

The Fostering Network Wales magazine for young people

THE MAGAZINE  
EVERYBODY  
IS TALKING ABOUT!

# Thrive

**Actually  
Amazing  
MAG!**

**LUKE**

'My social  
worker says my  
foster carer can  
take my phone  
off me'

**DON'T WORRY...**  
*be happy! ~*

*Time to turn that frown  
upside down with our  
motivational tips.*

**HERE COMES  
THRIVE!**  
**OMG! WARNING!**  
THIS MAG CAN  
BE SERIOUSLY  
GOOD FOR YOU!

**SAVVY tips**  
to get you the  
most out of  
your reviews

**IT'S MY LIFE**  
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE  
TO HAVING A VOICE  
& HAVING A CHOICE

**EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEWS**

Have those in  
charge got it right?

**Inside...**

Top 10 chillouts!

Sarah (aka the advocate)

Problems sorted!

*Plus...*

How to make it a

**RE-PHEW!**



Thrive

Sweettalk

Thrive

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Actually Amazing MAG!

# Sweettalk

Hey Guys

**W**hether you love 'em or loathe them, reviews are a great way to get your feelings and opinions heard.

This edition of *Thrive* is packed full with tips and ideas to help you get your views across. It will help make your reviews more interesting, get the people you want there and make sure that you take part in the way that you want to.

This magazine has been written for you!

Enjoy!

*Thrive* & x x



GET IN  
TOUCH

Write to:

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rhwydwaith maethu  
llais gofal maeth

the fostering network  
the voice of foster care



## RE-PHEW! HEADING TO YOUR REVIEW?

You'll need more than just everybody turning up to make it work. Check out these tips on how to make it work for you...

- 1 Prepare yourself and others.
- 2 List your top priorities for discussion.
- 3 Take a quick checklist to your review.
- 4 Give reasons and be clear.
- 5 If you're not sure – Ask.
- 6 Get Some Help – Advocates can speak on your behalf.
- 7 KEEP CALM – talk to somebody you trust.
- 8 Read a book or listen to some music before and after.
- 9 Keep to the point.
- 10 Relax!



## Ooh look!

There's another cheeky issue of *Thrive*!

Hands up – who's read it?

We talk about:

- ✓ Making your advocate work for you.
- ✓ Our Über problem page.
- ✓ You tell us – Do you really get to make the decisions in your life?
- ✓ 10 ways to get your voice heard.

And more!



## A BIG UP...

Everyone from across Wales who shared their smart ideas with us (especially the Caerphilly SHOUT group) without you we just couldn't do it.

When it comes to writing *Thrive*, we've tried to share the ideas you have for making your reviews better. You all live with realities of foster care day in, day out. Who better to consult on what works well?

THANKYAAAAAAH !



# DON'T WORRY... *be happy!*

*De-stress those problem areas in your review. Time to turn that frown upside down with our motivational tips.*

## MEGA BORED!

### WHAT MAKES YOU FROWN?

*'Reviews are sooooo boring! I get fed up and tired.'*

### TURN IT UPSIDE DOWN

Hey, it's your review, spice it up a little! What about asking for food and drinks that you like? What about taking breaks? Why not ask everyone to dress in casual clothes? Maybe play a warm up game at the start? And what about this – have a talking stick! This 'stick' (it could be a pen, ball or soft toy) has to be passed around by everyone at the meeting. If someone is holding the stick, it's their turn to talk. Sorted!

## NOBODY LISTENS!

### WHAT MAKES YOU FROWN?

*'Nobody listens to you and they all talk over you. What's the point?'*

### TURN IT UPSIDE DOWN

As hard as it may be to believe, social workers want to make the decisions about your life with your help. At times, you may disagree with them. But they MUST consider your wishes and feelings, and put your welfare before anything else.

If you are unhappy about something, talk to your social worker or the Independent Reviewing Officer. If you are still unhappy, contact a Children's Rights Officer.

## TOO MANY NOSEY PEOPLE!

### WHAT MAKES YOU FROWN?

*'I hate it, I have to talk about really personal stuff to everyone.'*

### TURN IT UPSIDE DOWN

Not everyone who comes to your review has to stay for the whole meeting. If there are private things you would like to talk about, it's OK to ask for some of them to leave the room while you talk about them. They can come back in to talk about the rest of your care when you have finished.



# It's My Life!

*We get to ask those in charge what they think it's like for a young person in care. Have they got it right?*

*We hung out with the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Keith Towler and Director for Children's Services in Neath Port Talbot, Andrew Jarrett.*

*We pumped them for deets and they faced the hardest, nosiest questions. Er, sorry about that guys...*

“

*Children and young people in care are the same as any other children – they all need strong relationships with adults.*

Keith

”



## FIRST THINGS FIRST! OK, DO YOU THINK LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE TREATED DIFFERENTLY?

**Andrew:** Yes. They have reviews. Other children don't have reviews where all the professionals meet together with the young person. It's where very private and personal things are discussed such as behaviour and how they are getting on at school. It can be difficult if it's not done properly.

**Keith:** Yes. Last year, when I was visiting a school, they kept introducing me to children in care as if I had to see them. Some of them got quite angry that they'd been identified. People were trying to do the right thing but actually they were making some of these children feel a bit silly. Sometimes, when some professionals want to do the right things they get a bit confused about how to go about doing it. The best way to do it is to sit down with young people and talk to them about how they feel about things, and how they would like things to work. Treat young people equally.



*Yes we are! People think that you are in care because you have done something wrong. You get all these questions asked of you. A 'normal' person doesn't get that.*

Faye, 15

## DO YOU THINK THERE IS ENOUGH INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

**Andrew:** There's a lot of information out there if you are in care but it's not interesting to young people. Lots of reports, lots of writing and lots of pages - it's not something I find interesting! I think we really need to think about other ways of giving you information such as digital stories, magazines, Facebook and texting. We need to get better at it.

**Keith:** Children and young people in care are the same as any other children - they all need strong relationships with adults. An adult that they know and trust to give them good information. Sometimes that doesn't happen. We've all got to do a lot of work on making sure that young people get the information they need.



*Enough info? Yes, because when you first come into care you get a book and No because some of the questions aren't there that you need answered.*

Luke, 14

## WHAT DO YOU THINK COULD BE IMPROVED FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE?

**Andrew:** We need to improve the communication between organisations, social workers, other professionals and children in care. It's very important that a young person's own views are at the centre of their care plan. It shouldn't just be written, and it is only then that the young person is asked their views about it.

**Keith:** We wrote a report 'Lost After Care' looking at leaving care. It struck me very hard how much children are really scared about leaving care and that some people who have left care haven't had the best experiences. One of the things I'd like to see improved is planning children's futures in a way that makes sure they are all well supported when they leave care.



*More information when you come into care so you know what should be expected of the foster carers and social services.*

Harri, 14

## WHAT DO YOU THINK IS GOOD ABOUT A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON BEING LOOKED AFTER?

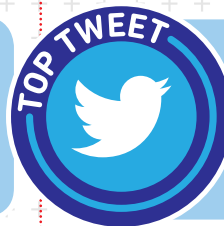
**Andrew:** That there are lots of people who are really interested in giving you the best opportunities. For example, foster carers who love and care for you, and are committed to your development. Another good thing is a safe and caring environment, a place where you can grow up and feel like you belong.

**Keith:** I've met with young people who have said some pretty fantastic things about their foster carers and their social worker. Things like: 'My foster carer has saved my life.' and 'My social worker has helped me turn my life around.' It's a real privilege to hear those things.



*Support for my future and someone to talk to. It makes you the person you are.*

Ben, 16



*A bad thing is being split from family. If needed then fair enough but if not, we should be able to stay and have a say. And when they split siblings up, that's not good.*

Leah, 15





We've been to lots of reviews.  
Trust us, they're an über to say what  
you want to happen in your life.

Here's the Lowdown  
to get you started...

### WHAT'S A REVIEW?

A review is a chance for you to be part of a discussion about the plans made about how you are looked after, **NOW** and in the **FUTURE**.

*YOU are the most important person at your review.  
They are about giving you the chance to say what  
YOU want to happen in your life.*

At a review you talk about your health, education, contact, legal status and the future. When you are 16 you must have a pathway plan.



### DID YOU KNOW?

You should have a review every six months. You can ask your Independent Reviewing Officer (**aka the IRO**) to have an earlier review if you think there are things that need to be sorted out.

### IT'S YOUR CALL...

Because it's your review, the most important person there is **YOU** and you get to say:

- ✓ Who comes to your review.
- ✓ How you want to take part.
- ✓ Where and when it takes place.
- ✓ How you get ready for the review and how you will get feedback.
- ✓ The kind of things that will happen at the review.

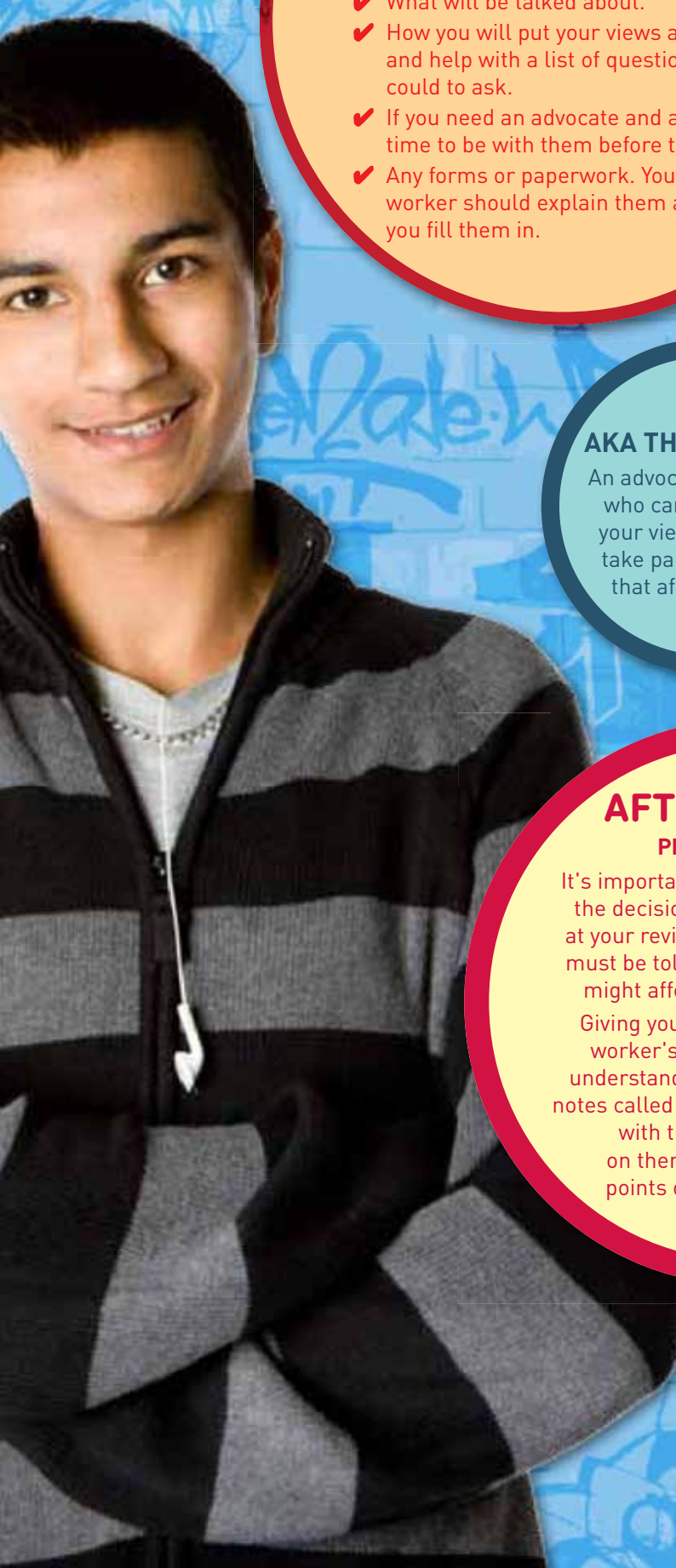
### WHAT PEEPS SHOULD BE AT YOUR REVIEW?

You, your social worker, your IRO, your foster carer, your advocate and maybe your parents (*if this is difficult for you, you can ask that they don't come to the meeting at the same time as you*).

You can invite anyone else who you think plays an important role in caring for you. Talk to your social worker about people staying just for the parts of your review that have to do with just their roles in your care.







## BEFORE YOUR REVIEW...

Your social worker should talk to you about:

- ✓ Why you are having the review.
- ✓ Who will be there, who has to be there and ask you who you would like to invite.
- ✓ What will be talked about.
- ✓ How you will put your views across and help with a list of questions you could to ask.
- ✓ If you need an advocate and arrange time to be with them before the review.
- ✓ Any forms or paperwork. Your social worker should explain them and help you fill them in.

## AKA THE 'IRO'

The Independent Review Officer (*aka the IRO*) runs your reviews to make sure that everyone understands your views and takes them into account. They keep an eye on your Care Plan and makes sure everybody is doing what they are supposed to do.

## A BIG UP TO THE IRO!

You can tell your private feelings just to the IRO rather than to everyone at the meeting. They can help you speak up, understand what's being talked about and help you make a complaint if you are unhappy with the way things are going.

## AKA THE ADVOCATE

An advocate is someone who can help you get your views across and take part in decisions that affect your life.

## AT YOUR REVIEW...

New things you have not talked about should not be talked about at the review. If you feel like this is happening ask for a break and the IRO will remind everybody not to do it.

## AFTERWARDS...

**Phew! Well done!**

It's important that you understand all the decisions that have been made at your review. The law says that you must be told about any changes that might affect you after the review.

Giving you feedback is your social worker's job. They can help you understand the decisions by writing notes called *minutes*, writing postcards with the decisions written on them or giving you action points on what everyone has agreed to do.

## REMEMBER... MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR REVIEW!

It's a chance for you to be part of the discussion about the plans made about how YOU are looked after, now and in the future.



# A problem shared...

→ **DOWNLOAD**  
your woes  
onto *Thrive!*

Teens in care  
and our agony  
uncle, Matt,  
answer your  
problems

## BELLY UP

**Q** Everyone in my class has got their belly button pierced but my social worker won't let me have it done until I'm 16. Why should I be treated differently because I'm in care?

Abi, 14

**Taz says:** "Ask your social worker why you can't have it done. Maybe they think something will go wrong. It could get infected. Speak to other people who've had it done and see what they say."

**Lee says:** "You should ask yourself if you really want it or is it just because your friends are doing it?"

**Kate says:** "Abi needs to speak to her social worker. Tell them you don't think it's fair as your friends have had it done. If Abi feels she's not being listened to, she should get an advocate."



**Matt says:** 'Social Services does have legal responsibility for you and the Local Authority have 'corporate parenting' responsibilities for all Looked After Children. But you can:

- ▶ Visit [www.info4carekids.org.uk](http://www.info4carekids.org.uk) to find out your 'rights'. Contact the Children's Commissioner for Wales [www.childcom.org.uk](http://www.childcom.org.uk), asking him to investigate it.
- ▶ Write a statement (with a letter from a family member or your foster carers) saying why you should be allowed to do it. Talk about it at your LAC Review and explain your reasons to the IRO. It's important to explain that you do understand the health issues related to body piercing.
- ▶ You could use the Social Services Complaints Procedure (information on the County Council site) to lodge a complaint.

"It's important to explain that you do understand the health issues related to body piercing"





# MOVING 'MARE

**Q** I've lived with my foster carers since I was 14.

I like it here, it's the only place I've called home. Now my social worker has said I've got to move out when I'm 18. When I was younger I used to ask them to move me and they wouldn't. Now I don't want to move they're making me. It's crazy!

Jen, 16

**Zoe says:** "Jen should speak to her leaving care worker, an advocate and a children's rights officer to find out what her rights are."

**Claire says:** "If she's going to move out she should find out what support she'll get. It shouldn't just all stop. Jen will get more support if she stays in education. She doesn't have to go to Uni though, she can study practical courses in college."

**Lee says:** "It's hard but when you're in care it's a good idea to know what you want to do in the future. It should be written in your plan. If you don't tell anyone what you want to do, you might not get the chance to do it."



**Matt says:** 'You will have to 'move on' from being a Looked After Child to an 18 year old with independent skills. Moving to independence should have been very much on your 'agenda' and that of your foster carers for the last couple of years and confirmed in your Pathway Plan. Remember, on your 18th birthday, you are no longer a Looked After Child and therefore your current foster carers will no longer be fostering someone 18+. Visit [www.inform4carekids.org.uk](http://www.inform4carekids.org.uk)

However, you don't have to move 'physically' from where you live now. There are a number of accommodation / 'moving on' options your social worker should have explored with in your Pathway Plan. They should have also been discussed in your LAC Reviews.

Ask your social worker for your LAC Review to be brought forward so the whole issue of your accommodation when you become 18 can be fully explored. One option is a 'supported lodgings' scheme which allows the young person to remain with their former foster carers with an agreement how much the local authority 'pays' them for the supported lodgings and how much the young person contributes for their keep. In addition, as part of the Pathway Plan and After Care service, there should be a general agreement for how long the 'supported lodgings' will be and to what type of accommodation the young person will be 'moving on' to. Good luck!



# FACEBOOK WOES

**Q** My social worker has told my foster carer that she can take my phone off me at night. I can't sleep, I use my phone to talk to my friends on Facebook. It's my phone, it's so unfair'.

Luke, 14

**Jessie says:** "Talk to an advocate or a children's rights officer".

**Cai says:** "They may have taken it off you so that you can sleep. If you can't sleep, you've got to do something to switch your mind off. Read a book or listen to music. Maybe you should speak to your foster carer, your friends or a doctor."

**Claire says:** "If someone is taking your phone off you it might be because they know you could be at risk."



**Matt says:** 'Come on, Let's be positive. Your social worker was thinking of your online safety, your health (in terms of getting enough sleep) and the phone costs.

You need to show everyone that you are aware of the dangers of social networking. That you are knowledgeable and mature enough to be able to make positive use of it and be safer.

Once you have done that, write a plan to discuss with your foster carers how you would use your phone at night and also how you would not use it. Once you have agreed a 'night-time use of a mobile phone' statement, you can then share it with your social worker to get them to agree. In agreeing your statement with them, remember that they need to listen to your wishes and feelings but also you need to be flexible in meeting them half way to meet their concerns. Try a different approach, it might just work!

*"You need to show everyone that you are aware of the dangers of social networking"*





# YES...

## *this is my job!*

*As an advocate Sarah listens, champions and fights tirelessly for young people in care. She gives us a behind-the-scenes peek into what she does on an average day!*



**9.00** The day starts in the office, checking emails and post. At last, a long-awaited response to a complaint has arrived. It's fab news for Leanne, who has permission to use Facebook. She's in school today, so excited about sharing the news with her this afternoon. She has been sad about leaving her friends, so I hope that this news will help her keep in touch with them.

**9.30** It's Tom's Looked After Child review later so I phone Tom to ask what issues he wants me to raise. He wants contact with his brother who lives fifty miles away. Although his social worker keeps promising to talk to his brother's social worker about this, Tom tells me that nothing ever happens.

**11.00** I make phone calls and send emails to Children's Services on behalf of young people I am working with. The great thing about this job is that I am independent from social services so I just focus on my client's views. I update my clients as I go along or make a note to call them after school. It's so important to keep them up-to-date.

**11.30** I met Nia for an update. She is 16 and mum to Rose. Social services were not sure if she was able to look after Rose. I have helped Nia by explaining her rights, finding her a solicitor and helped her put her views across for court statements. After several court appearances, the judge agreed that Nia could take Rose to a mother and baby assessment unit to prove that she was able to care for her. At the final hearing, the judge said how impressed he was with Nia's commitment and she was allowed to keep Rose.

**1.30** After lunch, I get ready to leave the office for Tom's review. But just before I leave, I get a call to tell me that his social worker has been taken ill so the review has been postponed. Poor Tom!

I call Tom, he's furious as he knows this will delay seeing his brother. He tells me how fed-up he is with his social worker and wants to change her.

I reassure him that I will chat to the manager but that it might be a better to ask for a face-to-face meeting as this may be a better way for him to be heard. Tom agrees and asks me to arrange a meeting. I call the manager and leave him a message.

**4.00** I take a call from a social worker about Hannah who has lived with nine different foster carers and keeps running away to stay with her older friends. Her social worker is keen to find her a happy foster home but Hannah refuses to talk or share her feelings. I must speak to Hannah soon to help her feel safe and settled. She is putting herself at risk by running away. I'll explain to her that I am not there to make decisions about her but just there to help make sure her voice is heard.

**4.30** It's back to updating all my clients who are back from school.

It's not good news for Jade who been told that she has to move placement even though she is really happy. I cant always make things better for everyone, but I have made everyone in charge of Jade's care understand how she feels. I now have to help Jade understand why those decisions have been made.

Progress for Sol on his pocket money. No news yet for Dylan who wants to see more of his mum and Leanne is over the moon!

**6.30** Phew! - It's been another busy day, time to head home and relax with my cat Oscar!



Sarah x

Oscar