



New Belongings

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.

CONTENTS

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
Overview	6
Origins and Concept	7
Why New Belongings was Needed	7
The Project : What we Did	7
Governance	8
Setting up the Project	8
Methodology	11
Achievment and Legacy	13
Nuggets of Gold : What Local Authorities Did	14
National Policy	17
Working Together and Next Steps	18
Acknowledgements	19
Annexe 1 : Policy Recommendations	21
Annexe 2 : The Gold Standard	26

New Belongings

A Report on the New Belongings Project 2013 – 2014 The Care Leavers' Foundation

“I am so proud of all the care leavers who were involved in New Belongings. Our care leaver panel working on the overall project team for their skill and commitment and younger care leavers from the Local Authorities who conducted themselves with so much maturity and who asked for real, achievable and reasonable changes that could be easily delivered”

Elizabeth Lyden

Trustee, The Care Leavers' Foundation & Chair of the New Belongings Steering Group

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

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 Charter¹,
- join up services to care leavers, as outlined in the Access All Areas report²
- 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

¹ Charter for Care Leavers, DfE, 2012

² Access All Areas, Care Leavers' Foundation, NCAS, Princes Trust, ANV, 2012

NEW BELONGINGS

panel, Local Authorities had to have an active and effective care leavers' panel and take the views and experiences of their care leavers seriously.

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 summary³ concludes:

We have consistently seen:

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

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

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

NEW BELONGINGS

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 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.

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.

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

Overview

New Belongings has been an innovative and ambitious initiative aiming to raise expectation and aspiration for care leavers and those who provide the services that they need. The first New Belongings 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 which in turn generate real and significant changes in service delivery. Most importantly, on the receiving end of this change, care leavers lives, and life chances, can be enhanced. This report sets out the key things that have been achieved, what we have learned, and how the beginning changes can be developed into the future.

Origins and Concept

The inspiration for New Belongings came from the care leavers group who meet regularly with the Minister for Children. The aim was for local authorities to improve their services for care leavers by using the experience and expertise of care leavers themselves. The project had three main objectives:

- to embed the principles of the Care Leavers Charter⁴,
- to join up services to care leavers, as outlined in the Access All Areas report⁵
- to bring in the energy of local communities to support care leavers.

⁴ Charter for Care Leavers, DfE, 2012

⁵ Access All Areas, The Care Leavers' Foundation, NCAS, Princes Trust, ANV, 2012

NEW BELONGINGS

Why New Belongings was Needed

Government's own statistics (available in 2013) tell us that care leavers:

- comprise 27% of the adult prison population; 40% of those under 21
- are 25% of those living on the street
- are 4 times more likely to commit suicide in adulthood than the wider population
- do worse at school with only 15.3% achieving 5 good GCSEs compared to 57.9% of the wider population
- are more likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEETs) with 36% of 19 year olds in this category compared to 18% of other 19 year olds
- 25% of young women leaving care are pregnant or mothers
- only 6% go to HE compared to 38% of the wider population

There is in existence a raft of policy and legislation, guidance and expected standards of delivery in this area, starting with the Children Act 1989⁶, and most recently with the revision of the Guidance to the Act as it relates to Care Leavers⁷. In theory at least, all that care leavers asked for in the Charter should already be in place. Sadly it hasn't been there in a reliable way for all care leavers, hence the idea of the New Belongings project, to revisit the things that are supposed to be happening and make sure that they are, to ensure that all care leavers feel cared for, cared about and able to care for themselves.

Through the Charter, care leavers were asking for very modest help to prepare them for, and sustain them through, their life beyond care. And for that help and support to be delivered in a way that cherished and valued them.

The Project: What we did

With financial support from DfE, The Care Leavers' Foundation set about translating the New Belongings concept into a model of best practice that would define a 'gold standard' for Local Authorities to deliver a more effective and joined up service to care leavers of all ages. The purpose was to ensure a better transition to independent living and adult life with a support network and a positive future. With an £80k grant for the core project and £20k for dissemination and evaluation the

⁶ Children Act 1989, DfE

⁷ The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations, Transitions Guidance, Volume 3 Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers, DfE updated 2014

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

Foundation established the New Belongings project in April 2013 to run for 18 months. At the core of our ambition was to have care leavers themselves lead much of the dialogue with Local Authorities and their community partners. We appointed a project Director, Peter Makeham, a panel of fifteen care leavers in their twenties and early thirties, and a central team.

The central team comprised people with experience of the care sector and others with specific relevant high level experience in related areas. They played a guiding and coordination role, alongside the expert panel of care leavers. A key principle of the project was that not only did New Belongings take the ideas of care leavers as the seed for the project, care leavers would form a central part of the delivery team. Care leavers and those who brought skills and expertise from other areas, worked alongside each other with mutual respect, each bringing their own contribution, each bringing something of equal value to the project.

The central team and the panellists provided support to New Belongings authorities from the time of the launch in September 2013 throughout the project period. The style was encouraging and informative with Local Authorities encouraged to look on their New Belongings team members as critical friends. Bureaucracy was kept to a minimum, the idea was to see action and change, not to get bogged down in planning and paperwork.

Governance

The project was guided by a steering group that included two care leavers and DfE as well as trustees and specialist volunteers from the Care Leavers' Foundation. The group, chaired on behalf of the Foundation by Trustee Liz Lyden, met quarterly to oversee progress, financial planning and risk, with an increasing focus on impact and next steps.

Setting up the Project : Methodology

Care Leaver Panel

At the heart of the New Belongings team was the expertise of the care leaver panel. Two members of the panel worked with each of the five pilots and there was a "national" team of five care leavers who worked on issues across the project as necessary and who could replace gaps in local teams. High quality applications to join the panel were received from care leavers of all ages. Written applications were followed by an interview and fifteen panellists were invited to join the team. These were paid

NEW BELONGINGS

roles with responsibilities allocated on a consultancy basis. Each local authority or cluster was initially allocated 6 – 8 days from their care leaver consultants although in practice the allocated time was delivered differently, and according to the requirements of, each Local Authority or cluster.

Planning, Training and Support

Once selected all care leaver panellists joined the central project team for a training day to share thoughts on the role of each and the outcomes sought. A methodology for working with Local Authorities was developed and the full team was involved in briefing the selected authorities. Training days were provided for the care leaver panellists to prepare them for their professional role. Panel members brought a great variety of different experiences to the project. Those who had full time employment elsewhere included a filmmaker, an NHS administrator, a trainer, an actor/youth ambassador. Others were students, stay-at-home mums or jobseekers. The panel included representatives of different ethnic groups and sexual orientation and included users of mental health services and care leavers with physical disability or special educational needs.

Each appointed care leaver panellist had a place on the project on their own merits, having passed a rigorous interview. However a secondary aim of the project was to provide the panellists with professional development through the carrying out of their responsibilities and aided by specific supervision/mentoring from members of the central team. Many of the panellist were still managing a great deal of trauma and chaos in their own personal lives at different stages in the project; it is to their credit that they continued to perform well within their roles during these periods. At times a significant amount of personal support was needed, and this was freely given by the central team. The fact that these older and more life experienced care leavers were able to do such a good job of bringing on the care leavers within the New Belongings Authorities while still struggling with some of their own demons is both a credit to them and a reminder of how important it is to build personal support into a project of this kind. It is a reminder too of why we are seeking to break down the idea of twenty-five as an arbitrary cut-off point for services and encourage a recognition that many care leavers will need to be able to dip in and out of support services throughout their twenties.

Selecting New Belongings Authorities

New Belongings set out to work with five Local Authorities in the first phase of development. In the event, those who submitted initial expressions of interest in response to letters sent out to Directors of Children's Services and CEO's were whittled down to 25. Out of these 25, who all met with the Central Team for exploratory discussions, 9 were offered places on the project, based on the willingness of six of them to work in cluster groups, still effectively leaving the project team with five 'units' of activity to manage.

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

Thus the following nine authorities embarked on their New Belongings journeys in May 2013:

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

Selection was based on bids from local authorities, who had to lay out their priority areas for change and how they thought participation in New Belongings could assist them towards achieving their desired outcomes. An additional filter was applied in so far as it was essential to the project that we had Local Authorities representing both two-tier and unitary structures, north and south, urban and rural. Sheffield's original bid was particularly ambitious with an expressed intention to cascade across Yorkshire and Humberside from the outset using existing Regional Forums. The scale of this ambition was thwarted by personnel changes and limited resources so although Sheffield did ultimately deliver some credible achievements as a stand-alone participant, we will have to wait for phase two of New Belongings to discover whether the benefits can easily be spread regionally. There were also specific requirements for all Local Authorities that had to be demonstrated as part of their bid:

Minimum requirements for Local Authorities to be considered for the New Belongings project:

- ◆ the bid was supported by their Chief Executive
- ◆ set out where they believed they currently were in meeting care leaver needs and commit to undertake a survey as a first step
- ◆ show they had a care leaver forum
- ◆ set out what they sought to achieve through the project both locally and nationally
- ◆ set out how they would involve their local care leavers, including the selection of two to work specifically on New Belongings
- ◆ commit to working with two care leavers from the New Belongings panel and with the central project team
- ◆ be a signatory to the Care Leavers' Charter

The participating Authorities, even without the Regional impact originally offered by Sheffield, gave a good spread: Herefordshire to ensure the gold standard was tested in a rural setting; Portsmouth, which was a microcosm of the multi ethnicity and asylum seeker population of larger cities through being a major point of entry by sea into the UK; the four Authorities in the North West who asked to work together as a cluster (Trafford, Stockport, Cheshire East and Wirral), and the two West Midlands

NEW BELONGINGS

Authorities, one County, one Unitary, who in the end did not work closely together but provided us with some interesting contrasts in what are actually neighbouring geographical Authorities.

Methodology

New Belongings has demonstrated a viable model to improve services to care leavers. The methodology developed provides a strong framework for improvement. We asked pilots to follow 5 steps that would hopefully inspire bespoke local solutions to improve the experience of their own care leavers:

5 STEPS TO FOLLOW TO GET NEW BELONGINGS UNDERWAY:

- ♦ Ask local care leavers to help you survey your own careleavers to understand the current picture which gave a snapshot.
- ♦ Examine in detail the role, experience and knowledge of personal advisers in dealing with care leaver issues and entitlements
- ♦ Create a comprehensive plan; a combination of what is already supposed to be delivered and lessons learned from local care leavers
- ♦ Apply the authority of the ceo to joining up services that need to work together better to deliver the plan
- ♦ Ask the council leader to host ways of introducing the community to support care leavers in the longer term
- ♦ Have a designated project lead within each LA at managerial level

Key features for success include:

- ♦ care leavers and their experience must be at the heart of the project. Matching service to need is the basis for improvement. Allowing care leavers to set priorities and developing effective and trusting relationships with them is the basis for people across the council and in the community both in listening to their voice and understanding fully that they have a responsibility towards them;

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

- ♦ the input of our care leaver panel, ranging in age from 21 to 34, helped with engagement at every level. With respect to local representation care leaver forums, either already in existence or created as part of the New Belongings project, gained a completely different level of credibility and confidence and the outlook and ambition of the local, and younger, care leavers was boosted massively as a result of the support and interaction with care leavers from the national New Belongings panel, who brought wider experience and skills outside the individual authority and the wisdom of hindsight from having lived through the different stages of life after care;
- ♦ local context is crucial and an ideal starting point to identify local priorities is by using surveys enabling local authorities to better understand the experience and views of their own care leavers. This was the starting point for action. In future projects needs more to be done to increase sample size and reach, but the principle established is a sound one;
- ♦ top level support for New Belongings is vital to success. CEO support encourages departments in the authority to understand the role they should play in corporate parenting and to be more responsive to the needs of care leavers; the support of the Council Leader and lead member can influence people and organisations in the wider community to provide opportunities and support to local care leavers;
- ♦ an effective forum of local care leavers must either exist already or be created;
- ♦ setting a relatively small number of priorities for improvement gives the project more focus, however we are also very clear as part of a longer term New Belongings ethos that just doing one or two things well is not good enough.

What happened

Although it is true to say that some pilot authorities progressed faster than others, we can say overall that progress was made as is demonstrated in independent evaluation. Through following the stages of the project, care leavers and pilots have come up with a wide range of integrated improvements and innovation which they can genuinely say is based on the views and experiences of their care leavers and has been shared within the project, whether working effectively in a cluster or in a stand-alone authority. The outcomes will take time to clearly emerge but looks likely to be in the areas of employment, education, training, housing and mental health amongst others. The evaluation summary⁸ concludes:

Participating authorities have, in the main, been embedding the Charter for Care leavers, 'Access All Areas', and engaging with the local communities; and have shown that the principles behind these are both sound and applicable within the context of different local priorities. We have consistently seen:

⁸ A Better Deal for Care Leavers – An independent evaluation of the New Belongings Project

NEW BELONGINGS

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

The overriding concern about these improvements will have been about their lack of reach, especially to many young people who will be leaving care from placements that are away from the local area of their 'responsible authorities'.

This independent evaluation has found that New Belongings has been so beneficial to the local authorities engaging in it that, if judged against the many changes and improvements reported, it must be in the interests of both care leavers and the future progression of leaving care services in this country to persevere with it in some form or other.

New Belongings – Achievement and Legacy

Many of the authorities in the project have taken innovative approaches to improve services to care leavers that other authorities could adopt. During phase two it is our intention to make the methodology and the detail of the specific achievements available to all online. The Care Leavers' Foundation will continue to work with selected authorities to develop New Belongings, but it is our aim that others will commence New Belongings journeys of their own.

Examples of specific developments and activities are set out below. It could be said in some ways that none of these individual activities are radically new; what has made them particularly successful as indicated earlier is that New Belongings Authorities have been urged to develop several strands of improvement at once, to do this rapidly, and to do it within a culture of high aspiration and expectation, as well as truly working with and alongside care leavers in the design, planning and implementation of the new activities. As already outlined, the buy in across the council and at the most senior level was crucial, and the requirement to embed the work so that it is not a flash in the pan if key people move on or the next set of priorities come along, so that which has been gained will not be lost.

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

What has also been noted is that the focus on leaving care service within the wider children's services teams has boosted the professional self-esteem of the participating teams. They are no longer the Cinderella service; they are noticed, they are valued. Suddenly being part of the leaving care team is a prestige and high priority activity; it is recognized as the necessary crowning achievement of all of the other preventative and intervention work done well. If the service as a whole is feeling more valued, care leavers are feeling more valued. If embarking on the New Belongings project is at the same time daunting, challenging and exciting, the possibility that being a care leaver in a New Belongings authority can be daunting, challenging and exciting. The personal energy and enthusiasm that has been released, and the belief in the basic values that underpin New Belongings, as outlined in the Care Leavers' Charter and the Gold Standard, have been a key factor in the success of the first phase of this project. Participants have told us they feel as if they have been given permission to give energy to their care leavers and to develop all the fresh ideas that they have which have not been given time to see the light of day.

Nuggets of gold – what local authorities did

Influence and Decision Making



in Staffordshire the views and priorities of the care leaver forum feed directly into the authority's corporate parenting panel

in Stockport – the care leaver café, a drop in and training service run by partner charity Pure Insight, enables a wider range of care leavers to input views into corporate decisions in addition to an active, and more formal, care leaver forum

in Trafford CEO presented to every single standing committee and got agreement that all decisions across the council would have to take into account the needs of care leavers as a specific group and not part of the wider group known as 'vulnerable adults'

NEW BELONGINGS

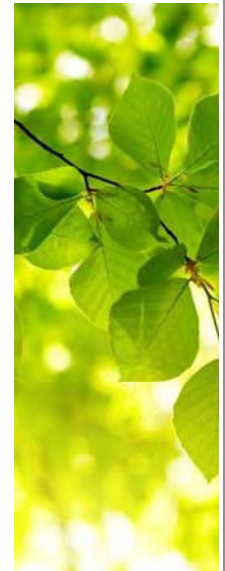
Personal Support and Finance

Stockport – has added an extra 1.5 days a week for EET and seen a reduction in NEETS among leaving care population

Trafford – is making good use of pre-payment cards to facilitate choice and value in the administration of leaving care grants, holiday payments for students and emergency hardship needs

Stockport - has extended the post of Virtual Head, giving it a lifelong remit and enabling care leavers at any age to come back and receive assistance and support to access education

All New Belongings Authorities have implemented joint working between leaving care teams with Job Centre Plus to support care leavers to age 25, in some cases with a Skills Worker from JCP working as part of the LC Team



Community and Independence

All New Belongings Authorities have issued leisure passes for fitness facilities up to age 19, with plans in place to extend to 21 or 25

Stockport have issued museum and art gallery passes to 16+ children in care and care leavers

Trafford has negotiated tram passes with local provider and driving lessons for care leavers are paid for in most of the New Belongings Authorities

All have created in house apprenticeships or internships and work experience opportunities specifically for their own care leavers.

Inviting the wider community to see themselves as part of the corporate parenting role has also resulted in many offers of work experience with job potentials In Trafford Manchester United is creating 100 apprenticeships for care leavers in a wide variety of roles resulting in one particularly vulnerable care leaver already in full time permanent employment

Following a screening of Scott King's 'Conscience' video, about the Care Leavers' Charter at a 45 minute business breakfast event in Cheshire East, every one of the thirty attendees expressed that they had no idea they could be involved and asked how they could help



A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS



Mental Health

In Portsmouth... CAMHS will assess any care leaver with a mental health issue and support referral to adult mental health where appropriate. If care leaver doesn't meet criteria CAMHS will continue support up to 25 if they have been receiving support prior to 18th birthday

In Trafford.... Care leavers have been brought to the attention of Multi Agency Adults and Risk panels at age 16 enabling assessment prior to 18th birthday. Enables fast track to adult mental health services if they meet criteria and in some cases continued support from CAMHS post 18

In Stockport..... Partnership working with health commissioners has enabled a business case to be made for the extension of CAMHS services up to 21 or 25, dependent on circumstances, for care leavers

..... and Stockport are piloting Personal Health Budgets for vulnerable care leavers who have a history of presenting at A&E because of crisis to see if personalised budgets can improve overall health and reduce crisis interventions.

In Hereford care leavers have set up a peer mentoring programme. They received seed funding from the Local Authority and have been fundraising to expand the reach of the scheme.



Education & Training

Portsmouth – identified better access to further education as a priority for its care leavers and is working with its six largest local FE colleges to work to implement the “Buttle Trust” standards

Staffordshire ring fenced 25 apprenticeships within the Council for care leavers

Walsall substantially increased work placements within the Council

Wirral allocated 10% of its apprentice places to care leavers

Cheshire East now requires any firm submitting competitive tender for Council work to make a commitment to providing work placements or apprenticeships to care leavers within the delivery of the service

National policy

The starting point for New Belongings was a recognition that legislation is not always the answer. Much of the legislation that now covers services for care leavers and ancillary services used by them is now very close to what is needed and is supported by good Guidance. The problem New Belongings set out to address was why there is such a big gap between intention at Government level and delivery within diverse Local Authorities. The Government also launched its first ever Care Leavers Strategy mid-way through the project in October 2013. This was in direct response to the Access All Areas initiative and itself a landmark. Nonetheless there were a number of issues about the experience of care leavers that came out of the project on which may require further changes in national policy and guidance to bring about the desired outcomes. We have set out in Annex 2 a number of possible ideas that should be considered. There are some that stand out:

- ♦ mental health and emotional wellbeing is an area where care leavers are particularly vulnerable because of their experience both before and during care. The point at which those difficulties can be treated does not happen neatly just before they are 18. After that age, it is much more difficult to get help as the threshold for access to adult mental health services is very high. The most straightforward way to address the gap in provision would be to extend CAMHS to care leavers up to the age of 25;
- ♦ the way in which sanctions under JSA are sometimes being implemented is causing particular difficulties for care leavers and damaging the efforts of local authorities to get them into employment, education or training. For example, a care leaver was sanctioned for not doing a job search at a time when he was attending an interview for an apprenticeship accompanied by the personal adviser from the authority. Although DWP has now introduced a 'marker' for care leavers so that in such a case the leaving care worker would always be consulted before any sanction is applied, awareness of this both within JCPs and leaving care team is still limited;
- ♦ Failure to support care leavers in managing their initial tenancies properly too often lead to the designation "intentionally homeless". Our strong recommendation is that use of the "intentionally homeless" designation is not permitted for care leavers up to the age of 29;
- ♦ care leavers are sometimes unable to take advantage of access to education earlier in their life because they are dealing with other issues. Improving access to apprenticeships and to further education has been a part of many of the plans of the authorities in the project.

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

Support up to 25 is available for care leavers in higher education but is not available for other types of education, including further education. Existing Guidance requires that “the Authority should have a written policy they give to looked after children and care leavers detailing the financial support that they will receive when they participate in any further or higher education” however in practice this is variable and we have found that financial support is unlikely to be given unless it is a requirement. Extending financial support to all types of education up to 25 would enable some care leavers to access the education that other young people were able to access when they were younger;

- ♦ Care Leaver forums have significantly improved the ability and willingness of local authorities in the project to better engage care leavers in decisions about care leaving services. It is important that Care Leaver Forums exist as a distinct entity separate from CiCCs. One option would be to require local authorities to have a specific forum for care leavers, associated with their formal arrangements on corporate parenting. Another option would be for the DfE to encourage that strongly in written guidance.

Working Together and Next Steps

The original New Belongings plan was for us to work with 5 local authorities. The geographical proximity of some of the applicants suggested some of them might do well to join together and six of them were asked to work in this way. This enabled us to work with nine Local Authorities in total. The two West Midlands Authorities (Walsall and neighbouring Staffordshire) seemed to gain little from the partnership approach, and in practice ran two almost separate New Belongings projects. The North West on the other hand joined as a cluster of four (Trafford, Stockport, Cheshire East and Wirral) and each of these four Authorities reaped huge dividends from working in this way. Instinctively this feels like a very strong and productive model, however the sample was not large enough to categorically say that working in a cluster is best. What we can say that these four Authorities, with the leadership teams that they had, worked exceptionally well in this way and showed they were able to achieve synergies, efficiencies, and a real energy from the partnership that, if it could be replicated in other clusters, would certainly extend the reach of New Belongings in the next phase. It also seems likely that embeddedness would be enhanced; if one authority faltered, or suffered a significant change of personnel, the project and the momentum would be held in the other three partner Authorities making it easier to catch up after a pause or setback. In the next phase we will be considering single, paired and clustered bids, with a firm intention that at least one similar cluster will be in the mix.

NEW BELONGINGS

The obvious next step is from cluster to region; Sheffield had high hopes when they began of working regionally with themselves as lead authority but this ambition did not materialise. The North West cluster has already begun discussion with partner Authorities throughout the North West to form a New Belongings North West consortium and spread their own achievements more widely. 2 North West Care Leavers Regional Ambassadors Posts are in the process of being created. If New Belongings can move effectively from individual Authority to cluster, from cluster to region, then there is a real possibility that the New Belongings approach can be spread to every Authority in the country in a 3 – 5 year timescale and, if widely adopted, Local Authorities would then have to give a very good reason why they were *not* using it.

Our plan is to recruit the next round of New Belongings Authorities 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 mind-set 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.

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

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

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

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

November 2014



Fast forward to integrated services for care leavers

NEW BELONGINGS

Annex 1 : National Policy Ideas

	Suggestion	Why?
	Accountability	
1.	<p>KPIs: Either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) develop new key performance indicators that local authorities, health authorities and DWP can use to measure how well services are supporting care leavers; or b) extend looked after children KPIs to age 21 or 25 for care leavers. 	<p>There are currently only two LA KPIs specifically relating to care leavers (accommodation & NEETs). There are many more KPIs for LACs which sends a signal that care leaver services are less important. Increasing KPIs for care leavers will get more senior corporate ownership and make it easier for services to join up.</p>
	Care Leaver Involvement	
2.	<p>A new requirement on local authorities to have a Care Leavers' Forum, with a minimum of 7-10 people. The Forum should have direct engagement with senior LA corporate management.</p>	<p>Care Leaver feedback on existing services and involvement in developing improved services is key to the New Belongings' methodology. A requirement for a Care Leaver Forum would ensure all LAs have at least one way of engaging with their Care Leavers. LAs should have flexibility about how they organise these, to reflect local views, but as a minimum they should have 7-10 people and should have a direct feedback route into the LA's senior management – maybe not for every meeting but at some point in each year. Training and mentoring should be provided to help care leavers take a full role and get their voice heard.</p>
	Implementing Care Leavers' Entitlements	
3.	<p>Local authorities, Jobcentres and Health Authorities should be encouraged to review their implementation of care leavers' entitlements to ensure all are readily available. Reviews should be, at least,</p>	<p>It's hard, for some care leavers, to access services and support that should be in place which implies not all services are fully up to date with care leaver entitlements or have checked they are supplying all they should be. This could be because rules have changed and services have not kept up with the changes. Some care leavers and PAs have to fight</p>

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

	biennial and should involve care leavers.	hard for what should already be easily accessible. A two-yearly review should reduce such instances. If entitlements are not being taken up this can also lead to inefficiencies. For example, an LA may be paying out emergency cash “top ups” to care leavers who are coming to them as a last resort but who could have got other funds if they had applied for them in time; e.g. Hardship Funds, advance accommodation payments. Savings could be redistributed so that all care leavers in an area get more. This would reduce concerns voiced by some care leavers that they are getting less than they should because the system “rewards” people who are “disorganised”.
	Care Leaver Strategic Manager	
4.	LAs to appoint a named Care Leaver Strategic Manager from within their top level senior team.	We’ve seen in New Belongings that where a CEO or other senior executive takes a personal interest this is a major driver in joining up and improving services across the LA. Both at a strategic level (ensuring care leaver issues get discussed at performance and funding meetings) and at case level (when a senior “champion” can take quick decisions if internal teams have conflicting views about how to best support an individual young person). The Care Leavers’ Group should have direct access to this person.
	Out of Area Care	
5.	Introduce a new duty for local authorities to formally notify the receiving authority if a care leaver moves into their area so that the receiving authority can offer support and services.	Care Leavers moving into an area may lose out on access to services – such as outreach programmes, readiness to work initiatives and community links if an LA isn’t aware they are living in their area. Can mean some care leavers feel more isolated and lonely than should be the case.
	Independent Review Officers	
6.	Extend the IRO duty beyond age 18 so that care leavers have access to independent reviews of pathway	Currently IRO duty stops at 18. This would allow a stronger challenge to post 18 support.

NEW BELONGINGS

	plans, etc, until they are 21, or 25 if in education.	
	Health	
7.	New Duty to be placed on Health Authorities and local authorities to conduct a joint health & wellbeing assessment for each looked after child, soon after they turn 17. (17 & 3 months)	The issue is the cliff edge between CAMHS pre-18 and adult care, post 18. Having a joint review close to becoming 17 would help CAMHS hand over a full history to adult services so that the care leaver is known to adult services and can get health care quickly. Making this a duty addresses the problem some LAs have, where it is hard to get external services to commit resources because there is no duty on them to do so.
8.	Extend the CAMHS' statutory remit to provide services for care leavers up to the age of 21 or 25.	This is the same issue as above. Extending CAMHS beyond 18 enables continuity of care. A potential downside is that this could prolong the care leaver being seen as a child which may stop them managing their own health as an adult or linking into services tailored for adults.
9.	Trial Personal Health Budgets for care leavers	Stockport are piloting Personal Health Budgets for vulnerable care leavers who have a history of presenting at A&E because of crisis to see if personalised budgets can improve overall health and reduce crisis interventions. Can this be tested in other areas as well?
	Education & Training	
10.	Extend financial support for care leavers in all types of education up to the age of 25. Support is currently available only for care leavers in Higher Education.	Financial support for care leavers in HE is vital but a similar package for care leavers taking GCSEs or A levels would help people stay in education or take up education again, post 16, if they didn't do as well at school as they could have. Education outcomes for children in care are abysmally low. Most children in care, either can't access good quality education or they are not able to engage with education whilst at school because of other things going on in their lives. Only a very small, exceptional, minority reach 17 with good quality GCSE results. We know many care leavers want to come back to education after they have left school but find it difficult to do so. This should be extended flexibly to a wide range of education and training opportunities so that it is easier for care leavers to access apprenticeships, FE courses and other vocational opportunities as well as

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

		university courses. It should also include access to wrap-around support should as housing outside of term times.
	Benefits	
	Amend benefit rules so that care leavers who are undertaking apprenticeships do not lose out financially because of training.	This is linked to the suggestion above. Care Leavers tell us that benefit rules don't support them doing apprenticeships or other education and training courses. If they earn more than £50, they lose £1 for £1 in benefits what they get in wages so there is no financial incentive to learn and some will be worse off. Some LAs are topping up the difference, taking funds away from other care leaver services. LAs are seeing more young people trying to access ESA as a way of getting round this issue which could distort ESA. It would be cleaner and more transparent to have increased support for all care leavers.
12.	JSA: Extend the use of the care leaver marker by requiring Jobcentres to talk to the local authority before a sanction is applied to a care leaver.	Although the Care Leavers' Strategy commits DWP to ensure a care leaver's circumstances are taken into account before applying sanctions, this does not seem to be routinely happening in Jobcentres. A conversation with the PA before sanctions are applied, could head off some sanctions and link the young person into other support that could help the care leaver stop the behaviour that triggered the threat of sanction. LAs where a DWP person is part of the care leaver team or where the LA has a named DWP contact seem to be finding sanctions reducing but still have examples where young people seem to have been overly-harshly judged and local flexibilities have not been used.
13.	JSA: DWP to publicise how the care leaver marker is improving services for care leavers.	This would help spread best practice and help PAs advise young people preparing for independence.
	Housing	
14.	Remove the "Intentionally Homeless" designation for care leavers.	Where an LA has the duty to provide accommodation for a care leaver, the concept of someone being "intentionally homeless" shouldn't apply in the same way as it does for non-care leavers. The designation allows Housing Associations to refuse to house care leavers – where their contract with the LA should be pushing them to do so. People thought the Welsh Assembly was making legal

NEW BELONGINGS

		changes to stop this designation being used on care leavers from April 2015 – can England do something similar?
15.	Encourage Housing Associations/Student Services to take local authorities as guarantors for care leavers	Where a care leaver is taking up a tenancy in student accommodation, the landlord will often require someone to act as a guarantor for payment. Landlords and student accommodation services won't accept local authorities as guarantors. Is there a way of making this easier at a national level or is it a local issue which LAs can get around by naming a senior person to guarantee rent payments?
	Clarifying the Legal Framework	
16.	Amend the Leaving Care Act: Government to update the Leaving Care Act 2000 to reflect changes to the legal framework since the Act's enactment (e.g. from judicial reviews).	The 2000 Act sets the framework but changes have come in since from judicial review judgements and case precedents. Can the Act be consolidated or reviewed so that all the current legislation is within one Act?
17.	Issue Consolidated Guidance updating the Leaving Care Act: Government to issue revised guidance which sets out, in one place, the legal requirements on services providing support for care leavers.	This links to the point above could either supplement a new Act or be put out separately if there is not parliamentary time to amend the Act.
18.	Personal Advisors: Government to clarify the role of local authority Personal Advisors.	This links to the point about legal frameworks. LAs would welcome clarification on the legal requirements of a PA function. For e.g., is it a "role" that could be taken on by a team or is it a named individual? At what age do certain "roles" or "functions" kick in; when the care leaver is 13, 16, 18? Clarification would help LAs plan services and also help them make the case to external agencies who should be providing support for care leavers.
	Family Links	
19.	Local authorities to help young people in their care maintain good links with their families so that they can have family connections in place for when they leave care [unless there are strong reasons not to do so]	This is already social care practice but as the pilots have reinforced how important this is, we should include it here to press how important family links are, where they can be maintained.

A GOLD STANDARD FOR CARE LEAVERS

Annex 2: The “Gold Standard”

The Charter for Care Leavers’ is where this all began. The Charter sets out principles which ask care services to be more personally responsive to the individual needs of care leavers.

It is about how to care. Many Local Authorities have now signed up to the Charter, and perhaps with the best will in the world are still not sure how to ‘care’ within the context of local government bureaucracy, targets and the simple daily pressures of service delivery. The New Belongings Authorities have been working out how to care. In working towards the Gold Standard we have asked them to look through the other end of the telescope; instead of relying on the interpretation of a Government document to tell them what they must and might do, we are asking them to explore intricately the views and experiences of their care leavers to influence and design their services to be more appropriate and sensitive to need. If in the future this concept can also be linked to measuring outcomes against care leavers’ experience of being cared for, cared about and beginning to learn how to care for themselves, instead of just counting things and measuring artificial targets that we call ‘outcomes’ this will provide Ofsted with the framework that they are looking for to assess the true quality and impact of service delivery to care leavers and Local Authorities will be closer to having changed culture and put their children first with their revised range of services. This is The Gold Standard. The Gold Standard cannot be reached without involving care leavers in all this and in creating their own positive destiny.”

Unlike more conventional ‘Standards’ the Gold Standard for care leavers does not invite the ticking of boxes for processes and tasks achieved, rather it invites and educates people to measure what is happening in the lives of those we are here to support by constantly assessing the quality of their experience.

1. Lived Experience

The essence of what a Gold Standard might mean emerged during the project. Our concept of a Gold Standard is not one of boxes ticked, but something measured and defined by the quality of experience of care leavers. Their experience of preparation for, leaving, and life after care. It is the quality of their experience that sets the gold standard and not processes, procedures or initiatives.

Implicit in developing this standard is that the experience and knowledge brought to the table by care leavers themselves needs to be understood and acted on.

This includes utilizing the experience and views of older care leavers, who may no longer be receiving services, both to bring the wisdom and perspective of time into discussions and to help facilitate the views of younger care leavers.

NEW BELONGINGS

2. Good enough for my child?

For service providers this means services have to be built around the needs and experience of care leavers, be responsive to the views of care leavers both as individuals and as groups, and based on the simple question “would I do this for my child?”

3. Cared for, cared about, and able to care for themselves

From the point of view of those assessing the quality of services for care leavers, such as OFSTED, the quality of their experience must be assessed properly.

The fundamental principle that should underpin the planning, delivery, review and assessment of services received by care leavers is expressed in the aim that care leavers be “cared for, cared about and able to care for themselves”.

“**Cared for**” means meeting the needs of care leavers, as younger and older adults, and includes:

- ♦ being educated to their potential;
- ♦ being supported into work;
- ♦ being healthy;
- ♦ living in suitable and sustainable housing;
- ♦ having an adequate level of income;
- ♦ being informed and supported.

“**Cared about**” happens when each individual care leaver knows there are people on whom he or she can rely:

- ♦ count for emotional support;
- ♦ give practical help and advice when they need it;
- ♦ that access to support will be on offer now and into the future.

“**Able to care for themselves**” is the principle that the ultimate aim of all interventions is to give them mastery of their own lives:

- ♦ being able to manage day-to-day life;
- ♦ attaining financial competence;
- ♦ capable of thinking through choices taking decisions;
- ♦ building the resilience to cope with obstacles and setbacks;

Approaches and services that meet these aims have been developed by New Belongings authorities in the course of the project. The starting and finishing point must be that care leavers are central to decisions about services. This includes decisions about them as individuals and about service development.