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# Improving outcomes for children already living in care

First published: 30 Medi 2019

Last updated: 28 Hydref 2024

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Find out more about what the MAG are doing to improve the outcomes for children who are already living in care

## **What are the challenges for children living in care?**

We know care experienced young people are less likely to achieve good educational qualifications and more likely:

- to have greater health, well-being and housing needs as adults
- to be involved in substance misuse
- to have a disability or diagnosed mental, emotional or behavioural issues
- to have contact with the criminal justice system.

### [Analysis of outcomes for children and young people 4 to 5 years after a final care order](#)

As corporate parents of children who are looked after, it is a local authority's responsibility to keep them safe, to make sure that their experiences in care are positive, and to improve their access to opportunities that will help them to succeed in life.

## **What is the Improving Outcomes for Children programme doing to support children living in care?**

The IPC research above shows 71 per cent of children in their sample had overall positive outcomes four to five years after a final care order.

These children had stable placements and good education. However, many of these children continued to need support with their education, health, and well-being.

The joint three-year education and social services strategy, [Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales](#) aims to strengthen arrangements to support the education of children who are looked after by achieving a better understanding of the barriers faced by looked after children as learners in education and how social and education services can work together to deliver better outcomes.

The Pupil Development Grant will continue for the rest of this Assembly term.

Through these grant arrangements, regional education consortia receive £4 million a year to provide educational support to children who are looked after.

Consequently, we have far greater understanding of the barriers which face these learners and effective ways in which those barriers can be removed, for example [What works to improve the educational outcomes of Children in Need of help and protection: A literature review](#).

## **Helping children who have adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)**

In part because of early life experiences, care experienced children are more likely to experience poor mental and emotional health.

Providing the right level of help, including therapeutic support, can reduce the emotional trauma caused by the impact of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and other disadvantages.

As part of the mental health school in-reach pilots, we are currently exploring how the needs of vulnerable children (including those who are being looked after) can be addressed.

Welsh Government contributed £400k this year towards the ACE Support Hub. In addition, it is investing £2.5 million to develop adoption support services which help adopted children who need a form of emotional support but may not need the specialist service provided by CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services).

Relevant documents include [Mind over matter: emotional and mental health support for children and young people](#) and [Listen. Act Thrive: The Emotional and Mental Health of Care Experienced Children and Young People](#).

## **Supporting children in the criminal justice system**

[In Care, Out of Trouble](#) is the outcome of an independent review chaired by Lord Laming which examines the reasons for, and how best to tackle, the over representation of children in care, or with experience of care, in the criminal justice system

In response, a Welsh Action Plan for reducing the number of children who are looked after and enter the youth justice system was published in August 2017.

A Task and Finish Group has been established to monitor delivery.

The Welsh Government has produced a Welsh Action Plan in response to the independent review In Care, Out of Trouble about how best to tackle the over representation of care experienced children in the criminal justice system.

## **Providing children and young people with the placements and support they need**

Stable placements are crucial to providing children in care with a feeling of belonging and security - one of the keys to better life chances and educational attainment.

For children already in care, this means making every effort to re-unify families when appropriate, in the interests of the child and when it is safe to do so.

Almost three-quarters of children looked after in Wales are placed with foster carers and, in the last 15 years, the number placed with kinship carers has almost doubled.

However, as the number of children looked after has grown, there has been an increase in the use of independent foster agencies and out of county placements.

There is strong evidence it's becoming more difficult to match children with appropriate placements across the range of options such as fostering, adoption and residential care.

The overall strategic approach needed is set out in NICE guidelines:

[Surveillance report 2017 - Looked-after children and young people](#)

In Wales, work is being done to improve sufficiency, choice and quality of placements through better commissioning and regional working, to ensure the right placements in the right locations.

The MAG are:

- gathering evidence of pressures on the availability of local authority placements and why they have a high cost
- using this evidence to inform a national approach to commissioning placements across the public and independent sectors
- increasing the focus on children's services (including placements for children who are looked after) in the work of the National Commissioning Board and Regional Programme Boards.

The MAG has also funded the Practice standards and good practice guide for independent visitors.

[Practice standards and good practice guide - Independent visitors](#)

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## **The role of local authorities in supporting children to remain in safe and stable placements**

Local and central government in Wales have invested in national, regional and local initiatives to improve placement choice, quality and stability.

This includes the [National Adoption Service](#) and the [National Fostering Framework](#).

The MAG has also commissioned a profile of children's residential care in Wales and its different models, [Residential care in Wales: the characteristics of children and young people placed in residential settings.](#)

The MAG has also commissioned work on improved data collection, models of residential care, out of area / cross-border placements, and remand / Place placements.

The Public Accounts Committee in the National Assembly is investigating whether public spending on these services is leading to good outcomes and represents value for money:

[Public Accounts Committee: Care experienced children and young people](#)

[The Welsh Government Response 2019](#)

What we already know is social services departments in Wales spent £284 million on children who are looked after in 2017-18.

This compares to £147 million spent ten years earlier.

This reflects the rising numbers of children who are looked after and the legal duties of local authorities. This doesn't include other public spending such as in health and education.

The MAG are learning from other countries. For example, The Fostering Network (in partnership with Cwm Taf Social Services and Cwm Taf Well-being Partnership Board) is leading on a social pedagogy project.

This innovative approach helps all those involved in the lives of fostered children and young people to understand and respond to developing education and life skills in a holistic way.

When a child or young person becomes 'looked after' by their local authority and is placed with:

- a kinship carer (a family member or close friend)
- a foster carer
- a residential home
- at home with parents
- adopted

the child or young person must have an 'independent reviewing officer' (IRO).

The IRO is independent of the child or young person's social worker and has certain responsibilities set out in the Welsh law which covers children and young people who are looked after.

The Association for Fostering and Adoption (AFA) Cymru has produced practice standards and a good practice guide endorsed by the Welsh Government.

These set out how the IRO should monitor, review and support the child or young person's care and support plan. It also sets out the local authority's responsibilities to ensuring the IRO can carry out their work:

[Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide: Reviewing and monitoring of a child or young person's Part 6 Care and Support Plan](#)