can say, growing up—. So, I'm still in kinship care. My sister is now in foster care. I've gone SGO now, sorry, but kinship. In terms of contact, I think people should be more considerate, so, on the one hand making sure contact is possible, but then on the other hand not pressuring that. At the beginning, for me, that wasn't the best option, yet that kept being a reoccurring thing, and I think the priority was on one of us in the situation and not both of us. But I think we should have been both taken into account. So, I don't know, as I've gotten older, if that has been any better, but like I said, I haven't had that much experience, to be honest, that I could say, 'Definitely.'

[66] **Jayne Bryant:** Elisa.

[67] **Elisa:** I think, with mine, looking back on my notes and stuff, even at three or four and when the adoption proceedings were taking place, it does note some of my wishes and feelings, but I was very aware of my situation. I knew I would be going to a new family. I knew I wasn't returning to my biological. I guess it's slightly different for me because in adoption proceedings I think they have to ask the child, 'Are you happy to be moving?' and I said 'yes', so I'm not sure if it would have been any different if I had turned around and said 'no.' So, my wishes and feelings were taken into account at a really young age. But I know I had a good social worker, so I think it's also very dependent on who your social worker is, because I've heard other stories where young kids don't get any say or they don't get a great experience because of their social worker. So, I don't think there's consistency.

[68] **Jayne Bryant:** Have either of you asked for your case notes at all, or is that something—?

[69] **Elisa:** Pardon? Sorry.

[70] **Jayne Bryant:** Have you asked for your case notes at all?

[71] **Elisa:** My parents were given my entire file when I was adopted. So, I had that, but I didn't read them until I was 18. So, I've got all my case notes.

[72] **Jayne Bryant:** Okay. Thank you. Just thinking about, maybe, people who

you've spoken to as well who are leaving care and how well-prepared people are leaving care. Rosie, you mentioned Roots, really, and that organisation. Is Roots throughout Wales, or how well is that—? Is it just in a particular area?

[73] **Rosie:** So, yes, we just have one building at the moment, and that's in Swansea, in south Wales. So, no, we don't support all of Wales right now.

[74] **Jayne Bryant:** So, what do you think about people leaving care and how they're best—? Are they being helped? Do you think there's enough information about—? We've talked about transitions, and that is a time when you know things are approaching and the time is approaching; have you heard from people as well about how prepared they are when they leave care?

[75] **Rosie:** Yes, so, personally I haven't experienced that, because I'm only 16, but I know through work with Voices from Care and speaking to young people all over Wales that a lot of the things that came up in the summit were actually around that. So, preparing the young person before they go and giving them enough time so they know how they'd move out by themselves. And also things like being able to stay with your foster carer, potentially, listening to that. And so if you wanted to wait until you were 25, for example. But, there were a lot of things that came up around that, yes.

[76] **Jayne Bryant:** Elisa, any points from you about what you've heard, or your experience?

[77] **Elisa:** I obviously didn't age out of the system or anything like that, so I can't really add anything to that one.

[78] **Jayne Bryant:** So, do you think that other people—? Perhaps Rosie can help then as well in terms of that information that young people have when they leave care. Do you think they've got enough information at the moment?

[79] **Rosie:** From speaking to other young people, I don't think so. I think that organisations like Voices, for example, help, but then if you don't know about these organisations yet, how would you know this information? Like we said about consistency with social workers, for example, at that point, if we're not in contact with them, how would we know that information? And then, again, looking at things like these, talking about leaving care but also at that age, things like going to university, for example, and being aware of

the options you have around that. Those were issues that a lot of young people talked about and discussed.

[80] **Elisa:** I think, as well, one of the only things I could maybe add is that I think there's a massive difference in services provided in north Wales and south Wales. I think locality is a big problem here. There are a lot more services in the south than there are in the north—with anything, not just the care system. I don't think that we could ever get a clear picture of the situation when there are no services up in the north.

[81] **Sioned Williams:** Are you talking specifically about things like support services and advocacy services, then?

[82] **Elisa:** Yes, support services, advocacy services, even if you look at solicitors, if children ever need solicitors in terms of guardians and things like that, it's always a southern firm. It'll be from Swansea or Cardiff most of the time. Even in my last role, I was at the Children's Legal Centre Wales at Swansea University and I was with the Children's Commissioner for Wales as well, and we were trying to come up with a database of services across Wales, and we could find barely any up north, but it was a struggle to even find what services were in the south.

[83] **Jayne Bryant:** Thank you.

[84] **Elisa:** I don't think the document was even finished because we just couldn't find them.

[85] **Jayne Bryant:** Thank you. That's really helpful. And just to say on the point around universities, we've been doing our inquiry into mental health support in higher education, and we have heard some evidence as well around care-experienced young people, so hopefully—. We haven't published our report yet, but that sort of thing is some of the evidence that we've heard as well. James.

[86] **James Evans:** I was actually going to talk about that, because I know Rosie's still 16 and probably not old enough to answer this question yet. But we heard about the service, and the support you do get—or what support you get, I should say—so, when you reach a certain age, it just falls off a cliff edge in a way and you're just left on your own to fend for yourself, to find your own way through. Did that happen to you, and did anybody give you, like Jayne was saying, any advice or help on what you do next, where you get

accommodation, how you go about planning your future, that type of thing?

[87] **Elisa:** With me?

[88] **James Evans:** Yes, if that that's all right, yes.

[89] **Elisa:** No, because I was adopted, the system is different. So, I'm technically meant to count as the same as someone who is biologically related to anyone. So, technically, I wouldn't be eligible for any of those services, purely because we've signed a document saying—*[Inaudible.]*—.

[90] **Jayne Bryant:** Thank you. I don't know if you've heard of anybody, in your discussions or when you've talked to people, have you heard how that would—? Or whether people are being impacted?

[91] **Rosie:** I know that one young person's very passionate about it, and she said that she actually missed out on a lot of her education, because—. I can't remember where she said she came from, but she moved to Wales, and then there was sort of no support. [She said she missed out on education for a shockingly long time], and then I think she said there was no encouragement into going to university, for example.

[92] **Elisa:** I think I spoke to someone before, as well, if I remember correctly, where she had been provided with accommodation after ageing out of the system, but she couldn't decide on location and things like that, so was actually being moved away from what she knew. And then there was—. I can't quite remember what it was, but there was also that there was a time limit on it, so then she had to move again. So, it was kind of like repeating the experience she'd had in care into adult life, and then because you're moving so much and trying to maybe go to a nearby college or something like that, you're constantly—*[Inaudible.]*—or moving or not able to sort that aspect of your life out, because all this is going on at the same time.

[93] **Jayne Bryant:** Elisa, would you have appreciated that support that was available to young people in care? Would you, as someone who was adopted, would you have appreciated that support? Would that have helped you?

[94] **Elisa:** I think so, because, in an odd way, it kind of invalidated the experience. It was kind of just like, 'Yes, you went through it, but you've got like a family out of it, so you might be ineligible for any of this now.' But a lot of adopted children—*[Inaudible.]*—they don't succeed, they're not always

successful. So, with my adopted brother, he wasn't a successful adoption story, so we're not in contact, but he would have needed that support, because I think he was 18 when he had to leave in terms of our family. So, I feel like just because you were adopted, it doesn't mean the services aren't required.

[95] **Jayne Bryant:** No. I was talking to somebody, actually, whose adopted father passed away, but then, in terms of his work, when his biological father passed away, even though they'd sort of had a relationship, he wasn't able to have the same amount of time of leave, because he'd already had one—. It's almost like you can have one relationship, you know, which—. That's really helpful.

[96] Sioned, did you—? Sorry, Sioned. Go on.

[97] **Sioned Williams:** I was just going to ask, actually, about something that struck me both from what you've said and from other evidence we've heard, which is that, obviously, everybody is an individual, and everybody's story is going to be different, and they'll have had a care experience in different ways, and their lives have developed differently, as you were saying, Elisa, with different levels of success and different levels of support. One thing that we've heard about, especially where social work and support work are concerned is that it is a one-size-fits-all approach, and you can understand why institutions work that way, because it's easier to manage. What would you change about that, based on your own experience but also on what you feel? What needs to change around that? We can talk about the cliff edges, and we've heard young people speak very powerfully about—. Some people will be completely ready and confident at 18 or 21, and some people are not even going to be feeling that at 28, so there should be somebody or some service you can turn to if you need it. Would you support that?

[98] **Elisa:** Yes. I think, for me, that's where the idea of an independent plan for each one would come in. So, even though you'd have the general system, if everyone has their own independent review plan, then it can be adapted to that individual specifically and their needs and their capabilities. It also requires them to be involved. So, I think something like that would possibly work. Yes, that's just my opinion.

[99] **Sioned Williams:** What do you think, Rosie?

[100] **Rosie:** Just agreeing with that, but then I think that also just stems from the communication aspects. So, we said no communication with the young person. Obviously, if that was there, you would understand the child and young person's needs better to suit them better.

[101] **Sioned Williams:** Because we've heard—. I was talking to some young people who were part of a Barnardo's project in Swansea, and they mentioned Roots, actually, and they were saying how amazing it is. But they were saying they feel sometimes, especially where the social worker is concerned, because—and you touched on this earlier—we know that there's a crisis in social work, we know the workloads are too big—. Some of those young people felt that you have to be in crisis to get attention. Have you ever felt that?

[102] **Rosie:** Yes. When we first got told we'd got to move from our grandparents', that was initially it, but I just remember a long period—. I think my social worker was off work, but we weren't put on to anyone else. So, during that time, we'd be messaging them, we'd be calling them and there was no response at all. We were told to contact the family and friends team, I think, and, again, they told us to ring the social worker, so that wasn't possible. There was a point where—. We'd both moved into our new placement, myself and my sibling, and it wasn't until my new carers said, 'We can't do it,' that there was a response. But we would hope that there'd be support first, and, hopefully, that would work both ways, but if there was support, then we could work together before that was the case. So, I think that's the main time we felt that—not having that communication with the social worker at all and how hard it was to get there.

[103] **Elisa:** There are two experiences with me. One was my own, and one is one that I know someone has gone through this year. So, with mine, it was kind of subtle and indirect, I feel, but I think it got to a point where I was so uncertain about when I was going to be leaving care and being adopted, and I wasn't really being told anything, and I'd just been with a prospective adoptive family who had just returned me, basically. I noticed that when I was then meeting families, I was kind of selling myself, if that makes sense, like, showing all my talents to kind of stress how desirable I was to be in someone's family. I think it was because, for me, I couldn't see the work that the social worker was doing, so I was, like, 'Oh, I've got to do it myself.'

[104] And then, with recent ones, I feel it's the opposite of what you're saying. So, with the demand thing, a family friend was adopting a girl this

year, and they were out of the transition period, but this child had been looking for a family for a few years and it turned out that the social worker had over 100 interests, and was just rejecting them all because she had some attachment to this child, but the child didn't have an attachment to her. I don't know how often that happens, but I think there are issues like that as well where social workers can sometimes become too picky and too extreme when, I'm sure, in 100 people, in a certain amount of time, there would have been prospective adopters, which would have meant she would have been out of the system.

[105] **Jayne Bryant:** James.

[106] **James Evans:** I want to talk just about opportunities, if that's okay. Do you think care-experienced children get the same opportunities as other children with regard to access to sport, the arts? And do you think that the local authorities do enough to support foster carers, adopted parents, to actually make sure you do have the same opportunities as other children do, because I think it's very important that we have that. The Deputy Minister said herself this morning that support does vary across local authorities to what foster families can get. Do you think there is disparity between what you get offered and between other children?

[107] **Elisa:** I personally think so. I know that sports was, for me, not my saviour, but—[*Inaudible.*—]sports was the time where I felt at my best. I don't think I would have been able to release a lot of emotions without sport. But, when in care, I couldn't join clubs and stuff, because you need to pay and fund those external clubs, and especially if you're in a foster placement where there are a few children—they can't use the money to fund external sport activities; it's not just enough money. Especially now, I think, if I remember, with my nephew, going to a football club, even as a four-year-old, was something like £30 a week to go to that, which I don't think—. I don't know if that's even the allowance. That covers a big chunk of the allowance that foster carers get anyway. So, yes, I do think there's disparity.

[108] **Rosie:** I think, similarly, I was going to touch on sports, but more after-school clubs, for example. When I went to secondary school, I'd have the school bus there, and I lived with my grandparents, and neither of those drove anymore, so I had no way of getting home after that club, so that meant that I missed out on things like that. And then I'd also say—you talked about authority providing the support—I think the main chunk of support I've ever got was from organisations, like I've mentioned already, so Voices

and Roots. So, unfortunately, I don't know if we get the support from other places as much.

[109] **James Evans:** We talk a lot about mental health and well-being of young people, and people who are care experienced have different traumas to other people, and I think it's very important that we give opportunities for young people to do sports, or the after-school clubs, because it does help with mental health and well-being. I don't think what you've experienced should be any barrier to access and your talents and developing yourselves as individuals.

[110] **Jayne Bryant:** Absolutely. Yes, absolutely. Are there any other questions? I wanted to ask if you've got anything else to add, really. But is there anything in particular? You've said about the biggest change you'd like to see in the system. If there was one thing, or two things—well, it can be a number of things—.

[111] **Elisa:** There is one part of the system that I think is really bad. I think a lot of people don't think about it, but I think it's quite disturbing. It's more when you're going from care into adoption, I think. But when there's matchmaking going on with families, and a family's learning about a child, to this day, you're still shown a catalogue of kids, basically. It looks like you're shopping for a child, and I don't think that that's okay at all, and the words used as well. It's not even, 'A child; red hair; blue eyes'; it's, 'A child with beautiful long locks.' It's too descriptive and it shouldn't be based on looks, but also I don't think it should be in a catalogue like you're shopping.

[112] **Jane Bryant:** That's a really good point. Thank you for that. Rosie.

[113] **Rosie:** So, I thought about the most important thing to me, and then, for all young people in general. So, for me, having experience in kinship care, I'd say that I just don't understand why they're treated differently. More so, financially, a foster carer to a kinship carer—I know that I touched on this earlier—it's the same job; they're still going out of their way to look after this child, why should they receive any less support, any less finance? I don't think it's fair at all. And, then, thinking about all young people, so, again, what we said earlier, just the consistency. I that know Elisa touched on it. So, like having a social worker, they could be the most consistent thing in your life for a lot of young people, you move a lot and so, you don't see these carers for a long time. So, I think, we really do need to prioritise social services, for example, or having that one person that stays consistent

throughout.

[114] **Jane Bryant:** So, is there anything else that you'd like to tell us that we haven't touched on today—anything that you think could help, or any other points that you'd like to make?

[115] **Rosie:** I'd just like to touch on a few points from the summit, if I could, please—so, the most important to me.

[116] **Jane Bryant:** Absolutely.

[117] **Rosie:** I know I've mentioned some already today, so far, accidentally. The ones I haven't mentioned—

[118] **Jane Bryant:** No, that's good.

[119] **Rosie:** Like we said earlier, the trauma and crises that young people and care-experienced people experience. We've said, that, as a nation, we need to understand how the trauma affects us as individuals and as a community, and then, also breaking down that stigma—that you're not just choosing to be badly behaved, for example, there's something that's stemmed that. And then, again, communication with the child or young person, understanding why they've behaved in this way, for example. And again, foster carers, we said—more being recruited, but also making sure that they have the right values and behaviours to support the children, so the idea of 'we're people, not profit'. And then, we really wanted to emphasise regular training and support, so whether that be for the foster carer or for teachers, for example, everything's changing. And also, understanding, like you said earlier, the one-size-fits all approach—obviously that's not the case, and so, training to ensure that that is it.

[120] I wanted to touch as well—I know Elisa said earlier—on, in schools, treating everyone the same, and I think that that should be something that we prioritise, because despite the fact that you're in care, you should be treated the same as any other young person.

[121] And then, again, just like earlier, care-experienced young asylum seekers will have the same rights to education as every other young person. We really need to be prioritising that. So, if there's a language barrier, breaking that down. It's not fair that they're missing out on the education. And the final thing that we said was just that care-experienced children and

young people will do as well at school and college as other children and young people. So, again, the support with getting into higher education, for example, and just knowing what's available to you. Thanks.

[122] **Elisa:** If I can—

[123] **Jane:** Yes, absolutely.

[124] **Elisa:** [*Inaudible.*—reminded me. In terms of the education and stuff, I think the stigma is a big problem and I think it is quite difficult. But I think it was something like—I think there's a statistic that 12 per cent of those who have been in care can get five GCSEs, and that's a C grade, which I don't think falls down at all to their capabilities, I just think it's the lack of understanding and the services there. But also, I think—was it James earlier who said about what help, maybe, that schools could give, or something like that? With companies, for example, they run schemes for ethnic minorities, where you can get traineeships with them for a certain amount of time. I think care-experienced or adopted children having those opportunities as well would be great, because, if they're not children who perform academically well in exams, it doesn't mean that they couldn't set up their own business one day, being, like, the best plumber in Carmarthen or something like—. I think having those opportunities and recognising that they're also a type of minority would be good.

[125] **Sioned Williams:** It's about, isn't it—? Because we know, as you quite rightly said, there are groups in society who are less likely to have the networks that can help you get into a firm or just have that self-confidence. So, it's recognising care-experienced people as a group, and that they could have some kind of affirmative action to help them progress, isn't it? To give them the chance, isn't it? It's an opportunity, as you said; it's not about their abilities, it's about providing an opportunity.

[126] **Elisa:** Yes.

[127] **Jayne Bryant continues:** They're really good suggestions. What would you think about being in care being a protected characteristic and treated in that way?

[128] **Elisa:** I think if it was a protected characteristic it would kind of place a duty on local authorities and the Government to really focus in on the problem. So, I would back it.

[129] **Rosie:** Yes, I agree.

[130] **Jayne Bryant:** Is there anything else that Members would like to add? It's so helpful—I can't say how much it helps us to hear from people like yourselves, who are going through this or have gone through it. It really does help us get some recommendations that we can really shape, and hopefully make sure that the Government focus on, really. So they've got big ambitions, and we're keen to help shape this as well, and hold them to account with those big ambitions.

[131] We can keep you up to date with everything that we're doing throughout this as well. We'll share with you all of our progress. We've got lots of things going on, so, yes, at every point—. And then, obviously, we'll have a report, and following that report, the Government will respond to our report, and then we have a debate in the Senedd. So, there are a few bites of the cherry along the way, really. So, hopefully this will raise the profile of this really important agenda. Thank you so much for coming in and for sharing with us. We really appreciate it.

[132] **Elisa:** Thanks for having us.

[133] **Rosie:** Diolch yn fawr.

[134] **Elisa:** Diolch.

[135] **Jayne Bryant:** Okay, brilliant. Thank you. We will see you soon and we'll hopefully be in touch, if you follow our work. And like I said, sorry about the giant table. [*Laughter.*]

[136] **Sioned Williams:** If there's anything you think of when you leave the room—because I do this all the time—you can just get in touch with the committee. If something comes to you, or if you hear something else—this isn't your only opportunity. Just get in touch with the committee.

[137] **Jayne Bryant:** Yes, absolutely. Sioned's right. Anytime. Thanks for coming in.