

# SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS:

A PRINCE'S TRUST REPORT BY  
'YOUNG RESEARCHERS'



Prince's Trust



LOTTERY FUNDED

# INTRODUCTION

## → From The Prince's Trust:

From Care to Independence is a five-year research project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, which examines “what works” in supporting care leavers into positive outcomes. In partnership with our research partner, the National Children's Bureau (NCB), The Prince's Trust is conducting research predominantly with care leavers and Programme Executives on The Trust's Fairbridge programme.

Separately to the research being conducted in partnership with NCB, a number of “Young Researchers” have also been working with The Prince's Trust to run their own research project about how to support care leavers into independence and positive outcomes.

The Young Researchers have completed training about how to undertake research and analyse data. Over the course of 2015 and 2016, they have gathered data from care leavers, as well as from statutory and non-statutory professionals. All of the data has been gathered through a mixture of focus groups, face-to-face interviews, and online questionnaires.

This report summarises the Young Researchers' findings. It is separate from, and is not attached to the research report being produced by NCB, which will be published in May 2017.

We would like to thank all of the Young Researchers who have been involved with this project, and who have worked so hard to gather data for the report you are about to read. We would like to extend a special thank you to two of our Young Researchers, Catherine Fuller and Katie Hatton, for their contribution to the analysis of the data and the writing of this report. We would also like to thank all staff and young people who gave their time to attend focus groups or complete questionnaires. Finally, we would like to thank Stuart Dunne at Youth Focus North West for his contribution to the project, and his supervision of Young Researchers based in the North West of England.

**Holly Padfield-Paine & Charlotte Lee,**  
**Project Managers**  
**From Care to Independence**  
**The Prince's Trust**

## → From the Young Researchers:

When I heard The Prince's Trust were looking for Young Researchers, I knew I wanted to be part of it. By bringing together the views of care leavers and professionals, we can find out what is working, and what still needs to be done in order to give care leavers the best possible chance to thrive when they stand on their own two feet for the first time.

Through the Young Researchers project, I have gained more confidence in public speaking, and have improved my interpersonal skills and my ability to work with others. I have also developed skills in data analysis, allowing me to contribute to finalising the content for this report.

I hope to continue to develop my understanding of the goals that care leavers have, and the support needed to help them to achieve those goals. We need to break down the stigma surrounding care, and to demonstrate the positive attitude of care leavers, including their goals and ambitions.

**Katie Hatton,**  
**Young Researcher**

**Please note, all data has been anonymised, and any identifying information has been removed.**

# WHAT DID WE FIND FROM OUR RESEARCH WITH CARE LEAVERS?

The data below summarises our findings from care leavers. It is based on quantitative and qualitative data collected from care leavers over the course of the Young Researchers project. 13 individual care leavers completed questionnaires for us, and we also held four focus groups with care leavers across the country.

11 of the care leavers who completed a questionnaire were aged between 15 and 25. Their views about independence were mixed, with 7 of the young people stating that they did/do feel ready to leave care, but 5 stating that they did/do not.

## SUPPORT

There was a fairly even split in the levels of support that care leavers had received in order to make the transition to independent living (7 young people reported that they had received support, but 6 reported that they had not.)

- 6 of the young people who completed questionnaires wanted **more** support from their social worker, 5 felt they had **enough** support, and 1 wanted **less involvement** from their social worker
- Positively, 11 care leavers felt they had a good relationship with their social worker/personal adviser, but 1 did not
- The majority of young people (10) were receiving support from a social worker/personal adviser at the time of completing the questionnaire, but 2 were not

Care leavers had received support from a number of sources in order to help them to make the transition to independence and achieve their goals.

**Sources of support included: social services; charity sector organisations; schools or education providers; foster carers; and friends.**

In a number of cases, care leavers identified themselves as having been the main source of their support or motivation. The support that the care leavers received included support with independent living skills, financial support, and practical and emotional support.

We also asked care leavers what qualities their ideal social workers and personal advisers would have. They told us they wanted professionals to be:

- Flexible, and available after 5pm
- Caring and supportive
- Able to treat young people as individuals
- Friendly, "but don't try to be our friend"



- Able to provide emotional and practical support
- Able to actively listen
- Non-judgemental
- Consistent and reliable
- Genuine

9 care leavers said that they were not getting support from any agencies other than the local authority, whilst 3 said that they were. However, later on in the questionnaire, 5 care leavers said that they **had benefitted from the local authority working with other agencies**, whilst 4 said they had not. This suggests that some of the care leavers who stated that they were not receiving support outside of the local authority also stated that they had benefitted from the local authority working with other agencies. We felt that this point was particularly interesting, and may demonstrate that care leavers are receiving input from agencies outside of their local authority, but may not always self-define that input as “support.” This may be because the input from others may be informal or irregular.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

One care leaver told us that they wished they could just ring their personal adviser for a chat, and to share good news. We believe that the system needs to change in order to allow this. Social workers and personal advisers should have smaller caseloads, in order to allow them time to build better, more positive relationships with the care leavers they support.

#### **SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENCE**

We asked care leavers to tell us the key skills they felt were important for care leavers to develop in order to live independently.

- 9 or more care leavers felt they needed the following skills: **managing their finances** (benefits and bills); **managing their housing**; **awareness of services**; **maintaining positive health and wellbeing**; and **career plans**
- 7 or more care leavers also rated managing relationships; making good use of/accessing other services; confidence; finding employment or volunteering opportunities; and training and education as important

**However, the fact that care leavers rated these skills as important did not mean that they were necessarily confident in their knowledge of them.**



**9 care leavers said they still needed more support with money and budgeting, and 7 said they needed help with benefits and getting into work.**

- 11 care leavers reported that their social worker/personal adviser helped them with education, 9 with housing, and 7 with issues with family/relationships. 5 said their social worker/personal adviser helped them with benefits, 6 with money and budgeting, 3 with mental health, and 2 with physical health

## **GOALS**

We also asked care leavers what their goals are. They told us they wanted to achieve in the following areas:

- Employment
- Education and qualifications
- Building positive relationships
- Health and wellbeing
- Housing

Others mentioned practical goals such as buying a car, or more general goals such as being happy, improving their confidence, or travelling. Some care leavers expressed very specific goals such as going into politics, working with children, working in social services, or working to improve mental health services:



**I WANT TO BECOME AN MP TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

- CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PERSON



**I WANT TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

- CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PERSON



**I WANT TO GAIN QUALIFICATIONS WITHIN SOCIAL SERVICES TO BECOME A SOCIAL WORKER**

- CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PERSON

## **OUR RECOMMENDATION:**

Often we hear negative statistics about outcomes for care leavers, but the examples in this report show that the care leavers we spoke to are driven, goal-oriented, and keen to help others. We want people to celebrate the positive skills and goals of care leavers too.



## **BARRIERS**

We asked care leavers what barriers they face. They summarised these barriers as follows:

- Confidence and self-esteem
- Education
- Health (including mental health)
- Money
- Motivation
- Employment
- Relationships (with social services and with family)
- Housing
- Stability
- Access to information, including about their rights and entitlements

### **OUR RECOMMENDATION:**

We have seen some of the barriers that care leavers face. We also think that as a society we need to break down the stigma around being in care.



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### **I WOULD DIE IF ANYONE FOUND OUT I WAS IN CARE**

- CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PERSON

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Care leavers said that when people talk about them as “disadvantaged” and treat them with sympathy, it makes them feel like a victim. This is why we need to showcase the positive achievements and aspirations of care leavers.

# WHAT DID WE FIND FROM OUR RESEARCH WITH STATUTORY STAFF?

This data is based on survey responses from 6 members of staff, and staff at 2 focus groups.

It should be borne in mind that a number of staff members identified themselves as working in statutory roles, including those who were not social workers or personal advisers. This may be due to the fact that they prioritised the fact that they work in a statutory service (e.g. a Children's Services Department) over the fact that their individual role is not statutory.

Their roles in relation to supporting care leavers centred mostly around supporting Children in Care Councils, Care Leaver Forums, and participation work in local authorities. Others were directly involved in creating Personal Education Plans, as well as supporting care leavers with education and training. Others worked as personal advisers or in leaving care teams.

## SUPPORT

→ 8 respondents stated that the care leavers they work with also receive support from outside the local authority. 1 respondent stated that the care leavers they work with did not receive support from outside the local authority, and 3 were not sure. The support on offer from external agencies included provision around education and training, housing and accommodation, benefits, and support with health and mental health. Some also helped with issues such as

immigration, advocacy, signposting, and employment

→ Staff agreed that this support was helpful, but noted that more was needed for those aged 18 and over, and that support was also influenced by whether the young person discloses that they are a care leaver. The majority of respondents also liaised with other agencies themselves, though a minority only did so if requested

**There were variations in how often staff saw the care leavers they work with, as well as the format of meetings. As a general rule, it depended on the needs of the care leaver**

→ The majority (7) saw their care leavers for between 1 and 3 hours in a typical month, and stated that they decided mutually with care leavers when meetings should take place

→ Given the range in job roles and purposes, there was also variation



in the kind of topics discussed at these meetings. Again, topics were generally young-person led. However, specific topics that were mentioned included transitions and independence, education, employment, training, and entitlements

- 6 respondents had a caseload of between 0-10, 1 had a caseload between 11-20, and 5 had a caseload of more than 20. Some specified that they did not have direct caseloads. When asked if they felt this was the right number of young people to support, some felt that it was, but added a caveat to state that it was dependent on need and staffing, or that it was manageable because not all the young people needed support at the same time
- With regards to challenges in establishing and maintaining relationships with the care leavers they work with, staff reported placement changes, lack of time, transport for care leavers to attend meetings, and the fact that a crisis or chaotic situation may prevent a care leaver from attending a meeting. A number of staff members also mentioned that care leavers were not always motivated to attend, or were not always engaged with the service

**With regards to gaps in general support, staff also agreed that care leavers needed to be able to access leaving care services earlier, and some suggested that care leavers should have the option of support post-21**

**OUR RECOMMENDATION:**

Care leavers need to have the opportunity to develop skills for independence at an earlier stage. Young people should start learning earlier about their rights and entitlements, as well as independent living skills such as cooking, ironing, using a washing machine and paying bills.

**OUR RECOMMENDATION:**

Care leavers need to have the opportunity to access support for longer. We welcome the proposal in the Government's "Keep on Caring" strategy to extend the entitlement to a personal adviser to all care leavers up to the age of 25.

## SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENCE

9 members of staff felt that the following were priority skills for care leavers to develop in order to live independently:

- **Managing finances**  
(benefits and bills)
- **Training and education**
- **Managing housing**

8 felt that employment or volunteering opportunities and maintaining positive health and wellbeing were priority skills. 7 rated making use of/accessing services, managing relationships, and career plans as priority skills. 6 highlighted confidence as a priority skill, and 5 noted the importance of care leavers having an awareness of services as a priority skill. "Other" skills mentioned included emotional strength and health and wellbeing.

Staff played a variety of roles in helping care leavers to develop these skills, including: running support groups; helping care leavers to develop life skills and social skills; signposting care leavers to the right support; and providing general advice, support and reassurance.

## GOALS AND BARRIERS

Staff reported that the care leavers they work with have a variety of goals. Housing, financial independence and employment featured as recurring themes.



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### **THE CARE LEAVERS I SUPPORT WANT TO ACHIEVE WHATEVER THEY WANT TO, AND DON'T WANT TO FEEL DEFINED BY A LABEL**

- MEMBER OF STAFF RESPONDING TO QUESTIONNAIRE

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Staff felt that the goals of the care leavers they work with are realistic, as long as they have the right support and motivation. They reported that the type of barriers that care leavers might face in achieving their goals include: access to support; placement changes and change of workers; stigma; confidence and self-esteem; finances; mental health; and lack of engagement or qualifications.

They also highlighted the barriers care leavers might face in developing skills for independence, which included: capacity; time; resource; financial barriers; lack of trust in, or poor relationships with professionals; lack of engagement, motivation or confidence; access to support, services, encouragement and opportunities; and services not meeting their needs.

# WHAT DID WE FIND FROM OUR RESEARCH WITH NON-STATUTORY STAFF?

This data is based on survey responses from 11 members of non-statutory staff. These staff worked in a range of organisations, including charities and local authorities. Some respondents worked in management, others in participation, others as project workers. The main purposes of their roles related to Care Leaver Forums, Children in Care Councils, and supporting young people with participation and influencing service delivery.

## SUPPORT

- 4 respondents had a caseload of 0-5, and 5 had a caseload of over 10. 1 person had a caseload of between 6-10 young people. A number of respondents stated that they did not have individual caseloads, and worked with care leavers predominantly in groups. Respondents discussed a number of topics with the care leavers they support, particularly: benefits and bills; employment; education; training; and housing
- 5 respondents saw the care leavers they support for between 4-7 hours per week, 3 for between 1-3 hours, and 2 for over 7 hours. 5 respondents said that the young person determines when they meet, whilst 4 said that they determined when they meet the young person. Contact generally took the form of Care Leaver Forums and Children in Care Councils, though other contact took place at corporate parenting boards, group sessions, national or political meetings, via Facebook or phone, or in locations such as cafes. Challenges in establishing and maintaining relationships included: changes in care leaver contact details; arranging transport for care leavers across geographical areas; resource, capacity and time; staff turnover; lack of trust in adults; care leaver life circumstances, chaotic lifestyles; and varying commitments (unspecified as to whether these commitments were from staff or young people)
- Staff also highlighted the statutory support provided for the care leavers they work with. This was mainly local authority social care. According to respondents, the statutory organisations their care leavers work with provide support with general statutory duties, personal advisers and leaving care services, financial support, and support with benefits. They also stated that statutory services provide support with housing, education, employment, advocacy, one-to-one support and access to healthcare
- 8 respondents said that support from social services does make a difference to care leavers' preparation for independence, whilst 3 were "not sure" if it made a difference. Some respondents felt that statutory support was inconsistent, and needed to be



promoted to young people more, and at an earlier stage

- 10 respondents liaised with statutory services, with only 1 stating that they did not. 1 did so only if there was a safeguarding concern, while others liaised with statutory services about Care Leaver Forums, corporate parenting boards, or signposting
- Non-statutory staff felt that there were gaps in the support that care leavers received from social services, including: money management and benefits; housing; health; education; employment; training; independent living skills and practical support; and information about their rights and entitlements
- Staff also identified gaps in broader support, particularly financial support and support with housing. Employment support; parenting advice; therapeutic support; supported lodgings; support for “staying close” to residential placements; and support with preparing for independence were also mentioned. Recurring comments suggested that staff felt social services should be responsible for delivering or commissioning that support

### OUR RECOMMENDATION:

We were pleased to see that care leavers were receiving parenting advice. We think that care leavers who have children should be supported to access parenting courses.

### SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENCE

- 9 or more respondents felt that **managing their finances (benefits and bills)** (11); **awareness of services** (10); **finding employment or volunteering opportunities** (10); and **managing their housing** (9) were priority skills for care leavers in developing independence
- 8 felt that managing relationships, and training and education were priority skills
- 7 felt that “maintaining positive health and wellbeing”, were priority skills, whilst 6 selected “confidence” as a priority skill
- Finally, 5 highlighted “making good use of/accessing other services” and “career plans” as priority skills

**Care leavers, statutory staff, and non-statutory staff all highlighted managing finances and housing in particular as key skills for independence.**



## GOALS AND BARRIERS

- Again, non-statutory staff reported that the care leavers they worked with were focused on goals around positive family relationships, housing, and employment. Some respondents noted that they did not often discuss goals with young people due to their job roles
- Similarly to the statutory staff responses, these respondents noted that care leaver goals are realistic, but they need support in order to achieve them



**MOST YOUNG PEOPLE COULD ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS IF THEY GET THE RIGHT SUPPORT AND WORK HARD**

- MEMBER OF STAFF RESPONDING TO QUESTIONNAIRE



**YES, [GOALS] ARE WHAT ALL YOUNG PEOPLE DESERVE TO ACHIEVE**

- MEMBER OF STAFF RESPONDING TO QUESTIONNAIRE

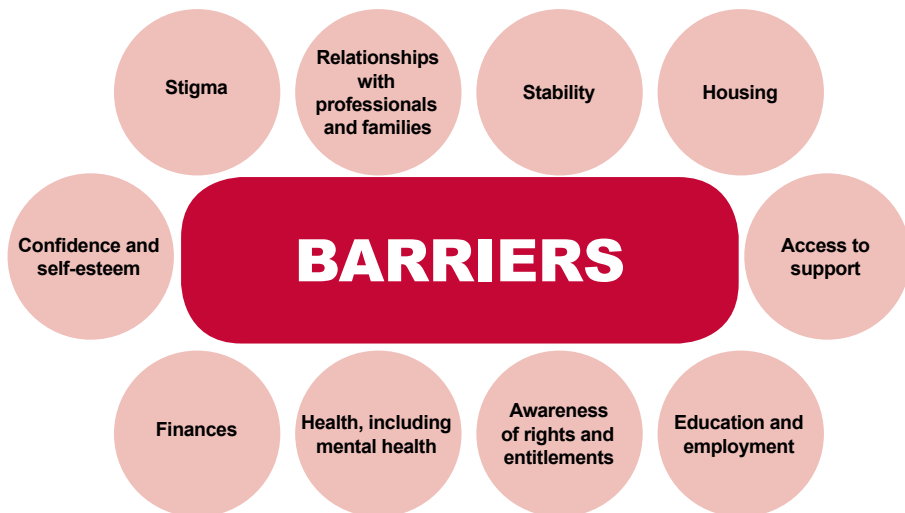
- Respondents felt that there were a number of barriers to care leavers achieving their goals, mainly relating to a lack of emotional, practical, financial and family support. Other barriers included: care leavers' lack of awareness of their entitlements; money; access to opportunities; having a suitable place to live; and having to live independently at an early age
- In terms of developing skills, non-statutory staff reported barriers such as: care leavers lacking awareness of their rights; high turnover of staff and statutory staff capacity; financial barriers; staff knowledge; lack of self-belief and low expectations of others; and a lack of willingness to ask for help, leading to care leavers appearing more confident than they are. Lack of services and opportunities, personal circumstances, and isolation were also mentioned



# THEMES

The following diagrams illustrate the recurring themes that we identified throughout our research.





# CONCLUSION

On the double page spread overleaf, we have summarised the key recurring themes that we found through our analysis. We hope that our findings will help to provide an insight into the experiences of care leavers and the professionals who support them.

We also hope that the report will form a reader for the general public, academics, and other interested parties. Our ultimate goal is that this information will be used to develop informed policy, based on the needs of care leavers and young people in care. The voice of these young people is present throughout this research. This provides a unique opportunity for local and national corporate parents to learn from care leavers' views about their own practical, emotional, and financial support needs. With the right support, care leavers can and will achieve great things.

Throughout the process of being a Young Researcher I have learnt an incredible amount about children and young people in care and care leavers, and

the frameworks surrounding this group of young people. I now work with young people and families, and I feel that being involved in the Young Researchers project will improve my personal practice and make me a more thoughtful worker.

The moments which I have reflected on the most are the focus groups and comments made by practitioners and young people. I will carry these individual stories with me as a reminder of the work yet to be done in the field of young people's rights and empowerment.

**- Catherine Fuller,  
Young Researcher**

If you have any questions about this report, or if you would like any further information about the From Care to Independence project, please contact **Charlotte Lee** on [charlotte.lee@princes-trust.org.uk](mailto:charlotte.lee@princes-trust.org.uk) or **020 7543 1277**



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