

# **TRANSITIONS TO INDEPENDENCE**

## **Briefing on accommodation pathways for young people**

**The purpose of this briefing is to provide an overview of the possible pathways for young people after they leave foster and residential care. In this briefing NCAS identifies the issues and problems with current arrangements and reflects on what could assist in improving the prospects of securing and maintaining appropriate accommodation for the 8,300<sup>1</sup> young people who leave the care system each year.**

### **Introduction**

Leaving home is a gradual process for the majority of young people with the opportunity to return for short or longer periods of time. The average age of those leaving the family home is 24.<sup>2</sup> However, for many young people in care this is not their experience: their transition is driven by age not readiness and as a result it can be abrupt with little or no chance of returning. Government figures show that 24% of care leavers leave the care system at age 16 and a further 14% at 17 years of age.<sup>3</sup> Those leaving care are a diverse group of young people with different support needs and differing levels of practical and emotional capability for independent living.

The importance of sustainable accommodation is critical. Abraham Maslow<sup>4</sup> proposed a theory of psychology that identified a 'hierarchy of needs'. The theory is based on the assumption that humans need to satisfy basic needs before other needs can be met. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, shelter to be safe from threats and danger is the second basic need. If this need cannot be fulfilled individuals cannot meet their social or status needs.

Local authorities only report on the accommodation situation of care leavers at age 19 and mixed success in meeting the accommodation needs of care

<sup>1</sup> DCSF gateway information on 2007-8 figures  
[www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000810/index.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000810/index.shtml)

<sup>2</sup> White paper: Care Matters Time for Change

<sup>3</sup> DCSF gateway information on 2007-8 figures  
[www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000810/index.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000810/index.shtml)

<sup>4</sup> A.H. Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*, Psychological Review 50 (1943):370-96.

leavers as they initially move on from care is reported. Studies have shown around a third of young people leaving care can experience homelessness in the first year after leaving care (University of York, 2004). Shelter cites that 20% of care leavers experience homelessness within two years of leaving care.<sup>5</sup> In addition there remain concerns about how care leavers fare in the longer term. The Broadway 'Street to Home'<sup>6</sup> key findings report identified that 13% of rough sleepers in London in 2005-06 had been in care.

There are a number of reasons why care leavers' transition to independent living is difficult.

- The young age at which care leavers are expected to make this transition.
- The range of appropriate accommodation and support available for those leaving care.
- The quality of the planning and preparation received by care leavers.
- The disadvantageous position of care leavers compared to other young people.

Young people leave care to live in a variety of accommodation arrangements. The latest statistics available identify that the majority of care leavers who were 19 in 2007 were in independent accommodation (43%); however 12% were living with their family or friends 10% in some supported accommodation and 8% in supported lodgings<sup>7</sup>. There are primarily 4 pathways young people can take on leaving care.

## **Pathway 1: Extend care placements beyond 18**

### **Staying on with former foster carers**

Young people can not legally be 'in care' after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. However, some young people do stay in their former care placements under a variety of arrangements. The most common arrangement is to convert the arrangement from a foster placement to a 'supported lodgings'.<sup>8</sup> There is no shared definition of 'supported lodgings' but they can be described as *lodgings in a domestic environment where there is both an adult (usually*

<sup>5</sup> See [www.housemate.org.uk/can\\_careleavers.htm](http://www.housemate.org.uk/can_careleavers.htm)

<sup>6</sup> The report can be found at [www.broadwaylondon.org/broadwayvoice/policy\\_detail.asp?id=45](http://www.broadwaylondon.org/broadwayvoice/policy_detail.asp?id=45)

<sup>7</sup> DCSF 2007 figures [www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000741/SFR27-2007tables\\_v2.xls](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000741/SFR27-2007tables_v2.xls)

<sup>8</sup> If a young person is aged 16 or 17 the placement cannot be converted to a supported lodgings placement. If a young person is placed with a family whilst still a looked after child it is likely to meet the definition of fostering. 16 and 17 year old care leavers who are no longer looked after can be moved into supported lodgings.

called the host) living on –site and a requirement/expectation/agreement by the Local Authority that some level of support is provided<sup>9</sup>. Given the placement will not continue as a foster placement it is likely that the financial arrangements will change. The young person may be able to claim housing benefit to cover the cost of the accommodation; they may also be able to claim benefits towards the cost of their living expenses - the support the host provides will continue to be paid by the Local Authority.

Converting foster placements is the subject of a *Care Matters* pilot 'Staying put' where 11 local authorities are developing arrangements where care leavers can stay in their foster placements until they are 21 years of age. Early indicators are that this option will only be available to a limited number young people.

### **Staying on in residential care**

It is rare that a young person is able to continue in a residential unit after the age of 18, as some registration criteria for the home may prevent this. It is also an expensive option which may be an additional prohibitive factor.

### **Staying on through adult services**

If a young person has enduring care needs the responsibility for their accommodation support and care may be passed onto adult services. The decision regarding whether a care leaver is entitled to adult services is taken after the young person has an assessment of their health and social care needs under the NHS and Community Care Act 1990. All adults from the age of 16 are entitled to a community care assessment but care leavers are expected to continue to be supported by Children's services until they are 18. Very often the threshold for adult services is high due to the great demand for Local Authority adult services.

## **Pathway 2 - Supported Accommodation**

Supported accommodation is an umbrella term which is applied to a whole range of housing based solutions for vulnerable people. Definitions in supported accommodation are problematic and vary depending on who is commissioning, providing and/or using the service. For example houses where residents have their own room but share communal areas may be referred to as a hostel, residential home group home or simply supported

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<sup>9</sup> Professor Bob Broad Fostering Networks Supported Lodgings Action Research and practice Project (2008).

housing. Supported accommodation is usually divided into two types of provision

1. Accommodation-based projects where vulnerable people live in a specifically designated property to receive support services; and
2. Non accommodation based projects where vulnerable people can receive the necessary support services irrespective of where they are living.

Supported accommodation can be permanent or temporary and contracts for funding have meant providers usually designate schemes as either permanent (long stay) or temporary stay (in Supporting People funded services this is usually up to 2 years).

1. **Shared Supported Housing** – a term commonly used in the housing sector to describe a temporary or permanent scheme where service users have their own room but share bathroom, kitchen and other communal areas with other service users. Support is delivered by staff who may have an office in the property or visit on a regular basis.
2. **Self contained supported housing** – this is where service users have their own flat or house. Sometimes sited in a block or cluster of the same type of provision and sometimes dispersed within a locality. Support is provided by staff who may have an office in the block or offer a visiting service. These are sometimes referred to as training flats.
3. **Hostel** – accommodation where a larger number of service users have their own rooms and share communal areas with other service users. Staffing is often provided on a 24 hour basis, 7 days a week and in some cases meals are provided.
4. **Bed and breakfast** – temporary accommodation that is usually shared and provided by the local authority or on their behalf. The accommodation is provided for homeless people awaiting a decision as to whether the local authority will offer to house them under their statutory homeless duties. Support is not always provided.
5. **Women's Refuge** – temporary accommodation for women (and their children) who have experienced domestic violence. Women often share a room with their children and share other communal areas with other women and their families. Support is provided by workers sometimes 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
6. **Adult Placements** – Usually commissioned by Adult Services for people with enduring care needs. The adult placement services are delivered host families who provide support care and accommodations usually in their own home.
7. **Residential Care Home** – can be temporary or permanent accommodation registered under the Care Standards Act 2000 to

- provide accommodation, support and personal care to service users. Service users usually have their own room and share communal areas; however some newer homes have private as well as communal cooking and washing facilities. Support and care are provided by workers for 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
8. **Foyer for Young People** – temporary accommodation for young people (usually 17-25 years) with support and access to employment training and education. The accommodation may be shared or self contained. Support is provided by staff who are usually based on site and may be available 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
  9. **Teenage Parent Accommodation** – temporary accommodation specifically for young people (usually aged 17-21 years) who have become, or are about to become parents. Service users often share a room with their babies and share kitchen, bathroom and communal areas with other service users. Support is provided by support workers who have an office on site.
  10. **Supported Lodgings** (see above for a definition) that is not a foster placement but an independent arrangement<sup>10</sup>.

The types of accommodation listed above are usually funded by Supporting People to provide housing related support and residents pay their own rent claiming housing benefit where appropriate. Even when claiming housing benefits residents may be required to pay a service charge. Supporting People funding is currently not available directly for those leaving care under the age of 18. Some Local Authorities social service departments fund their own supported housing provision, for example in the form of training flats or supported lodgings

Care leavers can also access non-accommodation based services the most common being floating support.

**Floating support**<sup>11</sup> – this is usually provided on a temporary basis to service users by a visiting support worker to enable the service user to sustain their tenancy and remain in their home.

Young people in their own tenancy are usually given a licence agreement or an assured shorthold tenancy agreement. The licence agreement does not give the holder much security and in some cases can be terminated with less than a months notice. The assured shorthold tenancy is more secure and

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on Supported Housing see 'Supported Housing and the Law', Baxter and Carr, September 2007

<sup>11</sup> For more information about floating support services for young people visit [www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/accommodation/floatingsupport/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/accommodation/floatingsupport/)

requires the landlord to go to court.<sup>12</sup>

Recent statistics indicate that over 1,000 care leavers accessed Supporting People services in 2007-8, 43% receiving a floating support service and 40% were living in some form of shared or self contained supported housing.<sup>13</sup>

### **Pathway 3 - Birth Family**

It is thought that the majority of young people when they leave care have contact with some members of their extended birth family. One study which followed up 100 young people after they left care showed that around four in five of the young people were in contact with family members (Wade, 2006<sup>14</sup>).

The DCSF figures identify that 12 % of care leavers are living with their family or friends at age 19. However, there is a lack of information on the nature of this contact and limited information on the current role of leaving care teams in considering return to birth family as care placement and/or supporting relationships with birth families.

It is important to note that a return to birth family changes eligibility to CLCA services: if after age 16 a child returns home successfully to a parent/someone with parental responsibility for a continuous period of six months then they will not be treated as 'relevant children'. A review at least 6 months after return will judge if the return is successful. If a child returns home but is still on a care order the child remains an eligible child until the care order is discharged by a court.

### **Pathway 4 - Independent Living**

DCSF statistics show that at age 19 the largest group of young people (43%) are in 'independent living'. The majority of care leavers will access some form of social housing either Local Authority or Housing Association. To access accommodation social service leaving care teams will usually place the young person on the housing register. When appropriate, their application will be activated and they will be given 'currency' or 'priority' to enable them to be offered or bid for appropriate accommodation. Local Authorities and housing associations usually have arrangements by which a percentage of housing association properties are used to house those on the local authority housing register. The type of accommodation young people will be offered is

<sup>12</sup> For more information on tenure visit [www.sitra.org.uk/fileadmin/sitra\\_user/Tenure\\_Briefing\\_June\\_2008\\_final.doc](http://www.sitra.org.uk/fileadmin/sitra_user/Tenure_Briefing_June_2008_final.doc)

<sup>13</sup> Supporting People Client Record reports 2007-8

<sup>14</sup> Wade, 2006 *The Ties that Bind: support from birth families and substitute families for young people leaving care*, Child and Family Social Work

commonly referred to as general needs accommodation and the young person will be given a long term tenancy, a secure tenancy in Local Authority properties and an assured tenancy in housing association properties. In a significant number of local authorities or housing associations new tenants will be placed on a probationary tenancy for the first 12 months of their stay. These agreements are introductory tenancies in local authority accommodation and assured shorthold tenancies in housing association properties. The probationary agreements give less security, however if there are no problems with the young person's tenancy their agreement will change to a more secure agreement.

In some cases young people will be expected to demonstrate that they have acquired the skills to live independently before they are placed on the register or their application is activated. This may mean living in some form of supported accommodation. There are a number of young people living in supported housing that have floating support services that help them with living independently.

In a number of areas, due to shortages of social housing or a lack of social housing in desirable areas, young people may be living in private rented accommodation. Private landlords overwhelmingly use an assured shorthold tenancy, which is a less secure form of occupancy agreement. The young person will be expected to provide a deposit, one month's rent in advance and a guarantor who agrees to pay the rent if the young person defaults. Some local authorities or third sector providers run rent deposit or rent guarantee schemes and social services would be expected to act as guarantor.

Young people leaving care may also be able to access home ownership if they have the income to sustain a mortgage. Housing Associations provide low cost home ownership initiatives although these are usually for key workers for example social workers, nurses, fire fighters etc.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For information on low cost home ownership visit [www.communities.gov.uk/housing/buyingselling/ownershipschemes/homebuy/keyworkerliving/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/buyingselling/ownershipschemes/homebuy/keyworkerliving/)

## **Issues and problems**

### **Preparation for leaving care**

Given that the majority of young people who leave care are under 18 years of age and have little opportunity to return to a care placement it is essential to prepare young people for this transition. Young people need to have the practical skills and emotional resilience to manage in an environment that will expect them to be more independent and take on a degree of responsibility for themselves. Despite the provisions in the legislation there are ongoing problems with Personal Adviser availability in some local authorities, who have to resort to using their duty system rather than a named worker. There continues to be evidence of inadequate and poor assessment in Pathway Planning. Some young people are not involved in the process and sometimes do not have copy of their Pathway Plan.

An Action on Aftercare Consortium (2006) report on transitions found that a quarter of young people's first move from foster care or residential care was not included in their pathway plan.

Voice reports that forward planning for housing is a common problem faced by the young people working with Voice. On reaching the age of 18 young people are often subject to great uncertainty and lack of options. Young people continue to say that they were not prepared for the reality of leaving care. Care leavers have said that the preparation they do receive for leaving care had focused far too strongly on practical skills like DIY, cooking and budgeting and had not really responded to all the issues they faced such as how to cope with loneliness, addressing issues around self esteem and identity<sup>16</sup>.

A National Voice (ANV) recommend the development of a self assessment tool kit for young people to assess their own readiness – emotionally, practically and financially – to leave care. Shelter has developed a resource for workers in residential care, 'A new tomorrow', which covers both practical and emotional aspects of preparation to leave care. In addition the What Makes The Difference project (a predecessor of NCAS) have developed resources around preparation and planning.

#### **NCAS Policy Recommendation**

All local authorities should review their own mechanisms for preparing young people to leave care and utilise resources available for example Preparation for Adult Life by WMTD (now NCAS) A New Tomorrow Shelter

<sup>16</sup> Centrepont 2006

and the NCAS toolkit that is currently being developed by young people to enhance the accommodation element of pathways planning alongside the resources highlighted above.

### **Extended care placements**

There are a multitude of issues regarding extending care placements such as:

- What will be the criteria for staying on in foster care after the age of 18?
- What would be the nature of the placement?
- How long will young people be able to stay on for?
- Will this have any consequences for later (e.g. accessing housing)?
- How will places be funded and what support will be on offer etc.?

There is currently a wide variety of arrangements regarding supported lodgings nationally and NCAS will continue to work with Fostering Network<sup>17</sup> on their project to research current provision, develop standards, training materials and information for providers.

In relation to young people staying in residential placements NCAS look forward to research in this area.

Leaving care teams anecdotally report problems both with the timing of assessments for vulnerable adult services and the threshold required to access those services. Those young people who are assessed as having enduring care needs through their care and pathway plan do not always meet the threshold for adult services and that decision is often not made until the young person is on the verge of leaving care. Reports from leaving care managers indicate that young people do not experience a smooth transition from children's to adult services and have an unwanted 'gap year' when during their 18<sup>th</sup> year, as adult services do not provide services until the young person is aged 19 years.

### **NCAS Policy Recommendation**

All young people are able to stay in their care placement until they identify that they have the skills and experience to live more independently and this is not based on the age of the young person but on their wishes and capability.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on Fostering Network visit [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)

### **NCAS Policy Recommendation**

Adult services carry out an assessment of young people the leaving care team has identified as having enduring care needs when they reach age 16. Adult services inform the Leaving Care team of the services the young person will be entitled to within 2 weeks of completing the assessment. Where the young person is entitled to adult services children and adult services agree a transition plan that is informed by the young person pathway plan.

### **Supported Accommodation**

The level of Supporting People funding varies across local authorities. There are no specific guidelines from Communities and Local Government (CLG) for levels of funding for particular client groups. Local authorities are responsible for implementing the programme within their local area and contracting providers to deliver the services required. The data on Supporting People funded services indicate that care leavers accessing these services are the minority<sup>18</sup>. This may be due to the fact that those leaving care at 16 and 17 are not eligible to receive services funded by Supporting People. Young people leaving care however can in some areas access supported housing and have the support they receive funded by children social services. NCAS have evidence of the variance of relationships between children social services and Supporting People teams and the ability of care leavers to access supported housing from the local authority National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum it coordinates.

Monitoring and inspection is often dependent on the type of housing. For example, supported accommodation services commissioned through the Supporting People programme are subject to service review against agreed standards and may be subject to a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with agreed service specification. Supported lodgings are usually overseen by Social services and private rented accommodation is subject only to 'Houses in Multiple Occupancy' (HMO) accreditation whilst Decent Homes Standards currently only apply to social housing.

Often this inspection and monitoring only deals with the 'bricks and mortar' aspect of housing and is not tailored to understanding whether the needs of care leavers are being met. The onus is therefore often on the Personal Adviser to check accommodation, but what they check and how they do this is not standardised across local authorities. Furthermore, workers may feel

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<sup>18</sup> NCAS have produced a report on care leavers utilisation of supporting people funded services [www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/5296-10665.pdf](http://www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/5296-10665.pdf)

they do not have the capacity to reject unsuitable accommodation, if their local authority has a particularly acute housing shortage.

Those leaving care are often the most vulnerable requiring specialised support to have their needs met. Currently in supported housing there are no guidelines as to how supported accommodation is staffed, or on the level of qualifications and skills base of staff to support care leavers. In addition, there are no guidelines about the level of support provided to care leavers and how this is monitored.

**NCAS Policy Recommendation**

Local Authority social service, housing departments and Supporting People teams jointly commission and fund services for those leaving care through joint working protocols.

**NCAS Policy Recommendation**

Supported housing for young people leaving care who are under 18 is regulated and inspected under the same framework that foster and residential placements are subject to.

**NCAS Policy Recommendation**

Local Authorities enter into service level agreements, which should include a definition of the client group suitable for the accommodation; the level and nature of support provided; the referral process; the reviewing process; service user involvement in the service; how complaints are dealt with; and training and qualification for staff.

**Returning to birth family**

Given that 12% of young people are recorded at age 19 as living with family or friends after leaving care it is surprising the lack of information in this area. NCAS would support research on young people leaving care and returning home to identify what support is given to the young person and the family and what impact on returning to the family has on outcomes for young care leavers

**NCAS Policy Recommendation**

Work on family relationships has not always been a major focus of worker activity for care leavers in the past and continues to be inconsistent in the present. Policy makers and practice need to work with extended families in preparing young people to leave care and effectively involve all relevant people in the reviewing process. Support after leaving care needs to

recognise and support young people in their continuing relationships with all people who matter to them.

### **Independent Accommodation**

By far the largest cohort of those leaving care are living in independent accommodation at age 19. Figures from the DCSF indicate that 43% of care leavers aged 19 live in their own accommodation<sup>19</sup>. NCAS are concerned that young people leaving care are living independently at very early ages compared to other young people. It is questionable whether young people have the financial and emotional resilience to live in their own accommodation and have the practical skills to manage such accommodation in addition to catering for their own physiological, social and status needs.

For some young people social accommodation is simply not available or is not in the right location - either being in socially disadvantaged areas or without access to colleges, training, education and/or work opportunities. In some areas social accommodation does not provide care leavers with suitable accommodation in terms of type or the standard of accommodation they aspire to. Young people in these cases might access private rented accommodation, but for those on benefits they find that at age 22 their housing benefit is reduced to shared room local housing allowance rate and they are expected to make up the difference from their benefits or allowances. If rent levels are too high, this may not be practically possible. Given that young people leaving care experience problems in accessing employment and are more likely to be in low paid employment it is nonsensical to discriminate against those reaching the age of 22 who require the assistance of housing benefit to meet their rental obligations. Leaving care services will not always be working with young people post their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, and the cost to the central and local Government is that these vulnerable young people may become homeless if they can not sustain their accommodation.

### **NCAS Policy Recommendation**

That young people leaving care are not expected to live in their own flat until they are at least 18 years of age, and where appropriate this is delayed until the young person is in a position to and aspires to live independently.

### **NCAS Policy Recommendation**

All care leavers have access to floating support services for at least 12 months when moving into independent accommodation.

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<sup>19</sup> Link to figures

**NCAS Policy Recommendation**

The Government should abolish the single room rent restriction for young people leaving care.

**Get in touch**

If you would like to discuss the issues highlighted in this briefing further or if you have examples of how your local authority has overcome any of these problems please get in touch with Sue Baxter, Accommodation advice service manager, [sue.baxter@raineronline.org](mailto:sue.baxter@raineronline.org) .

## CONTACT DETAILS

For further information and resources please go to our website [www.leavingcare.org](http://www.leavingcare.org) or contact:

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## ABOUT US

The National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) is the national advice, support and development service for children in and from care (age 13-25) and those who work with them. We work at local, regional, national and European levels to develop solutions based on good corporate parenting that include and empower young people, professionals and policy-makers to continually improve service quality and outcomes. Our aims are

- To promote improvement in outcomes for older children in care and care leavers by supporting work at a national, regional and local levels.
- To support the specific implementation of the Care Matters agenda across the country.
- To support local authorities to empower young people to be fully involved in the design, development and delivery of successful services.



NCAS is supported by Catch22. Registered charity number 1124127. Catch22, the charity that helps young people out. Before we were Catch22 we were Rainer and Crime Concern, two national charities which merged in 2008.

