

Improvement East- 2nd June 2026



Ohana means family.

Nobody gets left behind, forgotten, or excluded.

EST. 2020

Ohana's Philosophy

Our parents are
parents first and
care leavers
second.

Care does not
define our parents.
It is only a part of
their story.

To offer respect,
understanding and
encourage shared
support.

Asking for help is a
sign of strength.

What our parents were saying

We feel lonely, with no one to talk to.

We struggle to access groups and services due to our care experience.

We are struggling with our mental health and accessing services.

A lack of practical and emotional support from family or others.

We experience heightened stress and anxiety when facing challenges alone.

We would like more friends and a support network.

Continued...

We struggle to build connections with people who don't have similar backgrounds to us.

I need help to understand and fill out forms.

We want practical and emotional support from someone who won't judge us.

Please don't blame us for things that happened to us as a child.

We want to break negative cycles and be the best parents we can be.

Being care experienced does not mean we can't be parents.

Our Offer

Support Groups for young parents - Face to Face and on Teams

- Share experiences and build new relationships.
- Access advice & support services.
- Do fun activities together with our children.
- Help change Services for the better.
- Bespoke Activities.
- Help to shape services.

Ohana Champions

- Volunteers who can offer practical and emotional support.
- Support attendance at meetings, appointments and group.
- Help plan tasks, budgeting, shopping, paying bills, cleaning, preparing healthy meals.
- Help them to develop confidence to help build new relationships
- Believes in the person, even when they struggle to believe in themselves.
- Sees potential, not problems and offers reassurance during setbacks.
- Encourages independence while providing support.
- Models healthy, respectful relationships.

Lifelong Links

Lifelong Links is a child-centred process with the aim of establishing lasting connections and support networks for children who are looked after.

Lifelong Links aims to identify and engage relatives and other supportive adults connected to a child in care, who are willing to make a life-long commitment to that child.

Believes in the person, even when they struggle to believe in themselves

Ohana today

We are currently working with 93 families.

We have received 167 referrals since Ohana began.

We run face-to-face groups every week and online sessions fortnightly.

We run at least one larger event during every school holiday.

We have 19 Ohana Champion volunteers who are supporting Ohana families.

Good practice begins with **trust, respect and active listening**

We feel listened to without judgement. They don't rush in to "fix" things.

They believe our care stories and validate our experiences and feelings.

They recognise past trauma whilst focusing on our strengths, resilience and determination.

They use clear and honest communication.

We will always ask “What would support look like for you right now?” rather than assuming.

Support should feel relational, not procedural.

Focus on care, consistency, and trust.

Be emotionally available, reliable, and respectful.

See the person first and not their care experience.

Good practice includes:

Checking in regularly.

Celebrating achievements (big and small).

Providing support without conditions.

Provide choice — not everyone feels safe in the same spaces.

In-person groups help build connection and belonging.

Online groups increase accessibility to services and reduce isolation.

What good practice means to us

We make our own choices to suit us and our children.

Optional participation – no pressure to attend or share.

We have clear group boundaries that help us feel safe.

We have been involved in developing Ohana.

Staff being trauma-informed and recognising our triggers - what has happened to us?

Lifelong Links - finding out more about my family and making connections.

Parents' reflections on their experiences

We have our own interpretation of our lives which is likely to be very different from what is written in our files. We were children then.

We understand decisions needed to be made for us when we were in care. These mostly served to disempower and made us feel vulnerable.

Don't "hold against us what was done to us". This doesn't mean we cannot parent.

It was not our fault as many therapists tell us. As soon as Children's Services come back into our lives, it is our fault all over again.

We felt abandoned by our parents and abandoned by care.

We are no longer that child. We are now parents and, more importantly, parents of children we want to protect from the lives we had.

Continued.....

Things are not black and white. Please think about the grey areas if things are going wrong for us - it does not mean everything is wrong.

We have had Children's Services in our lives for our own children, no wonder considering the parenting we experienced. That's why we immediately feel judged. We **WANT** to leave our care stories behind us. Help us to be the best parents we can be.

I couldn't be like my friends, needed police checks to stay out, risk assessments to get on a train - no chance to grow, no spontaneity.

If we get angry and say things we don't mean, give us time - reword the question and praise us for things we are doing well.

Some other parents' thoughts on Ohana

It cheers me up speaking to other parents.

It is the only time my child gets to spend time with other children.

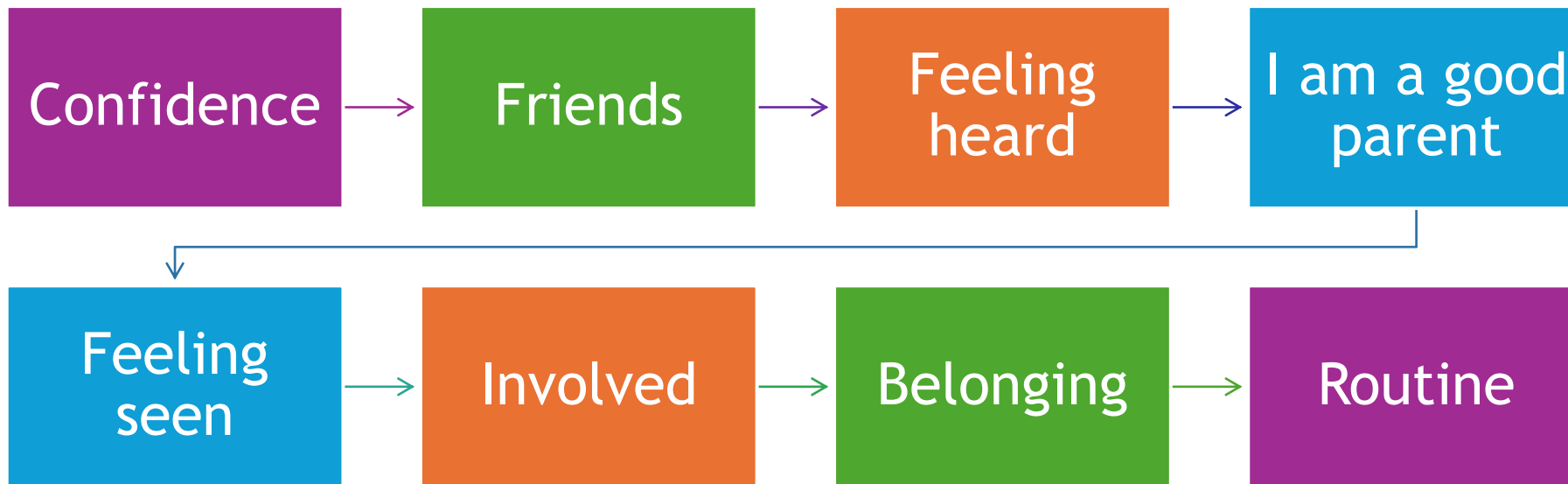
I love the Christmas party and getting together with others as I don't see family at Christmas.

We support each other. I was given advice about my CIN meeting - it really helped.

I struggle to feel happy but I genuinely feel happy when I come to Ohana.

I feel I have a support network now. Maybe if I had had this sooner, my life would not have been so dark and gloomy.

One thing Ohana has given me



To reduce stigma and barriers:

Challenge	Use	Make	Involve
Challenge negative language and stereotypes.	Use strengths-based language.	Make services flexible and accessible.	Involve care-experienced voices in decision-making.

Key message: Services should adapt to people – not the other way around.

Key Messages

Strengths, resilience, and potential should always be the starting point.

Ask “*What would support look like for you right now?*” rather than assuming.

Understand our relationships are often complicated.

Our traumatic past does affect our adult life. Ask and don't assume.

Be patient and consistent – trust takes time.

Don't take it personally if we are guarded or withdraw.

Continued...

Offer reassurance through actions, not just words.

Maintain clear, respectful boundaries.

Focus on strengths and coping skills, not deficits.

Sometimes the most powerful support is simply someone who shows up, stays, and believes.

Our reactions are responses to experiences – not personal failings.

Support should build confidence and independence.

What we've learnt

Working collaboratively with parents by listening and creating a project **with** them rather than **for** them

Regular sessions in a safe environment

Explore and create positive opportunities for parents to thrive

Thank you - any
questions?

Additional Resources

- ▶ [Ohana](#)
- ▶ [Volunteer to support care-experienced young parents as an Ohana Champion](#)
- ▶ [Supporting care leavers in Hertfordshire: Ohana](#) (Local Government Authority video)
- ▶ [Check out what young parents are saying about Ohana](#)
- ▶ To find out more please contact us at Ohana@hertfordshire.gov.uk