

Bright Spots programme findings

Stigma & disability: care leavers' views

Dr. Claire Baker (September, 2022)

Children and young people as 'experts' in their lives



Subjective Well-being:
Feeling good and doing well at both individual and interpersonal levels.



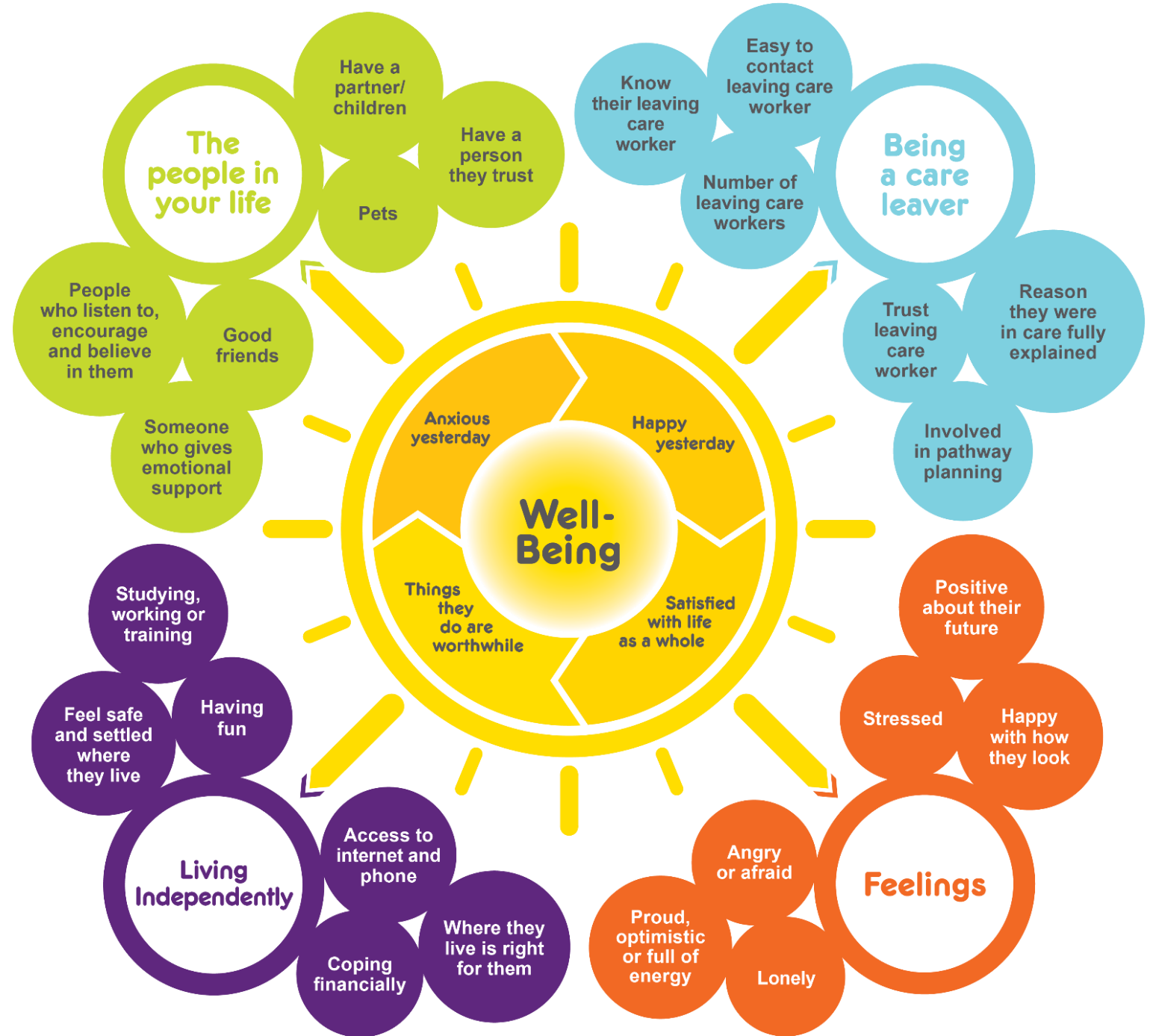
Your Life, Your Care

Your Life Beyond Care

Focus on what makes a good life..

Your Life Beyond Care Bright spots well-being indicators

- Co-produced with care leavers
- Shift focus of the care system to areas that may have been neglected – greater emphasis on what is important to young people.



Since the bright spots Programme started we have collected over

20,000 voices

through the *Your Life Beyond Care* and
the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys

together with more than

60 local
authorities

Why is this important? Stigma



- When you are stigmatised people make negative assumptions about you based on a specific characteristic (how you look or the group you belong to). Goffman (1963) defined stigma as an ‘attribute that is deeply discrediting’.
- Stigma is a dynamic multi-dimensional and multi-level phenomenon that occurs at three distinct but reinforcing levels of society: (1) individual or personal; (2) cultural and (3) structural (see Baker, 2019).
- Children and care leavers identify stigma and societal prejudice as a significant concern in their lives. There is a long history of children in care reporting their unhappiness with how they are treated by a variety of processes both internal to the ‘care system’ and beyond it (Selwyn, 2015; Baker, 2017).
- Factors associated with care system include: stigmatising language; lack of respect for young people’s privacy; unfair or different treatment & actions that unnecessarily identify young people as ‘in care’ or ‘care leavers’
- Elsewhere stigma is reported: public attitudes; representations in the media; outcome statistics and stigmatising experiences at school (see Baker, 2019).

Why is this important? Stigma



- Article 16 of the UNCRC states that every child has the right to privacy. Each country should protect the child's private, family, and home life, including protecting children from unlawful attacks that harm their reputation (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989))
- The Guidance on implementing the UNCRC for children in state care emphasises that all agencies should take, "*appropriate measures to ensure that children in alternative care are not stigmatized during or after their placement. This should include efforts to minimize the identification of children as being looked after in an alternative care setting.*"
- Young people want change. They need their carers and workers & for wider society to be mindful of how their actions and behaviour could inadvertently reinforce the stigma associated with care experience.



About 1 in 8 young people in care (12%) aged 11-18yrs felt adults did things which made them 'feel embarrassed about being in care': with children in residential care and girls more frequently reporting being embarrassed

'Adults do things to make me feel embarrassed about being in care.'

“Due to the stereotypes, I remain quiet about being a care leaver or someone that has been in care.”
(Care leaver)

1 in 10 care leavers felt that, as a care leaver, they have been treated worse than other young people

Stigma, privacy & discrimination

I've had people react very negatively about me being a care leaver because they thought that meant that my family didn't like me or didn't want me and I've been made fun of. (Care leaver)

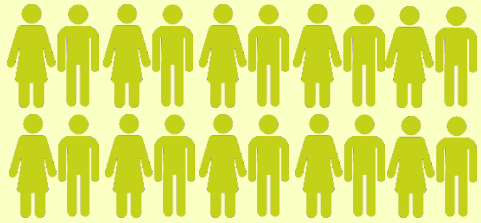
[I'm] nervous about leaving care because in our PSHE lesson on homelessness they told us that if you're in care you are likely to end up on the street. Makes me worried because I don't want that. (11-18yrs)

The sort of prejudice people have towards care leavers is ridiculous... when you move out of care ... whether it's getting a job, whether it's going to find a house, if you tell them you're a care leaver they're thinking negatively unless they've been through it themselves... hence the reason why trying to find a house was so difficult. everybody had these preconceived ideas that care leavers are partiers. they're criminals, you know, ridiculous things. yet I'm a quiet person who likes my own company ... and don't drink, don't smoke. you couldn't have a better tenant in a sense (cited in Baker, 2017)

*“(...) going to an appointment with a friend it is always assumed the friend is a carer/worker and **doctors will not speak to me**, or assume I am incapable of understanding. Or when having treatment in general hospital **colleagues from work** came to visit me, and it was **assumed they were my workers** and my personal medical information was disclosed to them which was completely inappropriate. (Care leaver)*

Well-being

Very high: 24%



Low: 30%

Care leavers with very high well-being

Factors associated with high and low well-being

Felt treated better/same as other young people

Felt proud and strong

Felt safe and settled at home

Did not feel lonely or afraid

Experienced low levels of stress

Bigger support networks, including partners

Felt optimistic about their future

Happy with how they looked

Struggled to cope financially

Hardly ever/never felt proud, excited or strong

Felt unsettled where they live

Felt lonely or afraid or angry

Experienced high levels of stress

Lacked trusting and supportive relationships and good friends

Pessimistic about the future

Unhappy with how they looked

Care leavers with low well-being

National policy discussions

Our Bright Spots research shows that being singled out, being stereotyped and treated differently continues to be an ongoing issue for both children in care and care leavers



- It was welcome to see stigma as a key theme in the care review
<https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/care-review-focus-on-stigma/>
- Recommendation in review: Make care experience a protected characteristic

Why is this important? Disability

- Research evidence – disabled children were more likely to be looked after, remain in care for longer and had a higher risk of being placed inappropriately in comparison to non disabled children.
- Disabled young people can face unsatisfactory transitions from children's services (lack of planning, inadequate information and consultation with young people & restricted housing and employment option) (Baker, 2011; CSDG, 2020).
- But there is limited research on disabled care experienced young people's experiences – a 'hidden intersectionality: care experience, neurodiversity & disability' <https://diversityandability.com/blog/a-hidden-intersectionality-care-experience-disability-and-neurodiversity/>

Why is this important? Disability

- We have no national data on ‘disability’ for looked after children / care leavers – in England the annual looked after statistics do not include data on whether a children is disabled.
- Yet the responsibilities of local authorities “to prepare pathway plans and support care leavers as they make the transition to adulthood apply irrespective of any other services being provided for them, for example, because they are disabled” (DfE, 2010).

Disability

Care leavers are more likely to report that they have a disability or long-term health problem



Care leavers

24%



Young people in general population

14%

“I am hearing impaired and there is no accessible way for me to access the service in an emergency.”

(Care leaver)



Of care leavers report having a disability or long term health condition

Consistently we see care leavers who reported that they had a disability or long-term health problem

- 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, where they lived and thought their accommodation was right for them.
- More also struggled financially and fewer felt involved in pathway planning.

“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)

Disability

Care leavers that define themselves as 'disabled' report lower well-being in a range of areas. Yet currently this group is largely invisible as data on disability is not systematically collected.

Recommendation:

Local commissioners and national decision-makers should actively identify care leavers who have a disability or long-term health condition and work with them to understand more about their experiences and how services can offer additional support. This will require introducing identifiers on case management systems, if not already in place, and regularly reporting on and scrutinizing the outcomes for this group.



“Being a care leaver, especially with no family support is 5x harder than an average young person. It’s even more harder if you suffer from a disability.”

(Care leaver)

Bright Spots Practice Bank

Emotional Health and Well-being	Family, Friends and Supportive Relationships	Accommodation, Placements and Carers
Social Workers and Leaving Care PAs	Rights and Voice	Financial and Practical Resources
Stigma and Being Treated Differently	Education and Learning	Free Time and Having Fun

Resource Bank

This Resource Bank includes best practice examples from local authorities who have listened to what their children and young people said was most important to them. There is also a wide range of useful materials and learnings produced by Coram Voice over the years such as national reports, publications and webinars.

All resources fall under one of five key themes: Daily life; Emotional health and well-being; Practical Support and resources; Relationships and finally, Rights and Voice. Please use the resources freely and share widely. Our vision is for this to be used as a tool for change.

Since 2013, the Bright Spots programme has helped local authorities directly hear from their children in care and care leavers through two sets of surveys.

Your Life, Your Care (for children in care aged 4-18 years) and Your Life Beyond Care (for care leavers aged 16-25 years) asks children and young people about what is important to them and what makes their life good. This ensures that their voices are at the heart of the conversation when it comes to service development and strategic thinking within local authorities.

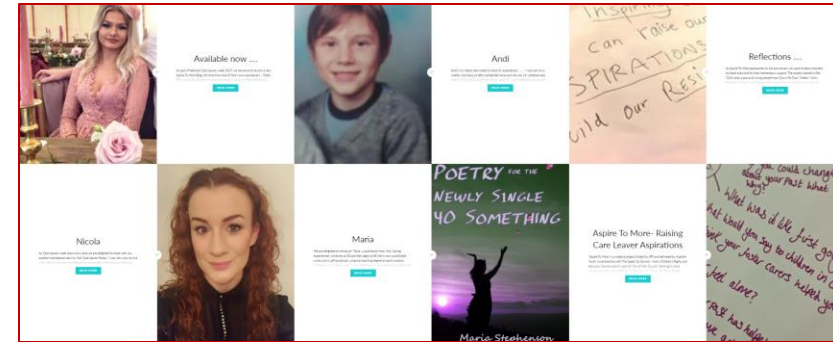


<https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/>

Young people led: challenging stigma



**THIS IS
NOT
A
SUITCASE**



Change the label! #ANationalVoice

**I am more than my care status,
I am...**

& So much more!

#ANationalVoice @CoramVoice #ChangeTheLabel

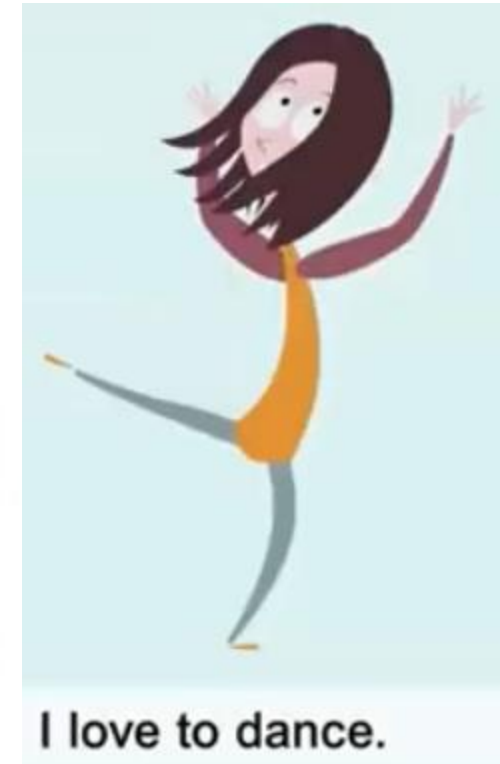
coram Voice
getting young voices heard

<https://aspiretomore.wordpress.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIQj7jffd0>

Examples of practice change

- Bright spots programme works with local authorities to understand the experience of their children in care and care leavers and then explore ways in which negative experiences can be improved. Initiatives are often led by young people to challenge the stigma they experience (**resource bank**)
- **Sheffield** responded to their Bright Spots findings by designing a school assembly session (includes games, a quiz and an animation telling the stories of children in care, written by the young people) to be rolled out in all schools in the city across the council to address the stigma felt by their children in care.



I am also a child in care.

Watch Sheffield colleagues talk about the work

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhbPB-SOVzY&t=9s>



Resources

Voices writing competition film – Who am I? My identity by Kerry

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zorUTXXwjo



Voices 2019: Who Am I? My Identity by Kerry

Community care article –

Simple messages from children in care and care leavers about how professionals can avoid stigmatising them

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2020/04/02/three-ways-social-workers-can-support-children-care/>

Blog from Shelly (Coram Voice)

<https://exposure.org.uk/2020/05/the-stigma-of-being-in-care/>

“I’ve sat in lessons and been called out for mandatory careers meetings, from which I’ve felt no benefit and tried my hardest to avoid. I’ve also personally felt stigmatised in situations where professionals have carelessly made assumptions about me. Children and young people should be encouraged to create their own life journey, but at times I have felt that I wasn’t given enough credit by social workers...

Clearly, adults working with care experienced young people have the best of intentions. But when their words or actions make us feel stigmatised or they give off messages that they don’t believe in our abilities, this makes young people feel that they have already failed before they’ve reached the first hurdle.”

- Coram Voice toolkit

https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/transition_toolkit.pdf

The ideal transition	Page 1
Common barriers and issues	Page 2
Sorting out problems	Page 3
Making complaints	Page 4
Jargon buster	Page 6
What the law says	Page 8
Still having problems?	Page 9

Stigma & Disability reflection sheet



bright spots

Notes from the film – your reflections / actions needed		
	Change stigmatising practice & policies*	Identify and support disabled care leavers*
What can I do to...		
What can I do with others (in my team) to ...		
What must the local authority / partners do to ...		

*How can you become an ally to support care experienced people to overcome intersectional barriers and stigma?

References

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- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>
- United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children adopted 2010 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/673583?ln=en>

See: www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots for all Bright Spots publications

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Find out more about the Bright Spots programme and read the full research reports on our website.

www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots

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