

Press Release

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Cafcass calls for virtual health centre for Children in Care

Cafcass, the organisation that looks after children's interests in the family courts, today publishes a report examining the health and wellbeing of young people in care.

The report found that young people in care were happy but they sometimes felt the affects of stress, wanted better advice on relationships and they wanted more support to eat healthily for instance in foster or children's homes.

Based on a research event organised by the Cafcass Children's Rights Team, the report outlines what young people in care feel about their health and wellbeing. The report was researched in collaboration with Professor Adrian James from the Centre for the Study of Childhood and Youth, University of Sheffield; and evaluated by independent research provider, the Policy Evaluation Group. Along with input from the Cafcass Children's Rights Team and the Cafcass Young Peoples Board, the report states issues for consideration following each section concerning the young peoples health and wellbeing.

One member of the Cafcass Young people's board commented, "Young People (in care) have a tendency to move from one place to another and there needs to be structured support at this difficult time. This is how we can be healthy, happy and well!"

The main findings of the report were that the young people did not like being referred to as different from other people their age - yet there is evidence that being in care did lead some young people to drink alcohol as a way of escape. The majority of them were happy but felt that they needed more support from their carers and social workers.

Other key findings:

- Many of the young people started to drink alcohol, smoke, take drugs, and experiment with sex at an early age but interestingly only 11% had experience of drug taking;
- More than a third of the young people felt that their health was only average;
- A large number felt that they were or had experienced stress;
- Cost was seen as a barrier when considering healthy eating;
- Very few people chose to go to professionals when considering sexual health;
- Young people in care seek support from family and friends they left behind;
- Peer pressure is a big impact on lifestyle choice for young people.

Christine Smart, Cafcass Children's Rights Director said, "It is so important that we listen to the voices of young people who have used the care system. It is vital that all professionals recognise that this group of young people have some additional needs that may not be met through traditional routes. For instance young people wanted more support and advice on managing relationship development."

Anthony Douglas, Chief Executive of Cafcass added, "Children and young people in care are first and foremost normal children and young people, with care being positive for many and negative for a minority. The care system provides a fantastic service compared to when I started out over 30 years ago, yet many young people feel like cogs in a wheel being turned by someone else in a direction they're unclear about - and some still feel desperately alone despite more support being around for them. Their health needs could benefit from local authorities establishing a virtual health centre model along the lines of virtual schools, in which the health needs of looked after children and young people are monitored corporately across a local authority and Children's Trust area, with far higher expectations."

- Ends -

Notes for Editors:

- The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) was formed as a new service for England and Wales on 1 April 2001 as part of the Government's commitment to supporting families and children. It brought together the services previously provided by the Family Court Welfare Service, the Guardian ad Litem Services and the Children's divisions of the Official Solicitor's Office.
- Cafcass has a statutory responsibility to ensure that children and young people are put first in family proceedings, that their voices are heard, the decisions made about them by courts are in their best interests and that they and their families are supported throughout the process. We operate within the law set by Parliament and under the rules and directions of the family courts.
- Cafcass' role is to work with children and families in the family courts. The following list provides some examples of the types of cases we work with:-
 - Adoption (public law)
 - Care Orders (public law)
 - Emergency Protection Orders (public law)
 - Residency and contact following divorce and separation (private law)
- Cafcass is sponsored by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and is a non-departmental public body.
- For the year 2006-2007 CAF/CASS promoted the interests of 80,536 children. This does not factor in the work we do with children and their families in dispute resolution and our support of contact centres.
- In 2006 Cafcass established a Young People's Board who have experience of our services. They advise us on matters of policy and practice.
- Cafcass is engaged in a major improvement programme, which is intended to improve quality and consistency of frontline practice during 2008 - 2009.
- The full report can be downloaded from our website www.cafcass.gov.uk

For further information:

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