

CARE LEAVERS COMMITMENT

July 2022



NHS
North East
Ambulance
Service
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Trust



LONDON &
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EDUCATION
GROUP



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Care Leavers Commitment

1. Introduction

Every year, an estimated 10,000 looked after children leave care in the UK and face a wide variety of challenges as they navigate adult life.

While the quantity of evidence looking into the impact of being in care is often lacking, the research and data available paint an unanimously bleak picture for the lives of care leavers.

Care leavers generally experience poorer education, health and work outcomes and are more likely to be involved in crime. These outcomes lead to an intergenerational cycle of harm where one in three children in care have at least one parent who was in care themselves. This is exacerbated when it is considered alongside the fact that 63% of children are in care due to neglect.

The combined cost of the care system and additional support provided for care leavers is £8.8bn every year. 32% of this cost is generated by the children of care leavers who go on to enter the care system.

Research into the care system and wider support for care leavers has highlighted serious flaws and inconsistencies across the country. Ofsted's January 2022 report into the views of children leaving care and the experience of care leavers has shown that:

- More than a third of care leavers felt they left care too early
- Many care leavers felt alone or isolated when they left care, unable to access help available to them
- Many care leavers do not leave their personal adviser until they are 18 or older
- Around a quarter of care leavers are not involved at all in developing their plans for their future
- Many care leavers are unprepared to manage money, with some falling into significant long-term debt.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ready-or-not-care-leavers-views-of-preparing-to-leave-care/ready-or-not-care-leavers-views-of-preparing-to-leave-care#recommendations>

While no one is denying the dedication and commitment of those involved in the care sector, the outcomes of the current system are not meeting the aspirations we all have for care leavers. As public sector organisations, it is our duty to ensure that care leavers enjoy the same quality of life and outcomes as any other person transitioning into their adult lives.

There are pockets of excellent support provided to care leavers across a range of public services. In order to improve the quality of life for care leavers, we should be aiming to make these cases the standard across the sector and level up the field for care leavers, so we can help prevent more children falling behind.

In this paper, we will summarise some of the key issues affecting care leavers and what each sector can do to tackle the challenges they face.

2. The Health and Social Care Sector

Care leavers suffer from a range of adverse health effects, predominantly their mental health and the impacts of substance abuse. Often, care leavers do not know how to register with their GP nor how to access the emergency and healthcare support available to them.

Looked after children (LAC) are more likely to drink alcohol at least once a month (25% of LAC in foster care and 42% in residential care), compared to 9% of young people not looked after.

Furthermore, as care leavers often struggle to budget and are more likely to be unemployed, they often struggle to eat a balanced diet.

- 32% of care leavers smoked marijuana daily compared to an estimated 5% of young people aged 16-24.
- Looked-after children and care leavers were between four and five times more likely to self-harm in adulthood
- In 2015, 50% of care leavers were considered to have an emotional health or behavioural problem

<https://www.health.org.uk/funding-and-partnerships/programmes/a-charter-to-action-anchor-youth-partnership> - Case study of Healthcare sector working with other public sector organisations to improve life chances for looked after children.

What can we do?

- Work with local authorities and other public sector organisations to establish local networks of public services to coordinate programmes and projects designed to improve the life-chances of care leavers
- Work with the police service with the aim of providing medical support services and clinics for those who are suffering with substance addiction
- Increase the amount of mental health support available to care leavers who are likely to have experienced trauma and adversity in their childhood.

3. The Education Sector (including schools, Further and Higher Education)

The introduction of virtual schools in 2014 has had a positive impact with attendance rates for looked after children being in line with average attendance figures and permanent exclusions averaging as lower than non-looked after children.

However, there are still improvements to be made in the outcomes for looked after children with only 37% of looked after children achieving the expected standard of Reading, Writing and Maths compared to 65% of non-looked after children in 2019. This continues throughout secondary education with only 17.5% of looked after children achieving a pass in English and maths compared to 59.4% achievement for non-looked after children in 2018.

Care leavers are more likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET) than non-care leavers. In 19-20 39% of care leavers (aged 19-21) were NEET compared to the NEET rate of 13% for 18–24-year-olds.

Furthermore, care leavers are less likely to enter Higher Education with only 6% of all care leavers enrolled on a higher education course compared to 35% of all 16-18 years olds who enter higher education. The Commissioner has called for universities to review their entry requirements for looked after children and support universities who have already implemented 'contextual offers' with appropriate support for finance and accommodation.

What can we do?

- Train staff in a trauma informed approach to provide supportive interventions
- Work closely with local authority key workers to secure positive destinations for looked after children transitioning into post-16 education.
- FE providers to work closely with schools to support transition into FE and delivering personalised support
- FE providers to review their curriculum offers to support the transition into lower levels with more targeted support for maths and English
- Targeted financial support to help remove financial barriers for looked after children accessing higher education.
- Universities to review entry requirements for care leavers and ensure that accommodation and finance support are available and remove barrier to participation.

4. Local Authorities and the Housing Sector

Many care leavers (35%) live independently with a further 15% living in supported and transitional accommodation (19-20). 85% of care leavers are assessed as being in suitable accommodation, however, care leavers are disproportionately more likely to be homeless with different surveys and data sets demonstrating a range of 8-25% of the homeless population having previous experiences of being in care.

The homeless charity, Centrepoin, highlight that care leavers are at a greater risk of homelessness due to a lack of support and accommodation options, financial difficulties and social isolation (2017).

In January 2021 the Government issued a letter to all local authorities which notes that individual councils can apply discretionary council tax reductions.

https://southwark.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_cla_serv_adulthood.html - case study

What can we do?

- Reduce the rates for rent for care leavers to support them in becoming financially stable and independent with the option to save money
- Guarantee housing for care leavers which supports them remaining near to their previously established support networks
- Work with Housing Providers to ensure that good housing is provided in low-risk areas and these are high quality provisions
- Implement discretionary council tax rates for care leavers.

5. Community Protection Groups including Fire and Police

Community protection, as delivered by many county councils or through other local authority governance models, can ensure that care leavers are specifically considered. Indeed, as the corporate parents of children in care, their duties are even clearer, and the moral case is higher.

As the data shows, in 2008, 49% of young men under 21 who had come into contact with the criminal justice system had experience of the care system, and in 2013, 24% of re-offenders were care leavers.

As regards to trading standards, we know that care leavers are particularly susceptible to scams and internet fraud, as they do not have the voice of a parent to guide them in matters of money, food, accommodation, form filling and general requirements of responsible adult life. Nor do they have the guiding hand in making choices, no one to say – “Hey, what was that you’re doing?” Just silence.

Many children get their first employment opportunities through parents or family friends; therefore, County Councils should be giving care leavers a priority (perhaps guaranteed interviews).

Most young people need to drive to their first job or further education. There should be a national mobility scheme for care leavers enabling them to acquire a driving licence and even help toward a first car, just like parents often do too.

The fire and rescue services often undertake visits to citizens to ensure they are not at risk from fire or carbon monoxide poisoning. They often have agreements to carry out multi-agency assessments for adult social care at the same time and as part of the community protection group of public organisations with a great reputation they could be the adult friend who pops in or invites care leavers to pop in for a friendly check-in, being aware of the signs of scams, cuckooing, difficulties and dangers to young people. This is not undertaken by FRSs across the UK and they do not know who and where the care leavers are in their area.

What can we do?

- Recruitment drive for care leavers – especially for BAME and female
- Continue and expand work within communities and schools to prevent looked after children and care leavers being involved in crime
- Targeted recruitment drives to encourage care leavers to work in the sector and act as mentors to the next generation of looked after children.

6. The Civil Service Sector

Civil servants support ministers in setting policy, deliver a wide range of public services and play a role in coordinating activities across a range of public, private and third sector organisations. Care leavers are some of society’s most vulnerable people and must be a group that policymakers and those delivering public services have as a focus. Improving social mobility is a core policy aim and this group must be at the heart of this. The civil service is also a large employer and care leavers can often find additional hurdles when

accessing work. The civil service should find ways to help them as part of their transition to independent living to access work opportunities.

What can we do?

- Ensure that care leavers are fully considered when developing policy and are given the appropriate recognition as one of society's most vulnerable groups
- Ensure that care leavers are fully considered as key group when developing and delivering services
- Provide suitable work experience opportunities for care leavers
- Targeted recruitment drives to encourage care leavers to work in the sector and act as mentors to the next generation of looked after children
- Provide information and education to our staff on the challenges faced by looked after children and care leavers
- Identify ways that CSR activities and volunteering days can be used to support work with care leavers such as work coaching and mentoring

7. Armed Forces

The armed forces have historically been a 'go to' destination for young people leaving care and mostly this has provided mutual benefit to both parties with care leavers getting food, accommodation, development, pay and pensions and a sense of belonging and self-pride with the ability to reach one's full potential in the meritocracy that the Military provides.

Military life is not for everyone and not everyone can join either (even if they wanted to), and so often the opportunity that joining the military provides is missed by care leavers. There are many elements that the military can provide that suit the care leavers that could be translated into other areas of employment and would be open or attractive to care leavers. A programme of care leavers' assistance could be set up if the military were able to pass on its experience to the wider employment community.

What can we do?

- Improve access, mentoring and support for care leavers to apply and succeed in military careers

8. Mayoral Combined Authorities

It must be recognised that Local Authorities have the legal role as 'corporate parent' to those in care/care leavers and they do an excellent job in that role. Mayoral Combined Authorities can help support Local Authorities in that duty in a number of different ways.

Each Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) has a different range of powers and responsibilities, but what we all have in common is a Mayor who has considerable convening power to help support bringing the different parts of 'the system' in a locality together around particular topics - across the range of players in each of the public, private and third sectors.

What each MCA can do is to support those partners working with Local Authorities to understand what more each organisation can do individually and collectively to support local authorities and to support care leavers to achieve their full potential – by doing the things in our organisation for care leavers that any of us would do to support our children to access opportunities.

Many Combined Authorities will be able to work with local authorities to help pull together a strong evidence base about any additional support care leavers most need in their area. Then they can look at how public, private and third sector partners can come together to work with local authorities and across an economic geography to consistently give care leavers the support they need to flourish. MCAs will be able to use influence and a range of direct powers to think about the support offered to care leavers across a range of services such as Adult Education Budget, Public Sector Apprenticeship, Data, Transport, Housing, Benefits and (Mental) Health services.

What can we do?

- Ensure the whole of the public sector is taking a consistent approach to supporting Apprenticeships and/or guaranteed interviews for all care leavers
- Looking at a free transport offer for care leavers aged 16-18
- Working with LAs to examine housing priority for care leavers extended from 21 to 25 years of age
- Ensuring the Adult Education Budget is used to support care leavers specific needs
- Working with employers to encourage them to offer opportunities for work shadowing work experience and interview to care leavers
- Monitoring and measuring progress, working with LAs, in how the area as a whole is pulling together to support care leavers to access opportunities in an integrated way and in the same way as other young adults

9. What can we all do as Public Sector Leaders?

There are many different initiatives across the sectors that have the primary purpose of improving outcomes for care leavers and there are examples of positive impact as seen in the improvement of attendance in education for looked after children since the implementation of Virtual Schools.

However, amongst all the schemes, policy and commitments to improve progress still remains slow with care leavers disproportionality having worse outcomes than non-care leavers across education outcomes, employment opportunities, housing, crime and health. This also continues to impact future generations with one third of care leavers having children who are in care themselves; this cycle of harm and trauma must stop and be improved on.

Although research is varied and underdeveloped in some areas there is a multitude of information of different incentives, publications and case studies outlining support for care leavers.

So, we are making it simple. **We are asking for a commitment or pledge from you all.** If every organisation and sector pledges to one (or hopefully more) suggestion of support to

care leavers together we can improve outcomes for care leavers and permanently reduce and eradicate the long-lasting impact of adverse childhood trauma not just for care leavers but for future generations.

10. Further Sources of Information

10.1 Care Leavers Covenant (CLC)

In October 2018, then-Education Minister Nadhim Zahawi launched the Care Leaver Covenant for England, to aid care leavers' transition to independence. It was first announced in 2016. The Covenant allows public, private and voluntary sector organisations to pledge support through work experience, apprenticeships and free or discounted goods and services. The announcement included an ambition to create 1,000 internships for care leavers in the first three years and up to 10,000 internships over the following ten years. At November 2020, 155 organisations had signed the Covenant, including public bodies, charities and businesses.

We believe that the offer can be renewed and reinvigorated with a programme to keep the covenant alive and ensure that more and more of us make the pledge to help the children that society must be the parent for.

A link to the Care Leavers Covenant can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/care-leaver-covenant--2>

10.2 Care Leavers Charter

A list of promises for central and local government to make to young people moving out of care and into adult life was developed by the DfE in 2012. Adopted by Local Authorities to varying degrees, it includes a number of promises and principles that can help in decision making in relation to support for care leavers into their adult lives.

A link to the Care Leavers Charter can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leavers-charter>

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