

## RESEARCH SUMMARY:

# FROM CARE TO INDEPENDENCE

### INTERIM FINDINGS MAY 2015

This summary by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) Research Centre presents key findings at the interim stage of From Care to Independence (FC2I), a five year project focusing on support for care leavers provided by The Prince's Trust Fairbridge programme and partner organisations. The research examines the implementation and outcomes of the project, drawing on data from care leavers and practitioners.



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Research  
Centre



# FOREWORD

The Prince's Trust works with young people who are struggling at school or are unemployed. Often, when they come to us these young people feel hopeless and find it hard to believe things can change for the better.

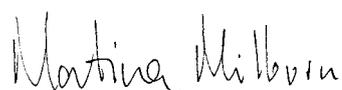
Our programmes give young people the practical, emotional and financial support they need to turn their lives around. Among the 58,000 young people we work with each year, around 4,000 have come to us having left the care system. We help them develop their skills and confidence so that they can take the first steps to re-engage with education or progress into employment.

We know that care leavers face some of the toughest challenges. Through a life often spent moving between different homes and without consistent support, they are more likely to struggle at school and to become unemployed.

However, with the right help they can fulfil their ambitions and aspirations. It is only by understanding these challenges and barriers, as well as what works in supporting them, that care leavers can be helped to fully realise their potential. With funding from The Big Lottery for the 'From Care to Independence' project, The Prince's Trust is delighted to have commissioned The National Children's Bureau to undertake this timely and important piece of research.

This document presents some of the National Children's Bureau's early findings and recommendations, which are already starting to change the way we support care leavers here at The Trust. There will be further insights and firmer conclusions in the final research report in two years' time.

However in the meantime, we are sharing these interim results in the hope that they will be helpful to the many dedicated professionals working with care leavers, enabling them to build on the great work which they already do. I would like to thank the National Children's Bureau for their thoughtful approach so far, and I look forward to sharing their final conclusions once the project is completed.



**Martina Milburn CBE**  
**Chief Executive**  
The Prince's Trust



# INTRODUCTION



Each year, approximately 10,000 young people aged between 16 and 18 years old leave care in England. Previous research has shown that the quality of support they receive varies considerably, and that they often struggle to cope with independent living, placing them at heightened risk of adverse outcomes including mental health problems, unemployment and involvement in crime.

From Care to Independence, supported by the Big Lottery Fund as part of their Youth in Focus programme, focuses on supporting care leavers' personal development through The Prince's Trust Fairbridge programme, and services provided by partner organisations.

The Fairbridge programme is targeted at the hardest to reach young people who are unlikely to be able to engage in more structured programmes. The programme begins with a short Access course; delivered using challenging, adventurous activities including a few days away from home at an outdoor residential venue.

Following the short Access course, young people then choose from a wide variety of follow on courses to develop personal and social skills that are practised in a range of relevant life situations as the young person moves through the programme.

Young people receive one-to-one support throughout the programme from a dedicated staff member which helps them get the most from the experience in a way that is tailored to their needs.

At the end of the programme, young people are supported in moving on to education, employment, training or volunteering or on to another Prince's Trust programme.

The research is intended to shed light on the role that programmes such as FC2I can play in supporting care leavers. As such, it is intended to be of use not only for The Prince's Trust, but for all those seeking to understand and address care leavers' needs, in statutory and other services.

**This summary highlights learning to date in relation to:**

- participation and outcomes
- drivers and barriers regarding progress in education, employment, training or volunteering (EETV)
- what works for engagement and achievement

# METHODOLOGY

This research has been conducted using qualitative and quantitative methodology and this summary is based on data captured in years one and two of the programme.

**Quantitative data were collected from practitioners and young people between October 2012 and September 2014.**

**This includes survey data from young people (359 baseline and 87 follow up), and “session logs” completed by practitioners for each young person, regarding the content and perceived progress achieved (1,187 interim and 140 final session logs).**

**Participants’ profile data held by The Prince’s Trust and partner agencies were also analysed (338).**

**Qualitative interviews with seven practitioners and nine young people were conducted in June and July 2013.**

# PARTICIPATION AND OUTCOMES

## BACKGROUNDS, NEEDS AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF CARE LEAVERS

The backgrounds and needs of the first 373 care leavers recruited to the programme were similar to those reported in previous research; they had a wide range of significant needs and challenges in their lives.

**Table 1: Backgrounds, needs and circumstances of care leavers prior to joining the programme**

Characteristics	Key figures
Did not have five GCSEs, including English and Mathematics at grades A-C	86%
History of offending	54%
Mental health problems	49%
Family relationships	39%
Disability	33%
Had been in work, education or volunteering prior to starting the programme	25%
Young parents	10%
Asylum seekers or refugees	5%

## ENGAGEMENT WITH SERVICES

At the time of joining the programme, young people reported being involved with a number of different services. However, care leavers may not be receiving all the support they need. For example, although over a fifth were involved with mental health services, this amounts to just 40% of those who reported mental health problems at the outset.

**Table 2: Services used by care leavers prior to joining the programme**

Services	Percentage of care leavers involved with these services
Social services	63%
Jobcentres	28%
Mental health services	22%
Police, probation or legal services	20%

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# PARTICIPATION AND OUTCOMES

## SUPPORT OFFERED THROUGH FROM CARE TO INDEPENDENCE

The type of support offered through FC2I was considered useful by care leavers. 98% of young people felt the one-to-one sessions with practitioners had been helpful to them achieving their goals.

## OUTCOMES

Research found that 55% of care leavers achieved at least one EETV outcome. The type of outcomes that care leavers achieved were:

- Places in education
- Paid work
- Self-employment
- Training
- Voluntary work
- Apprenticeships

12% who had not achieved any of these EETV outcomes had secured a place on another Prince's Trust programme.

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The vast majority of care leavers who exited the programme had made progress in relation to wider skills development and had taken positive steps towards their future. Practitioners most commonly reported noticing improvements in young people's communication, management of emotions, appraisal of their strengths and weaknesses, and engagement or motivation. The Prince's Trust plays an importance role in offering another route to further progress.

**Self-reported data from young people showed significant improvements in the following skills:**

- Communication
- Setting and achieving goals
- Confidence and reliability
- Teamwork
- Managing feelings
- Greater self efficacy around work/career plans and housing



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**IT'S VERY USEFUL, IT'S VERY HELPFUL, IT'S LIKE OBVIOUSLY IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE THEN JOIN THE PROGRAMME BECAUSE IT'S REALLY GOOD.**

**– CARE LEAVER**

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# DRIVERS AND BARRIERS IN RELATION TO PROGRESS IN EETV

## CARE LEAVERS' EETV ASPIRATIONS

Table 3: Care leavers' EETV aspirations at the start of the programme

EETV Aspirations	Key figures
Securing a permanent paid job	50%
Getting back into education or starting an apprenticeship	33%
Secure training or a place on a Prince's Trust programme	20%
Volunteering or starting up their own business	10%

Within our case study interview sample, alongside aspirations relating to education, most had clear employment or career goals in mind, including skilled and manual work, jobs in retail and teaching. Care leavers also mentioned non-EETV goals, relating to accommodation, life skills and practical or psychological steps.

## ADDITIONAL VARIABLES AFFECTING PROGRAMME ENGAGEMENT

Table 4: Care leavers' reasons for leaving the programme early

Reasons for leaving the programme early	Key figures
They had achieved EETV goals	44%
Disengagement from programme	31%

Reinforcing the importance of addressing care leavers' most pressing concerns and sometimes complex needs, care leavers were more likely to disengage or drop out if they faced ongoing obstacles such as practical issues around housing, physical health, mental health, or motivational or behavioural problems.

## CARE LEAVERS' SKILLS

Achievement of EETV outcomes were significantly associated with practitioner reports of improved personal, social and life skills. This highlights the importance of addressing care leavers' wider skills, to support progress towards EETV outcomes.

## CARE LEAVERS' ACCESS TO SUPPORT

Whilst 55% of care leavers achieved an EETV outcome 80% continued to face barriers to further progress in EETV once the sessions had ended; demonstrating a need for ongoing support in order to progress towards career goals. The research showed that care leavers' achievement of EETV outcomes were associated with the levels of support they received. Those with offending histories, lacking motivation, or facing ongoing barriers (e.g. housing or mental health problems) were less likely to achieve EETV outcomes.

# WHAT WORKS FOR ENGAGEMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT?

## Building a rapport

Ensuring that the first main contact with the practitioner was a good experience for care leavers was considered to be crucial by practitioners to ensure their engagement. Simply turning up for that initial meeting could represent a huge step for young people struggling with significant day to day challenges, and their motivation and commitment could not be taken for granted.



## Session content

Sessions covered a broad range of issues relating to EETV, personal and social skills and independent living. The average (mean) number of sessions received by young people leaving the programme from Fairbridge sites was four, and two thirds of sessions lasted for over 45 minutes. However, their length, frequency, content and format were determined by the needs of the care leaver.



## Methods of engagement

Care leavers appreciated flexibility in delivery of support. Consistent with previous research, feedback suggested that effective sessions were facilitated by: active listening; enabling care leavers to set their own priorities; providing positive feedback and regular reviews.



## Empowering relationships

Care leavers were generally very satisfied with their relationships with practitioners, finding them good listeners, responsive, friendly, flexible and non-judgemental. Nonetheless, many found it difficult to open up during sessions, at least sometimes (43%). While this may in part reflect the personal challenges faced by the young people, it also reinforces the importance of practitioners' skills and ongoing efforts in providing a safe space for them to talk.



## Access to services

The majority of care leavers were accessing, or needed to access, other support to achieve their goals. They also tended to be referred to the programme via other agencies. For both reasons, it appears vital for practitioners to gain a full understanding of the various agencies in young people's lives and devote time to working with or facilitating access to appropriate services.



**I HAVE SUPPORTED HER IN SEEKING ADVICE FROM THE LAC ADVOCATE TO CHALLENGE HER SOCIAL WORKER, AS SHE WAS NOT RECEIVING MINIMAL SUPPORT. THIS HAS RESULTED IN HER NOW RECEIVING ALL OF THE SUPPORT SHE IS ENTITLED TO, AND WE HAVE MOVED HER OUT OF HER FLAT AND INTO SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION.**

**– PRACTITIONER**



**SHE'S VERY, LIKE, CARING - LIKE IF YOU NEEDED TO TALK TO HER ABOUT ANYTHING SHE WOULD LISTEN. I FOUND IT REALLY HELPFUL HAVING THE GOALS SET DOWN, KNOWING WHAT I WANTED TO DO AND HOW WE WERE GOING TO ACHIEVE IT AND WE EVEN PUT A FINISH DATE FOR WHEN WE WANTED IT ACHIEVED BY.**

**– CARE LEAVER**

# CONCLUSIONS



Fairbridge and its partner organisations have had considerable success in helping care leavers to develop skills and take positive steps, with more than half of those involved in From Care to Independence achieving some kind of EETV outcome, and most benefitting in other ways. Programmes such as this can clearly make a positive difference to care leavers, in part through developing the personal, social and life skills which can be a prerequisite for further progress in education, training, employment or volunteering.

However, care leavers represent a vulnerable and diverse range of young people. Many have unmet needs on completion of the Fairbridge programme, with some dropping out early due to wider challenges or motivational issues.

In line with this, the importance of practitioners working in partnership with wider agencies cannot be underestimated, particularly given that some care leavers are not receiving adequate support from statutory and mainstream services.

This summary has highlighted features of programme provision which were considered important by practitioners, and appreciated by care leavers.

In order to further improve levels of engagement, it may be beneficial for The Prince's Trust and partner agencies to facilitate further opportunities for practitioners to share experiences and best practice, within and beyond Fairbridge, to learn more about the care system and addressing the issues faced by young people, and to maximise effective partnership working.

It could also be beneficial to hear more from care leavers - including the small numbers who express lower levels of satisfaction – and to involve them in reviewing and developing approaches to delivery, recruitment, engagement and retention.



The project will continue exploring young people's experiences of the programme. The final report in two years' time will provide more detailed information about outcomes and drivers, based on more young people having completed the programme. It will also examine the role of the FC2I programme alongside other services and support networks in more detail, and look at how they contribute to a broad range of outcomes for care leavers.

Interested in finding out more? Get in touch:

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