

A Lens on.....Participation of Care Experienced Young People



It is vital that all children and young people have the opportunity to participate across the arenas identified in the Learner Participation guide. However some learners face more barriers to full participation.

The Young Radicals¹, a group of care experienced young people who passionately believe in improving the lives of care experienced children and young people, chose two of the four arenas and considered

- what barriers had they encountered which limited participation
- how can adults help facilitate participation in these areas

Learner Participation Area: Opportunities for Personal Achievement



1. What are the barriers to this for care experienced children and young people?

- Additional Support Need bases – care experienced young people being automatically assumed to have additional support needs². This can put barriers up in terms of integrating socially with peers.
- There are variations from school to school in terms of their aspirations for their care experienced young people e.g. some young people were told to leave school while others were encouraged to embrace opportunities.
- It can feel like a 'postcode lottery' which comes down to funding, e.g. school trip which costs £2000, Carer/Local Authority states *"I'm not paid to send you on school trips."*
- Schemes which rely on parental consent or risk assessment,
 - e.g. *"I was allowed to go on a school trip but not allowed to take part in any of the activities as needed extra consent and risk assessment that I couldn't get."*
 - *"Couldn't go to an award ceremony to receive an award I'd done all the work for."*
- Limitations of taxi contracts e.g. a residential for a drama programme. *"I couldn't stay over as my taxi was contractually arranged. Also, couldn't do after school clubs as taxi was pre-booked. I could only go if I could find another way home but didn't have money to do that so HAD to use the taxi."*
- Funding for instruments or music tuition/space to practice was another key issue discussed. One young person described having to give up an instrument as the foster family did not pay the tuition fees.
- Options for care experienced students can be *'feed myself or go to school?'* e.g. section 29 money (Aftercare) only covering food, not uniform etc.
- Most of the supported opportunities for volunteering and community work are from S5 onwards and this can be too late for many care experienced young people.
- When care experienced people leave school early, they miss out on important skills which will help them to successfully navigate interviews etc. in the world of work or FE/HE.
- Getting it right for every child doesn't work in practice in this context, particularly due to poor communication between schools and social work/other corporate parents.
- These barriers can make care experienced people disengage and lose the stepping stones to achievement.

¹ Young Radicals are supported by [Who cares Scotland](#)

² There is of course a duty to assess whether or not a care experienced learner has additional support needs

- These barriers become internalised – being told no so often, care experienced people can start to believe it.

2. How can we help care experienced learners to overcome these barriers to participation?



- Schools need to communicate with social work, e.g. school drama production – school to tell social work about rehearsals and performance times to enable appropriate arrangements to be made, for example, sorting taxi/travel.
- Schools could encourage care experienced people to get into volunteering – this needs dialogue between school/youth workers/carers.
- Offer volunteering opportunities before 5th year. This will work best if the significance of this kind of work is understood and long-standing relationships are utilised.
- Encourage young people to get involved in raising money for charity e.g. appeal of getting to wear own clothes, work outside of school/classroom environment, raise money. Offer these kinds of opportunities to 1st, 2nd and 3rd years.
- Flexible taxi arrangements are needed – not locked into contracts which limit experiences.
- No young person should have to pay for instrument/music tuition.
- Provide spaces in school to practice instruments as care experienced young people can't always do so at home.
- Make sure people who are looked after at home/kinship care are considered and receive adequate support and that school understands these types of care placements. Avoid a tick box approach.
- One Young Radical reflected that they were encouraged and treated the same by their music department and they felt this was good practice in action.

Learner Participation Area: Decision-Making Groups



1. What are the barriers to this?

- Embarrassment (when don't have food/money)
- Foster carers/staff and their expectations re money
- Time limits for letting school know if you can take part
- Being 'singled out' at school
- Lack of self-belief
- Being influenced and having the information (from schools)
- Finances, e.g. using Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for food/clothes.

2. How can we help care experienced learners to overcome this?

- Feeling like you can make a difference.
- Resilience, which = confidence to take part and influence.
- Being part of a collective helps.
- Knowing key people and having an interest/background also helpful.
- Having practice in what decision-making feels like is good.
- If you can make a difference, or influence decision-making – BE RADICAL!
- Giving self-belief and resilience.

- Not assuming re finances in different placements/circumstances etc. For example if a group is running at lunchtime put on lunches (discreetly) /or offer lunch passes (some people don't want to identify).
- Stop the stigma/segregation.
- Bursaries from 3rd year onwards, to help access these opportunities.
- Information sessions / community education (reiterated by teachers and school).
- Online learning.
- Training for teachers.
- Care experience should be a Protected Characteristic!