

Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Bill

Young Advocates response

We are a group of care experienced young people who have taken part in Life Story Work and are now part of a Young Advocates Group that promotes Life Story work for care experienced young people. It is our view that –

- **There should be a statutory provision of Life Story Work made available to all care experienced young people in Northern Ireland.**

Life Story work gave us answers to our biggest questions. Through our Life Story Work we were able to understand why we were in care and why certain decisions were made about our lives.

- **It is a child's right to have information about their life before the age of 18.**

It is our view that accurate information should be provided to a child or young person at the time of need. Waiting years to get answers, in our experience, leads to feelings of frustration and powerlessness which impacts daily. We believe a child should have the right to have access to their own information and their life story before the age of 18.

- **Life Story Work should be delivered by an independent agency.**

It is often hard for us to open up and talk to our own Social Workers. Our Life Story was delivered by an independent agency who, because of its independence, was able to provide a unbiased, comprehensive and accurate account of our life stories, as opposed to the "protected" and partial version told to us by other adults. In addition to this, they were able to heavily support us throughout the work, enabling us to process all the information in a safe, supportive way.

During a consultation with our Young Advocates group, one member said:

“Life story should be essential for all kids in Northern Ireland who are adopted or in foster care because doesn’t a child/young person have the right to know the things that have happened in their life that affected them in some way and is causing them to have gaps in their memory? This is not fun because you think you know what happened but you really don’t and it just causes confusion. I feel it is better for that child to receive Life Story work and that they deserve it. They deserve the right to know their life story before the age of 18. Also, I think it is unfair that Life Story work is already a statutory requirement in other parts of the U.K, but not here in Northern Ireland. I just find that ludicrous and something that needs to be fixed.”

Young Advocates Group.