

# ACCESS ALL AREAS

ACTION FOR ALL GOVERNMENT  
DEPARTMENTS TO SUPPORT  
YOUNG PEOPLE'S JOURNEY FROM  
CARE TO ADULTHOOD



# CONTENTS

ACCESS ALL AREAS CAMPAIGN INTRODUCTION	3
THE UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STATE-AS-PARENT AND CARE LEAVERS: WHY WE SHOULD ALL CARE	4
ACTION FOR ALL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS TO SUPPORT CARE LEAVERS	6
'CARE-PROOFING' - PRIORITISING CARE LEAVERS	6
RESPONSIBILITY OF EVERY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT	7
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS	8
CABINET OFFICE	8
DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS	8
DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	9
DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	9
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH	10
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS - CONCLUSION	11
APPENDIX 1: KEY STATISTICS - CARE LEAVERS IN ENGLAND	12
APPENDIX 2: WORK IN PROGRESS AT BIS - IMPROVING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION	13
WORK IN PROGRESS AT DWP - SUPPORTING SECOND CHANCE LEARNING	14
WORK IN PROGRESS AT CLG - HOUSING ALLOCATION	15
WORK IN PROGRESS AT DfE - EXTENDING CARE PLACEMENTS BEYOND 18	16
APPENDIX 3: SUPPORT AND ENDORSEMENT	17
REFERENCES	18

## ACCESS ALL AREAS CAMPAIGN INTRODUCTION

**‘As the collective corporate parents of these children, it is our responsibility to ensure they get the start in life they deserve. They cannot, and should not, be expected to pay the price for mistakes they have played no part in causing.’  
(Tim Loughton MP, Children’s Minister)<sup>1</sup>**

Many care leavers have to cope with major changes in their lives, setting up home, entering work or college, at a much younger age than other young people. If they are to succeed and prosper care leavers need continued practical and personal support in the early years after they leave care from a wide range of services. Central government departments have a pivotal role in bolstering the corporate parenting duties of local authorities and making sure that care leavers are a joint priority and responsibility across government with a commitment of support up to at least age 25.

The *Access all Areas* campaign report calls on central government departments to improve the support they offer to young people as they leave the care system and in their early years after leaving care. This report examines how working across government is essential to improving the support care leavers receive and removing obstacles to their progress.

The overarching recommendation is for central government departments to make a commitment to ‘care-proof’ all government policies by assessing the impact they will have on looked after children and care leavers and those who support them. This work should be co-ordinated and monitored through the establishment of a cross departmental working group to consider care leaver issues in broader government policy, with a view to producing an associated action plan for each department.

*Access all Areas* calls for each central government department to scrutinise their own policies and suggests six areas for attention.

- 1. Explicit recognition** of the vulnerability of care leavers aged 18-25 and prioritisation of them in policy documents.
- 2. Automatic entitlement** for care leavers aged 18-25 to provisions addressing the needs of vulnerable adults.
- 3. Where a discretion exists in definitions of vulnerability or in giving priority access create a favourable supposition** that these are exercised in favour of care leavers up to the age of 30.
- 4. Create or maintain robust systems of information and data sharing** between different government departments and local services.
- 5. Ensure joint working and protocols** are in place between different government departments and local services and leaving care services.
- 6. Responsive, personalised services** to care leavers.

This report starts dialogue with central government by suggesting particular areas and issues that should be addressed in four government departments: Communities and Local Government; Department for Work and Pensions; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department of Health. In addition we propose that that the Department for Education, which has primary responsibility for care leavers, joins with the Cabinet Office to lead a cross government approach to improving journeys from care to adulthood.

The call to action has been developed jointly by Catch22’s National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), The Prince’s Trust, The Care Leavers’ Foundation and A National Voice and is supported by a number of other organisations (see Appendix 3).

## THE UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STATE-AS-PARENT AND CARE LEAVERS: WHY WE SHOULD ALL CARE

The vast majority of children enter care for reasons associated with neglect and abuse and not through any action of their own. When the state decides to take on the responsibility for parenting children who cannot live safely with their birth family, it creates a unique relationship between the child and the state-as-parent that is not replicated elsewhere in the many relationships that exist between citizens and their government. This unique relationship is reflected in specific legislation about care leavers.

### YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE - KEY LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS

The Children Act 1989 remains the general legal framework for young people in and leaving care but it has been amended and supplemented by later legislation Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and associated regulations and guidance<sup>2</sup>. For some young people<sup>3</sup> who were looked after prior to turning 18, local authorities continue to owe important duties after they turn 18 to help the young person plan for their future.

These obligations will usually start well before the young person turns 18 and will include duties to help the young person make the transition from being a child to an adult and any changes in their living arrangements that this may involve. The local authority must carry out a **needs assessment** and set out clearly the young person's plan for the future in a document called a **pathway plan**. The local authority will appoint a **personal adviser** to help the young person and to **review the pathway plan** and there is a duty to **keep in touch**.

Until a young person is 18, then children's services are responsible for **financial support**. Once young people are 18 they can usually claim benefits if they need to. However, the local authority should continue to give financial help (for example towards the costs of education and training), if that is what is agreed in the pathway plan. Support will continue **until age 21 or until an agreed programme of education or training ends**.

Local authorities must pay a **Higher Education Bursary** for all care leavers at University and a **16-19 Bursary** scheme is also available for those in further education.

From 1st April 2011, a change in the law means that **care leavers up to the age of 25** who tell their council they have returned, or want to return, to education or training, will be entitled to an assessment of need, and the support of a personal adviser while they are on their course (if the course is agreed in a Pathway Plan).

Despite the legislation and guidance, outcomes for young people leaving care still lag behind those for other groups of young people. Appendix 1 summarises current outcomes data for care leavers.

Central government departments need to remove the barriers which continue to make it so much more difficult than necessary for care leavers on their journey towards full adulthood by 'care-proofing' generic policy that is targeted at the overall population of adult citizens.

For most young people today, moving into their own accommodation, entering further or higher education, finding satisfying employment, and achieving good health and a positive sense of well-being, represent important landmarks during their journey to adulthood. As a group, care leavers are more disadvantaged than other young people in achieving these landmarks, although some do successfully move on from care whilst others just get by or struggle<sup>4</sup>. It is the responsibility of corporate parents to ensure that all their young people fulfil their potential and this will require comprehensive responses across their life course, including whilst they are in care, at the time of leaving care and on their pathways to adulthood.<sup>5</sup>

**‘Overall, being a ‘good parent’ is not cheap but the longer term costs associated with poor parenting and outcomes - both personal and financial - are far greater’.**  
**(Professor Mike Stein, University of York)<sup>6</sup>**

Improving the coherence of whole government support for care leavers from care to adulthood will not increase dependency but will create a firm foundation from which real and sustainable independence can be achieved. The journey towards sustainable independence is a lengthy one and responsibility for that process crosses different government departments. Commitment to improving cross department work is not only a parental responsibility, but has a sound economic grounding. Far from costing more, this approach will bring economic benefits, both immediate and in the longer term. For example, in comparison to a young person who successfully progresses through education to employment and independent living, a young person who struggles with this transition post care is likely to cost the state an additional £90,000 before they are 30<sup>7</sup>. Investing in front-end financial support to assist vulnerable young people leaving care to establish themselves thus creates long-term benefits for both the young person and society overall.

**‘A good parent is someone who doesn’t judge me... who will always have my back.’**  
**(Care leaver)<sup>8</sup>**

Whilst the local authority has responsibility for the day to day care and transitions for care leavers, government at a national level must demonstrate its recognition of the unique and vital role it has in relation to care leavers by aiming to mirror the support that other young adults get from their families. It must provide public services attuned to the individual needs of care leavers that recognise leaving care as a process, not an event, through which care leavers are supported, allowed to make mistakes and eventually learn to be independent adults. This commitment has already been embraced by the Department for Education (DfE) in its statutory Guidance to local authorities.

**‘Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a reasonable parent. The local authority responsible for their care should make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need, which will include offering them more than one chance as they grapple with taking on the responsibilities of adulthood.’ (DfE)<sup>9</sup>**

Increased housing prices, lower benefit rates and wages for young people and increased educational costs have all contributed to young adults remaining at home well into their mid-twenties, or having repeated spells at home later in life. Indeed some government policies towards young people such as lower minimum wage and reduced benefits levels appear to be predicated on an assumption of young adults being able to access extended family support up to a later age.

Care leavers do not have the safety net and support provided by the parental home - few have access to someone who can give them a lift to work or college, invite them for a Sunday meal, lend them money until pay day to top up their electricity meter or provide them with a home whilst they complete an apprenticeship or look for work after university.

Now is the time to share the responsibility and demonstrate this same commitment to care leavers and to create a system where care leavers are prioritised and not compromised. Access All Areas urges the government as a whole and each department within it to consider how they can open doors of opportunity for care leavers.

## ACTION FOR ALL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS TO SUPPORT CARE LEAVERS

Repeated studies and consultations with care leavers show that more needs to be done to approximate the support that most parents give to their own children. Particular areas include: lack of support when preparing to leave care<sup>10</sup>, no choice as to when they leave care or little or no information about moving to their new accommodation.<sup>11</sup> There is also some evidence to suggest that fewer care leavers are being helped to prepare for higher education and getting a job.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence has shown that leaving care services are able to provide the best services where they have good working relationships with external health, accommodation and education, training and employment agencies and there is specialist provision providing careers advice, negotiating suitable accommodation and addressing health and wellbeing needs. To ensure this happens central government needs to ensure the necessary legislation, regulation and guidance is in place<sup>13</sup> and is consistently implemented.

**‘The impact of the changes in social policy is not felt by policy makers or heads of service, it is felt by individual social workers and young people’ (Leaving Care Manager)<sup>14</sup>**

### ‘CARE-PROOFING’ - PRIORITISING CARE LEAVERS

Care leavers are a vulnerable group of young adults, trying to establish themselves against the odds, who often have no recourse to parental or family assistance and it is essential that the state recognises their vulnerability and gives them full access, and where necessary discretionary priority, to systems which ensure they get adequate assistance. As their corporate parent the state should ensure that any new policies, from economic investment to housing policy, support rather than hamper the experience of young adulthood for care leavers. The announcement of a new bursary scheme for 16-19 year old children in care and care leavers in further education, compensating for the withdrawal of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), is a good example of the type of policy initiative that needs to be replicated across central government.

The *Access all Areas* overarching recommendation is for central government to make a commitment to ‘care-proof’ all government policies by assessing the impact they will have on looked after children and care leavers and those who support them. In order to do this a cross departmental working group should be established to consider care leaver issues in broader government policy with an associated action plan for each department for effecting change for care leavers within a set time period.

## RESPONSIBILITY OF EVERY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

It is essential that care leavers are made a joint priority and responsibility, not just within the Children in Care Division of the Department for Education, but across government departments and agencies. In particular other departments should mirror the Department for Education's on-going commitment to young adult care leavers, by facilitating more gradual and later transitions and ensuring that support is offered at least until age 25, in the same way most families now support their own children.

In practice, extending corporate parenting and prioritising care leavers would be the responsibility of every government department who would:

1. **Explicitly recognise** care leavers in early adulthood (18-25) as a particularly vulnerable group and prioritise them in policy documents, especially those relating to education, employment, housing and health.
2. Ensure **automatic entitlements** for care leavers aged 18-25 to provisions addressing the needs of vulnerable or disadvantaged adults. This could include timely access to support, free or reduced cost services, and financial assistance.
3. Where a discretion exists in definitions of vulnerability or in giving priority access **create a favourable supposition** that these are exercised in favour of care leavers up to the age of 30, especially in relation to their housing education or health.
4. Create and/or maintain robust systems of **information & data sharing** to ensure that the intelligence about the needs of care leavers are passed between departments and services to inform commissioning of services, pooling of budgets and joint working.
5. Ensure **joint working and protocols** are in place between different government departments and local services with each department championing joint working with the services they cover, including joint commissioning and service development; co-location and secondment of staff.
6. Ensure the services they are responsible for are **responsive and personalised** for care leavers. Individual public services should provide specific support to young people leaving care in addition to that provided by local authority Leaving Care Teams.

The government as a whole and each department within it must consider how they, as care leavers' corporate 'uncles', 'aunts' and 'grandparents' can open doors of opportunity for them. They need to come together to offer support, whether this is to provide work experience or a job in the 'family business'; a 'home' to return to when it is needed or be a 'pushy' parent that advocates for their children across the system.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

Access all Areas has started to think about what action central government departments could take. However, these suggestions are just the beginning of our dialogue and each department will want to scrutinise their own policies in relation to the 6 areas and work on an action plan monitored by a central government working group.

### CABINET OFFICE

- Work closely with DfE to lead a common approach to ‘care-proofing’ of all relevant policies for care leavers.
- Establish a working group to oversee and monitor the development of action plans within other participating departments.
- Promote a culture of awareness of why care leavers warrant specific attention across government in ‘the first decade’.
- Provide an annual report jointly with DfE which summarises specific actions, policy amendments, and examples of good practice which evidence improvements arising from the cross departmental approach to ‘care-proofing’.

### DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

- Examine the feasibility of identifying care leavers on benefits forms. See NCAS briefing on this issue<sup>17</sup>.
- Explicit recognition of the vulnerability of care leavers in policies developed as part of the welfare reform programme.
- Extension of ‘second chance learning’ to allow care leavers to claim housing benefit and income support if returning to education to make up for missed qualifications up to age of 25. See NCAS briefing for further details<sup>18</sup>.
- Priority given to care leavers to extended support for job seekers.
- Requirement for local JCP services to work with and recognise employability schemes set up by leaving care services as partner providers.
- Named advisers for care leavers and lead contacts for leaving care services in Jobcentre Plus and Benefits Offices.
- Roll out of early benefit claims model piloted in Wolverhampton and Dudley.<sup>19</sup> One authority has estimated the cost of delays in benefit payments for children’s services<sup>20</sup>.
- Exercise presumption of discretion where moving in and out of work, education or training or mistakes or oversights in the process of benefits applications leave care leavers in real hardship or debt.



## DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

- BIS should analyse policies relating to: apprenticeships; access to higher and further education and information, advice and guidance services and seek to prioritise care leavers.
- Analyse and publish data on care leavers' participation in higher education through UCAS application forms and universities including conducting a review of access agreements.
- Implement automatic entitlement to Discretionary Learner Support in further education for care leavers.
- Implement automatic entitlement to the National Scholarship Scheme in higher education. See NCAS briefing on these issues<sup>15</sup>.
- Make provision for the small number of care leavers who progress to post graduate degrees.
- Reverse the withdrawal of student finance and home student status from care leavers who have discretionary leave to remain. See Refugee Children's Consortium briefing on this issue<sup>16</sup>.
- One-to-one information, advice and guidance service for all care leavers aged 18-25, linked to leaving care teams, based on the Connexions model.
- Work with the DWP to ensure that benefit tapers do not create disincentives for care leavers taking up apprenticeships, including taking account of housing, travel, and council tax costs.
- Promote an apprenticeship model based on assessment of skills not minimum qualifications.

## DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- Explicit recognition of the vulnerability of care leavers in policies around housing allocation and homelessness.
- Automatic priority status to care leavers aged 18-25 in statutory guidance on housing allocations and homelessness priority need status.
- Discretionary priority status as above to older care leavers, particularly when leaving institutions such as custodial or psychiatric settings.
- Continued encouragement of joint working protocols between housing and children's services departments, especially in two-tier local authorities.
- Development of a quality standards framework for accommodation providers providing services for care leavers, including supported lodgings.
- Housing officers aligned or seconded to leaving care services.
- Protocols for clearing council and social housing arrears and restricting evictions of care leavers where it is clearly in their best interests to do so.

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

- Recognising the specific vulnerability and emotional health and wellbeing needs of care leavers as young adults, in addition to looked after children, in policy documents, statutory guidance and regulations developed under the health reform programme.
- Securing care leavers interests in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, Joint Health and Wellbeing strategies and subsequent commissioning plans.
- Ensuring that care leavers in early adulthood are prioritised where any provisions are made for vulnerable groups of children and adults, e.g. talking therapies.
- Automatic assessment for adult social care.
- Free prescriptions for care leavers up to the age of 25.
- Mental health first aid training for those working with care leavers.
- Include specific information aimed at care leavers in the planned social marketing campaign for young people from 2012 announced in the response to the Positive for Youth Young People's Health and Wellbeing consultation.
- Developing specialist emotional health and wellbeing services for 17-25 year olds to address the gap between adult and children's mental health services or extending CAMHS provision to 25 for care leavers.
- Health and wellbeing boards to produce directories of the mental health resources and services available to young adults in their areas.
- DfE should work in partnership with the Department of Health to ascertain the quality and availability of lower tier mental health services for those care leavers aged between 17 and 25 years who may need access to these services.
- Leaving care services should be represented on Health and Wellbeing boards and effective joint working protocols should be in place between health and children's social care including specialist support and or staff to support looked after children and care leavers.

## CONCLUSION

*Access all Areas* sends out a clear message that care leavers are everyone's children and responsibility for enabling them to maximise their potential as they move into adulthood is a societal responsibility which is enacted from the highest levels of government.

1. **Explicit recognition** of the vulnerability of care leavers aged 18-25 and prioritisation of them in policy documents.
2. **Automatic entitlement** for care leavers aged 18-25 to provisions addressing the needs of vulnerable adults.
3. Where a discretion exists in definitions of vulnerability or in giving priority access **create a favourable supposition** that these are exercised in favour of care leavers up to the age of 30.
4. Create or maintain robust systems of **information and data sharing** between different government departments and local services.
5. Ensure **joint working and protocols** are in place between different government departments and local services and leaving care services
6. **Responsive, personalised services** to care leavers.

## APPENDICES

**Appendix 1** contains key statistics on care leavers in England

**Appendix 2** contains further technical detail of where policy developments across government are already moving in the right direction to better support care leavers, and need to be finessed to build on this progress and remove unintended barriers.

**Appendix 3** lists all those who have given their endorsement to the *Access all Areas* campaign

## APPENDIX 1

### KEY STATISTICS - CARE LEAVERS IN ENGLAND

#### NUMBERS OF CARE LEAVERS

- Last year 9,950 young people left care in England aged 16 or older; the numbers leaving care have been increasing year on year with a 22% increase in the past five years.<sup>21</sup>

#### ATTAINMENT GAPS

- 13% of looked after children achieved 5+ A\*-C at GCSE or equivalent including English and mathematics.<sup>22</sup>
- The attainment gap between looked after children and non-looked after children achieving 'The Basics' - grade A\* to C in GCSE or equivalent English and mathematics has widened by 4% to 45% meaning that many care leavers need to catch up on lost education at a later date.<sup>23</sup>
- The latest statistics show that only 390 care leavers (6%) were in higher education at age 19, compared to 7% the previous year. This compares to 40% of young people in the general population at age 19 at university. The decrease in numbers of care leavers at university goes against the trend of increased participation amongst excluded groups; an estimated 17% of young people previously on Free School Meals entered higher education at 19 in 2008/09, an increase from 13% in 2005/06.<sup>24</sup>
- At age 19 a third of care leavers were not in education, training and employment (NEET) in 2011.<sup>25</sup>

#### LEAVING HOME AND MANAGING INDEPENDENTLY

- The average age of leaving home is now at least 24<sup>26</sup>, this is in stark contrast to the experience of care leavers the vast majority of whom leave care by age 18 with around a fifth (19%) leaving aged 16.<sup>27</sup>
- Almost a quarter of young people feel that they have no choice as to when they leave care.<sup>28</sup>
- A very small proportion of care leavers (4 %; 203) stayed on with their foster carers after their 18th birthday.<sup>29</sup>
- After leaving care 45% said their life was better or much better than when they were in care. 35% said it was worse or much worse.<sup>30</sup>
- In one study 13% of those soon to leave care said they were getting no support<sup>31</sup> and in another study 24% thought they had been prepared well or very well to leave care but 49% said they had been prepared badly or very badly.<sup>32</sup>
- Over the past three years, the percentage saying they were being helped to prepare for higher education has fallen, from 65% in 2009, to 59% in 2010 and now to 56%. The percentage of those about to leave care saying they are getting help to prepare for getting a job fell from 60% last year to 52% this year.<sup>33</sup>

#### ACCOMMODATION

- Over 40% of care leavers live independently at age 19.<sup>34</sup>
- National statistics show that 10% of care leavers are in unsuitable accommodation at age 19<sup>35</sup>, but research suggests that 19% were unhappy with their accommodation.<sup>36</sup>
- 30% of care leavers felt they were given little or no information about moving to their new accommodation.<sup>37</sup>

## APPENDIX 2

Access All Areas does not require extensive policy changes in order to work. It simply needs a critical look at existing policy initiatives, already moving in the right direction, and work on the detail to ensure that the life chances of care leavers are maximised, and not unintentionally limited.

### WORK IN PROGRESS AT BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS IMPROVING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Care leavers remain under represented in higher education. The higher education bursary embedded support for care leavers in higher education in legislation, and many local authorities have provided higher levels of support to their care leavers. However, research continues to show that financial hardship and high debt levels is an obstacle to participation for care leavers<sup>38</sup>. Last year 6% of care leavers were in higher education at age 19, compared to around 40% all young people.<sup>39</sup>

The government has recognised the need for encouraging more students from disadvantaged background into university by placing requirements on those higher education institutions wanting to charge higher fees to ensure that they improve access to these groups, and by introducing a national scholarship programme, which can offer fee remission, discounted accommodation or other financial support. Given the low participation rates of care leavers, it is essential that they are recognised as a priority group under these schemes and any future initiatives to widen participation.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The review of the National Scholarship Scheme needs to consider how the scheme can best meet the needs of care leavers, including:

- Ensure care leavers automatically qualify for the National Scholarship Scheme and receive maximum benefits available.
- Information on entitlements under the scheme is made readily available to care leavers and those that work with them by dissemination through existing information portals (UCAS website, Direct Gov page on care leavers/higher education funding, [www.leavingcare.org](http://www.leavingcare.org) and other organisations in the sector).
- Streamline evidence requested to prove care leaver status to a letter from the responsible local authority confirming status.
- Underline the requirement to support care leavers in the conditions for Access Agreements and make it an essential criteria against which Office for Fair Access (OFFA) monitors and approves Access Agreements.
- Encourage joint working between universities and leaving care teams to ensure care leavers get a consistent financial package.

## WORK IN PROGRESS AT DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

### SUPPORTING SECOND CHANCE LEARNING

Currently care leavers have worse educational outcomes than their peers<sup>40</sup>, but, as they get older, some are keen to resume their studies to catch up on missed education. From April 2012 most care leavers who have missed out on education can take up non-advanced training (up to A-level) and continue to claim Income Support (IS) and Housing Benefit (HB) until they turn 21<sup>41</sup>. The extension of support for second-chance learning was welcome, but 21 is still too early a cut off point for those young people whose experience of care is coupled with disrupted education.

The current system means that there is limited support for care leavers over 21 who wish to go to college to get qualifications such as GCSEs. At present local authorities report a mixed picture in terms of whether older care leavers continue in education - a major barrier is the lack of financial support<sup>42</sup>. If the entitlement to financial support for second chance learning for care leavers through IS and HB were extended to age 25, this would align with local authorities' extended corporate parenting role to support care leavers until 25<sup>43</sup>.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- To change the rules so that care leavers can take up non advanced education ('second chance learning') at any point until their 25th birthday and continue to have access to housing benefit and income support whilst studying.

## WORK IN PROGRESS AT COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### HOUSING ALLOCATION

‘Why is there a debate going on within my local government as to whether Care Leavers should have top priority access to council housing when it is the government who intervene in our childhoods and propose (and in some cases, impose) that they could do a better parenting job? Would a good parent really see their child homeless?’ (Care leaver)<sup>44</sup>

Rising demands on social housing and other accommodation is making it increasingly difficult for young people to find appropriate accommodation as they enter adulthood. Care leavers have historically been given priority for social housing, but sometimes policies have been quite restrictive; care leavers and services report a shortage of choice and appropriate social housing, reduced priority for care leavers and particular difficulties accessing housing ‘out of area’. Locally, leaving care services may have established joint working protocols, but these tend not to be established outside local authority boundaries. However, as care leavers enter young adulthood they are likely to wish to move beyond or remain outside their responsible local authority’s boundaries. A third of looked after children live ‘out-of-authority’ and many others move for work, education or to access services.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

When revising the guidance for local housing authorities in England, for the allocation of accommodation<sup>45</sup>:

- Care leavers age 18-25 should be given reasonable preference in allocation schemes on ‘welfare grounds’ and ‘additional’ preference to any adults who are vulnerable as a result of being in care and in urgent housing need in a similar way priority is given to members of the armed forces.
- Additional allocation criteria should ensure that care leavers are given priority and deemed to have a local connection to the area where they live, independently of whether they live within their responsible local authority or not, and they should also have the option to return to their home authority should they so wish.

Homelessness legislation should be revised in two areas:

- To establish a presumption of un-intentionality when care leavers present to access social housing when aged under 25, and a discretion to presume un-intentionality up to 30.
- To enable care leavers to receive priority need status up to 25 years to reflect the policy driver that young people should stay in supported placements up to 21 years and the initiatives to increase the numbers of young people leaving care attending further and higher education up to 25 years.

## WORK IN PROGRESS AT DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION EXTENDING CARE PLACEMENTS BEYOND 18

It has been recognised for a long time that care leavers could benefit from the stability of staying in care for longer, yet many still experience a cliff edge at 16 or 18 where support falls away. The recently completed Right2BCared4 and Staying Put evaluations<sup>46</sup> both looked at how young people can be supported to remain in care for longer, or to remain in placements once they are no longer officially in care. However, the norm continues to be early exit from care. 1,900 (19% young people left care at 16 last year). Only 280 (4% of the care leavers at 19) young adults remained with their foster carer at 19. Despite the low numbers it is a requirement of all local authorities to have a Staying Put policy.<sup>47</sup>

Requiring young people to have an 'established familial relationship' with their foster carers and/or to be in education, training and employment may deny some young people the opportunity to stay put, in particular those who have experienced placement instability and/or have complex needs.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Broader definition of Staying put in Children's, Tax and Benefit legislation.
- Consideration of implications of changes in school leaving age on the age when a child can leave care.
- Entitlement to stay put extended to all care leavers who would benefit from this option, including staying put in children's homes.
- Working with Ofsted to ensure the regulatory framework of children's homes supports Staying Put.
- Promote supported lodgings as an alternative family based housing option for over 18s by:
  - Disseminating good practice in joint working between housing and children's services to establish supported lodgings schemes for 16-25 year olds.
  - Supporting households that welcome care leavers into their homes by a policy of tax and benefits concessions to all hosts/carers participating in recognised supported lodgings schemes.
  - DWP to raise the minimum income disregard for means-tested benefits above £20 per week and conduct an impact assessment in relation to the introduction of Universal Credit and its effects on the providers of supported lodgings for care leavers and homeless young people.
- HM Treasury and HM Revenue and Customs to reverse the recent loss of tax relief by supported lodgings carers by amending the Qualifying Care Relief (Specified Social Care Schemes) Order 2011 so that qualifying care relief will apply to hosts/carers in supported lodgings schemes for vulnerable young people aged 16 - 24, whether or not the young people were formerly in care, or instituting an agreed level of tax relief for supported lodgings hosts/carers should be instituted which would be significantly more generous than Rent a Room, and which would take account of the meals, household costs and care provided by supported lodgings hosts/carers.<sup>48</sup>



## APPENDIX 3 SUPPORT AND ENDORSEMENT

The *Access all Areas* campaign report has been produced by Catch22's National Care Advisory Service, The Care Leavers' Foundation, The Prince's Trust and A National Voice. It is the first step in a bid to work together across the whole community of interest for care leavers, including third sector, commissioning and provider organisations, all relevant government departments, local government, and of course most crucially care leaver led organisations and other forums and agencies which directly represent the voice of care leavers. The following bodies and individuals give their support to *Access All Areas*:

	BAAF		Kids Company
	Barnardo's		National Care Leavers' Week
	Brighter Futures		National Childrens Bureau
	Buttle UK		National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum
	The Big Issue		Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers
	The Caldecott Foundation		NCERCC
	The Care Leavers Federation		St Christopher's
	The Chartered Institute of Housing		TACT
	The Children's Society		The Who cares? Trust
	Drive Forward		Voice
	The Fostering Network		Voices from Care
	Future Horizons		Young Minds
	Imhotep Foundation		John Kemmis
	The Independent Children's Homes Association		Edward Timpson MP, Chair of APG for looked after children and care leavers

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# ACCESS ALL AREAS - A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

WHY CARE LEAVERS NEED TO ACCESS ALL AREAS OF SUPPORT THROUGH A RANGE OF ADULT ORIENTED PUBLIC SERVICES TO ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL.

## WHY SHOULD SOCIETY CARE ABOUT CARE LEAVERS?

### I. UNIQUE RELATIONSHIPS

When the State decides to take on the responsibility for parenting children who cannot live safely with their birth family it creates a unique relationship between the child and the State-as-parent that is not replicated anywhere else in the many relationships that exist between citizens and their Government. Children entering public care have already had an extremely rough ride and a difficult start in life. They do not come into care for no reason. The experience of growing up in care can have many positive aspects. In too many cases it can also reinforce rejection, feelings of worthlessness, displacement and inadequacy which are already embedded in the child's psyche at the time of removal from inadequate and harmful families.

When we plan for the child's journey from care into full adulthood and independence we must ensure that we do not create experiences and systems which reinforce strongly held negative beliefs carried forward from childhood. To do so is to negate much of the good work that the care system can do in helping children resolve earlier crises and to seriously impair the child's chances of achieving their potential as young adults. This is wasteful in terms of human lives and also in economic cost. A Government which works together across all adult departments to address the needs of vulnerable care leavers as they establish themselves independently is essential to effectively discharge that State-as-parent duty.

## 2. LIFE TRAJECTORY

Care leavers do not follow straight trajectories in life. Perhaps they should come with 'small print': 'life chances may go down as well as up'. Even for those who do eventually find a settled and fulfilled place in their life, the getting there is more likely to look like a stocks and shares graph than a straight-line run in an upwards direction. We are looking at long term investment in lives, and will be disappointed if we focus on quick returns.

There is much that can and must be done to improve the experience of care itself in order to optimise the life chances of children brought up in public care and better early intervention and family support may reduce the numbers of children coming into care. These will be small changes. Absolute numbers in care are fairly impervious to change over many decades and now rising again<sup>i</sup>. Whatever improvements are made there will always be children coming into care and children leaving care. Children leaving care will continue to carry with them the legacy of their experiences before the State became their parent. Some will have internalised new positive messages about themselves, others continue to struggle throughout their childhood and adolescence. Even those who appear confident, achieve the right number of GCSEs at the right age etc. are likely to be more vulnerable to the knocks of adult life than family reared peers. Once they leave care, we know that many will be over represented in the statistics for social exclusion in all its various manifestations; homelessness, chronic unemployment, mental health difficulties, drug and alcohol misuse, criminality<sup>ii</sup> etc.. We should not be complacent about these outcomes and much more needs to be done to improve the life chances of care leavers. However we also should not be surprised that youngsters whose childhoods subjected them to extreme adversity in its many different forms and lacked the stability and unconditional love of a birth family for much of their upbringing struggle to make their way in the world in the first decade after leaving the protection of State care. It is perhaps more remarkable that so many do overcome toxic childhoods and eventually step out as confident and fulfilled adults.

Childhood trauma has long lasting and deep rooted psychological effects and these effects are not always apparent until adolescence or early adulthood. Care leavers who seemed to be doing very well may be the ones who suffer catastrophic crises during their twenties, sometimes sinking forever; sometimes emerging stronger. Others who looked like 'trouble' throughout their time in care may sometimes be the ones who just slowly plod on and sort their lives out in an unspectacular way.

Although we have some clues from concepts like resilience theory<sup>iii</sup> which set out the personal, social and situational factors which are likely to be protective in enabling a child to handle adversity and trauma, these are not absolute predictors of 'success' or 'failure'; it is almost impossible to forecast accurately among the population of care leavers who will do well and who will fall by the wayside. Aside from providing the broadest statistical overview in measuring particular indicators at arbitrary stages in the lives of care leavers, the statistical snapshots which we take to assist in understand the direction of policy impacts and overall population improvements tells us nothing about the experience or longer term outcomes for individual care leavers. This is partly because their developmental processes are so interrupted by early trauma and subsequent instability that even those who do eventually settle on a reasonably smooth life path with settled careers, relationships, stable homes etc., are likely to be delayed in establishing that settled life and have a turbulent journey to get there.

### 3. DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT

For most parents there does eventually come a stage where they can redecorate the childhood bedroom and reclaim the space as their own, safe in the knowledge that their 'young' are now fully fledged and henceforth will return as visitors rather than refugees from life's difficulties. When we look at leaving home studies for indicators that a young adult has made a successful transition to independence are generally looking at a population of between 25 and 29<sup>iv</sup> years of age. Yet we are still 'measuring' the success of care leavers in terms of whether they have successfully established themselves as adults between the ages of 19 and 25. Not only do we fail to recognise the delay in psychological and emotional development that means we should expect them to take just a little bit longer to find their feet in the adult world, we actually expect them to achieve this transition and sustain it with very little support, approximately ten years earlier than we would expect for our own children, or for the general population. Even more anomalous is the conditionality of all the support that is available to older care leavers around education and employment. Of course we should incentivise and support care leavers who, for all the reasons outlined above, are likely to be late entering further and higher education. But does it really make any sense that we now support 21 - 25 year olds who are in education and those who are not – almost certainly the most vulnerable and the most needy - often the 'hardest to reach' are entitled to no on-going support at all?

### 4. SUSTAINABLE INDEPENDENCE

We are not arguing to make the State a 'forever parent' for the children it takes into its care; this would be neither practicable nor desirable. We are seeking an improved awareness across Government Departments of how and why many of the current policies which impact care leavers have seriously detrimental and unintended consequences and can hold back rather than incentivise care leavers on their beginning journey towards independent adulthood.

We are also not wanting to lower expectations; on the contrary we want everyone involved with care leavers to hold for them the same high expectations that they would hold for their own children (high expectations do not mean for every child an honours degree, every child is different and we hold expectations which are different for each of our own children). In recognising that the majority of care leavers will be set back at some time during their immediate post-care years by more than one significant area of difficulty which is either the result of, or is amplified both by their pre-care and in-care experiences, we are simply naming a reality that is essential to face up to if we are serious about improving long term life chances for care leavers.

In order for a person to achieve successful independence they must first have experienced a significant relationship of responsible and responsive dependency. Many children in care did not have this as an infant or growing child; many fail to find it during their time in care. This sense of reliable dependency can be created by individuals and institutions. Safe, trustworthy caregivers, educators, mentors, role models and nurturing environments with good boundaries in schools, clubs, children's homes, churches etc. all contribute to the upbringing of a confident child or the healing of a troubled child. Someone who has not themselves experienced what it is to be properly looked after and cared for; such that they can rely on adults and structures around them to create a safe and predictable world in which their own role and the expectations placed upon them are clear and fair will struggle to take a full place in their community, build their own family and become a participating and contributing member of wider society. Children who have had a rocky start in life will need opportunities both when in care, and when setting out on their journey through adulthood, to have these solid reliable experiences in order to develop for themselves a strong functioning self<sup>v</sup>, or adult ego state, that can survive and succeed in the world.

If we force premature independence on these vulnerable youngsters, and fail to provide adequate supports and safety nets to assist their continued growth in this crucial developmental stage we risk perpetuating dependency. If we work a little bit harder to sustain around them a reliable and dependable network of systems and individuals upon whom they can rely when they are in need the end result will be stronger and more independent care leavers as they grow through their twenties into full adulthood.

## 5. PREMATURE TRANSITIONS

What we know about leaving care is that it still happens too soon, and the inevitability of a one way street, with no turning back is very different indeed to the experience of a family reared child for whom that safety net is always there and never questioned. Most of the thinking about leaving care currently goes on in the Children in Care Division of the Department for Education. Much of what we now have in statute and guidance is excellent in intent and substance and most of the work left to do is in ensuring local authorities, in whom the Corporate Parenting duty of the state resides, deliver these policies in the spirit in which they were intended with consistency across the country. There are still some anomalies that should be addressed, but on the whole the work at DfE has been done, and many of the barriers which continue to make it so much more difficult than it needs to be for care leavers on their journey towards full adulthood and independence reside in generic policy that is targeted at the overall population of adult citizens.

What we want to encourage and contribute to is a wider debate about the range of policies that affect adult care leavers throughout their first years after leaving care and into their twenties. Care leavers struggling to make their way in the adult world, or determined to get back on track after a crisis or series of bad choices often face barriers wherever they turn. They may struggle to access suitable and affordable housing, to sustain low paid work when this makes them worse off and plunges them from poverty into poverty and debt; they may be denied access to further or higher education without the means to sustain themselves whilst studying. Care leavers also often struggle to access mental health services as adult psychiatry conventionally deals with a very limited set of conditions and those who received help as children and teenagers with post-traumatic or anxiety related or personality disorders may find themselves ineligible for any input through adult services. Children in care can rarely match the CVs of same age peers who have had more opportunities to work as teenagers and gain work experience through family friends and contacts. Even those who graduate from university may find themselves competing in the job market with students who have benefitted from exciting gap years funded from parental coffers.

## 6. REINFORCING SELF-DOUBT; WHY A BLAME AND SHAME POLICY APPROACH NEVER WORKS

For care leavers, the frequent experience of doors being closed in their faces, even after they may have tried the best that they know how to look for work, complete a course, or even just get through the week, stay alive, and manage their bills, reinforces the many negative beliefs they bring with them from childhood which continue to influence them consciously and subconsciously throughout their lives. 'I'm not good enough' 'It must be my fault' 'I'll never amount to anything' 'that good life that I see out there, and on television, and being lived by my neighbours, is for other people, not for people like me'. The systems they encounter are generally punitive – fail to turn up at the job centre because you didn't have enough money for the bus fare and you lose benefit the following week; take the risk of stepping into employment and you could very quickly find yourself in significant housing arrears; have the audacity to change your mind about what you said you wanted to study when you drew up your Pathway Plan age 14 and your local authority may refuse to support your new choice. Make the mistake of having a birthday at the wrong time and you might have to just give up your stable home – the first one you had in your life – because the single person's rent allowance doesn't cover the social housing you were placed in by your leaving care team. There are lots of small nuances of policy that hit care leavers particularly hard, that go against natural justice and common sense, and that do so much to make a hard journey even harder. These same problems hit high achieving and able care leavers who may also struggle to find their way after achieving a top degree; often those same strengths that drive some care leavers to fight their way through adversity towards success, also lead them to have quite spectacular crashes. The messages that they have internalised as children 'I have to take care of myself because no one else will take care of me' 'I have to be strong to survive' 'I don't need help from anyone' can become paralysing and explain why so many care leavers who seem to be doing exceptionally well suddenly go off course. This can take the form of eviction (this group will never



tell anyone they are in trouble with their rent until it's too late), depression or mental breakdown (because they drive themselves so hard, hold such high expectations of themselves and are so hard on themselves that eventually something has to give). They will also be the ones who often 'self-destruct' at the last minute, just when it seems success is really within their grasp and these patterns of self-destruction will be well established; there will almost always be a 'plausible' external reason for the turnaround or failure and if you look beneath the surface they are not pressing the eject button because the plane is going down, the plane goes down because they ejected! conditions and those who received help as children and teenagers with post-traumatic or anxiety related or personality disorders may find themselves ineligible for any input through adult services. Children in care can rarely match the CVs of same age peers who have had more opportunities to work as teenagers and gain work experience through family friends and contacts. Even those who graduate from university may find themselves competing in the job market with students who have benefitted from exciting gap years funded from parental coffers.

## 7. STRENGTHENING THE HIDDEN PSYCHE

These are very subtle and often unconscious psychological processes that affect career, relationships, and every aspect of adult life. Whilst generally propelled in life and decision making by a thought process that is positive and underpinned by a belief in self-worth and self-efficacy, there is an underlying emotional belief, usually pre-verbal and embedded as a very young child, that carries those worthlessness messages 'I don't really deserve to succeed' 'one day they will find out what a useless/worthless/bad person I really am'. This can be played out in education and career terms by managing to get ill just before the final exam, pulling out of the interview just before the promotion, or in relationship terms by never allowing yourself to be accepted and loved for who you are; if you constantly fear rejection 'I'm going to reject you before you reject me' is the safest response. This applies not just to personal relationships but to interactions with professionals, with 'system' people. Recognising and understanding these predictable psychological patterns can help us to make attitudes and responses to need and the interactions between a whole range of public services more robust and able to cope with these destructive and rejecting responses. What generally happens is that systems punish these kinds of behaviour and therefore reinforce the underlying beliefs. We often make the mistake of trying to help care leavers by talking to them in purely rational terms when in fact their responses are being driven by something much more deeply embedded than thought. Understanding this underlying psyche is not a prophecy of doom for children brought up in public care; many can and do eventually overcome some of these negative internal processes. To do so they need to have enough positive experiences, relationships and beliefs to erase earlier patterns of thinking and feeling. This process is begun when a child finds stability in just the right placement for them; it is continued when they encounter an extremely supportive and thoughtful team to guide them through the process of leaving care. It is rarely completed by the time a care leaver is 18 or 19, or even 21. Developmental adolescence is a process that takes place between the ages of 15 and 25 and throughout that time we remain very susceptible to change and psychological growth which eventually creates the more settled adult patterns of thinking that tend to stay with us. Systems which punish instead of supporting can do a great deal of harm when care leavers are in their twenties. The experience of the premature ejection into adult life is difficult enough; often this creates an overwhelming sense of instability and uncertainty ironically just at the time when the child may have begun to feel settled in a good care placement for the first time. When everything else around them starts to wobble too, this can be simply overwhelming. Understanding this is essential to creating policies which enable care leavers not just to survive, but to thrive in their adult lives.

## 8. BEING AN EFFECTIVE STATE-AS-PARENT

Just a little more thought from all Government Departments whose policies have a significant effect on care leavers about the specific impacts those policies have on this vulnerable group could make a big difference in making those journeys from care a little bit less rocky and improving the life chances of children leaving public care. A child in care should not be 'nobody's child' but everybody's child. Government acts for wider society in protecting our most vulnerable children and society expects better outcomes for the children that are looked after on our behalf.

'Care proofing' policies against unintended consequences for care leavers will take some creative thinking and the will to make a difference; we are not seeking big policy changes. This is a group that both Government and society have a unique responsibility towards and who have a very particular set of needs; to fail to meet these needs sets up another generation to potentially repeat the cycles of despair and underachievement that blighted the lives of their own inadequate parents causing them to be brought up in care. The State as parent needs to align its policies across all relevant Departments so that it provides a predictable, supportive and transparent set of expectations and institutions for the delivery of services that care leavers will need as vulnerable young adults. It needs to recognise that far from costing more, this approach will bring economic benefits, both immediate and in the longer term. Improving the coherence of whole Government support for care leavers in their most crucial final steps towards adulthood will not increase dependency but will create a firm foundation from which real and sustainable independence can be achieved. Care leavers currently face barriers and obstacles at every direction they turn. When care leavers turn towards a public service which should be there to support them in their journey through adulthood we want them to be able access all areas of support and not be excluded, rejected and neglected in a way that repeats and reinforces the experiences of the traumatised child.

## 9. ALWAYS A CARE LEAVER?

Being a care leaver is a life-long circumstance; the community of adult 'care leavers' is a distinctively invisible and inherently vulnerable population. Every care leaver is an individual and as they grow as adults will variously reject, or positively integrate their care experiences into their developing identity; whether they see these experiences positively, choose to remain 'out' as adult care leavers, or seek to leave their time in care behind them, their experience of growing up in care, like all childhood and previous experiences, remains part of them in some way.

One of the perennial problems in getting children care 'on the agenda' as a major concern across Government is that there simply are not that many of them. This is not an issue that impacts on whole populations in the way that schools, hospitals or the closure of old people's homes do. This should be seen as a positive; the relatively small scale of the population we are talking about should mean that there is no excuse not to open up thinking and open up policy so that care leavers can freely access all areas of support that they need until they are established in their adult lives. This is a small enough problem to be solved if there is the political will to do so. Although care leavers a population are differentiated in all the ways described, there is also a good deal of intersection between care leavers and other vulnerable cohorts. If Government is successful in creating integrated policies that work for this small group, there may be many useful lessons learned that can be transferred into much wider benefits in the future.

The state cannot and should not be a forever parent for care leavers. It can and should be a better and a more thoughtful parent for care leavers as they make their transition through the final developmental stages of adolescence from 15 through to 25, and remain a vigilant, if more distant, parent to its care leavers throughout their first crucial decade after leaving care.

This is not just a moral responsibility it will enable more care leavers to fulfil their potential and give back to society; it will reduce the economic waste which occurs when mismatched policies produce unintended consequences and it will provide a model of good parenting by a responsible Government that understands the value of families and the enormous responsibility it takes on when it steps in to take over the parental role in the interests of protecting children at risk.

- <sup>i</sup> Department for Education, England Summary Tables: SFR21/2011/B1  
<http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/datasets/a00196857/children-looked-after-by-las-in-england>
- <sup>ii</sup> Centre for Social Justice, 2008, Breakthrough Britain: Couldn't Care Less, p.11  
<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/Couldn't%20Care%20Less%20Report%20WEB%20VERSION.PDF>
- <sup>iii</sup> Resilience and Young People in Care, Overcoming the Odds, Mike Stein, JRF, 2005 <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/185935369x.pdf>
- <sup>iv</sup> Eurostat, Average Age of Young People when Leaving the Parental Household, 2007  
[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php?title=File:Average\\_age\\_of\\_young\\_people\\_when\\_leaving\\_the\\_parental\\_household,\\_by\\_sex,\\_2007.png&filetimestamp=20101209133941](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php?title=File:Average_age_of_young_people_when_leaving_the_parental_household,_by_sex,_2007.png&filetimestamp=20101209133941)
- <sup>v</sup> Berne, E. (1957). Ego states in Psychotherapy. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*

# ACCESS ALL AREAS - A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

## CORPORATE PARENTING FROM CARE TO ADULTHOOD: A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

Professor Mike Stein

### THE CHALLENGE OF CORPORATE PARENTING

For most young people today, moving in to their own accommodation, entering further or higher education, finding satisfying employment, and achieving good health and a positive sense of well-being, represent important landmarks during their journey to adulthood. As a group, care leavers are more disadvantaged than other young people in achieving these landmarks, although some successfully move on from care whilst others just get by or struggle<sup>1</sup>. It is the responsibility of corporate parents to ensure that all their young people fulfil their potential and this will require comprehensive responses across their life course, including whilst they are in care, at the time of leaving care and on their pathways to adulthood<sup>2</sup>.

### YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES IN CARE

Studies show that good quality placements are central to the present and future wellbeing of young people<sup>3</sup>. These can provide young people with: compensatory attachments to carers, stability and continuity of care; a positive experience of education; assessment and responses to their health and emotional needs, and; preparation in self-care, practical and inter-personal skills. Research suggests some young people with social, emotional and behavioural problems may benefit more treatment based approaches whilst in care<sup>4</sup>.

### YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRANSITIONS FROM CARE

Many care leavers have to cope with major changes in their lives, in leaving foster care or residential care and setting-up home, in leaving school and entering the world of work, or post-16 education or training, or being parents, at a younger age than other young people: they are denied the psychological opportunity to deal with issues over time which is how most young people cope with the challenges of transition. Studies show that those young people who have more gradual, extended and supported transitions from care have better outcomes than those who leave care early<sup>5</sup>.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S PATHWAYS TO ADULTHOOD

Most young people today receive practical and emotional support well into adulthood. This highlights the importance of the corporate parenting role 'from care to adulthood', not just at the time of 'leaving care'. Research studies show that young people's main pathways to adulthood – accommodation, careers, health and wellbeing - are closely connected and reinforcing and that they can be assisted by different forms of support including leaving care teams, mentoring, assistance by former carers and positive family and kinship networks<sup>6</sup>.

### ***Accommodation Pathway: corporate parenting and housing providers***

Research shows that leaving care teams are successful in assisting most young people in accessing accommodation at the time of leaving care and in supporting them when they get into difficulties, including homelessness<sup>7</sup>. The main challenges for corporate parents arising from research studies on the accommodation pathway are:

- Providing more opportunities for young people to remain in placements, in particular those young people settled in residential care
- Providing more supportive accommodation, including supported lodgings and semi-supported housing, for young people who leave placements early, including young people not in education, employment and training and those with higher support needs
- Ensuring the support provided by foster, residential and kinship carers, to young people who move on is built into the pathway planning process
- Making use of family group conferences to identify supportive family, kinship and social networks

### ***Careers pathway: corporate parenting, schools, post-16 further and higher education, training and employment***

There is evidence leaving care teams have contributed to the increased participation of young people in further education and work experience, the latter through targeted careers support and employment opportunities (e.g. *From Care2Work* programme)<sup>8</sup>. However, both official data and research has consistently highlighted the 'attainment gap' between looked after children and those in the general population, although many young people make progress from entry to care, when wider criteria are adopted (e.g. school attendance, health and wellbeing), and when outcomes are identified over a longer period of time (more time to catch-up - outcomes generally get better over time<sup>9</sup>). The main challenges for corporate parenting arising from research studies are:

- To maximise the educational and career opportunities of young people through placement stability; early support for catch-up learning; action-oriented Personal Education Plans; individual tutoring to compensate for gaps in schooling; support from family, carers and professionals; financial resources and practical help; sympathetic schools; positive community and cultural influences; clear protocols agreed with colleges and universities, and; staying in placement and being settled in accommodation after 18<sup>10</sup>.
- Providing targeted careers support and enhancing employment opportunities through partnership working, raising aspirations and supporting young people in employment
- The DFE should consider piloting a composite measure of progress ('impact of care'), based on young people pathways from entry to care, to adulthood, as well as using the current normative educational and employment measures.

### ***Health and wellbeing pathway: corporate parenting, CAMHS and adult services***

Research shows that many young people enter care with mental health problems and their physical and mental health problems may increase at the time of leaving care<sup>11</sup>. This is associated with coping with the physical and psychological demands of leaving care early, often combined with earlier pre-care and in care problems. The main challenges for corporate parenting arising from research studies are:

- When young people enter care they should have comprehensive assessments, the provision of stable, high quality placements and, where indicated, treatment interventions
- At the time of leaving care young people will be assisted by more gradual transitions from care, ongoing support by their personal advisers, and access to mental health and psychological services
- Young people may experience problems in moving from child and adolescent mental health services to adult services. However, if they are not in education, employment or training, they are not entitled to support by leaving care services, up to 25 years of age. They may also fail to meet the threshold for adult services. One solution would be for adult services to commission leaving care services to provide this support
- More attention should be given to young people with additional support needs including: the transition of disabled young people to adult services; supporting young parents; care leavers in the youth justice system; working with asylum seeking and trafficked young people, and; responding to the diverse needs of different groups of black and minority ethnic young people

### **CORPORATE PARENTS: IMPROVING THE RANGE AND QUALITY OF SERVICE**

Since the introduction of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, reinforced by the Transitions Guidance, introduced in 2011, the present organisation of leaving care service has resulted in more clearly defined structures, roles and responsibilities and more formalised multi-agency work. However, Government information and research findings, including those based on young people's views, show variations in the range and quality of services<sup>12</sup>. There are some excellent, some good and some very poor services. A major challenge for corporate parenting is how to 'level up' services, especially in the context of 'localism'. NCAS' benchmarking forum could provide the starting point. However, there needs to be an agreed process between central and local government to make this happen – for example, ensuring formal links between 'good' and 'poor services' with similar levels of need (e.g. linking cluster authorities), and developing and reviewing 'action plans' to bring about improvements. This process should also include sharing best practice in relation to specific groups of care leavers, such as some disabled young people, young parents and care leavers in the youth justice system, where there is evidence of service variation.

- <sup>1</sup> Stein, M. (2008) 'Resilience and young people leaving care.' *Child Care in Practice*, 14, 1, 35-44.
- <sup>2</sup> Stein M (2008) *Ibid*
- <sup>3</sup> Sinclair, I., Baker, C., Lee, J. and Gibbs, I. (2007) *The Pursuit of Permanence: A study of the English care system*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- <sup>4</sup> Biehal N et al (2012) *The Care Placements Evaluation (CaPE) Evaluation of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescents (MTFC-A) Research Brief*, DfE
- <sup>5</sup> Munro R,E, Lushey C, National Care Advisory Service, Debi Maskell-Graham and Ward H with Holmes L (2011), *Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme Pilot: Final Report*, DfE
- <sup>6</sup> Dixon et al (2006) *Young people leaving care: an evaluation of costs and outcomes*. SPRU, University of York
- <sup>7</sup> Stein, M. and Morris, M. (2010) *Increasing the Numbers of Care Leavers in 'Settled, Safe' Accommodation*. Vulnerable Children Knowledge Review 3. London: C4EO.
- <sup>8</sup> Dixon et al (2006); National Care Advisory Service (2011) *From Care2Work, Phase I Final Report*, London: NCAS
- <sup>9</sup> Stein M and Dumaret A (2011) The mental health of young people aging out of care and entering adulthood: Exploring the evidence from England and France, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33,12.
- <sup>10</sup> Jackson, S et al. (2011) 'England.' In S. Jackson and C. Cameron (eds) *Final Report of the YIPPEE Project, WP12, Young People From a Public Care Background: Pathways to further and higher education in five European countries*. London: Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London
- <sup>11</sup> Dixon, J. (2008) 'Young people leaving care: health, well-being and outcomes.' *Child & Family Social Work*, 13, 2, 207–217.
- <sup>12</sup> Morgan, R. and Lindsay, M. (2012) *Young People's Views on Care and Aftercare*, Office of the Children's Rights Director, London; Ofsted