

Debate – Cost of living crisis and housing

MS Briefing – April 2022



Barnardo's Cymru works with children, young people and their families across Wales to provide support on a number of issues. This briefing focuses on the risks of homelessness to young people leaving care, and how action can be taken to support them.

Key messages

- Approximately 500 young people leave care in Wales each year.¹
- The rising cost of living is having an impact on everyone in Wales, but young people leaving care already face even more financial challenges.
- In the UK, young people on average live in their family home until the age of 23. Yet for those who have been in foster care or a children's home, the expectation is that young people start to live independently at 18, or in some cases even younger.²
- **25% of the homeless population are estimated to have been in care.**³ This demonstrates that care-experienced people are overrepresented in relation to homelessness and need to be given the right support from an early enough stage to plan their transition to adulthood and living independently.
- **Finding safe, secure and suitable housing which meets care leaver's needs is important for their wellbeing, and supported accommodation can be a stepping-stone towards more independent living.**
- Welsh Government should prioritise supporting care-experienced young people and provide holistic interventions to help prioritise stability and prevent homelessness.

Barnardo's Cymru priorities for Welsh Government:

1. Provide free public transport to young people leaving care and help them maintain their networks

¹ <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hidden-Ambitions.pdf>

² *No Place Like Home: a look at young people's experiences of leaving the care system*
<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/No-Place-Like-Home-Report-IKEA.pdf>

³ Cardiff University and Crisis (2014) 'Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain'. Available at: [crisis_nations_apart_2014.pdf](#)

Barnardo's Cymru recommends that, given the higher risk of homelessness for care leavers, this group of young people be given free bus and train travel up until the age of 25. This has the potential to make housing placements more successful as care leavers often report feeling isolated if they are removed from their support networks when they are offered housing away from their current area. By moving care leavers out of area, a financial barrier is created to maintaining a person's wellbeing, as the financial cost of public transport is often cited by children and young people within Barnardo's Cymru services as prohibitive.

Welsh Government should be seeking to remove these barriers at every opportunity and look for solutions that are not always primarily housing-based to help ensure that housing placements are as successful as possible. This should form part of a well-rounded care leavers offer, which supports every part of their life as they transition to adulthood.

2. Ensure that sustainable housing for care leavers is fundamental to the basic income pilot

Barnardo's Cymru welcomes Welsh Government's pilot of basic income for care leavers, but some questions, many of which are related to sustainable housing, need to be addressed.

Young people leaving care often access semi-independent accommodation – often flats in a complex where a young person has their own, independent space but has access to significant support to help make the transition to living independently.

These flats are expensive to run and as such the rent can be high. For many young people leaving care this would be paid directly to landlords via housing benefit. Young people taking part in the basic income pilot will have reduced benefits as a result of their income.

It is Barnardo's Cymru's concern that young people will be disincentivised from using transition accommodation and will be financially pushed towards private rented accommodation, meaning that they miss out on vital support and are potentially at greater risk of exploitation. We would urge Welsh Government to ensure that participants on the pilot are financially supported to access the best possible support and accommodation, and for sustainable accommodation to be at the heart of the pilot.

3. Work with the voluntary sector to plan for a young person to leave care

In *Hidden Ambitions: Wales' Commitment to Young People Leaving Care*, the Children's Commissioner for Wales recommended that social services, housing and education all work together in order to plan a young person's move to living independently.⁴ However, in the review of these recommendations a year later in 2018, it was still unclear how these services were working together.⁵ For young people to have confidence in the service, and for partnership working to be successful, this should be made clearer and the role of the voluntary sector – often a critical part of the support network around a care-experienced young person – should be clearly set out.

It is vital that young people should be involved early in their pathway planning and involved in decision-making.

How is Barnardo's Cymru supporting care-experienced young people in Wales?

We support care-experienced young people through a range of services across Wales. This includes our personal advisor services for young people leaving care, supported accommodation, mentoring and support with skills and employment.

Bays Partnership provides the Personal Advisor service in Swansea as well as supported lodgings service, Transition and Training Flats service and Youth Homelessness prevention services which offers support to assist and sustain independent living for young people leaving care in Swansea.

Flintshire-based Compass offers a collaborative, holistic model of advice and assistance to young people (aged 16-25) to access emergency, short term and longer-term housing options that are secure and sustainable through innovative approaches, which include:

- Ensuring the Housing Advice service is visible and easily accessible
- Provision of outreach housing advice surgeries.
- Supporting young people to access advice in relation to their housing rights

Cyfle Care Leavers Service provides Personal Advisers to act as mentors to young people who are Looked After or Leaving the Care of Denbighshire Education and Children's services aged 16 to 25 years.

About Barnardo's Cymru

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people, and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's

⁴ <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hidden-Ambitions.pdf>

⁵ *Hidden Ambitions: One Year On* <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Hidden-Ambitions-A-follow-up-report-on-local-authorities%E2%80%99-progress-and-good-practice-in-supporting-care-leavers.pdf>

charities working in the country. We provide more than 60 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with local authorities. Last year we worked with over 10,000 children, young people, and family members.

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