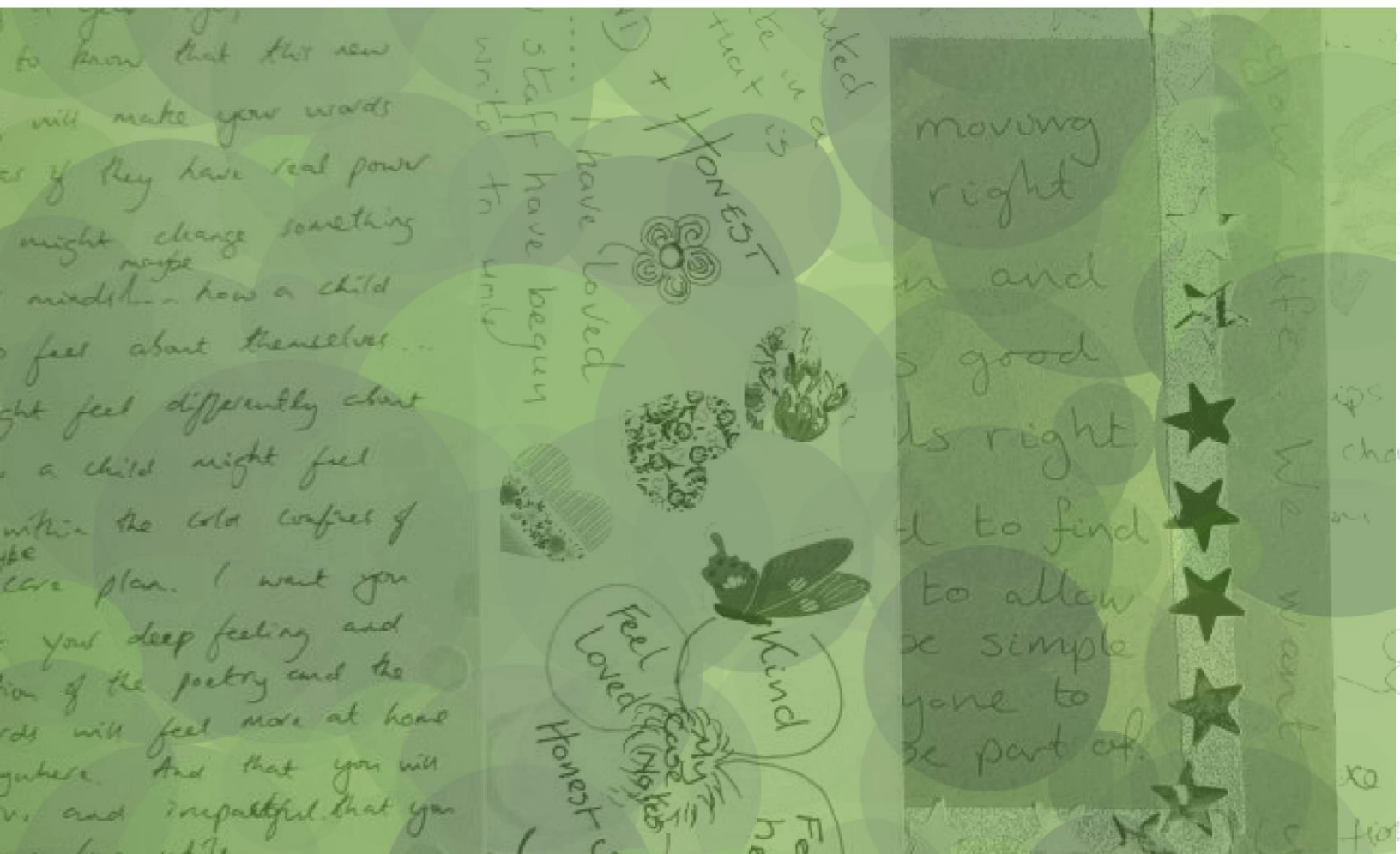


Falkirk CCCR Group

Child-Centred Case Recording Transformation

FEBRUARY 2024



**We want you to feel seen,
heard and loved in all that we
write about you.**

**We will write in a way that
makes sense to you, that is kind
and is honest.**

**We will write in a way that will
help you to understand why we
were involved with you and
your family.**

Background

The Falkirk Child-Centred Case Recording Group, formed in 2022, is dedicated to changing the way written records are written for children and families in social work services. This initiative was spurred by the Falkirk Champs, a group of young care-experienced individuals, who emphasized the need for a shift in culture, systems, and practice to ensure that case recording is child-centred.

The overarching aim of our project is to ensure that children, young people, and their parents feel seen, heard, and loved in all written communication from Falkirk's Children & Families Social Work staff. This commitment involves writing in a manner that is not only kind, honest, and easily understood but also provides insight into the reasons for Social Work Services' involvement with them and their families.

Key People:

Due to staff change over and changes in roles, This report aims to summarize the project so far in order to hand over leadership to new staff.

The project was initially led by Arun Singh (Senior Service Manager) and Sharon Laing (Service Manager), and involves a committed group of practitioners including Christine Brown, David Todd, Gillian Kerr, Gillian Millar, Iona Markey, Iona Millar, Joanna Gowans, Lindsay Karwowski, Liz Beattie, Louise Wrigley, Rachel Drummond, Rebekah Francis, Sharon McCafferty, and Winnie Delaney.

The Children Case Recording group should include representatives from Leaving Care Team, Senior Service Management, Training Manager, Residential Childcare, Family Placement Team, Reviewing Coordinators, Initial response Team, Locality Social Work, Senior representation, Childrens with disabilities team and Multiagency Training co-ordinator.

Where we started: Learning from The Champs

In our journey of learning from young people, the primary aim is to ensure that the changes we implement will significantly enhance the well-being and experiences of children, both now and in the future. We want to empower all the children who have social work involvement in their lives by providing them with a comprehensive understanding of their unique stories and actively involving them in the care planning process. By placing their voices at the forefront, we want to create an environment where their perspectives play a central role in decision-making processes.

The profound impact we hope to achieve through this initiative is the establishment of a system where compassion is inherent, and professionals can bring their whole selves to the process. This shift not only keeps us accountable but also fosters a culture of openness, transparency, and genuine connection. The written records, reflecting positive memories and celebrating the successes of each child's care experience, aim to provide a tangible record that encapsulates their journey.

Our commitment extends to ensuring that care-experienced individuals can fill gaps in their memories and seek answers to questions about their time in care. The language we employ will be carefully chosen, emphasizing empowerment, strength-based narratives, and a delicate balance between sensitivity, honesty, and empathy. This approach seeks to instigate a broader culture change towards

best practices in social work, placing the child at the center of our endeavors and fostering an environment of trust, understanding, and support.

The Champs gave us feedback on previous styles of notes:

- *'it's a fragmented story and its multiple versions of a story, and it's not totally me it's their interpretations of me, and it takes a long time to try and find what you think is your version'*
- *'there's not much of me in is as in my voice, im pretty silent,.....when I read my voice its powerful but most of my voice is through other people'*
- *'while in care you do have moments of joy ...I don't just want to know negative thingsI want to go back and remember my whole story'*
- *'I wish I have known what you written at the time, I would have questioned your interpretation, it was probably different in my mind... '*
- *'sadly the file doesn't capture them (social workers) as humans they are behind this bureaucratic wall ...it be good to a sense of who they are ...what are their motivations'*

Project Aim

By 30 June 2027, Falkirk's Children & Families Social Work staff will write all written records as if they are writing to you.

Our written records will kindly reflect:-

- why your family was involved with Social Work Services
- the concerns we have about your wellbeing
- the plans made to support you
- your views
- where we agree and where we disagree
- your positive achievements
- personal stories that will be meaningful to you now and in the future

Project Drivers

Change in CULTURE across practitioners and managers that supports writing in a style directly to you.

- Ensure culture and practice reflects Falkirk Council's values of being Responsive, Innovative, Trusted & Ambitious
- Ensure culture and practice takes account of the ambitions set out within The Promise's five foundations
- Culture will be influenced by refresh of GIRFEC
- Ensure written records are 'Rights Respecting' in keeping with UNCRC

- Ensure practice and systems take account of Falkirk's' Closer To Home strategy

Change in SYSTEMS that will embed child centred case recording

- Ensure there are systems which allow the voice and views of the child to be gathered and respected
- New Child Centred Recording will be part of Liquid Logic system
- Updated Policies & Procedures will support child centred practice
- Inform the workforce of how child centred recording is being implemented via Council Website and Practitioner Pages
- Produce Lead Professional Integrated Assessment & Child's Plans which embraces child centred recording.

Change in PRACTICE that will allow you to understand notes written about you

- written records will purposefully capture your lived experience and what matters to you.
- Staff supervision will allow us to understand your lived experience
- Develop Workforce Training to support the adoption of child centred recording
- Promote a learning culture for sharing and developing child centred practice

Tests of change

The group initially agreed the following tests of change as a starting point for the project. progress has been made against a number of these, while others have been deprioritized.

1. Co production with children & young people of positive child centred case recording examples.
2. Promotional film includes views of young people which wins the 'Hearts & Minds' of the workforce.
3. The lived experience of each child is reflected in practice and written records.
4. Trauma Informed practice reflects practice and written records
5. Quality Assurance processes includes auditing selected written records – Audit Activity every 6 months
6. Practice Learning Sessions facilitated every 6 months until it has been assessed that staff feel confident they are being supported to make notes more child centred
7. Case Recording workshops facilitated every 12 months will capture learning and continue developing child centred.
8. Corporate Induction Training session accessed by new staff and also as an eLearning Olle module to existing staff. Requirement for relevant staff to access this every 12 months for them to keep up to date with ongoing changes and developments

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9. Other staff groups will understand and adopt the improved child centred recording style of writing:- Children's Panel, Child Protection Review Co-ordinators, 'Hearing our Voices', Speech & Language Teams, Corporate Parenting and Multi agency partners

Our Progress so far

In our journey towards child-centred case recording, we have made significant progress. We have showcased a transformative shift in our approach and fostering a culture that prioritizes the voices and experiences of the young people we serve.

The project uncovered some unexpected learning. We found that direct writing to the young person is beneficial in various situations, especially when information is limited due to limited interactions. The new writing style brings out a stronger voice of the worker, providing clearer descriptions of concerns, pride, hopes, and support for the young person. Writing directly to the child removes the detachment caused by generic corporate speak, promoting greater ownership of the content.

Shift in Practice and Cultural Impact

Initially setting a five-year timeline for cultural change, we discovered that small changes in practice have had a profound impact on shaping the overall culture. Colleagues have reported instances where others have admired and adopted their written records, initiating conversations that contribute to a positive cultural shift.

"We gave ourselves five years when we drew our first driver diagram. We thought we would have to change culture to create changes in practice. But this approach has showed us that actually, what we have done is on the other way round - made small changes to practise that are shifting the culture. Which is quite nice."

Cross-System Collaboration and Preparation for Change

Recognising the need for a broader cultural change, we have actively shared our work across various settings. Presentations to Senior management, engagement with legal services, discussions with the children's panel, and briefings for fostering and adoption panel chairs are integral steps in preparing different systems for embracing this new way of working. The willingness to conduct a small test case in the children's panel demonstrates a commitment to overcoming hurdles and adapting our approach.

"There have been lovely examples of people reading your case notes, looking at them for different reasons, and then saying, "oh I really like how you did those case notes", so people are talking about it which is creating change. So, it's kind of filtering. We keep saying - you're not going to break the

system, try something, give it a go, find out what the barriers are. I think that permission has kind of meant that things have gone a bit faster than we intended.”

“There's been discussions with members of the Children's Panel. There's an agreement that there is going to be a small test of one case so that the panel can experience this type of paperwork. This represents quite a big hurdle because these are really long detailed reports with lots of information, not just about the child. So I think trying to re-frame that is going to be a challenge. But I have seen examples from an English local authority who have done it in this way so it is possible. When you read it you realise, Oh, actually, that's not that hard. It can be done!”

Personal Reflection and Courage

Acknowledging the personal challenges faced by workers, particularly the emotional engagement brought about by this writing style, our team initiated sessions for personal reflection. Recognizing that this approach makes the writing more emotive and brings the worker closer to the story, we actively addressed fears and concerns, fostering a courageous atmosphere for embracing change.

“We've been thinking a lot about what the change asks of workers. We've done a lot of personal reflection on that over different sessions. We did early sessions about what all our worries were and why we wanted to do it, what the personal barriers were. One of the things that came up was that writing in this way brings a story a lot closer to home, and the proximity it brings to yourself. It makes it much more emotive. Using 'I' more in our writing makes it much easier to be loving and caring. In my plans now I'm writing things like “I was so glad to hear that you started college and I'm really looking forward to seeing you again.” which are details I probably would have missed before. So it really brings you and your feelings into it. That can be a challenge particularly when you're making more difficult decisions.”

Inclusivity and Empowerment

We actively seek feedback from young people, empowering them to have more ownership of their reports and plans. The shift from a more distant approach to a collaborative understanding, acknowledging inputs from various sources, demonstrates a dedication to involving young people in their narratives.

In our pursuit of making written records more engaging, we have explored creative avenues, including the incorporation of colour, stickers, pictures, and photographs, bringing a sense of individuality into the documentation.

Strengthened Voice of the Worker

Our new approach has strengthened the voice of the worker, providing clearer descriptions of concerns, pride, hopes, and support for the young person. This enhanced communication enriches the narrative and ensures a comprehensive understanding of the worker's perspective.

“Because it's a new way of writing, you can't use the same stock phrases that you're used to using. It does take more time initially because you're having to rethink how you explain regular events. But once you get more practice it starts to flow. Initially we did talk about making a kind of cutting paste glossary to support people to make this change. But we decided that actually all practitioners are different and need to find their own words to explain to young people what's happening in their lives. But we do think examples will help people make the change.”

Measurable Progress and Accountability

From a recent internal case file audit 50% case notes were regarding as genuinely capturing the voice and experience of the child. This 50% will be the baseline for measure change over time, ensuring accountability and continuous enhancement. As we continue on this journey, our collective efforts aim to create lasting positive impacts for care-experienced children, fostering a culture of compassion, empowerment, and genuine engagement. We look forward to building on these accomplishments and navigating challenges with resilience and innovation.

Moving forward

We have lots of ideas going forward about what we want to do next. For example, we want to support foster carers to start writing to the child when they are doing young people's diaries.

We need to keep young people involved in the direction of the project. One of our next steps is to go back to the Falkirk Champs who initiated this change. It will be great to hear about what they think about the progress we've made.

“In the leaving care team, young people are very actively involved in writing their reports, so they are seeing them. They are young adults. They certainly have said that they like this way of writing better. Professionals have said “oh yeah this is great this we like it’. It will be a long time before we truly see the impact of this work because when it will really impact People is when they revisit the notes as adults.”

Recommendations

The first step going forward will be to Identify a new Group Leader and actively seek and recruit new members to join the child-centred recording group.

These recommendations aim to create a supportive and informed environment where staff are empowered to embrace child-centred recording practices, fostering a culture of collaboration, understanding, and continuous improvement.

We suggest moving forward with training, delivered to all staff to support the change to direct writing. This should include:

- Acknowledgment that the new writing style won't solve all concerns but aims to make the young person recognise areas for improvement and feel supported in successes.
- Emphasis on the young person having more ownership of the report and plans, even if they disagree with decisions.
- Recognition of the need to check with young people about their feelings regarding this approach.
- Shift from "still getting to know" to acknowledging what has been learned in limited interactions.
- Learning from the process and acknowledging the time it takes to adjust to the new writing style.

Challenges and Reflections should be incorporated into the training, including noting that

- Processing time and thoughtfulness are required to write directly to the young person, maintaining a kind and honest tone.
- The shift from writing formally to writing directly involves deeper emotional involvement for staff.
- Staff have concerns about potentially missing important or uncomfortable parts when writing in a more connected way, but our experience tells us this need not be the case.

We also recommend these Next Steps for Developing Practice:

- Permissions needed from managers for staff to adopt child-centred recording.

- Managers' understanding of the purpose behind the change in writing style is crucial.
- Peer review and rewriting notes to the child or young person for practice.
- Regular drop-ins for community-of-practice theme after learning sessions.
- Exploring the use of photographs to enhance connection.
- Considering the addition of staff photos in case files and signatures.
- Acknowledgement that formal writing may still be required for legal processes, with the possibility of a front page explaining the formality to the child. Further exploration required for legal requirements for court, children's hearings reports.

In addition, we can see the following potential for systems change:

- Reflection on how staff are trained at universities and how to influence this.
- Recognition that writing directly to the child does not solve all issues, emphasising the importance of quality in child-centred reporting.
- Consideration of trauma-informed mindfulness in the writing process.

Examples

Previous style:

H caused damage to his placement, including breaking a window, the TV, pulling a radiator off a wall and damaging cars. H was upset and unable to regulate his emotions and he wants to move out today. Staff supported him and ensured he and staff were safe. Transition planning ongoing for H to move to supported accommodation.

New style:

I visited you today and you had a difficult morning and caused some damage to the house, but you didn't damage anyone's personal property. We talked about you feeling upset and you don't want to be in care anymore, which we all understand, and I am making plans for you to move to your own flat but understand how difficult it is for you to wait. I know this as you were visibly upset and said some things

to me which expressed your anger at the situation you feel stuck in. This is the only time you have been so distressed to cause damage since you moved here and the staff and I understand the reasons for this. I am glad we could talk things through today to help you express your feelings in a safer way and you were able to compromise with me, which showed you are taking responsibility for your actions, under what are really difficult circumstances for you. You talked about being bored and your days are long, I hope you make new friends when you move and enjoy a social life. This is important as we had to move you away from your friends, and it's important that you get to make new ones and other young people get the privilege of knowing you.

Initial Response Team example

Previous style:

Call received from school to raise concerns for behaviour displayed by child in classroom. Child also disclosed physical harm from parents. Teacher to gain further information and update social work to assess risk.

New style

The head teacher from your school called M called social work to share her worries about you. During a class discussion about behaviors, you said you break things at home and scream and hit out. You also said if people were screaming and shouting you would be scared and you said that your big sister feels scared. You also said that your mum either slaps or smacks you (your teacher wasn't sure which word you used.). M said that she had already felt a bit worried before Christmas about you not wanting to come to school and your mum finding this very difficult to deal with and the school had offered to help by coming to get you. You really like the school staff and having been looking well.

M said you are a "loveable rogue". However, we want to try to understand more about how things are at home for you and how mum is looking after you and managing your behaviour when it becomes more difficult. We want to find out more if anything is happening to you that is causing you any harm therefore M is going to chat to you more tomorrow about what you have said today as you have already gone home now. M will call a social worker tomorrow once she has spoken to you and we will decide how best to try and help make sure things are good for you and your family.

Childs plan Example

(Details have been changed or redacted)

Purpose

R, we met because M (your worker at the Leaving Care Team) and the team were worried that things weren't going as planned for you. M asked me if I'd organise an early review meeting so that we could think about what to do for you. You reminded me in the meeting that you were at your previous home for a long time. We talked about how keeping you connected with 'your people' was part of the reason why everyone supported you moving on to new accommodation even although you stayed at your school.

Worries

People want to understand your needs and whether you are autistic. This might mean that you need to be supported in a different way. It also might mean that there are other services that could support you. It isn't your fault, but it's been hard to find the right person to do this assessment so there's been a long delay in this happening.

Learning and Work

We want you to have opportunities to achieve and to use your skills and experience. We want to support your hopes and dreams. Everyone wants to be able to understand how you learn and what you need. You worked with L, Clinical Psychologist. She said that you should have an assessment with a Speech and Language Therapist (SALT). Between L and the Speech and Language Therapist they will figure out whether you might be autistic or not.

What will happen if your plan doesn't work

If things aren't working out for you at the new home then you would potentially be eligible for a place somewhere else. Everyone thinks this would be the best thing because then you would have the Leaving Care Team to support you and to help connect you to other people and other services. Right now, you don't have enough connections in your new home to be well enough supported there if it isn't right for you.

Glossary

This is an example glossary from Borders Social work. The group decided not to focus on creating a glossary as we felt that practitioners should use their own voice and find what works for them, but this may give them inspiration and ideas, or be a point for discussion.

We will try not to use....	We will try to use
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Abscond	Run away, go missing, not coming home on time, walked out
Addressing behaviour	We have 'discussed your behaviour'
Birth or Biological Parents / Natural Parents	First family, First mummy or daddy, Parents, family, mum & dad, tummy mummy
Care Leaver	Care experienced adult
Case/Case Support/Case allocation	Children, young people and families, I support [x] young people, I am lead worker for [x]
Challenging behaviour	In distress, reacting to a situation, unmet need, upset, having trouble coping
Chaotic	There are risks to... There are a lack of protective factors
Child's Plan	Your plan, Next Steps, My plan
Contact	Family time, your plans to see or keeping in touch with family, seeing or meeting up with my/ your Dad/Mum/Grandma/Sister/ Brother etc.
Continuing Care	Stay put, remain, plan for after you are 18
Defiant	Strong-willed, confident in their choices/opinions
Difficult to place	Can't find a home good enough for them; failed by the system
Drop out	Early school leaver

Drug running/involved in a gang	the child/young person is being criminally exploited to distribute drugs; part of a friend group who have been doing illegal things such as...
Dysregulated	Describing context, behaviours and emotions, e.g. Distressed response to [context]
Education	School or college
Foster Carers	We will ask you what you call them – might be; my family, Foster Mum, Foster Dad, People who care about me, my new family, or just their names
Hard to reach	Not approached enough
Holistic health	Overall health, health in general
Incident	Describe the context and behaviours
Intervention	Support, elements of a better life
Issue	Challenges, barriers, things you're not happy about, difficult situation, something they want to change, goals they want to set
Kinship Carers	We will ask you what they should be called – might be; my family, gran, granddad, auntie etc. or use their names
LAC/LAAC	Young people, care experienced young people, use their name, LA should say 'our children'
LAC Review / LAAC Review	Your meeting, your planning meeting, your review, a looked after child review, (Child or young person's name) review
LAC Visit / Statutory Visit	Home Visit, Visit to see you, social work visit

Leaving Care	Moving on, moving house, becoming independent
Making choices (drug/alcohol related)	unhelpful coping mechanisms, risky coping mechanisms, seeking something, in survival mode

Minutes	Notes, written notes of what was said today, what we agreed today, what was decided today
Moving Placements	Moving to a new house, a new chapter or fresh start
Non-compliant/non-engaging/Hard to reach	We have not been able to engage yet; Services have not yet found the best way to build relationships with them; Support was offered that did not meet the needs of the young person at the time; We need to find a way to build trust; they are not in a place just now to seek support Not ready- look at organisation and family approach here
Offenders, young offenders	Young people in conflict with the law-this term reorients our thinking, to consider the young person's relationship to organisations like the police, and how this may have been damaged.
Pathway Plan	Your future planning; moving on plan; your plans for the future
Peers	Your friends, people your age
Placement	Your home/ your house / where you live
Placement Breakdown / Placement Breakdown Meeting	Things didn't work out with your previous a carers, things became bit difficult and you had to move

Placing themselves at risk	Seeking reassurance elsewhere
Promiscuous	Seeking reassurance/comfort elsewhere
Putting themselves in danger	Seeking reassurance elsewhere
Residents	young people
Respite	Short breaks, short stay, sleepover
Rehab / rehabilitation	Going back to live with your family; Going back home, back to mums/dads/ gran's etc.

Reviewing Officer / Chair	Person who meets with everyone occasionally to make sure you have everything you need to be well cared for
Sanctions	consequences
Siblings	Your brothers or sisters (but sibling may be a good non-gender word), or use their names, important people in your life
Unit	house
Verbally aggressive	They react to [some situations] by shouting and using swear words. They used personal insults including 'xyz' e.g. Lewis started to shout close to my face and clenched his fists. I was unsure why he reacted in this way, his keyworker will explore different ways that we can approach this.
Views	What's important to you, how are you feeling, how do you see things, what you think, what would you like to see happening?

Vulnerable

Unsafe at points

With vulnerabilities- this term acknowledges risk but allows that the person is more than the vulnerabilities that they may have.