

Are looked after minds really looked after?

Comparing mental health support for care-experienced young people in England and Wales

1 in 2

Young people living in residential care receive mental health support

Care-experienced young people are

x4

more likely to face mental health issues than their peers

1 in 3

care leavers do not know where or how to access mental health support

Care-experienced young people are much more likely to face mental health issues than their peers and this is often due to factors outside of their control. The reasons why care young people are taken into and living in care itself often negatively impacts mental health.

Between 2021-2022 66% of children in England entered care primarily because of abuse or neglect and in Wales, this figure was 62%. Nine out of ten young people who have experienced abuse or neglect will develop a mental health condition before turning 18 years old.

Under Article 39 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children who have experienced trauma or abuse during their childhood must be provided with specialist support to help them recover.

However access to mental health services for care-experienced young people is limited. The average waiting time for young people to access mental health services is between 8-82 days. Referrals made to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for care-experienced young people frequently are rejected.

Happy Homes, Happy Minds

One in ten care-experienced young people will move home three or more times each year, and only one in six will experience stability in their living arrangements, education, and social workers. These constant changes can prevent young people from building and maintaining the positive relationships that can help support their mental health.

When care-experienced young people have access to the correct mental health services, they are less likely to experience frequent placement changes and are more likely to build stable and long lasting relationships with people who care about them. These relationships are vital to supporting the mental health of care-experienced young people during and after their time in care.

Mental health support for care-experienced young people across England and Wales

Policy	England	Wales
Is a mental health specific screening assessment offered to young people at the point of entering care?	No	No
Is statutory guidance available that promotes the physical and mental health of care-experienced young people?	Yes	No
Is government funding* to access mental health support services available to young people who are adopted?	Yes	Yes**
Are care-experienced young people assigned a transitional worker when moving from CAMHS to adult mental health services?	No	Yes
Is it a statutory right for care-experienced young people to not lose their places on waiting lists for mental health support when they experience placement moves?	Yes	No

*Young people are eligible up to the age of 21 or 25 if they have an Education, Health and Care Plan

** Young people are eligible if have been adopted from a Welsh local authority but must be living in England to receive the fund

NYAS' 'Looked After Minds' campaign calls on the UK and Welsh Governments to take urgent action that prioritises the mental health and wellbeing of care-experienced children and young people. Our message to all care-experienced people is that we hear you, and we will not stop working to improve your access and standard of mental health and wellbeing support through our 'Looked After Minds' campaign.

NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) is a children's rights charity that campaigns for the rights of care-experienced young people across England and Wales, championing their voices to be heard in their decisions. We work to uphold children's right to a standard of living adequate for physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. NYAS is committed to tackling child poverty and its root causes.

Across the Border Briefings are a series of NYAS reports that draw on our experience of working within the different national systems of England and Wales. They aim to highlight best practices, and where improvements need to be made to make sure young people's rights are protected in line with the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). Care-experienced children and young people must receive the best possible support, no matter where they live.



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