

## **INTRODUCTION TO LEAVING CARE**

### **Support for transitions from care in England**

**There are around 60,000 children in care at any one time and in 2007/08 8,300 young people over 16 left care. Young people who have spent time in care tend to have poorer outcomes than their peers. They are more likely to have poor educational performance, contact with the criminal justice system, poorer health, and be vulnerable to homelessness and unemployment. It is therefore very important that they are supported to deal with the transition to adulthood. There is a range of specialist services that support care leavers. Government has also increasingly focused on improving outcomes for this group of young people most recently through the Care Matters agenda.**

#### **Policy and legal context**

The [Children Act 1989](#) remains the general legal framework for young people in and leaving care, but it has been amended and supplemented by later legislation such as the [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#) and the associated [Regulations and Guidance](#). The aim of the Act was to improve the life chances of care leavers and provided important new entitlements and extended the age range supported.

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In June 2007, the government published the [Care Matters: Time for change](#) white paper, which had been preceded by a green paper and extensive consultation. The Care Matters agenda is currently being implemented and details of this work can be found in the [Action Log](#). Some of the changes that are proposed on Care Matters will be brought in through the [Children and Young Persons Bill 2008](#).

Outcomes for care leavers have also become a focus for measuring local authority performance. Care leavers are one of the groups in [Public Service Agreement 16](#), which is focussed on socially excluded adults. Public Service Agreements set out the key priority outcomes the Government wants to achieve in the next spending period (2008-2011) This links with two of the 198 national indicators, which local authority performance is assessed against – (NI 147) the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation and (NI 148) the number of care leavers not in education training and employment.

## Issues

### Early transitions

#### KEY STATS

- Although the proportion who leave care at 18 have increased, 24% of young people are only 16 when they leave care and 15% are 17. In the general population the average age when young people leave home is about 24.

Young people leaving care are said to have 'accelerated and compressed transitions'. They are expected to move into independence younger than other young people, when they may not be emotionally or practically able to manage a home and look after themselves. In a report by the [Children's Rights Director](#) about the experience of leaving care worries related to not being able to deal with independent living were care leavers' biggest concerns for care leavers.

**How can we better support care leavers?** – Practical support to prepare for independence, such as budgeting, life skills are important, but young people in care also need emotional support and should also be given opportunity to stay in care until they are ready. Care matters includes the [Staying Put Pilots](#), trialling models to allow young people to stay on with their foster carers up until the age of 21. However, young people who are not in foster care may not be able to stay on in their placements and will still need a range of suitable accommodation.

### Accommodation

#### KEY STATS

- 10% of care leavers feel unsafe and 44% worry about their safety.
- In a University of York study 34% of young people reported being homeless at some time in the year after leaving care.
- 12% of rough sleepers in London had experience of being in care (CLG 2008).

Care leavers can experience housing difficulties. Some end up in unsuitable accommodation or become homeless. Some are moved into independent living before they are ready for this could lead to tenancy failure.

**How can we better support care leavers?** – Some local authorities use training flats that allow young people to try independent living before they move into their own flat. Tenancy sustainment support, giving young people a range of accommodation options and good partnership working between housing and leaving care services are important ways of supporting young people. Care leavers are also one of the priority groups for local authority homelessness assistance in the [Homelessness Act 2002](#).

**Education, training and employment**

**KEY STATS**

- 11% of children in care gained 5 good GCSEs in 2005, compared to 56% of all children
- 29% of care leavers are not in education, training and employment at 19, compared to 10% of all young people.
- At 19 only 7% of care leavers are in higher education.

Young people in and from care tend to have poorer education, training and employment outcomes than other young people.

**How can we better support care leavers?** – Placement stability, continuity of care and schooling and an environment that is supportive and encourages education are all important. Initiatives to develop work experience and employment opportunities can be beneficial and some Local Authorities offer this in-house for their young people in care.

**Specific groups**

**KEY STATS**

- Young people in care are 4 times more likely to have a mental health disorder, and almost a quarter have had contact with Special Education Services.
- 15 to 17 year old girls who have been in care are 3 times more likely to become teenage mothers than others of their age.
- 3,500 young people in care are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)
- Around 27% of adult prisoners have spent time in care compared to 2% of the general population
- It is estimated that 10-20% of children in care are disabled.

Specific groups in and from care may need additional support or their circumstances affect the way leaving care services work with them. The transitions to adult services can pose specific problems for some groups e.g. young people with disabilities, UASC or young people leaving custody.

**How can we better support care leavers?**– Effective partnership working with the relevant services that support and work with specific groups is essential to ensure that young people receive continuity of support.

**Participation**

**KEY STATS**

- Only 59% of care leavers say that they are usually/always asked their opinions about things that matter to them and 56% say that their opinion usually/always makes a difference.

Care matters stresses the importance of young people’s involvement in the services they receive and, although involvement is increasing, it is clear from the above evidence that this is not always happening.

**How can we better support care leavers?**– There are an increasing number of fora for young people to get involved, e.g. Children in Care Councils. Employing young people to establish and run participation groups can be a successful way of ensuring that they remain relevant to the young people involved.

**Leaving care services**

Local authorities have a corporate parenting duty to support young people leaving care. There are leaving care services in all English local authorities, but they are structured differently; e.g. some work with young people from the age of 16, others only once they turn 18; some services are commissioned from voluntary sector agencies or private companies, others are part of Children’s services.

**National standards**

The [National Leaving care standards](#), associated self-assessment tool and practice database can be downloaded from our website. They help leaving care services to assess, review and improve their services.

Like good parents local authorities are responsible for giving advice and support, but also for financial assistance, to young people leaving care. The [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#) introduced the Personal Adviser role to support care leavers. Personal advisers develop Pathways Plans with care leavers, to meet their support needs and help them prepare for independent living. They plan for: personal support, accommodation, education and training, employment, family and social relationships, practical and other skills, financial support, health needs and contingency planning. Leaving care teams may also have specialist workers in areas such as mental health, accommodation or employment.

The level of support young people receive from leaving care teams depends on their status as care leavers. A breakdown of the entitlements and how you qualify for them is available in the [Regulations and Guidance](#) related to the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, but the table below gives an overview.

<b>If you are a/an</b>	<b>Children’s services must</b>
<b>Eligible child</b> – child aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who are still looked after	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pay accommodation, personal and education related expenses</li> <li>• Carry out a needs assessment</li> <li>• Prepare a Pathway Plan</li> <li>• Regularly review the pathway plan</li> <li>• Appoint a Personal Advisor</li> </ul>

<p><b>Relevant child</b> – child aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who have left care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out a needs assessment</li> <li>• Prepare a Pathway Plan</li> <li>• Regularly review the pathway plan</li> <li>• Provide a Personal Advisor</li> <li>• Arrange suitable accommodation and pay for furnishings</li> <li>• Provide an allowance, which must not be less than if on benefits. Relevant children cannot claim benefits unless they are disabled or a lone parent.</li> <li>• Pay for any additional costs set out in the pathway plan</li> <li>• Keep in touch with the young person</li> </ul>
<p><b>Former relevant child</b> – 18-21 year old (or until the end of agreed programme of education or trainings) who were previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the Pathway Plan</li> <li>• Provide a Personal Advisor</li> <li>• Pay for the things set out in the Pathway Plan</li> <li>• Paying towards the costs of education and having a place to stay (but you are expected to get a student loan if you are at university)</li> <li>• Keep in touch with the young person</li> </ul>
<p><b>Qualifying child</b> – Any young person under 21 (or 24 if in education or training) who ceases to be looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, or privately fostered, after the age of 16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give advice and support</li> <li>• Keep in touch with the young person</li> <li>• May also help with paying expenses related to the young person's education.</li> </ul>

**Other support services**

Young people leaving care will also benefit from a range of other generalist and specialist provision including: Connexions, health/mental health services, housing and housing related support, education, drug and alcohol services, mediation, benefit support, befriending and mentoring services. A [list of organisations](#) that work with people in and from care can be found on our website.

**NCAS enquiry service**

The National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) offers a free [advice service](#) to care leavers and all those working with them.

Advocacy services can be particularly important to young people if they have problems with the services they receive. An advocate is someone who listens to the young person and helps represent him or her. Many different organisations provide advocacy services, but [Voice](#) run national helpline for young people in and from care and can direct young people to local advocates.

**Sources** - General stats in this briefing come from [DCSF](#) statistics. Care leavers experiences and opinions were taken from the [2008 Children Care Monitor](#)

## 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.

The National Care Advisory Service is supported by Rainer Crime Concern, the national charity for under-supported young people.

*Rainer* crime concern

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