

What makes life good? Care leavers' views on their well-being

Over the past five years, we have collected over 10,000 care-experienced voices through the *Your Life Beyond Care* and the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys. Children in care and care leavers have told us how they feel about their lives and what and what they have shared gives an unprecedented insight into their subjective well-being.

Our new report ***What makes life good? Care leavers' views on their well-being***, published by Coram Voice and the Rees Centre and the University of Oxford, is the first analysis of the 1,804 care leaver responses collected between 2017 and 2019. This is a brief overview of the findings and recommendations.



Key findings

Care leavers did worse than the general population on a range of measures. For example, more care leavers had higher anxiety, lower life satisfaction, felt lonely and were less likely to have trusted supportive people in their lives.

“Often we require more support and care than the general population because of our experiences though in reality we get much less... please fix that.”
(Care leaver)

There was a steep decline in well-being after young people left care. We found that compared with children in care a higher percentage of care leavers felt unhappy, unsafe and unsettled where they live.

Care leavers who reported that they had a disability or long-term health problem were particularly vulnerable.

They had lower well-being and were lonelier and less likely to have goals and plans for the future. Compared with other care leavers fewer felt safe and settled where they lived and more struggled financially.

“My rights are often ignored because I am very disabled I [am] expected to fit into a system that I can't fit into.”
(Care leaver)

Overall, although a majority of care leavers had moderate to high well-being, 30% had low well-being. Our analysis identified the factors associated with high and low well-being.

The care system can get it right. We can learn from the positive experiences of those with high well-being. We also found that care leavers do better in some local authorities than in others, e.g. the percentage of care leavers with low well-being in a local authority ranged from 14% to 44%.

“She is amazing! Always goes above and beyond for you, always makes sure you're okay and lets you know she's always around.”
(Care leaver)

Many young people were especially positive about the support they received from their leaving care personal advisers (PAs).



Recommendations

To improve the care system for care leavers:

- We need to be aware of what is working and not working on a local and a national basis.
- We need to measure this based on what young people themselves believe is important to them.
- With the promised Care Review coming up, the success of policy and practice developments need to be measured by whether children and young people **feel that their lives improved** as a result.
- The *Your Life Beyond Care* survey was co-produced with young people so the questions that it asks (the **Bright Spots well-being indicators**) do just this. The indicators should be used by local and national decision makers to understand how care feel about their lives and design services that better meet their needs.
- We need to focus more on the **10 issues that are most strongly associated with well-being**:



This will entail a particular focus on:

- **Improving connections and relationships** (to develop friendships, trusting supportive relationships and address loneliness);
- **Provide emotional and mental health support** (to address stress, high negativity and low positivity and help care leavers feel good about themselves and their future);

- **Provide money management and financial support** (to support care leavers to cope financially);
- **Improve accommodation support** (to help care leavers feel safe and settled where they live)

- In addressing these issues we need a change of culture where corporate parents **step up** to be the best parent that they can be and compensate for the disadvantages that many care leavers experience – by supporting them emotionally, practically and financially.

- We need to **level up** services by identifying and replicating the practice in the areas where young people do well.



- We should build on the positive experience many care leavers report of leaving care **PAs** and make sure that case loads are protected and PAs are supported to give all young people high quality support, whilst also helping them build supportive relationships in the wider community with friends, family and other networks.

- We need to address the **cliff edge of care** by investing in leaving care support and reviewing and changing both the legal framework and local practice that lead care leavers to experience a sharp drop in support when they turn 18.



- We also need to focus more on the experience of young people with **a disability and long-term health condition** – get to know them and the support that they need and ensure that we measure the extent to which services work for them. Case management systems must identify who these young people are and services should report and scrutinise the outcomes for this group.

The full report is published on our website at:

<https://coramvoice.org.uk/whatmakeslifegood>

For further information email about the report or the Bright Spots programme go to www.coramvoice.uk or email brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk.

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