



*Fast forward to integrated services for care leavers*

# *New belongings*

2013 - 2014

*Project Report for New Belongings – an initiative designed to improve the design and delivery of services for care leavers in nine local authority areas.*

## Executive Summary

1. New Belongings has been an innovative and ambitious initiative aiming to raise expectation and aspiration for care leavers. The project ran from May 2013 to October 2014 in nine local authority areas and has shown how attention to the care leavers' voice and a commitment to improvement can begin to create radical shifts in culture and belief.

2. The inspiration for New Belongings came from the care leavers group who meet regularly with the Minister for Children and was the third in a series of initiatives which produced The Charter for Care Leavers and the Access All Areas campaign.

3. New Belongings aimed to:

- ♦ embed the principles of the Care Leavers Charter<sup>1</sup>,
- ♦ join up services to care leavers, as outlined in the Access All Areas report<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ bring in the energy of local communities to support care leavers.

4. New Belongings was needed to create a culture change in delivery of services for care leavers to address the continuing over-representation of this group in all the statistics of disadvantage and social exclusion including adult prisoners and mental health service users, and chronically low paid or unemployed.

5. New Belongings began by asking the specific questions why, when there is so much good legislation and guidance in place at National level is there so much local variation in the quality and quantum of what is delivered? What more needs to be done at local and national policy level to join up services?

6. New Belongings began with care leavers and ended with care leavers. Bidding Authorities had to survey their own care leavers as a basis for setting their priorities which would form the basis of their Action Plans. As well as receiving advice and support from the consultant care leavers who formed the New Belongings expert panel, Local Authorities had to have an active and effective care leavers' panel and take the views and experiences of their care leavers seriously.

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<sup>1</sup> Charter for Care Leavers, DfE, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Access All Areas, Care Leavers' Foundation, NCAS, Princes Trust, ANV, 2012

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7. New Belongings was funded with a small project grant from DfE and delivered by The Care Leavers' Foundation. A project Director and five other senior personnel, four of whom were working pro bono, made up the central advisory team.

8. The central team came together regularly to review progress. Care leaver experts worked either in specific Local Authorities or on a National advisory group. Care leavers were in their twenties or thirties and brought a wide range of experience and diversity to the project. Care leavers were supported and mentored by the senior professionals. This was a mutual exchange process; there was learning in both directions.

9. The bidding and selection process yielded nine participating New Belongings Authorities instead of the five initially planned:

- ◆ Herefordshire
- ◆ Portsmouth
- ◆ Sheffield
- ◆ Trafford, Cheshire East, Stockport, Wirral
- ◆ Walsall, Staffordshire

10. Successful Authorities had to show commitment at CEO level, willingness to work with care leavers as equal partners at the heart of the project and an ambition to really improve the lives of their care leavers by harnessing the power and resources within the local community.

Results were encouraging. The evaluation summary<sup>3</sup> concludes:

*We have consistently seen:*

- ◆ *better accommodation choice and options;*
- ◆ *improved documentation to support pathway planning;*

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<sup>3</sup> A Better Deal for Care Leavers – An independent evaluation of the New Belongings Project

- *better provision of advice and information;*
- *more opportunities through employment and apprenticeship schemes;*
- *more care leavers supported to stay on in their education;*
- *better engagement with young people when it comes to improving services;*  
*and,*
- *more care leavers getting what they are entitled to*

11. Examples of innovation stretched across all areas, including housing, personal support, finance, mentoring, influencing, decision making, education employment and training, mental health and community involvement. The overriding characteristic of the successful projects was their determination to change negative cultures and low expectations to ambition and aspiration.

12. This concept coined The Gold Standard for leaving care services, which requires Local Authorities to demonstrate that their care leavers are ***cared for, cared about and able to take care of themselves***. This concept of a Gold Standard for leaving care services is to be further developed and is being seen as a potential model against which inspection and evaluation of services could be conducted in the future.

13. The project team noted that the focus on leaving care service within the wider children's services teams boosted the professional self-esteem of the participating teams. They were no longer the Cinderella service and this made a difference.

14. A number of National Policy recommendations were made by the New Belongings team which are in the same direction of travel as the Government's Care Leavers' Strategy, but suggest that certain things require new legislation or guidance issued centrally to generate reliable and universal change.

15. It is believed that as well as fulfilling a social and ethical responsibility to a group of young adults towards whom the State as parent has a very particular and unique responsibility the improvements looked for through the New Belongings project will

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yield long term benefits by reducing chronic reliance on welfare and crisis services and producing employable and tax paying citizens who become a net gain to the economy at large. Improvements in transitional, supportive and preventative services for care leavers may also reduce the creation of future generations of looked after children.

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16. New Belongings has demonstrated real and rapid improvement and culture change over a period of eighteen months in just nine local authorities. Next Steps for New Belongings will involve supporting the existing New Belongings Authorities to embed culture change and consolidate progress, to continue innovating and listening to care leavers, to spread their work through regional forums, mentoring other authorities and regional or sub regional activities, and to recruit a second cohort of Local Authorities to commence New Belongings projects.

17. The longer term aim is for the New Belongings approach to be widely adopted across the country within a timescale of 3 – 5 years and simply to become the way we work with care leavers to support them into and through their early adult lives and into more secure and settled futures.

18. The next round of New Belongings Authorities will be recruited in January/February 2015 for the second phase of the project which will run until June 2016.

## Acknowledgements

The Trustees would like to congratulate all those who have worked hard to change culture and mindset in their authority and 'do things differently' and in ways that ensure their care leavers are more likely to feel **cared for, cared about and able to care for themselves**. Thanks go to colleagues in Local Authorities and DfE. An extra thank you is due to DfE not only for recognising that New Belongings is the right way forward for the delivery of better services for care leavers, but also for taking the bold step of responding to our insistence that a care leaver intern was embedded in DfE throughout the life of the project. Particular thanks go to those older professionals who have worked on this project for next to nothing. We would like to say a special thank you to the care leavers both on our own team and within Local Authorities who have worked with us to make New Belongings a reality, and who have taught us so much along the way. We hope that this is only the start in improving experiences and outcomes for care leavers now and in the future.

## Further Information

The New Belongings Project will commence its second phase of activity in early 2015.

The Independent Evaluation report on the 2013/14 Project is available at [www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/newbelongings/project](http://www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/newbelongings/project)

Visit the website regularly for updates and resources. A Handbook outlining the full New Belongings Methodology, plus details of specific initiatives and activities undertaken by New Belongings Authorities will be made available in the first quarter of 2015. A web-based resource with fuller information, news, discussions and tools together with the methodology handbook will be developed during the course of 2015

Local Authorities who are not formally working with the New Belongings team on this project may wish to implement the concept on their own and materials are being made freely available for that purpose. All we ask is that you let us know about your successes and learning on your New Belongings journey.

Contact: [newbelongings@thecareleaversfoundation.org](mailto:newbelongings@thecareleaversfoundation.org)

The Care Leavers' Foundation  
PO Box 202  
Bala LL23 7ZB  
Registered Charity Number 1081410

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