

# Parliamentary Briefing

## No place like home: improving outcomes for young people leaving care

### Summary

On average young people now live in their family home until the age of **23**<sup>1</sup>. However, for more than **10,000** young people who leave the care system every year<sup>2</sup>, the expectation is that they become independent at the age of **18**, or sometimes even younger. By the age of 19-21, one in three (35%) of care leavers live independently<sup>3</sup>.

Children who have been in local authority care generally have poorer outcomes than their peers. They are already amongst the most vulnerable in our society, having often experienced abuse or neglect at an early age. At 18 they are often faced with a 'cliff-edge' as support drops off. **4 in 10 care leavers aged 19-21 years are not in education, employment or training<sup>4</sup>, they are more likely to be homeless<sup>5</sup> and to take their own life<sup>6</sup>.**

Our new report, based on the direct voice and experience of care leavers in England, sheds new light on the reality of leaving the care system. A safe and stable home is vitally important in laying the foundations for positive outcomes in all areas of a young person's life. However, care leavers are too often placed in unsafe and unsuitable accommodation – ranging from extreme mould to exposure to abuse.

*"The amount of antisocial behaviour that was there, my neighbour smoked crack which leaked into my flat, I witnessed knife fights outside my front door... I spoketo the council and the police...they don't think if this were happening to my child what would I do, they don't seem to have that approach."* Care leaver

We would expect far better for our own children, so we must also demand better for children 'looked after' by the state. With the launch of the Independent Review into Children's Social Care<sup>7</sup> and the Government's commitment to ensure these children and young people have the support, protection and care they deserve<sup>8</sup>, we have an opportunity to achieve a step change in outcomes for some of the most vulnerable young people in our society.

From our direct experience of supporting care leavers over many decades across the UK, we believe that improving outcomes for this group depends on improving their access to safe and appropriate accommodation. This means:

- Making it easier for young people to stay with their foster carers over the age of 18.
- Improving support for young people leaving residential care.
- Changes to housing benefit and other policies that protect young people from homelessness.

### What you can do:

# 1

Raise our report's findings and recommendations during oral questions or a debate in Parliament.

# 2

Highlight the issue on social media using #NoPlaceLikeHome.

# 3

Meet with us to discuss the findings of the report.

For more information contact Claire, UK Public Affairs Manager,  
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# What are care leavers' experiences of post-care accommodation?

Every year more than **10,000** children and young people aged 16 to 18 leave care in England<sup>9</sup>. While some have a positive experience transitioning into adulthood, many care leavers face a **'cliff-edge' of support** having left education, their foster family or residential home, and no longer having access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Care leavers we spoke to for the report described a range of experiences, but too often the support; they accessed after care was inadequate, and at worst unsafe.

## Positive experiences

- **Staying Put:** Care leavers we spoke to who had lived in family homes after leaving care, as part of the Government's 'Staying Put' scheme, benefited from avoiding the 'cliff-edge' that many care leavers face and the pressures of living independently straight away.

*"I have the opportunity to get the apprenticeship, if I came out of foster care and straight to living by myself it would have been too much of a drastic change."* Additionally, care leavers found it more 'homely' with everything they needed to access already there.

However, 'Staying Put' is only available to those who are in long term stable foster placements when they leave care. Just **8%** of care leavers aged 19-21 live with former foster carers<sup>10</sup>.

- **Supported Accommodation:** Some care leavers accessed support from key workers to develop life skills, like cooking, and built friendships with other young people. However, high-quality semi-independent accommodation can be difficult to access, and thresholds can be high. One care leaver told us: *"I had to be a naughty kid to get that [accommodation], if I was a quiet kid I wouldn't have got the care I wanted."* Around 15% of care leavers aged 19-21 live in semi-independent transitional accommodation<sup>11</sup>.

## Negative experiences

- **Lack of support:** Care leavers with additional needs, including those with babies, are especially vulnerable and often miss the right support.

*"There was mould everywhere, it grew on my curtains and on my clothes, it was everywhere, I got a dehumidifier and after an hour I had to empty it because there was so much water in there, when I spoke to the council about it, they didn't really care."*

- **Unsafe and inappropriate accommodation:** This included young people with a history of abuse being placed in a house with people of the opposite sex and those with a history of drug and alcohol addiction. Some care leavers were forced to flee accommodation, becoming homeless.

*"It was hectic there were people coming off the streets, constantly seeing people coming off of drugs and fights going on, I wouldn't call it somewhere to live, it was more somewhere to sleep."*

# What needs to change?

## 1

### **Make it easier for young people to stay with their foster carers until the age of 21.**

Commit long-term funding for the 'Staying Put' scheme and extend the eligibility to all care leavers.

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## 2

### **Legislate for a national 'Staying Close' scheme for young people leaving residential care.**

Amend the Children and Families Act 2014 to place the scheme on a statutory footing.

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## 3

### **Provide robust quality standards for semi-independent accommodation.**

The Government's new statutory standards for supported accommodation should apply to all care leavers up to the age of 25.

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## 4

### **Increase the 'setting up home allowance' for care leavers to £4,000 to ensure there is enough to make a house a home.**

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## 5

### **Provide better support for care experienced young people who end up with nowhere to live.**

Introduce a duty on local authorities to secure accommodation for all homeless care leavers up to the age of 25.

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1 Office for National Statistics (2019) 'Milestones: journeying into adulthood.'

2 HM Government (2013) '[Care Leaver Strategy](#) – A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care.'

3 The Department for Education. Children looked after in England including adoptions, reporting year 2020.

4 Department of Education (2013/2021) '[Statistics on children under local authority care at national and local authority level](#).'

5 Cardiff University and Crisis (2014) 'Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain'. Available at: [crisis\\_nations\\_apart\\_2014.pdf](#)

6 Department of Health (2012) 'Preventing suicide in England. A cross-government outcomes strategy to save lives'

7 The independent review of children's social care website: <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/>

8 UK Parliament: Written Statement, The Secretary of State for Education, '[Children's Social Care Update](#)'. 12 February 2021 & Department for Education, May 2021, £51 million for councils to support care leavers. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/50-million-for-councils-to-support-care-leavers>.

9 HM Government (2013) '[Care Leaver Strategy](#) – A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care.'

10 The Department for Education. Children looked after in England including adoptions, reporting year 2020.

11 The Department for Education. Children looked after in England including adoptions, reporting year 2020.