



Centre for excellence
for looked after children in Scotland

International Summit of Youth in Care Report on the CELCCIS Host Site

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the International Summit of Youth in Care

The [International Summit of Youth in Care](#) was held in Baltimore from 26-29 June 2012 and was led by a partnership of organisations based in Americaⁱ. The Summit aimed to: *'set an agenda for change and start a conversation with senior officials worldwide on the consequences and impact of transition for young people in care. The Summit set out to be a partnership between young people and adults, directed by young activists who have personally experienced being in care, with support from staff from sponsoring organisations. Five priority themes were the focus of the Summit:*

- *Prevention and Placement*
- *De-Institutionalization*
- *Identity and Culture*
- *Permanence and Independence*
- *Youth and Alumni (Care Leavers) Engagement.'*

The Summit aimed to bring young people and stakeholders together to develop a set of recommendations based on the Summit themes. Stakeholders included young people in care, care leavers, researchers, strategic planners, child welfare experts and politicians. The [transitions framework](#) was used to help young people and stakeholders explore care experiences.ⁱⁱ

1.2 Links with CELCIS and Who Cares? Scotland

The Summit provided an opportunity for CELCIS, Who Cares? Scotland and their partners to contribute to a global discussion with young people about care experiences. The Summit aimed to enable young people and stakeholders to jointly make recommendations on the priority themes. This provided an opportunity for CELCIS and partners to learn about participation approaches used by other countries. The CELCIS Stakeholder Participation Lead collaborated with the Summit Co-Chair and Who Cares? Scotland to develop links with the Summit. The following activities were agreed:

- 1.2.1 ***Participation in the Summit at Baltimore:*** The Summit provided sponsorship for Alex Horne, a young person, employed by Who Cares? Scotland to attend as the 'young correspondent' for Scotland. CELCIS provided sponsorship for Grant Gilroy, Who Cares? Scotland to accompany Alex to Baltimore.
- 1.2.2 ***Consultation on the Summit themes:*** Using the Summit Consultation Framework Alex was asked by the Summit to interview five young people. The young people

were nominated from organisations represented on the [CELCIS Partnership Group](#). The consultation findings were presented by Alex at the Summit and shared by the young people at a Multi-Generational Forum in Edinburgh.

- 1.2.3 **Facilitation of a Multi-Generational Forum:** Held as a day event in Edinburgh, the Forum provided an opportunity for young people involved in the consultation to share their findings and have a virtual conversation with delegates at the Summit in Baltimore. The Forum was run as a parallel event with the LACSIGⁱⁱⁱ Two Year on Event. This provided an opportunity for strategic planners and policy makers to meet with Forum members.
- 1.2.4 **CELCIS Host Site:** CELCIS agreed to broadcast the Summit live on the CELCIS website and to facilitate the virtual conversation with the Summit in Baltimore. CELCIS were the only Host Site to the Summit.
- 1.2.5 **Production of a Summit Report:** This will be collated by the Summit organisers. It will make recommendations across the priority themes based on the findings from the Summit. It is intended that this will support international and national policy making for young people in care and care leavers. This will be considered in line with the [UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#).

2. Consultation on the Summit Themes

2.1 Nomination of Young People

Alex interviewed five young people on the priority themes. The consultation framework was provided by the Summit and adapted by Alex so it was relevant for young people in Scotland. Young people participating in the consultation were nominated by members of the [CELCIS Partnership Group](#). The young people were from:

- The Debate Project, Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum
- Hear My Voice Project, Stirling Council
- The Voice of Reason Group, Robert Gordon University.
- Who Cares? Scotland

A young person from a children's unit in Renfrewshire Council was also nominated. However due to timescales, they were unable to participate in the consultation and the Forum. The young people participating in the consultation were invited to participate in the Forum in Edinburgh.

2.2 Consultation Process - Who Cares? Scotland and The Debate Project

Following the interviews with young people, Alex collated the findings and submitted them online to the Summit. These were then presented by Alex to the Summit delegates in Baltimore. The findings from the consultation are detailed in the [Who Cares? Scotland Report](#).

Alistair from The Debate Project gathered the views of care leavers from The Debate Project. They focused on the priority theme, youth and alumni engagement, and shared their experiences of leaving care. These were part of the consultation response and were shared by Alistair at the Multi-Generational Forum. Appendix One contains the feedback from The Debate Project on the Summit Consultation. Their report highlighted young people's views on support available when leaving care and participation in decision making processes:

To emotionally prepare young people for leaving care they should...

- *get support from someone who also has experience of being in care*
- *ensure young people know their involvement will really make a difference*

Young people felt valued as experts in relation to the leaving care field in relation to being asked their views and opinions...However there was a sense that young people's involvement was often left at a consultative/responsive level rather than young people being valued as individuals who could in fact initiate changes...

A young person from Who Cares? Scotland and Alistair from The Debate Project presented the consultation findings at the Forum. Key themes emerging during the Forum are detailed in Section 4.

3. The Summit in Baltimore

- 3.1 The [Who Cares? Scotland Report](#) details the Summit programme, outcomes for young people and staff and learning and recommendations for future practice. Below is an excerpt from the report describing Alex's feedback on the Summit:

Excerpt of Feedback from Alex on the Summit

Tuesday was the official start day of the Summit the main focus was to get to know everyone a little better before you got into your group...mine was on youth and alumni engagement. Our project over the following days was to consider how we could engage with other young people. We came up with the idea of an international internship and a book or magazine with info from each country about their services that they carry out with young people in care. At the end of the week a representative from each of the five groups pitched their ideas and considerations to the young people in Edinburgh who had completed the initial consultations over a live internet link. The link was used to pitch the ideas of each group and also a Q/A session (translated by yours truly). After the link we went back to be with our groups and pitched our ideas to the other groups then to a large conference audience and five panel members who are experts in the field of each topic.

4. The Multi-Generational Forum

4.1 Purpose of the Forum

The purpose of the Forum was for participants to:

- Share their views of the Summit themes and the results of the consultation
- Develop key messages to share with the Summit in Baltimore
- Report to LACSIG members on their findings at the parallel conference
- Explore how to take forward learning from the Summit.

The Forum involved young people with a supporting staff member from:

- The Debate Project, Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum
- Hear My Voice Project, Stirling Council
- Who Cares? Scotland

A staff member from Robert Gordon University represented the views of young people from the Voice of Reason Group.

4.2 Themes from the Consultation

Findings from the Summit consultation were presented by young people from Who Cares? Scotland and the Debate Project. A summary of the key themes which emerged are detailed in the box below.

Summary of Themes Discussed by Young People at the Forum

- *Local authorities should be a good parent:*
 - *Involved early - not thrown in at the deep end*
 - *Properly supported participation*
 - *Support is not consistent across Scotland*
- *We need a long term plan - not just crisis!!*
- *Young people's participation should be standardised - need to listen to young people*
- *More peer support and peer mentoring*
- *There is still stigma from being in care*
- *Workers need training and support with diversity and sexuality*
- *Need to build self-esteem of young people and support their mental health*
- *Transition is too protected - we are not prepared for leaving care*

4.3 Themes from the Global Discussion

Forum members prepared key messages and questions for the delegates at the Summit. These were shared through an online discussion with young people from Finland, Canada, America and Alex from Who Cares? Scotland. Examples of issues discussed are detailed in the boxes below.

Young people's participation in the development of services: in Canada there is a project called 'You Can' that links young people with staff and the Parliament. We are encouraged to have our voices heard. There are volunteers and paid positions. There is a conference and 250 young people in care come together every year. We have Youth Ambassadors and an infrastructure for young people in foster care.

Age of young people leave care:

Delegates said:

In Washington, it's 18-21. We receive benefits if at college until 21

In Finland it's 18 with aftercare until 21

In Canada it's 18 with aftercare until 21, for young people in group care it's 24

We think the age should change to 25

Support for young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender:

There is a 'RISE' group that works with young people in foster care. In Canada there are festivals, groups and training to support young people who are LGBT.

Support for young people in Foster Care: *In America there is a programme called One Simple Wish which grants wishes to young people in foster care.*

4.4 Meeting with LACSIG Members

Forum members joined delegates at the parallel LACSIG event. This provided an opportunity for participants to share learning from participating in the Forum and to discuss the Summit's process for engaging young people in decision making. Participants also explored the development of a global community for young people in care. A summary of key issues and feedback from the group discussion is detailed below:

4.4.1 Develop participation methods in Scotland

- *Service providers need to talk to young people and hear their views on the services they are delivering. Sometimes what a young person wants and what a service can provide can be miles apart, but they need to hear from each other to improve.*
- *There is a need to work collaboratively with young people from the start. Young people should be more involved in the decision making process.*
- *Enable young people in foster care to link with Who Cares? Scotland through The Fostering Network and local authorities. Need to engage with children who are looked after at home or in kinship care.*
- *More groups should be provided for young people to participate in the decision making process.*
- *There should be a direct link with the Scottish Parliament for young people who are looked after to contribute their views.*

4.4.2 Learn from examples of practice on involving young people

- *Young people being trained as inspectors. This can help the young person with employability. A young person may open up more to a young person who is an inspector.*
- *Local authority example where two young people are members of the strategic corporate parenting group.*
- *Make links with Scottish Youth Parliament and school pupil councils. An example was given of a student council which will have representation from a young person who is in care.*

4.4.3 Increase support for young people in care

- *Need flexible services to allow young people to receive support when they need it. Canada provides support up to the age of 25 years. In Scotland if you leave a service, often there is no more support. The age of leaving care should be increased to 25 years.*
- *Need to put more effort into helping young people to maintain supportive friendships.*
- *Still problems in the public about their understanding of being looked after.*
- *The Modern Apprentice scheme for care leavers has had a profound effect of challenging those who work in the system to think differently.*

4.4.4 Support a global community and digital communication

- *We need to establish links with and learn from other countries.*
- *Social networking can help you to make sense of your situation. Global discussion helps you make sense of how you fit into this system and then how you can shape it back. This is how we make change in the world.*
- *Need to develop local structures before being part of a global community*
- *Use technology to help the global community develop - a group social networking site could be set up to enable care leavers to talk globally*
- *Need to consider digital inclusion e.g. access to lap tops*

- *Young people can communicate via social media, however young people don't want other young people to know they are in care (on Facebook)*

5. Learning and Recommendations

5.1 National Voice for Young People in Care

Young people and staff commented on the benefits of different organisations coming together to explore a common agenda. The organisations were linked through the [CELCIS Partnership Group](#). There is an opportunity for CELCIS and partners to continue to support a national voice for young people in care.

5.2 Learning from the Global Community

Participation in the Summit and the virtual discussion at the Forum highlighted the common experiences for young people in care and care leavers from different countries. The sharing of practice and types of support for young people in care proved valuable. There is an opportunity through contacts established by Who Cares? Scotland, CELCIS and partners to continue to support a global community. This has been recommended by Alex, following his return from the Summit:

Feedback from Alex on next steps for the Summit

I think the experience was amazing meeting all the amazing people that I did making lifelong friends even making a brother, also doing things like going to Washington D.C and going to Capitol hill seeing Capitol and getting a tour of the museum underneath capitol its an experience I will never forgot and also one I am VERY grateful for. In term of the future I would like to be involved in the planning of ISYIC 2013 (International Summit of Youth in Care) which starts late July where if I did go back I would be more than a delegate I would be a founding member!

5.3 Findings from the Consultation

As part of the consultation on the Summit themes, young people presented a range of issues related to care experiences. The findings from the consultation are part of the Who Cares? Scotland report and will be available on the CELCIS website. CELCIS has a role to collate and disseminate the views of children and young people who are looked after to inform policy and practice. The findings from this consultation will be part of this process.

5.4 Support for Virtual Dialogue

A range of technical issues were presented to enable a virtual conversation with the Summit. The need for I.T and communications support was evident during planning for the Forum and the virtual discussion. CELCIS agreed to broadcast the Summit live on their website; however this was not feasible due to technical issues at the Summit. The process has identified the need for appropriate support at both ends of the global partnership.

5.5 Links with Decision Making Structures

The Forum provided an opportunity for young people to meet with members of LACSIG. During these discussion recommendations were made to develop links with the Scottish Youth Parliament and with members of the Scottish Parliament. These will be progressed by CELCIS and partners.

5.6 Young People and Staff Learning Together

The Forum provided an opportunity for young people and staff to learn together about how the views of young people in Scotland compare with the experiences of young people in care from other countries. Following the Forum, young people completed a short questionnaire to feedback their views on the Forum. Their comments are highlighted below:

Feedback from young people on the Forum:

I enjoyed...Getting to speak to people in Baltimore and learning from them.

I loved speaking during the link to people from other countries and hearing what they do differently in their countries.

To make things better...I think a bit more time to chat and plan before hand

We should...To do more streams with other countries in the future.

It would be good to do (conferences) regularly for Scotland and then every so often involve young people from other countries...so we can learn from each other...I think it's a good idea to get together with people who are making policies so that we can tell them what we think too.

Had a great time and was good to learn from experience and make new friends.

I really enjoyed the day and would like to go back.

Appendix One: Feedback from The Debate Project on the Summit Consultation

2012 International Summit of Youth in Care

Host Site Reporting Template for Consultation with Child Welfare Stakeholders

Summit Priority Theme: Youth & Alumni Engagement

1) How do we emotionally prepare youth before engaging alumni and youth in care in child welfare outreach and initiatives (panels, speakers bureaus, councils)? Should this be standardized?

Participants answered this as if they had been asked what *should* be done to emotionally prepare young people:

- *Get support from someone who also has experience of being in care*
- *Recognise young people's expertise*
- *Make the young people feel wanted by the project/group*
- *Ensure young people know their involvement will really make a difference*
- *Make sure young people know the process don't throw them in at the deep end*
- *Give young people plenty of notice, give them clear information and take them through the process of what will happen before hand*

2) What methods of support are currently in place to support their well-being?

Participants answered this using their experience of Debate Project and the support they get here:

- *Recognise young people are individuals and not all the same*
- *Young people trusted and given freedom to take the lead and use own initiative*
- *Nurturing family type relationships where group can turn to each other for help and support*
- *Actually listening to young people*
- *Find out what young people's comfort zones are*
- *Give young people a chance to practice before doing an activity publicly*
- *Make sure young people know they have back up - workers will be there if things don't go according to plan*

Young people felt that support was not consistent across geographical areas and was very dependent on staff and projects they were involved in. They suggested there should be local coordinators who link up with national organisations so that young people have support locally.

3) What are the long-term investments being made in the youth we engage? Should there be?

Young people talked about what they felt the long term investments made in them from the Debate Project:

- *Having a voice*
- *Time*
- *Help to build confidence and have new experiences*
- *Learning from one another (peer learning)*
- *Social skills, working in a team, technical skills*
- *Learning how to facilitate groups, working on own initiative.*
- *Developing problem solving skills*
- *Learning and experiencing how it feels to have trust*
- *Freedom to be yourself in a group*
- *People accept you for whatever you are*
- *Building long term friendships*
- *Improving our employability*
- *Gain volunteer awards*

4) How are young people valued as subject matter experts? How should they be valued?

Young people felt valued as experts in relation to the leaving care field in relation to being asked their views and opinions. They also felt they were represented in and consulted on relevant literature and policy movements. However there was a sense that young people's involvement was often left at a consultative/responsive level rather than young people being valued as individuals who could in fact initiate changes and be seen as collaborative partners in developing and initiating changes to policy and practice.

Young people questioned how much their input was valued and take seriously to make changes.

Young people felt they should be valued as peer researchers, educators, consultees, learners and co-coordinators.

Young people did not hold rewards e.g. payment/vouchers etc. in very high regard. They valued far more thanks in the shape of being trusted and respected to make decisions and as individuals. They also felt good close relationships with other young people and workers was a far more valuable gain than monetary rewards.

Additional Discussion Points

Please make note of any specific issues or insights that were identified that may not have fallen under one of the questions asked during the consultation:

Young people felt strongly that more trust should be put in young people by decision making agencies. The group felt that opportunities to influence the care system were not consistent across Scotland. Often opportunities to be involved in making decisions or expressing opinions were left to chance and the area you lived in.

Facilitator / Writer Comments

Please make note of any specific learning's, suggestions or challenges you encountered as part of this consultation process:

These questions in this section were not particularly young person friendly. Questions seemed to be constructed for workers rather than young people. It was unclear whether questions referred to what was happening in reality or what we felt *should* be happening.

It was also difficult to distinguish whether questions referred to our own organisations or organisations across the country.

Looking at the rest of the survey questions they seemed to be much clearer than this specific section.

However the subject matter was interesting and generated some great conversations, really making the group of young people explore their thoughts and opinions.

The Debate Project would be pleased to respond to the other questions in this survey if at some point there was another opportunity to feed in to this work.

ⁱ Lift Teens, Baltimore, America, Voices, America and International Foster Care Organisation

ⁱⁱ 2012 International Summit of Youth in Care, Host Site Framework for Consultation with Child Welfare Stakeholders

ⁱⁱⁱ Looked after Children Strategic Implementation Group

About CELCIS

CELCIS is the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland. Together with partners, we are working to improve the lives of all looked after children in Scotland. We do so by providing a focal point for the sharing of knowledge and the development of best practice, by providing a wide range of services to improve the skills of those working with looked after children, and by placing the interests of children at the heart of our work.

For more information

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