



In 2004 alongside a committed group of care experienced young people we launched A National Voice's This is Not A Suitcase Campaign. A National Voice at the time was the only charity run by, and for, Care Experienced young people.

Having conducted what was the largest survey of care experienced people at the time and producing the Amplify Report we were shocked to find that some many young people told us that the biggest thing they wanted to change about the care system was being moved with their possessions in Bin Bags. This ranked higher than issues such as changes of social workers or having to have your friends parents police checked before you could go for a sleepover (remember that!!).

I think the biggest shock was about the messages it conveyed to young people who often already had low self-esteem and had already been through trauma leading to being in the care system. They talked to us about feeling like their belongings were rubbish, they talked to us about things getting damaged. I'll always remember one young person talking to me about a treasured photograph of his mum being ripped whilst being moved in a bin bag.

We undertook a campaign and asked businesses to buy suitcases for young people (which they did) but with approx 60,000 children in care at that time it was never going to be the answer. We put stickers on bin bags and said to Social Workers and politicians "This is not a suitcase". We even ran a fashion show at the Tate Gallery in London called the refuse collection where all of the outfits were made from bin bags.

We thought the answer was simple, go to a supermarket and ask for empty boxes, but as age and experience tells us, things are never that simple. There are considerations about who will go to the supermarket, where will you store the boxes etc etc.

It is now the end of 2021. Care Experienced people from across the country still contact me to say their things are being moved in bin bags. Social Workers across the country still contact me to say that they don't have a budget to buy suitcases. There isn't yet a solution and bin bags are still not suitcases!! As far as I'm concerned this wasn't good enough then and it certainly isn't good enough now.

Following our "This is not a suitcase" campaign I followed the USA Comfort Cases movement and was saddened that the issue is multinational but heartened by their work in doing something about it.

I was even more delighted this year when I found out that Comfort Cases have come to the UK!! What this means is that at no cost to Local Authorities, Comfort Cases will provide you with suitcases (and empty holdalls for social workers cars to be used in emergencies). They will post them out to you next day delivery and the only thing they'll ask in return is that you don't use bin bags, and you give them some feedback from time to time about the difference they've made. Sounds like a pretty amazing deal to me!

Ordering could not be easier - you simply visit <https://comfortcasesuk.org/> place your order then repeat to keep your stock levels up. With comfort cases help we really can stop children being moved with their belongings in bin bags.

This movement needs champions.... people who will say "this isn't good enough" and then do something about it. Will it be you? I really hope so.

Jonny Hoyle – Trustee at Coram Voice – November 2021