



30/ 04/ 2020

Dear Decision Makers,

We, the Peer Power Experts, are specialists in voicing the issues for young people with experience in social care, justice and mental health services. Together, utilising empathy based training and co-production, we can work towards the common goal of improving services to help others.

This letter covers some of the issues we are experiencing at the moment and things we would like from services, including suggestions about **mental health support, employment, finance, housing, education, and communication** to young people.

More often than not, those with lived experiences are considered 'voiceless', though as we progress hopefully it will be revealed that we are not voiceless, rather we have our voices listened to us less.

By listening to those with lived experience, especially in light of new and rare circumstances, we can identify where those with real life experiences may need additional care and support. To make lines of communication clearer and more transparent between services and those who require them, **we have drafted this letter to highlight issues that have been brought to our attention via personal and collective experiences.**

The needs of **mental health support** during this crisis to those needing help managing feelings such as grief or trauma is essential. This would be difficult to face alone, whilst also having limited to no social interaction, for anyone and so should be addressed a priority.

It is more the magnitude of those who need this support that is pressing, as opposed to a new, detrimental consequence to consider this an urgent requirement. That being said, some may say a pandemic is a sufficient enough reason to validate this urgency.

In regards to **employment**, there are many young people losing zero hour contract work thus affecting their **finances**. Combined with the lack of support and understanding of people's current circumstances in being able to pay rent, it seems as though some form of authority ought to be pushed into place upon evaluation of the government's 3-month ban on evictions. We understand Chancellor Rishi Sunak has put in support for landlords, however, without some sort of legislation or authority, it is not uncommon for young people to face the negative implications of this lack of accountability.

Other areas causing concern include **putting services on hold**. Young people are having to be told things can't be done due to the pandemic that are integral to well being – **housing** placements as an example. Young people are having to find other arrangements, being told to "stay with friends" until housing can find a placement, which is expected to take an additional 6 months. For some of these young people, it is a lot to ask a friend to stay in their home for a period of 6 months whilst also having to worry about going into another year of education, with nowhere to stay as there is nothing special in my circumstance to speed up my housing application. Upon further discussion, it was said that a lack of routine and structure for young people contributes to poor mental health.

Touching on **education**, there is an expectation for young people to still do well. Alas, due to insufficient set ups and resources to work effectively from home, a more than unfair circumstance is created due to an environment without internet access or access to a digital desktop. How do you explain to a young person that although Internet / Wi-Fi access is considered a bare necessity in the 21st century, something that is available for free at McDonald's Restaurants, that they are still expected to move forth with their online education - when they currently do not have access to internet?

Whilst on the theme of services, it has been communicated that there is a **lack of personal communication from services**. Blanket, impersonal messages - from GPs or leaving care services - are sent in groups, almost mass messaging with not as much support readily available; communication done via email or message. We suggest a message or email asking when the young people would like a call, if they would like a call to at all, then slot the time allocated into the work schedule. We understand that this may increase workload considerably, however, we do believe it will be very beneficial and could also be considered a step in increasing **mental health support!**

We also ask you to consider young people in vulnerable family set ups and small spaces and wonder if there is any support available or that could be made more available specifically for this group of young people. There are often messages broadcasted by the face of government officials, there is **“no one who looks or sounds like us”** as young people, which could heighten feelings of isolation.

The strain on services after lockdown will mean even longer waiting times and increase poor communication between services and young people. **We hope by surfacing this concern, something preemptive can happen.**

We really appreciate you taking the time to read this letter and look forward to your responses!

Thank you and stay safe,

peer power experts

This letter was written by Jenny, a Peer Power Expert, on behalf of a group of 10 Peer Power Experts. The Peer Power Experts are young adults and teenagers with lived experience of social care, justice and mental health services who are committed to voicing issues for and with other young people.