

**Summary Report - Children and Young People with Care  
Experience Workshop**

**Hazelwood Integrated College**

**13 October 2022**

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## Introduction

The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care Services in Northern Ireland was announced on 21 January 2022. Ray Jones, Emeritus Professor of Social Work at Kingston University and St George’s University of London, has been appointed as the Lead Reviewer. Professor Jones will be assisted by an Advisory Panel which includes Professor Pat Dolan, UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement; Marie Roulston O.B.E, Former Director of Social Work at the Northern HSC Trust and Her Honour Judge Patricia Smyth, a Deputy High Court Judge who had previously served as an Advisory Panel member on the Gillen Review of Family and Civil Justice.

Since undertaking the Review, Professor Jones has met with a wide range of stakeholders, and importantly, children, young people and parents / carers who have experience of children’s social care services. In order to gather as much feedback as possible, a series of themed workshops will take place to hear from the experts with experience to listen to their views and experiences to help improve children’s social care services.

Children and Young People with Care Experience was the second workshop in the series of planned workshops which was held in Hazelwood Integrated College on 13 October 2022. We were so pleased and proud to have held the workshop in the “best school in the UK” as awarded by the Times Educational Supplement in 2021.



### 1.1 Workshop Objectives

- Highlight the key issues affecting care experienced children and young people within children’s social care services.
- Listen and hear the experiences of people who are in contact with these services.
- Provide an opportunity for children and young people and providers to engage, discuss and feedback on the main challenges and issues to help shape services for the future.
- To help inform and improve delivery of services.

- Explore and examine opportunities to develop robust and sustainable service models.

## **1.2 Attendees**

A total of 90 delegates made up of a wide range of stakeholders attended this second workshop. These included young people, foster parents and adoptive parents, frontline practitioners, service managers, policymakers and representatives from the community, voluntary and statutory sector. Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) facilitated attendance of the young people and Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) and The Fostering Network facilitated attendance of the adoptive parents and foster parents.

## **2. Structure of the Workshop**

The workshop was co-chaired by Adel Varadi and Marie Roulston. Adel is Head Girl of Hazelwood Integrated College and Marie Roulston is a member of the Review Advisory panel.

The workshop was structured as follows:

- Professor Jones opened the workshop to give a word of thanks to Hazelwood Integrated College for hosting the second workshop of the Review. Aine Leslie, Acting Principal, welcomed attendees to the College. The co-chairs, Adel and Marie followed by introducing the workshop programme.
- Attendees were asked to complete a survey questionnaire to identify what they consider to be the three main issues for children and young people with care experience within the children's social care services.
- Four speakers each delivered a five-minute presentation on their experiences of children's social care and identified key issues from their perspective. The speakers included one care experienced young person, one adoptive parent, one foster parent and the school social worker.
- Round table discussions followed. Each table had groups of 8 -10 individuals based on their organisations / roles. This allowed participants to engage in discussions to identify the main issues within children's social care services.
- This information was recorded at each of the tables which was then collated and analysed along with the completed survey questionnaire responses. A summary of the qualitative findings were presented by Professor Dolan, a member of the Review Advisory Panel.
- A plenary discussion was led by Professor Jones enabling attendees to reflect on the key issues and themes that emerged.
- At the end of the workshop delegates were asked to complete a short feedback survey questionnaire, the aim of which is to help improve future workshops.

### **2.1 Key Speakers and Presentations**

Four speakers each delivered five-minute presentations on the three main issues affecting care experienced children and young people within children's social care services.

### **2.2 Presentation from a Young Person**

Rhianna Brown highlighted the key issues within children's social care services from the perspective of a care experienced young person.

- There should be more support for young people leaving care.
- Children's homes are often understaffed and overcrowded and seen as a last resort. These characteristics lead to breakdown.
- Children's homes should be run by Trusts with the same standards as private providers.

- Support workers and social workers are needed OOH; our issues aren't 9-5. 24/7 supports should be available.
- Many young people don't know their social workers.
- Young people need to be more involved in decision-making.
- There needs to be better access to advocacy support.
- Many leave care too young and leave everything they know behind at 18.



### **2.3 Presentation from a Foster Parent**

Hugh Marcus highlighted the key issues within children's social care services from the perspective of a foster parent:

- Hugh framed his presentation around a photo taken on his foster son's wedding day.
- On the day of the wedding, Hugh brought him back to when he was 13. He had been excluded from school for getting in a fight. He was called the worst pupil and Hugh got a lecture on bad parenting.
- Hugh asked how did we get from there to now?
- His son left school at 16 with few qualifications and entered a training programme.
- The trainer mentioned to Hugh that his son would just stare out the window, and Hugh recognised that he often did that.
- The trainer asked what to do, and Hugh said trust me, give him a welding machine. His son is now a successful welder.
- Hugh asked, what was done that made his son become a successful young person?
- Hugh also asked attendees, 'how do we classify our kids when writing a Review?'
- He said the clear reason a Review is needed, is because the system isn't working. 'Are our kids failing us, or are we failing them? Is the system failing them?'
- To come up with effective solutions we need to want the same outcomes.
- Young people with care experience have additional challenges we need to be mindful of. Without understanding what's going on, someone might ask 'why are they distracted?' However, the young person could be absorbed by and thinking about past or current difficult experiences. These are additional issues which aren't easily perceived.



## **2.4 Presentation from an Adoptive Parent**

Dave Linton presented the key issues from the perspective of an adoptive parent:

- Even when young people leave care at 18, they are still 'care-experienced.' This is a narrative that follows them and informs their identity. Many young people still experience trauma even though they have left the care system. This can be seen for instance with attachment issues.
- Policies focused on the care system needs to be child focused. Children and young people in care need to be treated with dignity.
- Issues often take place outside school and are not seen or understood by teachers.
- Parents feel like failures if they go back to the care system.
- It's not that young people leave care, "care leaves them."
- "We value what we do and what we do is what we value." Actions speak louder than words.



## **2.5 Presentation from Hazelwood College Social Worker**

Eimear Rafferty presented the key issues from the perspective of an onsite school social worker:

- Effective communication is extremely important at all levels, between social workers and foster parents, young people, and to the school. There are issues happening

outside school which is not feeding back. This results in a lack of understanding of the lives of the young people. In turn, they don't get the support they need.

- Caseloads are too high; social workers are often expected to deliver the same work for 32 young people as they would have for 15. This is a failing in the system which means the young people do not get the service they deserve. It also causes burnout among social workers.
- Often, the 'life story' of young people in care is not prioritised, i.e. the narrative of their lives up to this point, and the reasons why they entered the care system. This causes young people to struggle when they try to understand their past, which impacts both their present and future.
- There are also different thresholds and responses across Trusts.
- Family contact is often not administered properly.
- The wellbeing of social workers doesn't receive enough focus from Trusts, which leads to vacancies. Offering proper support to social workers would help young people in turn.



A copy of Eimear's presentation is available at Appendix 1.



### **3. Round Table Discussions**

Following the presentations, delegates engaged in group discussions to identify the three main issues affecting care experienced children and young people within children's services. Each delegate was seated at tables according to their respective organisation / role to allow them to speak openly and discuss what issues impact them directly. A facilitator was assigned at each of the tables to lead discussion and record the key issues. Appendix 2 set out the detail of the key points, from each group's discussion and feedback, in bullet point format.



### **4. Summary Analysis of Issues by Professor Pat Dolan**

The information recorded during the group discussions was analysed by Professor Pat Dolan with the assistance of the Review Secretariat. This information was compared with the qualitative data obtained from the survey questionnaires to identify common themes and trends. Research findings were presented onto a PowerPoint Presentation. Appendix 3 provides a summary of the common issues and themes in bullet point format.

## 5. Plenary Discussion

Professor Jones led the plenary discussion. Delegates were asked to contribute to an open floor discussion to give their feedback on how children's social care services should be improved to help shape the recommendations of the Review. Key points from the discussion are summarised below in bullet point format.



### 5.1 Children's Homes

- Children's Homes – we could do better, select staff, training, unified approach across the Trusts.
- Is there a role for foster carers expertise in Children's Homes?
- Age ranges in children's homes –12 – 14 year olds and 15 – 18 years olds - 17 year olds should not be placed with younger children.
- Year on year funding / one year funding – clear role / remit, fit within menu of services.
- Some flexibility introduced during covid pandemic ceased/lost – example of 2 bed annex to bigger Children's Home in Southern Trust – a success!
- There is benefit and a need for Children's Homes and the flexibility they can provide.
- Expertise from other – i.e. Meeting with Adoption NI.

### 5.2 Foster Care and Kinship Care

- Foster Care - struggling with number of placements / number of placement moves.
- Workforce pressures across the board for SWs and Foster Carers.
- Lack of support – expectation of support when approved.
- Post covid – wellbeing not being looked after.
- Issue re finance – can't recruit carers – cost of living crisis – issues re support.
- Regulations need updated – no standards.
- System in crisis – issues of accountability – introduce a system of inspection?
- Frustration – 23 foster care field schemes, no mechanism to be represented in policy to inspection – not valued in terms of views.
- Day to day survival – most staff want to do their best – who is planning?
- Most precious and most vulnerable C/YP in our society.

- Fee schemes – system is opaque – role of SPPG on planning fee scheme.
- Continuum of care – Edge of Care.
- Matching is a luxury at present.
- Departments working in silos – need more collaborative work and carers left out of the loop – particularly on policy making side.
- Kinship Care – intrusion into family – LAC process for kinship care.

### **5.3 Leaving Care**

- PA / GEM (Going the Extra Mile) viewed as good where they are in place.
- Accommodation / Housing – YP much diluted access – needs addressed both in practical support provision options and in legislation – unaccompanied and separated young people.
- Specialist input - heightened level of health and education support systems – up to age 25.
- Look at what is working well for some of our care leavers – networks with community teams.
- Enduring relationships for YP leaving care which support independence not interdependence.
- Pick up the Foster Care Review – implement it.

## **6. Delegate Feedback on Workshop for Children and Young People with Care Experience**

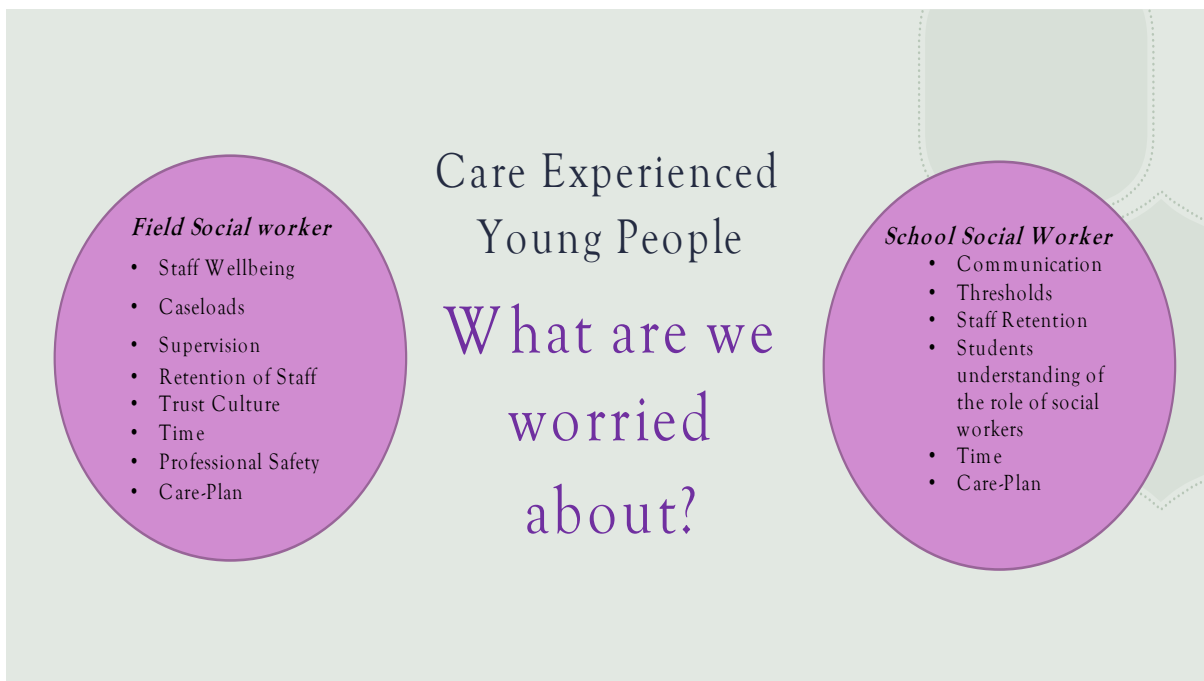
71% of delegates completed feedback forms on the workshop. Overall, feedback was extremely positive, for example 100% were satisfied with the location and 98% were happy with the facilities. In terms of the effectiveness of the workshop, 91% of participants felt the workshop was useful for informing the Review. Qualitative data cited “Excellent afternoon – thought provoking with some inspired comments, particularly from young people. Looking forward to the outcomes”. Feedback was complementary in terms of the participation of care experienced young people with delegates reporting “delighted to have young people in attendance today as they are the purpose of this Review. We need to continually hear their voices” and “It was great to have the co-host approach – GO ADEL!”

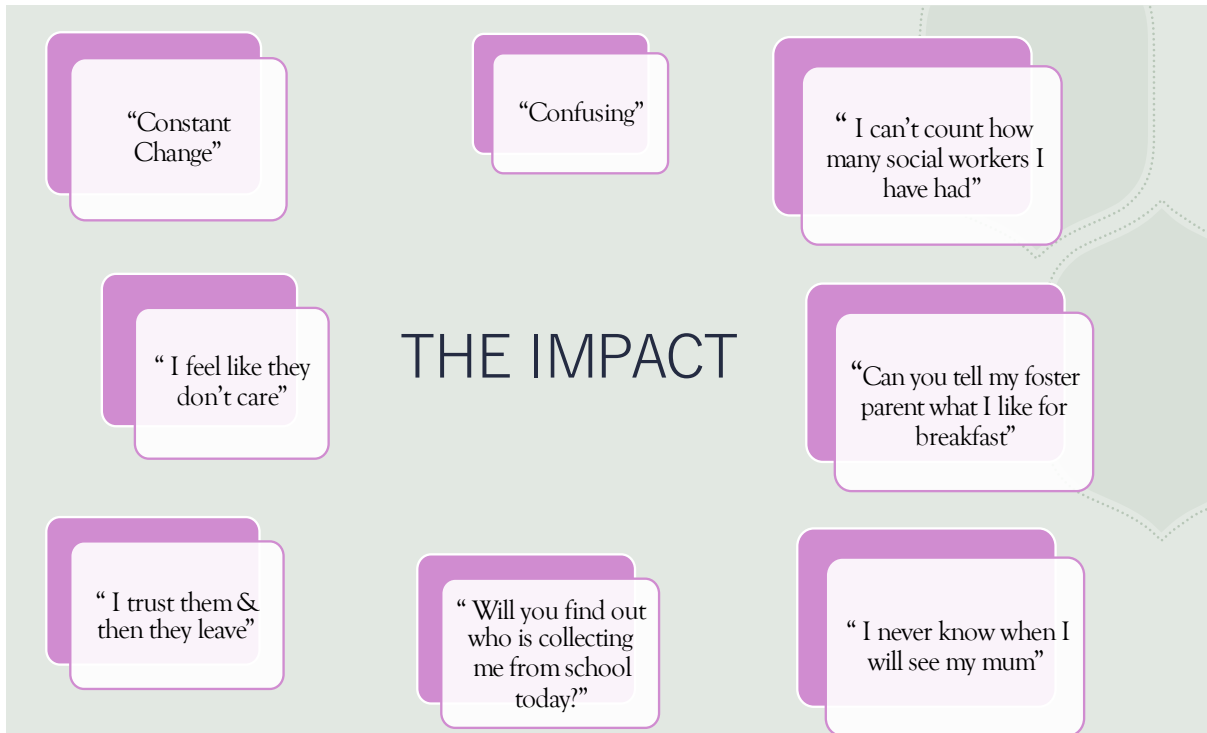
More detail of delegate feedback responses is included in Appendix 4.

## **7. Conclusion**

The workshop concluded with Professor Jones and the co-chairs thanking attendees for their time and contribution in helping to inform and improve service provision for children and young people in Northern Ireland.

## Appendix 1 – Hazelwood College Social Worker Presentation Slides





## Appendix 2 - Key Issues raised in Round Table Discussions

### Group One – Policy Makers

- Inconsistency of relationship / various people in young person's life.
- Children and young people focused on coping – not normal life.
- Can you maintain safe relationships with birth parent/s?
- Post care links with birth parents – risk management.
- Better understanding of being in care – wider system e.g. schools.
- Placement supply – **Response** - more variety to meet children's needs.
- Difficulty in matching – not working well.
- Positives – post care services need to be better generally.
- Complexity of need – increase in demand vs better evaluation / diagnosis.
- Problems with Children's Homes - suitable for some children – narrative not all negative.
- Current services not geared to meet complexity of need.
- Use of language by professionals over complicates – over medicalised discourse.
- Not enough places (right number / type).
- Social Worker caseloads too big.
- Social Worker training issues / needs reviewed - **Response** – Develop core skills and additional skills
- Social Work leadership issues – **Response** – reduce distractions / paperwork.
- Foster Carers / Adoptive Parents – differentiated foster carers to meet complex / less complex needs.
- Trauma for foster carers with very complex situations / trauma support.
- System that understands complexity and responds appropriately.

### Group Two - SPPG, EA, RQIA, NIPSA & PSNI

- Forward planning – we need to focus from pre-natal care, early years, primary school to influence the future demand.
- Consultation of policy across all departments /trusts. Streamline workstreams.
- Most risky CSE children are not prioritised for services.
- Staff wellbeing – policy does not reflect on the ground reality.
- Social workers in **all** schools – co-ordinated approach.
- Change in legislation / policy \*
- Back to basics – need to start to get those things right – instead of instalment of new 'policies'.
- Strategic overarching board – same as the mental health collaborative board. \*
- ABE (Achieving Best Evidence) Cadre in Southern Trust should be rolled out across all Trusts (Gillen Review Recommendation).
- Pitt-stop Model Hybrid (UK).
- Primary children LA Service – a model of good practice could be extended into early years.
- Young peoples voice needs more focus / embedding in all services – multi skilled teams.
- Out of Hours – ability to access systems and information (hours of work of children's services).

### Group Three – HSCTs DCS's & Heads of Service (Fostering / Adoptions Teams)

- **Placements**
  - Demand / capacity.

- Need for flexibility (learning from Covid).
- needs led – right placement at right time.
- increased complexity.
- Autonomy re decision making.
- **Workforce**
  - Recruitment / retention.
  - Role of SW/ skills mix / delegated responsibility.
  - Well-being – support to staff.
- **Structures**
  - Need for service consistency on regional basis.
  - Focus on Looked After Children.
  - Outdated commissioning and delivery models.
  - Need equality of access to support for Looked After Children regardless of placement.

#### Group Four – SW Principals, Leads & Managers

Key Issues	How to Address
● Staff recruitment processes.	● Each Trust overseeing their own recruitment.
● Number of homes and young people – more homes reduced numbers.	● More homes, reduced numbers, more therapeutic and access to some
● MD staff – in house access – working patterns service is not 9 – 5.	● In house access – OTs etc working in homes.
● RQIA – Inspections / differences in recommendations.	● RQIA – need standardised expectations from inspectorate – more flexibility and understanding.
● Input from residential staff.	● Working rights in residential.
● Differences in support – professional foster carers vs residential staff.	● More access to training.
● Understaffed / difficulty in retention,	● More access to early intervention services – SWs etc in schools.
● Voice of young person	● Youth work and collaborative working with social services.
● Residential used as a last resort.	● Focusing on S.O.S approach assessments for YP in residential.
● Early intervention SWs in schools, GPs etc.	● Drop-in centre/ clinic in schools.
● No consistency across Trusts.	
● Commission, contract, doing admin of services - therapeutic assessments – language, YP don't understand.	● Matching process planned times.
● Educational outcomes	● More access to bespoke education.
● Discrimination of YP in care within schools.	● Training / therapeutic input with education staff.



•Criminality of YP in care, police attitudes.	•Training / education work with police, more collaborative working, designated officers to homes.
•Lack of placements.	
•Bureaucracy – SW’s doing admin, contact, managers doing HR work etc.	•Regular meetings with police. Support hubs.
• Allocation of funding resources.	•More funding for staff – admin and contact workers so SWs can get back to basics.
•Under resourced – changes and scale down pf services, NSPCC in Southern Trust, lack of psychology services in Belfast Trust	•ECRs (Extra Contractual Referrals) in the north.

### Group Five – SWs / Practitioners

- **Placement Crisis and Impact**
  - Lack of bespoke placements, residential units overcrowded.
  - Lack of stability moving from placement – disruptive connections, not availing of services, change of SW, disconnected from family and friends.
- What we can do
  - More kinship placements / trained foster carers – complex needs.
  - Appropriate finance for foster carers
  - Appropriate matching / geography / culture: family time / stability – engage in support services.
  - Care experienced child will not feel secluded and different to other children.
  - Increased communication between foster carers / SWs / school / professionals / and then this relayed to the young person.
  - Access to services support on edge of care.
  - Good communication between all professionals.
- **Trauma and Timely Access to Services**
  - Complexity of trauma – security, risk, CSE, crime, drug / alcohol, self harm, poor health, non-engagement, education.
  - Children and Young People – complex trauma, mental health issues – physical / emotional needs / placement holistic care.
  - Barriers of waiting lists – discharged so quickly when not engaging.
  - Teams and services working in isolation.
  - Lack of flexibility – individual needs of child and foster parents/ carers.
- What we can do
  - Empower and go back to basics – social workers / foster carers to meet holistic needs.
  - Family time so important – contact priority.
  - Services Hub – immediate responses.
  - Therapeutic services overhauled.
  - Communication between professionals.
- **Staffing Issues**
  - More bespoke roles
  - Increasing complexity of career for young people.
  - Staff wellbeing – caseloads overloaded
  - Bureaucracy around decisions – staffing and change, recruiting.
  - Impacts quality of service and unreal expectations

- Impact of cared for children as bespoke work not being addressed with young people.
- Firefighting to address crisis.
- What we can do
  - Make job more attractive – pay and compressed hours.
  - More support.
  - Development of roles.
  - Means young person will have continuity.

## Group Six – Young People

- **Foster Care**
  - No accountability for SW, give timelines but don't follow through and up to young person to follow up.
  - Trauma being moved places but no help, support or recognition of it.
- **Therapeutic Service**
  - Should be other options – art therapy / play therapy.
  - Don't always know other supports – like jigsaw.
- **Relationships are key!!!**
  - Foster carers / social workers -need to build relationship.
  - SWs need time to build this relationship – “I see mine every two weeks and this helps”
- **Leaving Care**
  - “I moved at age 17 and they said that was my placement to age 18. I am 18 in less than a month, have no social worker and don't know what will happen”
  - Support going to university – keep changing what they will pay for, not upfront about what they will pay for.
  - Pathway plans not happening.
  - PA: still waiting at 16/17/18 for PA; have a PA but haven't heard from her; my PA is good I can ring her anytime.
- **Children's Homes**
  - No-one knows what you are up to.
  - Not a lot of options when placement breaks down – don't look outside the box – what is free rather than what suits your needs – don't give you any other options, feel not listened to about where I want to go.
- **Social Workers**
  - Can't get in contact – often on leave or leave and don't tell us.
  - Sometimes unallocated don't know who to contact or what to do.
  - Give limited information and feel keeping information from us.
  - Have to move SW at 16/18.
  - Positive experience
  - Same SW for 4 years, can contact anytime – even when on leave.
  - Some good experiences of SWs but sometimes when they leave have 5/6 in a year.
- **Coming into Care**
  - Need to have a warning before being removed from home.
  - Told going away for a weekend and removed from home for 14 years.
  - No information about going into care.
  - Positive experience
  - SW before coming into care stayed with me through coming into care so well informed.
  - Works when they have brothers and sisters too because they know about family.

## **Group Seven – Parents / Carers**

- Adopted children are still care experienced – must be able to access therapeutic supports, finance allowances – they still need trauma addressed.
- Parents need post-adoption support to deal with trauma.
- Transition – at age 18 – ‘toxic’ families can have access to vulnerable young people.
- Contact can be traumatising - best interests of the child must be the consideration – adoptive parents must be able to change the arrangements and be part of the negotiations and kids must be able to decide yes or no.
- Difficult to get information needed to talk to kids about their background – adoptive parents don’t hear that a new brother or sister has been born.
- System so stretched that you have to fight for information and services.
- We are alerted to problems / diagnosis’s – warning about potential impacts – but not given wherewithal to prepare and deal with impact.
- Teachers are not informed about impact of trauma – having SWs in schools could act as a bridge to understanding.
- Issues for our kids also pertain to other kids – addressing generally could positively impact whole school population.
- Increasing breakdown of adoptions is down to lack of support.
- Need specialist / direct intervention / therapeutic support – not more parenting classes.
- Peer support via community / voluntary sector needs to be financed properly.
- Concurrent carers have no say in contact – only drop off - not allowed to be with the child (who may be distressed).
- Unnecessary delay in assessment process and whole adoption journey.
- Teachers should have early childhood trauma on their curriculum at St Mary’s & Stranmillis.

## **Group Eight – The Fostering Network**

### Key Issues (Round One)

- Staffing – changes of social workers, lack of skills mix, not enough foster carers.
- Inconsistency of quality and availability of support provided for children and foster carers.
- Differences of approaches (e.g. some workers very empathetic in visits and meetings – others harsh).
- Workers under a lot of pressure, so beneficial support falls to the wayside and great people leave.
- System is reactive rather than proactive or responsive.
- Everyone around the child should be advocating for their needs. Foster carers often begging and pleading for years.
- Things can be left to get really worrying before anything is done, both before care admission and in care.
- Difference between Trusts (e.g. some 16+, others 14+) - permissions and what children allowed to do vary greatly.
- Kinship carers particularly not well informed by Trusts.

### What can be done (Round One)

- Life story work should be done well as early as possible
- Impartial peer support – carers supporting each other formally and informally.
- Foster carers need to be given all relevant information, including information about taxes, being able to get mortgages, benefits, what children can access.
- For children to have the best care, the team around the child need to be well supported and resourced.
- Consistency and predictability of workers is really important. We know people are unlikely to stay forever but they are leaving so often because they are unsupported.

- Make contact work for the child, child centred and parent's rights.
  - Support parents to be consistent and attuned to the child.
  - Can help when foster carers are connected with birth parents and helping the contact time to be good for the child.
- Communication and sharing of information should help – e.g. if SW is off, the rest of the team are well informed.
- Effective use of self – this is personal and emotional for foster carers and many professionals.

#### Key Issues (Round Two)

- Support for kinship carers who are not approved is so much less than those who are approved.
- There is often a risk averse approach and blame culture which restricts children and carers, rather than supporting them.
- We are wondering how contact with birth parents can be positive and helpful. When it changes last minute or impacts the child's healthy routine, then changes for the better are needed.
- Foster and kinship carers need to be recognised as part of the professional team around the child
- Utilise carers skills.

#### What can be done (Round Two)

- Cut out the jargon! These are real children, being looked after by real people.
- Systems, policies and procedures (e.g. PEPs) should serve the child rather than being a tick box exercise. Be child centred.
- All schools and educationalists should be truly trauma informed. Essential for looked after children, but beneficial for every child.
- Admin packs for children who come into care (e.g. medical cards, birth certificates, baptismal record etc).
- Children can be made to feel different daily (e.g. have to wait for social worker approval for school trips, hair-cuts, sleepovers etc) – delegated authority by default would help.
- Need new fostering regulations and the development of standards.
- Age and stage appropriate care – what is needed changes throughout the journey of a child.
- Consistent support for foster carers and kinship carers wellbeing.
- Edge of care services that are helpful should be properly resourced – this should not have to be fought for.
- Post adoption support needs to be long term and emphasised.
- Consistent training for social workers.

#### **Group Nine – Hazelwood Integrated College**

- Not enough communication with children. Basic things such as dates of meetings etc, no tutor, no PA – therefore no voice - powerless.
- Not enough communication with schools – don't know when kids are off CP register / no information on meetings.
- Too much turnover of SW's - 13(!) for one child.
- Children feel they have to misbehave in order to be heard.
- Reports from schools requested at short notice.
- Pressure being put on schools to provide specialist services.
- EWS (Education Welfare Service) have trained SWs – but no work in terms of family support. No impact from EWO.
- Schools are directing SS. Schools are being proactive.
- Serious CP issues not being allocated – 9 months!

- Senior leaders are carrying burden of responsibility for following up serious social work cases.
- Difference in thresholds between Trusts.
- AYE and NQSWs managing cases beyond their expertise.
- Inequality in academic attainment.
- School to prison pipeline – stemming the flow of LAC through the youth justice system.
- Therapeutic work dealing with trauma – beyond counselling.
- YP and family support long term to deal with ACE's - 'The body keeps the score'.
- Early intervention as soon as possible to provide social and emotional support.
- Protected caseloads and supervision (consistently).
- More support for children in need.
- Support for kinship carers – training, finance, etc

### **Group Ten - Voluntary & Community Sector**

- Post 18 – decision making driven by financial considerations, not needs of the child. Last minute decision making – not getting support in practice.
- Extension of support post 21 in education. Pushing YP into education to extend statutory support.
- Going into a system for all but no safety net – no safe housing options. 6 YP going into what should be deemed a homeless option. No child should be told at age 18 to present as homeless – protocols in place.
- Suitable placements – foster, residential, appropriate placements – not enough / apt causing placement breakdown.
- Where risk exists – being translated to foster carers and not enough support – value of advocacy services in these situations.
- LAC reviews should be written to child.
- Housing crisis -care experienced YP most vulnerable – no safety net being proposed. Can't leave YP in such dangerous situations – forcing professionals to act outside what is ordinarily allowed.
- Waiting till too late to plan for transitions out of care 'care leavers cliff'.
- 5 HSCT Areas – different models of support e.g. 14/18+ and equity and disparity across system. 23 different foster carer fee system across 5 HSCTs.
- Budget decisions separated from decisions re child – financially driven decisions re children's needs to save money e.g. needs down played / financial allocations reduced for under 18's living independently.
- Huge disparity in how Trusts do things – no consistency.
- Lack of HSCT staff – vacancies /unworkable caseloads.
- No one to make decisions as no staff.
- Hundreds of children without a social worker (even if allocated but loads unallocated).
- No consistency in staff (Contract worker staff) / no placement consistency.
- Narrative work – amount of YP who don't clearly understand reasons for being in care. Falls to family to do this post 18+ can be very damaging / abusive.
- Should be team established to do narrative work and system for updating this.
- Huge disservice to YP if they don't know their story / history – should belong to child.
- Focus of social work is lost – policy / procedure focus. Not trained to work with people.
- Undermining of professionalism of foster carers,
- Children going into residential care – taking on problems of everyone else in care and their needs not being met / other children. Went in with one problem and came out with more – awful long-term outcomes.
- Criminalisation of YP in residential services – culture in teams – PSNI have to respond – get a result.

- Complex therapeutic needs not dealing with all needs – only one issue – different in each Trust – postcode lottery of services in each Trust – also depends on which part of fostering service you are in.
- Not enough therapeutic services for children e.g. CAMHS – not getting in if considered behavioural etc.
- Lack of information coming through re safety planning / guidance – not even written down – guidance required for consistency.
- Preventative interventions not inn placed once child placed – missing opportunity to make difference.
- All children in care should be able to access therapeutic services.
- Need to be child centred / consistency in child's life.
- System centred family support system.
- Delays in care planning and court process.
- Over representation in youth justice.
- No SW – no voice – no safeguard.
- Quality of contact / contact at all costs / pulled art last minute / - refection.
- Need work done with parents re quality of contact.
- SWs time spent arranging contact – admin tasks.
- Parents undermining what professionals are trying to do e.g. you will come home.

#### **Group Eleven – NISCC, SBNI, QUB, UU, NIGALA, Judiciary & CLC**

- Need for a consistent infrastructure to support carers (adoption, birth family, foster carers, residential staff).
- Identity work ongoing / continuous.
- Consistent network
- YP not feeling listened to / involved in decision making.
- Impersonal system e.g. language we use to describe young people, where they live, professional jargon.
- Sibling relationships – valuing and supporting these enduring relationships.
- Multiple placements and living too far from their school / community / social supports.
- Consistent support for YP with family time.
- How are we addressing the correlations between poverty / neglect / children coming into care.
- Workforce – support mechanisms.
- sup around the child e.g. consistent family worker.
- Support for (safe) family members to be a consistent part of the child's support network.
- Early intervention.
- SWs in communities – in healthy living centres.
- Lessons learned from those who entered the workforce early during Covid e.g. mentor support.
- SWs in schools – connections to the community, destigmatising, support at the right time.
- Raising the age of criminal responsibility – 16.

## **Appendix 3 – Professor Pat Dolan - Summary Analysis of Questionnaire Responses and Group Feedback**

### **Young People – Key Issues**

- No accountability for SWs.
- Give timelines but don't follow through - up to YP to do so.
- Trauma on placement – movement with no support.
- Range of therapeutic support.
- FC and SW need to build relationship YP.
- More support for 3rd level education.
- SW need to inform YP on costs they have to pay in Uni.
- Needs SW with specialised training.
- Need notice and warning before being removed home.
- Told going away for the weekend – 14-year placement.
- No information about going into care.
- Don't know who to contact if you are unallocated.
- More support for YP – e.g. those who use drugs.
- Support for 18-year-olds transitions!
- Too much admin in the way of a social life.
- Different rules in different Trusts.
- Res Homes need to be 'homes' and better
- SW Turnover constant problem.
- Lack of regular contact between SW and YP.
- More compatible placements for YP.

### **Positive**

- Foster Carers and their networks 'work for YP'

### **Parent Foster Family Carer – Key Issues**

- Education some good but not the norm – impact on emotional wellbeing when unable to respond to child.
- Don't feel valued as key component in child's life.
- Lack of staff - Inadequate depth of services for C/YP.
- Valuing Children – support for later life no plastic bag belongings!
- Education support to child key ++.
- Trauma and consequence don't diminish post adoption+.
- Education system does not match needs of YP.
- Kinship carers not informed by Trust.
- Peer support via community sector.
- Delays in assessment process.
- more information on child background and records.
- Foster carers begging and preaching for years – advocates.
- Some workers empathic others harsh – approaches.
- Reactive not proactive system.
- SW under stress too heavy workloads ++.
- Foster carers prohibited from enabling YP to good budget+++.
- More psychological assessment.
- Practical help for children post-placement.
- Too many moves' carers - children not properly matched.

### **Positives**

- External support we got ourselves - good.
- Good specialist team well resourced.
- Home for Good, positive initiative.

- Adoptive and foster carers doing well despite the system.
- Foster carer organisations work well.

#### **What can be done**

- Life story work.
- Impartial peer support.
- Better relevant information to FC.
- Predictability of and in workers.
- Contact which is child centred.
- Work with Birth families need to be consistent.
- Better communication.
- Effective use of self as the human tool!
- Trauma informed workforce.
- Admin packs for children coming into care.
- New fostering regulations.
- Untapped Carer's skills look to utilise them.

#### **Practitioners Key Issues**

- Safe caseload management for SW (Cap on caseloads).
- Bespoke placement.
- School to Juvenile Justice.
- Work force pressures – SW as Firefighters.
- YP disconnected from Family/Friends.
- More £ for FCs!
- Housing issues crucial.
- Care Leavers Cliff!!!!
- Role of education and welfare officer – is key.
- Retain SW staff prioritise their wellbeing.
- Communication to YP and between professionals.
- Lack of services and choice.
- Need for more MH wellbeing services for staff
- MH care experienced lack of therapeutic interventions (CAMHS)
- Lack of coproduction.
- Unequal system.
- Sibling contact should be promoted
- Children and Young People need to believe they are listened to and really involved in decision making!
- Lack of therapeutic services +++ lack of placements.
- Children's homes not like a home!
- No specialist placements available.

#### **Positive**

- Community and Voluntary Sector with innovation practices needs to be utilised
- Dedicated foster carers good.
- High turnover of workers SW mostly.
- Changes in SWs burnout and lack of resources.
- Poor capacity all impacts on children and families.
- Juvenile Justice services not connected with children in care systems.
- Edge of Care system might work but due to lack of a resource it fails.
- Over 20 years countless examples of good practice initiatives parent/staff/young people.
- Haven't been embedded.

#### **Service Managers Key Issues**



- Right Service - Right Time - Right Timing.
- Need more training and support.
- Growing complexity of needs – increased demand.
- Lack of supported accommodation.
- Budgets in residential home don't meet need.
- More multiagency working.
- Increase skill mix.
- Need forward planning!
- Crisis model in residential homes.
- Homes sharing good policies and practices.
- More understanding of reasons for being in care.
- Too many in homes.
- Lack of proper placements.
- Children in and out of care revolving door.
- More education.
- 24/7 support.
- Better contact with parents and families.

**Positive**

- SW and FC confident, committed and hardworking.

**Policymakers – Key Issues**

- Address greater complexity of need.
- Children in care with disabilities overlooked.
- Insufficient and restricted workforce.
- Lack of resources to meet the needs of Trusts.
- Better accommodation and other support for YP leaving care.
- More differentiated residential care provision.
- Greater support for foster carers or we lose them.
- More specialist foster carers needed.
- Go back to basic core practices are key.

**Positive**

- Individual pockets of good practice!

**Other**

- Growing complexity of needs of YP.
- High turnover of SWs.
- Use of language overcomplicated.
- Trauma support for foster carers.
- YP as decision makers!
- Valuing sibling relationships.
- Post care support for birth parents.
- Risk management training.
- Needs to be SW in every school.
- YP rights need to be prioritised.
- Smaller size of residential units.
- Lack of trauma informed practices.
- Mental health services for LAC.
- Inconsistencies across the five Trusts.
- Need to promote youth mentoring.

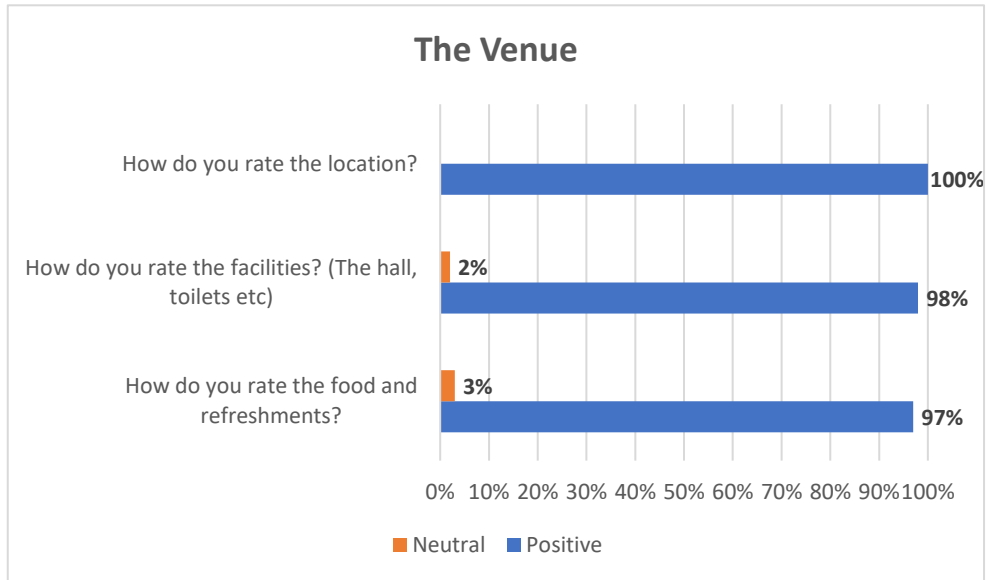
**Positive**

- Committed staff in teams – Community / Vol sector offer good practical support.

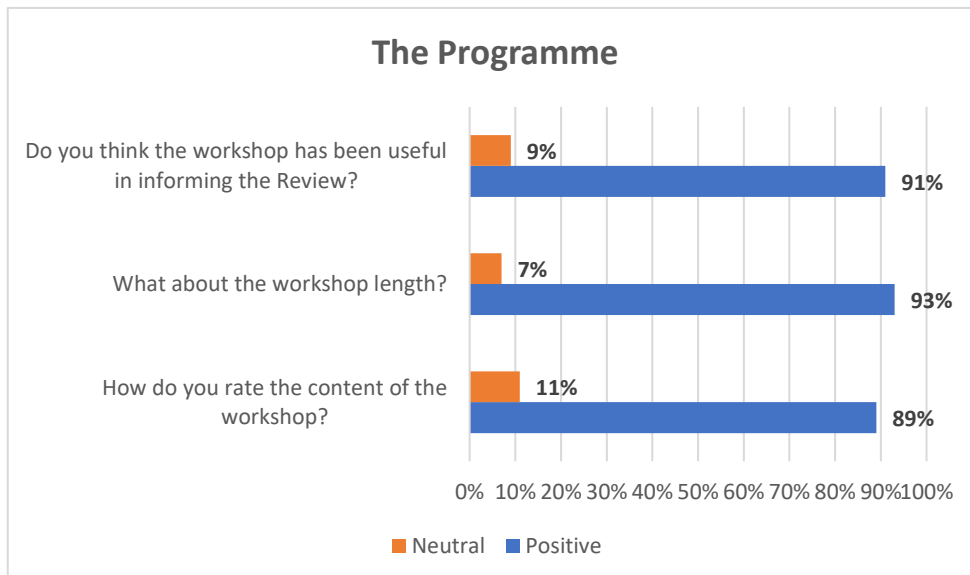
## Appendix 4 - Summary of Delegate Feedback

Feedback is based on collated findings provided by 71% of delegates.

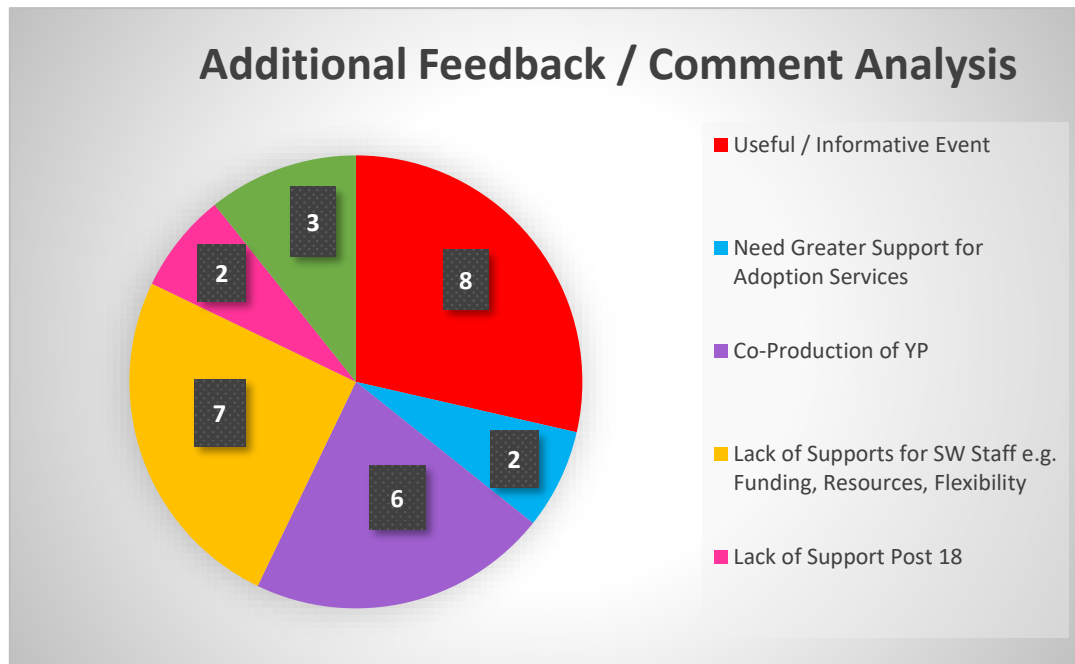
### (i) The Venue



### (ii) The Programme



(iii) Comment / Suggestions Analysis



*Thanks for the opportunity to be involved and share my views – Parent / Carer*

*A very useful event – Parent / Carer*

*I think the Review has been very useful – a massive undertaking. I hope that it will impact change. A new children’s service should include adopted children as there’s a need for greater support – Parent / Carer*

*Adopted Children are care experienced and need to be treated by professions i.e. teachers, doctors, SENCO the same as children in care – Parent / Carer*

*Delighted to have young people in attendance today as they are the purpose of this Review. We need to continually hear their voices – Parent / Carer*

*I left feeling very disheartened as a frontline practitioner; I am trying my absolute best to support my young people. We are understaffed, underfunded, underpaid and unable to fulfil our role and meet our young peoples needs. Staff are at breaking point which is impacting on our ability to provide the best standard of care – Service Practitioner*

*Excellent afternoon – thought provoking with some inspired comments, particularly from young people. Looking forward to the outcomes! – Service Manager*

*We all want to do our best for care experience children, however change does not come due to bureaucracy / budgets / policies / procedures which frontline practitioners are unable to change as our voices are not heard or listened to, no matter how hard we shout. As individuals we should try our best and make a difference in our day-to-day work with young people – Service Practitioner*

*Very informative, it gave an insight into different perspectives – Service Practitioner*

*Some excellent points made. Unfortunately lack of government funding and leadership is preventing progress – Service Practitioner*

*Children with disabilities not represented or discussed, they are children and should not have separate workshops for inclusivity. Too long for young people to sit through especially when we are discussing their lives and the barriers in place that impact on their lives. It's good to hear from them but should they be expected to listen to our worries about the system that controls their lives? – Service Practitioner*

*As one of the people said “the carers aren't getting their wages”. They shouldn't be looking after us for money that shouldn't just be a bonus they should look after us because it's right. We should be matched with people who are compatible for us and we should be asked what were looking for in our carers – Young Person*

*Catering was great and staff really attentive. Great venue – Adel was a fabulous co-host. We need to hold social workers so they can hold foster carers who can in turn hold the children – Service Manager – Service Practitioner*

*There was a good mix of listening and talking in groups. It was great to have the co-host approach – GO ADEL! It was good to have a range of roles and people in the room, from children and young people, the parents, foster carers, social workers and teachers. Edge of care provision is not prioritised regionally and really should be! – Service Manager*

*Very interested in the reflective discussion from care experienced young person on what made a difference – Policy Advisor*

*Really great to have a face-to-face event again. Great discussion - hopefully all issues will be reflected in the Review – Policy and Public Affairs Manager*

*Interesting comments; hard to listen to at times although issues not unknown. Would have liked more time in terms of what is working well and how to build on this. Some personal agendas given space without context at times but each person has a sense of the world from their perspective. Funding / workforce and capacity are the reality of the existing landscape of state of nation in NI – context of change is required. Also impact of political instability and legacy – Service Manager*

*Really good having a mixed cohort to hear different perspectives and really thought-provoking but also disheartening because everyone wants to do their best but there's always red tape, constraints and procedures that deter this – Service Manager*

*Yes, children's residential is much better here than in the UK due to not being a private business. But please also consider the number of unregulated placements being used for young people whose foster care or residential placement has broken down or young people only just coming into care.*

*This is using hotels and B&Bs to accommodate young people, some 16 years old. The risk! Also, field staff are being used to look after the young person who is placed in a hotel or B&B at a high cost – in terms of finances but also staff doing an overnight shift and then coming on to day shift as field social worker - Lecturer*

*Flexibility and affordability need to meet the needs of children's services. No one size fits all, there are a range of children's homes that are small e.g 1 / 2 beds.*

*Kinship carers need better support. Need responsive 24/7 Monday – Sunday. Young people should have at least one significant person in their life – research tells us this as it develops positive long-term outcomes –  
NGO Leader*

*Great opportunity to share concerns and ideas. We rarely get an opportunity to meet as a cross professional group / body. Talking is great but if we can't move forward to address the needs of our young people without professional input. From a school perspective we need to have dedicated Support Staff – Social Worker – Nurse – Mental - Health Workers and Youth Workers. Key drive on recruitment and retention of social workers –  
Teacher*

*Children in supported accommodation where ETE should be provided but those who work are now being financially disadvantaged. The transition to adult services is a nightmare. Transition nurses, mental health and housing needs to be joined up – Service Manager*

*Senior managers need flexibility to deliver what young people need – we want to deliver but need the environment to be conducive and supportive in doing so – Service Manager*

*When leaving care, young people are asked an awful lot more with an awful lot less. In-reach support and inter-dependence is very important – Service Manager*

*Not really space today to think about the therapeutic services for care experienced young people and assisting children / adults / families in planning therapeutically for our young people. We need to pay attention to the impacts on development, health and education on specific therapeutic techniques and interventions – Service Practitioner*

*Really good opportunity to discuss how children's lived experiences can be different. However, it does need to drive safe, child centered outcomes on focused interventions and not create further in safe practices – Service Manager*

*Roundtable discussion was good, everyone was very passionate about their role – this was great, although it got very in-depth. Smaller roundtables might have given more varied yet still in-depth feedback. Important event, thanks – Service Practitioner*

*More specifics are required on the basics of a single agency. Wider consideration needs to be given to the policy / strategic landscape currently available and what conditions need to be in place for this vision – Policy Advisor*

*We need evidence to determine what parts of the system works well. Other factors need to be considered e.g. poverty, deprivation and geography. In NI nothing gets done quickly – risk adverse in terms of trying new approaches. If no political will – no change. Different agenda's – need Education, Health and Justice to work together – service users must be at the centre. Need a children's strategy similar to mental health – Policy Advisor*