

Advocacy for Looked after Children

Alongside providing advocacy to adults, VoiceAbility delivers advocacy services to Looked After Children in Bradford, Milton Keynes and Bexley as well as in Lincolnshire as part of our Total Voice work. Since 2004 our skill in engaging with children with complex needs has helped many to be heard within the care system. Our formal advocacy contracts contribute to this track record, particularly those delivered to Looked After Children.

Who are 'Looked After Children'?

Looked After Children (also known as Children in Care) are children and young people under the legal guardianship of Local Authorities. Looked After Children may live in a variety of places:

- With their parents
- With family or friends acting as foster carers
- With foster carers provided by the Local Authority
- In residential homes provided by the Local Authority.

All Looked After Children are eligible for the advocacy services we provide.

The aim of Looked After Children Advocacy services

The aim of the services is to enable Looked After Children, through independent support, to make their voices heard in matters and decisions affecting them and to ensure they understand and exercise their rights.

VoiceAbility works to achieve this aim through three methods:

- Offering advice and guidance on rights,
- Offering support with regular meetings or
- Offering support with making a complaint

We may speak on behalf of the young person concerned, or we may support them to speak for themselves. We aim to increase the confidence of Looked After Children so that in future they feel able to advocate for themselves.

Independent Visitors

VoiceAbility also provides Independent Visitors in some of its services. Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to provide Independent Visitors to young people who are looked after but have little or no contact with their family.

Independent Visitors visit and befriend the Looked After Children they have been paired with. The relationship usually lasts for a long time so that the Looked After Children come to trust the Independent Visitor.

Independent Visitors spend time with their partner, encouraging them to reach their full potential, helping them work through difficult problems they may have at home, or supporting them to exercise their rights.

Return to Care Interviews

Social Care staff offer Return to Care interviews to all Looked After Children who go missing. Those who take the offer are referred to VoiceAbility. We try to interview each young person as soon as possible after they return, but definitely within 72 hours.

By talking to each young person when they return to care, we hope to find out what led them to leaving in the first instance and work with them to improve their situations.

If the young person does go missing again, VoiceAbility will work with the relevant authorities to assist in a missing person's investigation, with the aim of finding that young person and keeping them safe.

Help us improve

Want to make a comment, complaint, suggestion or compliment? Talk to any of our team members - email us on comments@voiceability.org or give us a ring on 01223 555800.

strengthening voice, championing rights, changing lives