

# Children who are looked after



Find out more about what we're doing to help improve the lives of children who are looked after or care experienced.

First published: 1 April 2019

Last updated: 27 January 2025

This document was downloaded from [socialcare.wales](https://socialcare.wales) and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://socialcare.wales/resources-guidance/improving-care-and-support/children-who-are-looked-after> for the latest version.

Improving outcomes for children who are looked after or care experienced is one of our three national priority areas for improvement in Wales

## Who are children who are looked after?

Children and young people who are 'looked after' don't live with their parents, either temporarily or permanently, because for many reasons they can't safely take care of them.

As of 31 March 2018, over 6000 children in Wales are looked after away from home, mostly living with:

- extended family members or friends
- foster carers
- in residential child care (including residential school)
- adopters
- living independently.

Many of them experience placement moves ([10 per cent had lived in three homes or more in 2016/17](#)), often far from home.

Children are looked after largely through experiencing abuse, trauma and/or neglect. They need high quality care, and the right help at the right time. We know children do best when they have [consistent, stable relationships and live in a safe home](#), so we're working with partners to support the people who care for these children.

We know we need to improve social care for care experienced children, including supporting them to be physically and mentally well, to reach their goals, and use the Welsh language if they choose.

## **Residential child care worker resource**

### **Residential child care worker resource**

A resource for residential child care professionals that supports good practice by giving access to essential information, case studies, data, and research.

## **How are we helping to improve outcomes for children who are looked after?**

We work with Welsh Government's Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) on improving outcomes for children to:

- safely reduce the number of children in need of care
- have sufficient, high quality placements
- support children to have the best possible journeys through care and into adulthood
- develop a sustainable workforce and good professional practice to support children who are looked after.

We're working with residential child care providers to support them to develop their workers and improve the quality of care that is offered to children living in residential homes.

### **Improving outcomes for children programme**

Find out more about our work with Welsh Government's Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) on improving outcomes for children.

We also register workers and managers in children's homes and you can [search our register](#) to find information about them.

Some of our other work to support children who are looked after includes:

- developing [training resources around safeguarding](#)
- revising [Evidence Matters in Family Justice](#) in 2018 (a guide to help social workers use research for decision making and to present that research in family court proceedings)
- developing qualifications to ensure the children who are looked after workforce is safe and competent to practise
- launching a social care worker recruitment campaign in March 2019, including people who support children living in residential child care and in foster care
- [mapping research about work what people are already doing to support care experienced children](#), to study good practice in child care across Wales and to look at how we can share that learning with our workforce.

## **The experiences and outcomes of children and young people from Wales receiving Secure Accommodation Orders**

We commissioned a research report by CASCADE at Cardiff University that looks at the experiences and outcomes of children and young people receiving Secure Accommodation Orders in Wales, along with a summary version of the report. This report heard directly from children and young people about their experiences, and made a number of recommendations to improve the system of secure accommodation.

## The experiences and outcomes of children and young people from Wales receiving Secure Accommodation Orders - Summary

### The experiences and outcomes of children and young people from Wales receiving Secure Accommodation Orders

[View transcript](#)

00:08

Many young people eventually enter care have experienced chaotic lives.

00:13

They've often been abused or neglected, making them vulnerable to exploitation,

00:17

substance abuse, self-harm, and mental health difficulties.

00:22

When they come into care, some find the residential foster homes they live in aren't enough.

00:28

These young people often moved from placement to placement until eventually it seems

00:32

only secure accommodation can provide the safe environment they need.

00:37

We spent some time talking with young people and their social workers,

00:40

discussing what it's like living in secure accommodation

00:45

Everyone was having meetings and decisions about where I was in my life

00:49

and it just felt like I wasn't being involved in any of it.

00:53

No one gave me a warning that I was going in to secure.

00:56

I didn't know anything about it. I just had a social worker turn up and she was

01:00

talking me through it and then the next minute these men came up behind me

01:04

and picked me up and threw me in the van and I was like, I didn't know what was going on.

01:09

I thought I'd got kidnapped. It was so scary and it was horrible.

01:16

Many young people described poor experiences of secure

01:19

accommodation and had issues with things like being confined and restrained

01:24

They'll put you in a completely empty room with nothing in. Like take the

01:30

mattress out, everything. And the bathroom would always be locked. The door would

01:34

always be locked until you needed a wee. I got dragged down the corridor. He had

01:39

these massive hands as well. Both his fingers were in my eyes when I was being

01:43

dragged down the corridor. I couldn't see nothing. Like literally, it was horrible.

01:48

I don't think he should have done that.

01:51

In contrast, more relaxed homely units do exist

01:54

and young people who stayed in these found life there easier

01:59

That secure I went to, I loved it because it was all not criminal it was

02:04

all welfare so like they were all really nice and it was more understanding.

02:09

Football, gym, cooking - they have like a music suite in there with Apple Mac

02:14

computers and instruments and that. Stuff like that. I feel better in myself and that

02:18

since I've been there - don't take drugs, don't hang around with the same people

02:23



since I've been there.

02:25

Despite this, few received the help they needed for

02:28

behaviour, emotional and mental health problems.

02:32

When leaving secure accommodation, young people followed different pathways

02:36

Just over a third of these young people settled in new placements and progressed well.

02:41

The rest did poorly. Many became troubled by behaviours such as self-harm and going

02:46

missing and many went back into secure accommodation.

02:52

The prevalence of exploitation mixed in with poor mental health, mixed in with neglect that leads

02:56

to secure or mental presentation that might need sectioning they're increasing.

03:00

Studies show this. I almost feel as if we need a social worker who's actually

03:04

clinically trained as well as the normal route that we go through but that's what

03:08

I want to fight. That's what I'm fighting for now and would like to see.

03:14

Positive outcomes appear to be down to the quality of the young person's placements,

03:17

consistent relationships with key adults and access to sufficient mental health support


03:23

In these cases, placements were maintained, young people continued to

03:27

progress positively and even displayed interests in career planning

03:33



To enable this positive progress for all our young people, action needs to be taken

## **Residential child care conference February 2020**

The conference aim was to challenge the negative perception of residential child care as being a last resort and to share good practice from across the sector to celebrate the successes of residential child care.

### **Contact us**

If you have a question or if you can't find what you are looking for [get in touch with us](#).