LISTEN TO OUR VOICES!
HEARING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN THE CARE OF THE STATE

SUMMARY
**Main Things Young People in Care Said Were Important**

- Having a right to see their birth parents without being made to if they don't want to.
- Being treated as 'one of the family' in foster care.
- Foster families should be checked out and have preparation and training in 'how to be a good foster family'.
- There is not enough information for young people in care, especially about 'aftercare' (what happens after they turn 18).
- There is too much moving around, which can be very upsetting.
- It is really important for young people in care to have at least one person to 'listen' or to 'be there'.
- Information about young people in care should be kept private.
- If you tell someone about something private, they should not tell everyone else.
- Every single thing about a young person in care does NOT need to be written down in a file every day (in residential care).
- Having good Internet access.
- Being able to have a pet.

As well as these things, two other things were talked about a lot by young people in care:

- **Social work services**: Some young people in care said that their social worker was 'really good'; they really liked when they were honest and gave 'straight answers'. Young people aged 8-12 liked their social workers, but most people over 12 did not. They did not feel that the social worker listened to them and they made promises that they did not keep. They also thought that they made their problems worse. The biggest complaint was that they never got to see their social worker, especially if they lived in Dublin. Young people in care thought that more social workers were needed.

- **Care plan reviews**: Care plan reviews are meetings to talk about and make decisions about what happens for each young person in care. Some young people in care did not know what a 'review' was because they had never been at one, even though that is where really important decisions about their life in care were made. Most young people who had been at a 'review' meeting did not like it. They said there were too many adults there, whom they had not invited, and that it was too difficult for them to say anything in front of all these adults, who then just took over the decisions. Young people also thought that 'nothing changed' after the meetings so they were 'a waste of time'.
THINGS YOUNG PEOPLE SAID TO DO TO MAKE THEIR LIVES IN CARE BETTER

- Have better social work services, where social workers have fewer young people to look after. That way they can spend more time with the young people that they DO look after.
- Change ‘care plan reviews’ (meetings to talk about what happens for young people in care) so it is easier for young people to speak up and have more of a say in the decisions that are made about them.
- Foster families should be checked out more before they are allowed to foster young people.
- Foster families should HAVE TO do training before they become a foster family.
- Have more information for young people in care on, for example:
  - how the care system works;
  - aftercare;
  - groups that work with young people in care.

HAVING YOUR VOICE HEARD

Young people who are in Detention Schools (places where the Courts can send young people if they do things that break the law) and St. Patrick’s Institution (a type of prison for young boys) are not allowed leave if they want to. They had some different things to say, e.g.

- drugs and alcohol are a big part of their lives;
- they don’t have much freedom or privacy (e.g. having time alone or keeping information about themselves secret);
- the services (like the shop or gym) are not very good;
- they don’t get much respect from the people who work there.

They also had some ideas to help make their voices heard:

- being treated like humans (St. Patrick’s Institution) and being respected by the people who work in the school or prison;
- having a group to tell the people who work in the prison or school what young people think;
- being able to talk to a person who does not work there;
- having a visit from the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to talk about important things.

WHAT NOW?

It is REALLY important that the people who look after children in care LISTEN to all of these ideas from young people who are living in care and, most importantly, DO SOMETHING about it.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs
43 Mespil Road, Dublin 4
Tel: +353 (01) 647 3000
Fax: +353 (01) 667 0826
Email: contact@dcya.gov.ie
Web: www.dcy.ie