

# Listen to us:

## Independent Advocacy for Children and Young People

Young people - especially children in care and care leavers - have important rights that need to be considered when decisions are made that affect them.

### What does an advocate do?

*They speak up for children and young people, and help them to speak up for themselves.*

*They are independent and separate from other adults who look after children.*

*They can help to sort out problems and with making a complaint.*

The work they do is called advocacy.

### What did we want to find out?

Many children and young people helped us plan this work, and told us what they needed from advocacy. We also wanted to find out...

- How many children and young people use advocacy support
- What is being done to make sure they can get an advocate when they need one
- We also asked:
  - local councils and other organisations how many children they provided advocacy for, and the money they spent on this
  - advocacy organisations to tell us how they could find out if advocacy was making a difference to young people's lives

### What did we learn?

The main problem we found was that children in care and care leavers said that they ...

*"...didn't know about advocacy!"*

So they couldn't ask for it...

But when children and young people did have an advocate they:

- really listened, made sure your views were heard and helped sort out the problem
- helped them understand the reasons for a decision even if it wasn't what they wanted
- helped them to understand how to tackle problems
- made them feel they were worth something and act as a 'bit of a friend'.

## What else did we learn?

- Children and young people in different areas get different services
- Disabled children and younger children don't always get the kind of help they need
- The money spent on advocacy varies across the country, as well as the number of advocates
- Young people who are locked up or are getting treatment for their mental health can also get advocacy even if they are not in care, but many don't know this
- There are various ways of measuring the difference advocacy makes to young people and their lives, but young people are not often involved in thinking about this

## How can we measure the impact of advocacy on children?

It was suggested that we could ask children:

- about the kinds of problems that have been sorted out by advocates
- what changed, or how it had made them feel or think differently

## What does the Children's Commissioner recommend?

**1) We want the Government to make sure children who are entitled to advocacy know about it.**

**2) We want it to be easier for younger and disabled children, and those in placements outside their area, to use advocacy.**

**3) We want the Government to make sure that children across the country get a good service from advocates.**



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## Contact us for advice

We run an advice and assistance service line for children in care. If you need the help of an advocate, we can help you get in touch with your local advocacy service.