

## Answers made us smile

### Three young people explain how they found their voices in the care system.

In total the three of us have clocked up eleven years in the care system. That may not seem like a lot, but for us being in care was a make or break situation.

While in care, with Bexley Social Services, south London, we felt that we asked lots of questions that didn't seem to get answered. But we were not alone. It was so common to hear young people in care and care leavers saying: "My social worker never listens to me and when they do they belittle me."

Hearing these comments all too often, Bexley decided to take steps to find out why this complaint kept recurring. This time it was not the adults who did the investigating, but us. We formed a small group and met every week to conduct interviews with a social worker, a manager and an educational liaison officer.

We were trained in interview techniques by peer trainers at Children's Express. And with these skills we were able to get the long awaited answers to our questions.

We asked a senior social worker why there are still no young people on the foster care panel in Bexley when perspective foster carers are chosen. We asked a leaving care manager how effective she thought the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 was and what sort of emotional help they give young people leaving care. Our final question was about what sort of financial help was available to young people thinking about going into higher education.

We received our answers, and left each interview with the satisfaction that we were finally getting our voices heard. We also left feeling that we wanted to do more for young people in care and those who have left care.

What surprised us most of all, was that those concerned with the care of young people at Bexley were a lot more in touch with people's doubts and fears than we first thought. Some of the information we found out even brought a smile to our faces.

We will publish the outcome of all the interviews in a special document called *Listen to Us*, which will be circulated among social workers and care workers.

We don't know if other local authorities have allowed young people to question their care workers or social workers, but we believe it's a very good idea to give care leavers and those in care a platform in which to voice their opinions.

At the end of the day it is we who have to live in the care system, so we should have the opportunity to say what's on our minds. We feel a lot still needs to be done to improve social services.

And if services for young people are to improve, then doing projects that involve us in face-to-face discussions and help restore our faith in Social Services can only be a positive step forward.

**About the team** This story was produced by Mark Smith 18, Sarah Coleman 19 & Karen Bull 17 - all care leavers. It was published in [Community Care](#) magazine.

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