



# Care leavers' views on their transition to adulthood:

## A RAPID REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE

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October 2017

## FOREWORD

**We are extremely pleased to be able to be publishing this rapid review of care leavers' views on their transition from care to adulthood. It gives valuable insight into what makes a successful transition based on what young people have said is important. Our focus has been identifying research that reports the voices of care leavers and not simply adult perspectives on their lives.**

High-quality local authority services to children in care and care leavers must be grounded in an understanding of children and young people's experiences and views, which in turn requires effective mechanisms to listen and respond to them. Not only does this review contribute to our understanding of care leavers' experiences, it was also the first stage in a project to develop a survey of care leavers' subjective well-being. Subjective well-being looks at young people's own evaluations of how they feel about their lives (68).

The rapid review explores the research into what care leavers say about their transition from care and informs the development of an online survey. The new care leaver survey will be co-produced with care leavers. It complements an existing suite of 'Your Life, Your Care' surveys capturing the 'subjective well-being' of looked after children developed by the University of Bristol and Coram Voice as part of the Bright Spots Programme (67).

We started our work on the Bright Spots care leaver survey in July 2017 and it will be available for local authorities to use in early 2018. The care leaver survey is being developed using the same rigorous methodology as the surveys for younger children in care.

The development of this rapid review and associated care leaver survey was made possible by funding from Coram I via the Department for Education (DfE) Social Care Innovation Fund. We are very grateful for this support that enables us to fill an important gap in the understanding of the needs of care leavers. We are also grateful to the Hadley Trust, who funded the work with looked after children that preceded, and provided the model for, this work with care leavers.

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## SUMMARY

**Young people with direct experience of leaving care are best placed to evaluate and comment on the care system and how it has worked for them. This rapid review sought to place their voices at the forefront of our development work on well-being and care leavers.**

### CARE LEAVERS' EXPERIENCE OF LEAVING CARE

- Young people's sense of control over the timing and decision to leave care varied; for some taking the next steps in life was positive, for others independence came too soon.
- Not everyone felt they had received enough preparation support: some reported they were not ready to take on the challenges of adult life.
- Young people said services usually focused on helping them develop practical skills, but too little attention was given to preparing them emotionally.

### LIFE AFTER CARE

- Independence did not always live up to young people's hopes and plans. For some it brought uncertainty about the future.
- For many, the best thing about leaving care was gaining independence - being able to make their own decisions, get a job and their own home. In contrast, the worst thing was often the responsibility of managing on their own and struggling on a low income.
- Care leavers often struggled to manage their money, and some wanted more help with this.

### RELATIONSHIPS

- Care leavers wanted people who cared about them and helped them successfully move on from care in their lives. But not everyone found the support they needed.
- Many young people felt very lonely and socially isolated since leaving care. Some reported that this affected their emotional well-being and triggered mental ill-health.
- Some care leavers struggled to trust others, because past relationships had been disrupted or they had previously been let down.
- Coping with transitions was easier for care leavers who had a key person to go to for help.
- Not getting support from workers was an issue for some care leavers.
- Young people valued ongoing support from their previous foster and residential carers, but only some benefitted from these.
- Re-connecting with birth family had led to improved and strengthened relationships for some. For others it triggered renewed disappointment or problems.
- Partners were supportive for some young people, but others had volatile experiences.
- Siblings and friends could be important sources of support, but some had lost contact with these important people.



## LIFE AS A CARE LEAVER

- Some young people felt strongly that the care system had not sufficiently equipped them with an understanding of their background and personal history.
- Young people commented on being labelled or judged for being in care and a care leaver.
- Young people valued being listened to, but involvement in decision-making at both an individual and collective level was mixed.
- Some young people described not feeling part of pathway planning and felt it lacked connection to their lives.
- When pathway planning was positive it helped young people to reflect, set targets and keep things on track.
- Care leavers were not always clear about their rights and entitlements and wanted better information.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF EARLY ADULTHOOD

- Young people emphasised the importance of feeling safe in their homes and neighbourhoods and having good quality housing. Living in an unsafe area was stressful.
- Care leavers were keen to talk about their goals and aspirations. Education or employment could provide a source of income and stability but also an alternative identity.

- Disrupted or negative school experiences; low self-esteem and confidence and changes in circumstances such as bereavement, family problems or becoming a parent could be barriers to education and employment.
- Young people enjoyed a range of hobbies; spending time with friends, sport and music but they identified time, money and motivation as barriers to pursuing these activities since leaving care.
- In several studies young people said that leaving care had an adverse effect on their general health and some experienced a rise in mental health problems after care.

## CARE LEAVERS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

- Some care leavers reported negative peer influence and financial or sexual exploitation.
- Disabled young people wanted the same opportunities as their peers but sometimes felt treated differently.
- Some young parents talked about their parenting skills being more scrutinised because they were in care.
- Worrying about the future because of uncertainty about what would happen featured both for young people seeking asylum and young people in custody

## CONCLUSION

**Care leavers identified that good transitions from care were supported by quality relationships with the people that were important to them, being supported in decisions and help with achieving their aspirations. Looking across the review strongly reinforces the message that effective services must always start with, and continue to champion, the voice of young people.**



## INTRODUCTION

*Looked after children are children first and foremost: becoming 'looked after' is just one aspect of complex identity and experience. There is a need to recognise the diversity and individuality of children who become looked after, and to take account of their characteristics and needs, and their varied pathways and experiences within the system, from the point of entry, through childhood, and into adult life. (12)*

All care leavers have had a diverse range of experiences prior to leaving care; differences in family background and varied experiences of care, all of which set the context for their experience of leaving care (7; 9; 26; 49). Their journeys to adulthood will continue to be shaped by their previous experiences (82). It is only through listening to care leavers' own accounts of their experiences and feelings that we can fully understand what leaving care is like for young people and how they can be better supported in their transitions from childhood to adulthood.

Around 80 UK studies were included in this rapid review (see Appendices 1 and 2 for more information on the review methodology and the References section for a full list of evidence sources). This report is a summary of the key themes and issues that emerged from the review. The quotes used in this review are from the young people interviewed or consulted in the various studies.



## CARE LEAVERS' EXPERIENCE OF LEAVING CARE

Young people in a range of studies discussed their exits from care. Care leavers generally reflected on two main things; firstly, how prepared they felt they were for the move from care and secondly, whether they had a choice about leaving.

### Preparation for independent living

Despite some improvement over time, care leavers still move to independent living at a young age compared to young people who are not in care. Most care leavers have left their last care placement by age 18 and some as early as 16 (23).

The research showed that care leavers were acutely aware that they would be expected to manage on their own at a much earlier age than their peers who were not in care. As a result, many care leavers placed high value on being well-prepared. Young people in several studies said opportunities to learn the skills they needed for when they left care were important (25; 19).

*Start cooking and learning to budget and other independent skills as soon as you can and before you're 17. (30)*

Whilst local authorities have a duty to prepare young people in care for adult life (20; 21), care leavers reflected that this did not always happen and that there was much variation in the quality of preparation support that they received (5; 9; 18; 26; 31; 52; 59; 60).

*The support only came into play once I had left care - it needs to start sooner. (30)*

### Practical skills



Young people who had received help said that services usually focused on helping them develop the practical skills necessary for looking after themselves. Activities were often focused on how to manage a home: cooking, cleaning, DIY or helping them understand more about the bills they would need to pay (9; 18; 30; 49).

### Emotional preparation

Young people felt that there was too little attention given to preparing them emotionally for the changes that leaving care would entail (3; 4; 18). As a result they often felt unprepared for living alone (19; 30).

*When you leave care, they think financial support is enough. I was so independent from a young age I was OK. What about emotionally and mentally, for some? There's not enough support to check you're OK. If you're OK on the outside then you get left – they are concerned with the surface, not much else. (13)*

*I know how to live independent like surviving; I don't know how to live independent as in like being happy and living. (4)*

*Emotional support is especially important when you don't see your family. They tell you what you will be doing and tell you you'll be getting a flat, but they don't know how it feels - it's scary, weird things happen in life. (18)*

### Gradual transitions



Young people were keen to emphasise that they needed to learn skills and also to get an opportunity to practice what they had been taught. Some thought it was useful to have opportunities to 'test out' what it may be like once they left care (30). In one study (30) several young people talked about having a 'rehearsal' or a 'trial to do stuff by yourself but with support' such as in taster or training flats provided by their local authority. They thought this would accustom them to the responsibilities of managing their own home and let them experience living on their own.





*I'd say wait 'til you're at a place where you're... ready in your head; you've maybe got a job or whatever; and you're ready to support yourself - and, also if you get the opportunity to try independently living before you get to the age you have to leave care. (56)*

Some care leavers highlighted that their care experience had not helped them prepare nor given them the chance to try out new skills:

*I was supposed to start cooking in the children's home and the chef there has cooked a meal. I'm not going to start cooking a meal when there is a meal sitting there you know ... Like cooking and washing clothes they do try and sort of educate you on but for me the environment was completely wrong... the staff always wash your clothes... And then suddenly about six months before you move out you are like 'now you want me to do that?'... It needs to be done from the minute you go into residential care. (49)*

*Having someone clean my room for me did not prepare me for independence. (30)*

*When you're in care you don't have to worry about bills and cooking or meals. All of a sudden when you leave it's harder to manage and it stresses you out. (19)*

In one study (18) of 123 care leavers, just under a quarter thought they had been prepared 'well' or 'very well' for independent life, but nearly half thought they had been prepared 'badly' or 'very badly'. In contrast, two studies reported that the majority of care leavers felt well-prepared.

One study (26) of just over 100 care leavers reported that over four-fifths (83%) of young people felt they were 'very' or 'quite' well prepared. Another survey of care leavers showed the majority were confident about their independence skills, in particular their self-care skills (31).

### Too much, too young

Although the proportions varied across studies, it was clear that a significant group of care leavers felt they had not received enough preparation support and that they were not ready to take on the challenges of adult life when they moved to independent living (18; 26; 31; 60; 63).

*Loads of responsibilities - it's not normal for kids to shop/pay bills and live alone at 18. (18)*

*Moving from there to living by myself, I definitely wouldn't say it has been the easiest thing by no means. Everyone, even I do, underestimates moving out by yourself. Just small things that you really need to focus on, like paying bills at the right time. Getting things sorted like heating, your plumbing. Anything like that that goes wrong. Getting your food. Knowing what you should eat and what you should stay away from, all that sort of stuff... It's stressful. (49)*

Those who felt less well prepared were more often those who had spent less time in care, those who left care at an earlier age (74) and disabled care leavers (26).

The strong messages from young people were that developing independence skills should start early, be gradual, go at the young person's pace and not be done in a hurry.

## When to leave care

Young people described mixed experiences in terms of how fully they felt they had control over the timing and decision to leave care (37; 49). For some it felt like they had had an abrupt end to care; 'a shock' (2b; 70). Others reflected they felt they were too young (46).

### Choice



In one study, (31) over half of young people felt it had been their choice to leave care when they did, but a sizeable minority felt they had had no choice (32%, n=83). In another study (14), nearly a third reported they did not leave at the right time for them.

*I was forced to move out when I was 16 – to be honest I had no job, I couldn't fund my expenses ... it's very hard to move out at that age ... you're still only a baby ... I felt like I was pushed out to leave home so they could get another person in. (83)*

*Because I am worried about moving out and having to live on my own without a choice in the matter, people who are not in care get to stay with their parents until they feel ready to move out and I feel that I am nowhere near ready to leave but I don't have a choice in the matter. (14)*

Care leavers often described not having enough information about changes that were due to happen as they left care (10).

One study (72) examined young people's experience of their move from foster care in terms of choice and planning and identified three main groups. The first group of care leavers (40%; n=19) tended to take a positive view of their move; they felt it was time to move on and generally saw themselves as moving for positive reasons (such as a job, college, to look after a child or enjoy 'independence'). The second group did not feel ready and did not feel they had a choice (n=10; 20%). They felt they had been forced out of foster care. However, they valued the prospect of

freedom. The third group differed from the other two groups in that they defined the reason for the move as a 'quarrel; they did not necessarily like foster care and described strained relationships with their carers (n=19; 40%).

*I left so someone else could have what I had... If I could do it again I maybe wouldn't be in such a rush. I could still be at home [former foster care placement] now but I'm not ... Someone else is in my place. (49)*

*I was kicked out of the children's home, so I had to learn quickly to live on my own. I would have preferred to be in the children's home working and earning. It would have put me in a better position. (24)*

### Timing



Some young people described decisions about when they left care as primarily led by age:

*When it's your birthday and you're throwing somebody out, it's just like saying "nobody wants you, we're just throwing you out on your birthday," when that's a day when you should be celebrating everything you've achieved in that year. (63)*

*I left there at 19, just after my birthday. I had to go. There was a lot of pressure put on. The council thought I was too old to stay. (63)*



Badly timed moves could negatively affect aspects of care leavers' lives, such as studying and education, as this young person describes:

*It more had an effect on my emotional wellbeing and my education. When I was in foster care I did my first year of A Levels and I got really good grades, I got like A's, B's, C's. But then I moved (mid A-level) and you see in my second year I got like D's, E's, and U's. (37)*

## LIFE AFTER CARE

Across many studies care leavers described how independence brought both freedom and stress. A particular problem for young people was managing finances. One of the main themes young people discussed was the disparity between the reality of their day-to-day life compared to their expectations of how things would be once they left care.

### Gap between reality and expectations

Many young people said they had been enthusiastic about leaving care and becoming independent before they left care. Interviewees typically described looking forward to life after care, which they said offered them an opportunity to be more in control of their life such as where they lived (4; 36). However, in many studies young people suggested that the experience of being independent did not always live up to their hopes and plans (3; 9; 10; 36; 83).

Some of those who were initially positive about leaving care regretted leaving care early and advised other young people to delay leaving for as long as they could (70). Sometimes young people felt they had been made to 'grow up too fast' (18).

*I had this glamorised thought of living on my own and having all my friends around and life being a big party but it wasn't that ... I was studying too and coming home and doing homework on my own, there was no mum or dad so I had to come home and cook and do the washing and the laundry ... I was basically on my own. (3)*

*I was just a bit lonely and down ... since I've had this flat I've had lots of time on my own thinking more about not being with my family and missing things. (27)*

### Anxiety about the future



Care leavers in several studies explained that they had felt anxious about their move out of care, and that it was a stressful experience (18; 30; 56; 63). Independence brought with it a degree of 'uncertainty about the future' (30).

*Leaving care was a worry, not understanding fully how it would be, worrying about when you would leave and where you would live. (18)*

*Even when you're 18 it [leaving care] is a stress time you know... You are excited but somehow, you're scared, too – there's fear there, too. I didn't think there was any help, really I didn't get any help. (63)*

*It was hell [moving to independence]. Everything, I was just so scared of everything... moving in by yourself is so scary, especially if you're a lass. (56)*

In one study, some care leavers with autism spectrum disorders said they found it difficult to cope with the uncertainty about the future that occurred when leaving care:

*I started worrying about moving out two years before I actually moved out. I worry about things way ahead... I do a lot of worrying to myself. (49)*

## Freedoms and pressures of adulthood

'Being adult' in some young people's narratives was associated with 'freedom' (51). For care leavers, 'freedom' could mean different things: freedom from 'service involvement', 'not being in care anymore', 'not having a social worker', 'not attending reviews' and 'not being told what to do' (30).

### Gaining independence



One study (30) reported young people's views on the 'best thing about leaving care'. For lots of respondents this was linked to gaining 'independence' which was described in many forms:

- Financial independence (being in charge of own money);
- Social independence (such as seeing friends and family whenever they wanted; 'not having a curfew');
- Getting their own home (where they could be themselves and decorate it as they wished);
- Autonomy to make decisions and choices (such as about their future and what they did with their time);
- Markers of 'adult' status (such as getting a job / obtaining driving licence).

Some care leavers explained how, whilst things could be difficult, they were proud of themselves and how they were coping:

*I'd say I'm doing great and I'm really proud of how well I'm doing. I don't want to blow my own trumpet, but I'm not in any debt with anything and I keep all my washing and everything done up to date, like, it's not building up or anything. Change my bed sheets... everything. I'm so dead grown up. (56)*

*I think I do quite well and everybody's quite proud of me ... just being really mature and sensible. I get a wage... and I don't blow it. I'm saving up for a car and learning to drive ... I am better at cleaning and tidying ... I think probably the worst things is just having to make sure I do everything right, I'm very aware of it all the time; not wanting to make any mistakes. (26)*

In contrast, some of the 'worst things about leaving care' were also related to 'independence' and 'freedom'; young people emphasised the stresses associated with being independent and the responsibility of managing their own home, coping on their own and the difficulty of living on a low income (30).

*I went from not paying anything, and I mean anything, literally just my clothes and my cigarettes, to having water rates and light rates, TV licence, council tax and having these different cards to pay for different things. Wow, it was a bombardment! The one question I kept asking myself was, 'How will I cope?' and the answer is, you don't. This is where I am now, my mental health is getting worse. (9)*

### Financial pressures



Although financial independence was something some young people had been looking forward to, the reality could prove very stressful and challenging. Young people in several studies reported that they struggled to manage their money and for some this was an area they wanted more help with (10; 18; 25; 31). As the following care leavers described:

*When you're in care you don't have to worry about bills and cooking or meals. All of a sudden when you leave it's harder to manage and [it] stresses you out. (18)*

*Financial support is really important, like advice on budgeting. I had, over a period of time, gone shopping under a worker's supervision to make sure I was buying the right things. This had worked well and got me used to managing money. (18)*

Many young people were struggling financially. In one study, almost a third of care leavers felt they were not coping well on their income (26). Young people thought this was due to being on a low income and a lack of budgeting skills.

Some young people were in debt through rent arrears, benefit sanctions, outstanding payments on purchases or loan re-payments (1; 15; 26; 37).

*Finances is really hard. I'm on the dole. You don't get much money on the dole... I tried to save up every week for oil for the end of the month. I can't save... Once you get your shopping... his nappies and milk and food, you're skint... The social workers helped me get oil last month because I couldn't afford it at all (49)*

*I lived in a lot of gas poverty I'd call it. I'd say that many young people live in gas poverty. We never have enough money to just keep our houses warm for a little while, let alone to have a long hot bath. (37)*

In addition, care leavers with autism spectrum disorders reported some experiences of financial exploitation from money lenders and family members (49).

*I would have people phoning me constantly... It was my idiocy in the first place by lending them the money. So, it is my fault that I didn't get the money back ... I actually ended up getting a lot more taken off me but ... I have learnt a lot... People can be a lot more deceptive than you think they are... (49)*

Some care leavers thought that the money they received whilst in care was not necessarily helpful in terms of helping them with their future planning as after they left care their financial situation was very different, as this young person explained:

*They would have given us £70 a month to buy clothes and I would have always bought trainers, but then you don't get it. To me they are setting you up for a fall. (49)*

Even when care leavers reported they were doing well managing on a tight budget things were still a struggle, as this young person describes:

*I do very well with the money I get, anyway it lasts me as long as I need it to. I manage it, it's not easy but I do manage it. It's not easy but I do manage slowly but surely, usually by Monday I'm skint though. I get paid on a Friday and after I've paid rent and done my shopping and stuff like that, Monday I'm usually sat here thinking, I wish Friday would hurry up and come again, I need more money. (26)*



## RELATIONSHIPS

The people in your life are the ones who you turn to when things are not going well or who you share your successes and positive experiences with. These relationships are very important to quality of life and well-being. Across research studies care leavers strongly agreed that good relationships were essential to them.

### Emotional support

Young people felt that having ongoing emotional support helped them manage their transition to adulthood. However, they also reported that their emotional needs were not always supported well enough, both within the care system, and after they had left care (63; 65).

Some young people talked about how their past experiences continued to affect their lives:

*When I went into care when I was young there was no emotional support there for me whatsoever and maybe if there was, I would be slightly different to how I am now, cos in my adult life, I do struggle with certain things now, I have a lot of emotional stuff trapped inside me now. I think it's very important to have the emotional support when you're younger to prepare you for more serious stuff when you're older. (3)*

*Dad was an alcoholic and was a gambler ... with my mum it was mental health reasons. She couldn't help that obviously... But I always felt abandoned ... I don't think I'll ever really get over it but I've certainly learned to live with it ... There's days I feel worse than others. (49)*

These care leavers spoke negatively about the lack of emotional support they had experienced:

*Services tend to focus on practicalities, not emotional stuff... making sure you're ok in day-to-day life rather than the core of the issues. That's what I found myself... I've had to deal with it my own way... and I think a lot of kids find that too and because they can't deal with it, it breaks them apart and they get into drugs and stuff or they should sort it out their own way, or else you can't keep going. That support could be provided by a range of individuals and should be easily available. (63)*

*... things I thought I had forgotten about but when you're on your own every day watching TV, things you thought you got over come back to you, that's when emotional support needs to come in. (3)*

*I think [you need] more help with the emotional, psychological stuff when you're first living on your own. Just someone checking in on you, or giving you a call. I didn't get any of that. (65)*

### Difficulties accepting help

Some care leavers said that they did not always reach out to those around them for help and support.

*No one really knows what I'm thinking, I could be upset and no-one will know 'cos I'm smiling. (3)*



Young people described how it could be difficult to accept help and discussed difficulties they had relying on people; some said they automatically switched off from any information from their local authority due to the association with care. Others reflected that they did not want to be perceived as not coping. In one small scale study care leavers discussed the complexity for some of them in being able to accept support (3). Some young people explained that when they turned down support, this did not always mean they did not want it. Non-acceptance of support could be related to wider issues such as timing, lack of trust or sense of pride (59).

*I didn't want to say I needed help with budgeting because a lot of the stuff they said about me was negative so then they'd say: 'she can't manage living on her own' 'cos then it's easier that way and they think 'B is doing well', it's easier. (3)*

The importance of 'self-reliance' was a theme identified in a study led by care leaver researchers (60). Several young people described themselves as their main source of support:

*I had a lot of friends, I made a lot of friends but I wouldn't really rely on them, at the end of the day they're your friends, things can happen so I don't want to put my everything in that, I'm more of a private person, I try to deal with my issues myself. (3)*

### Loneliness and social isolation



Many young people recorded that since leaving care they had felt very lonely and socially isolated (3; 5; 9; 10; 18; 24; 30; 41; 51).

*I live very far from my friends, I feel very isolated and lonely. I don't like living by myself. (5)*

*I feel really isolated from everyone, like not that people have isolated themselves from me it's just what I've done because living by myself and just trying to live ... that's why I'm probably lonely quite a bit. (16)*

Some young people had lost contact with important people in their lives such as carers, support workers or friends.

*[What is the worst thing about leaving care?] ... missing staff and carers the worst was, I don't know I actually miss them, I can't believe it just happened quickly I'm 21. (30)*

*... lonely, most young people really want to move to independent living but it's not the same as you think it will be. It's you and this house, if you don't have any savings or not enough money to buy a TV or something to entertain yourself, sometimes it can be really, really lonely. (9)*

Some young people who described being socially isolated explained that their sense of loneliness affected their emotional well-being and triggered mental ill-health (49). One small scale study interviewed care leavers about their experiences of depression; overwhelmingly this had impacted negatively on their life and transition to independent living (4).

*It's like living under a black cloud... you don't know when you're going to get a bad spell ... you cannae plan day to day because you don't know if you're going to wake up, and just want to stay in all day and not want to see anybody. (4)*





## Key person to rely on



Many care leavers agreed that one of the factors critical to successfully moving on from care was having people who cared about you (42). Data from one synthesis of qualitative research into the experiences of young adults leaving foster care found that coping with transitions was easier for care leavers who had a key person to rely on and go to for help (59).

As one study (66) reported: *'at the heart of every single positive story and experience the project heard, was that just one strong relationship with one person who was willing to go the extra mile and show they cared'*. However, in some studies young people commented how it could be difficult to trust other people (50).

**As soon as you were beginning to trust them [social workers] they moved on. Just as you were putting trust in them, if you did put trust in them, they were gone.** (35)

Trusting people was important, but as these young people explained, it was also important to feel that you were trusted by others:

**I think the thing most folk need is trust. If you can see that somebody trusts you it makes you feel happier, it makes you feel as though you want to get it right in your life. It makes you want to get your life sorted out and basically get on with it.** (42)

**Like me, a lot of people in care or care leavers sometimes just need someone who can help them out with anything and who believe in them to do the best for themselves in life.** (58)

## Professional support

Having the right support during the transition to adulthood can make a real difference to care leavers and local authorities have on-going legal duties to provide leaving care services that deliver this. Government guidance details the formal support that should be provided to care leavers by their local authorities (20; 21).

Care leavers were clear that they wanted services to be matched to their individual needs (76). Examining young people's views, it was evident that the extent to which they were satisfied with the support they had received varied across services (36; 38; 60; 66).

When asked about how life had worsened since leaving care, not getting the support they needed was one of the top issues described by young people (7; 18; 38). Some care leavers had not received the help they needed and wanted and said they wanted more support (1; 37; 59). They felt that the support they got was not good enough.

Some care leavers reported that their support networks had contracted after leaving care (30). As a result some care leavers felt vulnerable, because if things went wrong, they had fewer people to turn to (13).

**It was hard to get in contact with the right people at the Social Work office and they didn't really help me out.** (31)

**I didn't have much support. They only come round every six months. Otherwise they might give you a call randomly and see if you need help with anything, if you don't ask it won't get done. I needed more help.** (37)

Some care leavers encouraged young people preparing to leave care to stay engaged with services as much as they could, as this young person described:



*Being able to take control of your own life ... is enjoyable... but if you are moving out on your own don't be naive about it. It's not really easy... You have a lot of struggles. You have to budget... cook for yourself... Make sure that you are not being neglectful too... and don't break all the rules in the book by having a midnight party and getting thrown out the first week... make sure you have the support... cos it can be very lonely. And have good friends.... Make sure that you know you can tell them what's happening... Stay engaged [with 16+ services] ... cos the more people you block out the more dangerous it gets for you. (49)*

Some care leavers talked about their concerns for when statutory support ended and were worried about this as they got older. In one study with a small sample of care leavers, some described the sense of abandonment they felt when support was not available and ended abruptly (65). This viewpoint was echoed in other research as well, as these young people explained:

*[The worst thing is] knowing that you're going to be totally on your own when you turn 21 and that there is no help or support, not like people with families who have most of their support for the rest of their lives. (30)*

*I'm worried now about turning 21... I'll finish my degree and won't even be a student then... although they've told me they'll still be there for me ... I still worry about the little things now and I think I always will... things I should really know but still need to ring up for reassurance. (63)*

*At the minute, I'm going through depression and half of that is because I'm going to lose my social worker... I've adapted to her and I'm not a good person when I lose people... I go down very quickly coz [sic] I'm sick of losing people in my life you know? (63)*

*The fear of having to face things alone, suddenly all the support you were familiar with has gone. (30)*

### Workers



At times, support was unavailable and care leavers struggled to obtain what they needed from professionals (44).

*[My] second PA would only meet when she needed to and wouldn't be available at any other time... she would only talk about what she needed to get done in paperwork ... she wouldn't make herself available. (58)*

Sometimes care leavers thought they were offered the wrong type of support ('pointless') or had support 'forced' on them (44). Young people complained about their workers' time keeping, availability or the fact that they took a long time to contact them (51).

*Once in your own place, your social worker does not help as much: they said they will call once a week, but they called after 4 weeks and said: 'this is a quick call to say are you OK'. You don't want to say what you really feel then. (13)*

*[The] social worker, I've not heard from her for considerable time, [she's] late, no responsibility. (31)*



The professional status of workers could be a barrier to trust. For other young people past experiences had affected their ability to trust others.

*I've never been able to trust anybody, because I have been moved about so much. I've never really had that type of bond with my mam or any of my foster carers or anything like that, to be able to open up and speak to them and trust them. I've put trust in people before and they've just let me down because I have been moved about so much, so, my wee motto is: don't trust nobody but yourself, and in that way you can't go wrong. If you don't need to trust anybody, nothing's going to go wrong and you can't get hurt... (4)*

*I was used to so many changes in social worker that the PA was just another one. (58)*

In contrast, across several studies (9; 30; 42; 63; 64) young people described the positive impact that their workers had on them in their post-care lives:

*Well I went away ... when I got my flat and by the time I'd come back for three days, my flat was fully decorated and carpeted and everything and she wasn't even at work, so like she's, she just, she goes out of her way like for people. (64)*

*Having an allocated person that I can feel I can talk to and who understands me and listens to what I say and sees me regularly. (30)*

*My 16 plus worker is like my mum. I am still in contact with her. Hugs when I've done well, lectures when I've done something wrong ... I wish I didn't have her as a social worker, I wish she was my friend. (63)*

*The personal adviser I have now is the best, she understands me, she listens to me. I like having someone that I can tell stuff to, I am pleased that I can tell her everything I am doing, I can trust her. (9)*

*My social worker? I really, really like that guy. He's helped me a lot. I feel like he's thrown another lifeline to me. He used to come and see me a lot and that helped. It's like the social worker goes out the window and a father comes in and talks to you and you know that you are going to really get somewhere. (42)*

*I don't know how to describe it, we're not mates, I know we're not mates because she's got to be professional. But, but at the same time like, I know I can talk to her about anything ... she's always willing to listen, and at the same time she gets in touch with me. (64)*

*Over the past year the best thing for me has been my support worker with 14+ with all the support she has given me I feel like you have built up a good relationship with her and I feel like if I have any queries I can always go to her about them so it has been nice to build up a good relationship with someone who I can trust. (14)*



Ultimately, the nature and type of support that care leavers experience is likely to vary depending on the quality of the relationship they have with their worker(s) (44). Across a range of research care leavers were clear about the qualities that they valued in their professionals. These included someone who:

- Was responsive, consistent and reliable (in terms of delivering on promises and being there for you) (43; 44; 51);
- Worked with the young person as an individual (showed genuine interest and empathy, was 'non-judgemental') (43; 60);
- Demonstrated a desire to help them achieve; holding positive but realistic ambitions for them (43);
- Showed an interest above and beyond their job (43), going the 'extra mile' (51);
- Facilitated access to out of hours support (43; 60), was easy to contact (51);
- They trusted (44); and
- Was friendly, 'but don't try to be our friend' (60).

### Foster and residential carers



Staying in touch with, and getting support from, past foster and residential carers was valued by many of those who had done this (26; 77; 78).

*She is my foster carer and I go home twice a week for dinner... I can call in anytime I want ... If they were going shopping at the weekend they would always ask me to go ... I am not left out. I am going home for Christmas. (49)*

*They're a part of your life, your history and part of the reason you are who you are. They've taken you in when you had nothing or when the situation in your life was so dire and that means something. Often, it's the only attachment you have. (78)*

*It's important because they are often the closest thing you will have to parents under circumstances where your biological family cannot support you. (78)*

*I see them every day... I've got excellent foster parents and I'm classed as one of the family. I call them my mam and dad and [my leaving care worker] is like a mate, helping to sort out college places and taking me to interviews... I can talk to him about anything. (26)*

However, one survey found some young people who wanted to stay in touch with their foster carer had been unable to do so (78). For some this was because they lived too far away, others felt unsure if their previous carers would want to see them and a few said that their local authority wouldn't allow them to. Over half of respondents felt their worker did not necessarily support them keeping in touch.

### Staying Put



One study looked at the experiences of young people who remained living with their foster carer ('Staying Put' arrangement) (56). Many of the care leavers who decided to continue living with their carers described the strong relationships they had and how they felt part of the family. Continuing to live with their carer had helped some of these young people continue in their education (56).

*I was really chuffed 'cos at 18, to know that, if that [staying put] wasn't there, I'd be living out on my own - I would have had an emotional breakdown, I really would, 'cos I love the family environment. (56)*

Based on young people's accounts it appeared that for many 'Staying Put' enabled them to have more choice and control over their transition from care.



**Because I've been able to stay put, by the time I move on it will be more of a choice that I've made because I know I'm ready, rather than being forced to, which I wasn't ready to do at 18. It's made a massive difference in the sense that I know that when I do move out I will be able to cope.** (56)

**I think it [staying put] made a hell of a difference. It was, yeah, it was really good, purely because it doesn't throw you in at the deep end, and it's sort of like, a sort of approach to being an adult. It was good.** (56)

### Staying Close



Staying Close is designed for young people leaving residential care and involves young people living independently, but in a location close to the children's home they lived in previously (22). Pilots for Staying Close are looking at different ways to enable young people to have the support of the same team and same key worker, so that they experience continuity and a more gradual transition to independence. Prior to the approach being piloted young people were asked their views on the idea (57). In the main care leavers were supportive of the plans.

**Yes, I believe it is good because the age that they ask young people to leave care is just too young. As we are age 16, 17, 18, we are studying hard for our A levels, the thought of living on your own and trying to balance A-levels is not an easy task. We are too young to have this additional pressure. This residential care option, will take pressure off young people, this will enhance their performance at schools/colleges and university. It also gives the young person stability which is needed. It is also good because, it is what they are used to, it allows them to feel at home.** (57)

Young people who were consulted emphasised the importance of each young person having choice about what happened to them and stressed that no one option would be right for everyone. They also thought that careful consideration needed to be given to the availability of support and the way this was delivered especially if there were a mix of ages in a home.

**It could be a bad idea having loads of 16-18-year olds living together if there is not enough support. I know I would have enjoyed living with my friends at 16 but I don't think it would have been the best thing for me.** (57)

### Wider support networks

#### Birth parents and extended family



Care leavers told researchers that they had high levels of contact with family members after leaving care (26; 43; 80). Young people's view of what 'family' meant to them often included a wide range of family members beyond their birth families (who they saw as their 'closest family'); people who might be a potential source of support in life (80). Most frequently care leavers sought contact with their mother or siblings (26).

Re-connecting with parents or extended families after leaving care was potentially a time to re-negotiate past relationships or reconcile differences. In reality, care leavers reported mixed experiences of how things had gone. Some care leavers reported that things went well and that re-connecting had led to improved and strengthened relationships (26; 59). One study reported that young people with stronger family support had a better sense of confidence and self-esteem (26).

Other young people reported that their attempt to re-establish contact had led to negative or strained relationships. Some described disappointment, re-emergence of past difficulties or the emergence of new problems (26; 49). A few young people acknowledged that relationships with birth parents after leaving care left them feeling a renewed sense of rejection (49).

**Whilst you always want to have a good relationship... realistically it's not going to change ... I've just had to ... take a step back ... I barely even ring her... She's a complete nightmare.** (49)

**Seeing my mum, it was like, are you really mum? Like it gave me mixed emotions cos I love her but it's difficult because I don't want to show her too much affection for her to just drop it like she did before.** (16)

Some care leavers had made an active decision to withdraw from contact with their birth family due to the negative effect contact had on their mental health (49). Others did not know their birth family members or were uncertain about paternal identities. Some young people's relatives had died.

In one study, with a sample of nearly 600 older children in care and care leavers, the aspect of life care leavers were least happy with was their family relationships (31). Almost one third (30%; n=165), were 'unhappy' and nearly one in 10, 'very unhappy' with family relationships (31). These findings contrast with the general population for whom family was the domain that young people were most happy with. It is an area that is crucially important; happiness with family was the aspect most strongly associated with overall well-being (15).

Support with family relationships is an area where some care leavers say more support would be welcome. Not all young people felt they had received the support they needed from professionals to facilitate relationships with birth family (26). A few said they had got practical help with birth family contacts such as with transport costs but not with emotional support (26). Young people thought that some professionals viewed relationships with their birth family less positively than they did (43).

**Social workers should be made to prioritise contact – it may be a small thing to them but it's so important to us.** (18)

## Brothers and sisters



Maintaining and developing relationships with brothers and sisters was also important for some young people. In one study, the most positive birth family relationships discussed in the interviews were relationships with siblings (46). Where the relationship was strong, siblings were an important source of mutual support in the process of leaving care (37; 49; 80).

**I'm very close to my brother, because we've been together through everything. That's definitely helped a lot I would say. It's a shame because other people might not have the same support, because they've left their families, left everything and they're just thrown into the darkness.** (37)

Care leavers said they didn't always see their brother(s) or sister(s) as much as they wanted because siblings lived in different parts of the country and it cost too much to visit them regularly.

**How am I meant to stay in contact with my sister? We've got different social workers [in different areas of the country] ... how are we going to be able to afford to travel ... there's nothing about that in the pathway plan.** (83)

Other young people had more difficult sibling dynamics and fractured relationships sometimes due to separate placements and risk concerns.

**All my brothers and sisters have been in foster care... Our relationship is kind of awkward because we don't really know each other.** (49)



***I grieved for my wee brothers. I still grieve for my wee brothers. I mean my wee brother is 22 but I still haven't got over the loss.*** (42)

## Friends



Friendships were important to young people. In one study it was the area care leavers said they were most happy with (90%, n=506 'happy' or 'very happy' with their friendships) (31). For some, friendship offered both practical solutions as well as emotional support (59). Friends could help reduce social isolation (26).

***I will be able to manage, and if I do need help, I will get it from friends and family.*** (19)

However, care leavers experienced high levels of disruption to their friendships and other social networks (43). Losing contact with friends had been one of the negative experiences associated with care or leaving care (18).

***Being moved away from home area meant lost friendships. Placements should always be near to where young people originate so it's easier to keep in touch with the people who matter to you.*** (18)

Findings from research with care leavers found that some had experienced difficulties in meeting new people and finding support networks. Negative past experiences could impact upon young people's ability to form and maintain friendships, with issues related to trust and low self-esteem (49).

***I have such little confidence. I have been told that so much. But I don't know how to gain it... I am very self-conscious.*** (49)

At times care leavers felt disparities between themselves and their peers and said they felt different to their friends. For example, they described how they lived in a much more adult world compared to their peers who had not been in care (3).

***... five close friends from school, they've grown up with me through my different families, it's nice to have them but only problem is that none of them been in care so sometimes when you're down about stuff it's hard to relate to them. I only have one friend who lives on their own who is older than me, all my other friends live with their parents, I feel like, oh my god, is this honestly just me.*** (3)

***All the other students in my class were young – the same age as me but they were going home to their families and like it was harsh because I had to realise that five pounds was no longer money for going to the coffee shop, it was electric money and I had a whole different meaning to life and it was so fast.*** (46)

***I had plenty of friends at school and have never really had a problem making them. I didn't like to tell anyone I was in care, maybe if I did tell people then I might have found making friends harder.*** (58)



## Partners



Living with a partner could reduce loneliness and provide emotional support (26).

*My boyfriend supports me by encouraging [me] that I should always think positive ... my boyfriend's family support me because my own family does not. (31)*

But other care leavers described their relationship with their partner as volatile. A relationship breakdown for a few had led to the loss of their home (26). Several young people in one study had experienced abusive or manipulative relationships with their partners (49).

## Opportunities to meet other care leavers



Participants in some studies described the value they placed on spending time with other care leavers whom they felt were more likely to understand their perspectives and who were easier to relate to (13; 73). Sometimes care leavers met as part of a care leaver forum or at social events. Occasionally care leavers described more formal models such as peer mentoring schemes (30).

*Care leavers should be employed to support young people in the care system and train professionals. (13)*

*... people who live in care have more of an insight into what it's been like in care. I reckon that counts for a lot. (73)*

*I found out everything from either being in [participation project] or from my friend who also comes to [participation project], and who's also in care. (51)*

*I get better opportunities compared with friends of mine. I have been involved in many activities such as being involved in a youth council. I have been able to travel to London as part of a group I was involved in. (18)*



## LIFE AS A CARE LEAVER

Young people discussed issues that were directly associated with being a care leaver. A range of themes emerged from the research. A prominent theme was care leavers' views on their identity and personal history. At times this was intertwined with stigma associated with coming from a care background and some young people described discrimination they had experienced. Young people placed high value on their views being listened to and supported, but there were mixed experiences in how much young people were involved in decision-making both on an individual and at a collective level.

### Identity and perception

#### Identity



Young people emphasised that culture and identity were important to them, but not always straightforward (13). Participants in one study described confusion over their status as a 'care leaver' - on the one hand, they were told they were leaving care, whilst at the same time they kept in contact with services for several years after the label 'care leaver' had been introduced (43).

*I was always called a care leaver from the age of 16 upwards anyway, so it was like, well, so what am I? I'm a care leaver all between 16 and 21 but I'm still in care, so how come I'm a care leaver?* (43)

Past experiences shaped how care leavers understood their identity (16). A review of what was important to children in care and care leavers found that a sense of identity was compromised by the lack of a sense of belonging (25).

*The thing about being in care is it doesn't matter even if you have the greatest [foster] family in the world, if you don't know where you're from, who you are, you always have that sense of loneliness and being on your own ... you need to be able to feel that you belong and that people are there for you.* (83)

#### Understanding personal history



Some young people felt strongly that the care system had not sufficiently equipped them with an understanding of their background and personal history.

*... even though in the care system there's all this anti-discrimination and equal rights policies and all that, but even though that's in effect, people I don't think within the social services really know how to implement that into the young person's life. I mean all right you might put a picture of a black person up on the wall but that isn't giving you your roots.* (7)

Making sense of the past and understanding family identity could be challenging for care leavers (49). Young people said they wanted support to help them understand and connect with their personal history when and if they wanted to (13; 32).

*It's important to know your first words, your birth weight, what time you were born ... many a time I've thought 'what time was I born?'. When you don't know it's hard. I could wake up at that time and think 'I was born at that time'.* (13)

Care leavers generally felt it was important for them to have information about their past to help them understand the reasons for their entry to care and their experiences while in care (49).

*I still struggle with childhood issues... I sort of haven't got over them but I've learned to live with them... I've asked the social worker and she's kind of explained stuff that I didn't really know from early on ... My relationship now with my parents ... is still difficult.* (49)

## Access to records



Accessing their care files was seen by some care leavers as a way to help them understand what had happened in their past. Some care leavers who wanted to access their care information said this was because they wanted answers to the questions they had and needed to fill in the gaps in their life (39).

Around half of respondents in one study of adult care leavers across a wide age spectrum had either accessed their records, or were in the process of doing so (32). Previous research found the average age for accessing records was approximately 35 years old (32).

*I've waited years and years to get my file. When you read your file, you have to be at the right stage and have someone supporting you. (13)*

*You have lots of questions - it doesn't prepare you for the reality of reading your file. (13)*

*I began to read and re-read the story of my life ... In reading this material I once again keenly felt those feelings of isolation and abandonment that had ruined my childhood ... Re-connecting with such awful feelings hit me hard. They will stay with me for a long time. (39)*

## Stigma



Young people said a negative aspect of having a care background was being labelled or judged for being in care and a care leaver (18; 63; 73). Negative stereotypes and the stigmatisation of care leavers concerned many young people.

*What I've heard from different police officers when I've been arrested, it's like, 'you're a kid in care, you're never [going to] get out of this way of life. You're in care, kids in care are always on drugs, kids in care always make themselves unsafe, kids in care always self-harm'. So, they sort of put a title on kids in care like they're something bad. (11)*

Some young people said they had experienced discrimination because of being a care leaver:

*Sadly, my learning was hindered by the negative stereotypes of certain teachers in school and the continued bullying from my peers. It may have benefited me to go to a new school with a fresh start where the students did not know my past. (58)*

A common worry care leavers had was that other people might treat them differently from other young people if they knew they were from care, and that this could lead to prejudice, for example in getting a job or accommodation (19; 37).

*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. (49)*

***I used to live next to a shop and as soon as they found out that one of the young people that was coming in was from a care home, they used to ban them from the shop because they thought they were going to steal. (63)***

Young people thought that the term 'care leaver' was not well understood by most of the general population. It was a term that could attract negative judgements from others (18; 44; 49). In one survey, half of the care leavers who responded reported that they 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' tried to keep it a secret that they were in care (18).

***Sometimes... you don't really want people to know you're in foster care because some people just judge you, they don't really know why people are in foster care, they think that 'oh maybe you are a bad person' or like your family doesn't want you. (51)***

***Every time you tell people you are a care leaver they always want to know why you were in care. (18)***

Some care leavers felt a deep sense of injustice about being negatively labelled (49).

***They seem to tar us all with the same brush. They all think because we were in care that we're causing trouble... but I think people need to change their view ... They need to remember that it wasn't necessarily their fault ... As soon as you say to somebody 'I was in care', they look at you funny as if 'Oh we don't want her here' sort of thing. But I don't let it get to me now because I don't really care who knows anymore. It's not something I should be ashamed of... It's kind of got to the point where I don't care what they think, whether they're holding judgement or not. (51)***

Other young people saw leaving care as an opportunity to put the past behind them, and to distance themselves and to 'start again', 'free from stigma' or 'not be tarnished with the brush of being in care' (30).

## **Making plans and taking decisions**

### **Supporting care leavers with planning and decision-making**



Care leavers are entitled to ongoing support services from their local authorities. Pathway planning is the formal process through which care leavers' support needs are identified and plans made to support those needs (20; 21).

***I didn't really know what a pathway plan was or what it was supposed to do. I thought it was something that we just had to fill out in meetings. I didn't really understand what impact this pathway plan had or could do. I realise now it's actually quite a valuable piece of paper. (37)***

Young people's views should be central to pathway planning. Some care leavers described circumstances where their workers had not included them in planning and decisions (63). Some young people explained their views were not listened to, or simply not asked for, during pathway planning.

On occasion, some care leavers felt that their former carers and workers dominated decisions about their future. This left them with limited opportunities to take an active role in the planning process (49). As a result, some care leavers saw the pathway planning process as unnecessary, and experienced it variously as patronising, confusing or stressful (35; 43; 49; 58).

Some care leavers felt a degree of powerlessness in the decisions about their moves and transition (41; 48).

***I didn't know I had a pathway plan and only found out several weeks ago but this was already after my leaving care social worker stopped working with me. (34)***

**It's just people talking about me.** (31)

**They need to obviously listen to the young person ... I wasn't asked once in that meeting. Everybody was talking amongst. There must have been about six or seven people in that meeting ... There were staff members, key workers ... So, there was all them and they were all making decisions about me and me sitting there listening.** (49)

When pathway planning was described in positive terms it had helped young people to reflect, set targets and kept plans on track (31). Most young people (82%) in one study said they were generally happy with the amount of say they had in their pathway plan (31).

**About planning for the future. Helps set out future and provide help if needed.** (31)

**Because it direct[s] me to the path of achievements - it sets clear aims and objectives for me as to what I want in life.** (31)

In contrast, young people who did not find pathway planning useful commented on a lack of connection to their lives (31; 37). Young people in one small scale study revealed that they strongly disliked the very idea of planning for their lives (beyond day-to-day planning) and were generally deeply unenthusiastic about it (48).

**It is quite a ridiculous thing 'Cos to sit and plan about what is going to happen when it might never happen ... especially when leaving care... Stuff happens when it happens ... There are lots of things you just can't plan for.** (49)

**Because what's the point, I'm going to do my own thing anyway.** (31)

**My pathway plan is a waste of paper, waste of a tree. They may as well let the tree live longer.** (34)

Both young people and social workers in one study expressed dissatisfaction with the pathway planning process; they said it took too long and was repetitive (49). Many care leavers thought there was scope to improve pathway planning so that it helped them more effectively.

**I think they need to get with the times. Technology is so advanced – why are they still writing it on paper?** (58)

## Inclusion in service development



Some care leavers wanted to have a say in how their local authority worked and wanted to work with services to improve the quality of their support to care leavers. Some care leavers explained they got involved in recruiting or training new staff. A few had taken on roles as 'young inspectors' to help quality assure commissioning and delivery of accommodation provision (30).

**Start listening to the people you are meant to be helping ... management need to be involved more, stop sitting behind a desk.** (30)

**Yes, I feel I was heard but sometimes felt like they were just listening ... instead of understanding where I came from and putting themselves in my shoes.** (30)

Young people need to feel that they are fully informed and involved in the decisions which affect their lives and the services they receive. In one survey of children in care and care leavers, the most common comment in response to 'what would make care better?' was that young people needed to be listened to (14). In another study, most young people (77%) felt that their views were being heard and considered at least some of the time (30). However, researchers who examined care leavers' interviews found that whilst young people tended to describe feeling central to the planning of their transitions, analysis of their narratives almost always described adult-led transitions. Some young people said they were not able to participate in or were not even informed about important decisions (51).

Whilst generally young people wanted and looked forward to being more autonomous, once they had left care and made decisions for themselves, some recognised this was a daunting prospect.

**All your life ... decisions have been made on your behalf so now that you've got to suddenly become an adult and make decisions yourself. You think, am I making the right decision or can I even make a decision, you can doubt yourself.** (51)

## Knowing your rights



Care leavers were not always clear about the things they were entitled to and wanted better information about their rights (1; 18; 25; 33; 34). It was also important to them that there was transparency and equity in processes so that they were treated fairly and fully understood what was happening, as this care leaver explains in relation to their 'setting up home grant':

**Some things I am purchasing are coming out of the allowance which I am not being told about. Had I known I would have saved it for when I move out properly.** (34)

In one study, nearly two-thirds (64%) of care leavers said they did not have enough information about their entitlements (18). In another survey (33) only a minority (17%) of care leavers felt that they had all the information they needed, though the proportion reporting this had increased (32%) when the issue was revisited one year later (34).

**They try and put you off finding out what you are entitled to.** (18)

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF EARLY ADULTHOOD

Securing the right place to live, being satisfied with their work or education and enjoying free time were major areas of life that care leavers talked about. Young people emphasised the importance of feeling safe in their homes and neighbourhoods and having good quality housing. They were often keen to talk about the goals and aspirations they had and how they were doing in terms of achieving these.

### Establishing a home

Research with care leavers has shown that housing is a key contributor to well-being during transition (9; 51). Young people who were living in suitable housing felt they were more able to cope and had a positive sense of mental well-being (26).

### Finding the right place to live



Across studies young people talked about the importance of living in a place that was right for them and the need to have good accommodation. However, many said there were very few options available to them when choosing where to live after leaving care (7; 10; 37).

*I think I was just dropped into a flat on my own. I didn't get to choose the flat. I felt I was just dumped and not really prepared, and that is a quite common experience.* (10)

One care leaver valued the opportunity to view potential accommodation in advance and to decide which place was suitable for them:

*She [worker] looked at the top two semi-independent living places, places in [town] and then obviously [current supported placement] as well, and she took me to the other two and she took me there, she let me decide where I went.* (64)

One recent project created the first housing co-operative for care leavers (29). It aimed to give young people more control in their transitions to independent living and ensure they had greater involvement and choice. An evaluation which included young people's views showed that care leavers valued the chance to 'create their own home to be proud of'. A strong message from young people was that the project also gave them opportunities to make friends and create a supportive social network.

*It's like not ... being lonely... I think [social worker's] concern was me being on my own, I wouldn't have anyone there, but this project means that I can still be part of a group of people and I won't always be on my own.* (29)

### Safety and quality of housing



Care leavers in several studies had experienced unsafe or poor-quality accommodation (1; 2; 37). Examples of inadequate conditions included broken equipment, damp conditions and environmental health problems (9; 10; 75; 49). The quality of accommodation, fixtures and fittings affected young people's level of satisfaction (31). These young people reflected on the housing conditions they had experienced as a care leaver and commented:

*I need more money... and a house that works ... The fire doesn't work. The heating doesn't work ... The field mice ... are in and out of everybody's flats. I had pest control out two times and they just keep coming back... and the neighbours are nuts.* (49)

*This is the only flat which has been decorated to look homely and I have no infestations in this flat, no holes in walls etc. which I have previously experienced in old flats and nothing was done.* (5)



**It is horribly decorated – the bathroom is stinking; the whole place is stinking. It needs re-decorating. My window frame is broken so I can't close it and it's really cold.** (5)

Care leavers did not always feel empowered to address their poor housing conditions:

**I wouldn't have the best confidence going to my landlord and necessarily asking to get some maintenance done in the house. I don't want to be annoying. That's my type of mind-set.** (49)

Feeling safe and secure in their home was key to young people feeling that their home was a good place to be (49; 55).

**The security, there's no lock on the front entry of my block of flats.** (5)

**When I was in the hostel I was around all these young people who had all these issues. I felt like it was putting me at risk living there.** (37)

**This one was on a main high street and in quite a rough area that's notorious for a lot of crime to happen at night time. The front door entrance was down an alleyway with no light, so I found this quite nerve-wracking sometimes.** (37)

## Neighbourhoods



Care leavers wanted to live in a safe neighbourhood. For young people, this meant living in a 'good location' where neighbours were 'friendly' and they did not feel compromised by the behaviour of other tenants. They stressed it was important that their local area felt '*relatively crime-free*' and they were not in '*rough areas*', where there was drug dealing or sex workers (5; 14; 37; 38; 55).

**It is quiet and the neighbours make an effort to be friendly and make you feel a part of the community.** (5)

**The police are always up here. There is always trouble where I live.** (5)

**It was kind of a halfway house, but not a halfway house because I'm not a criminal ... So, when I moved in, there was like five young people under 18 and two over 35 ... it was a strange, strange place. Another person moved in that had just come out of jail and they decided that they weren't really going to try to change their ways and started selling drugs from there and using my name to buy lots of equipment, and I'm blacklisted because of it. It wasn't a good place.** (7)

Living in an unsafe area could be particularly stressful and pose additional problems for some groups of care leavers such as parents: '*the violence, drugs and my son can't go out to play*' (5).

The importance of the physical location of their accommodation and proximity to amenities and services including shops, educational and leisure facilities was also talked about by young people (31; 77).

**Near to everything I need e.g. sports centre and shops. Friendly neighbours. Secure. Enough space to feel good and room to study.** (5)

Most young people said they had received support in finding accommodation (82). Despite this some young people had struggled to maintain tenancies and found it difficult to cope with limited skills for managing a home (49).

**Even in my own flat, I still don't feel at home. I don't think I've ever felt like I have a home.** (13)

Some care leavers had experienced homelessness after leaving care; young people talked about the impact this had had on them:

**Think of it (sofa surfing) as you're living in a place where you're uncertain whether you're going to be there the next day or not so you couldn't focus on anything else... Probably the most precious thing a human can have is certainty, where I can guarantee myself to wake up the next day in the same bed. So that was not there, cos where are we going to go, what's next, what's gonna happen.** (37)

Generally, compared to children still in care, care leavers reported they were less satisfied with their accommodation and local area, and felt less safe and secure (31).

## Achieving goals

### Access to education, employment and training



Care leavers in many studies identified the importance of being in education or work (2a; 59). They described that this was for both practical and emotional reasons. Education or employment could provide a source of income and stability but also an alternative identity.

**When I got a job, my whole life changed. Just going to work opened my eyes and made me realise that I wanted to be someone. Now I'm going to college and I'm a bit more grown up. I'm more confident and I know what I want to do. Back then, I didn't know what I was doing, so I stuck in a dead-end job. But I admit that even though it was a dead-end job, I had some good experiences there.** (2)

Several barriers to educational or employment pathways were identified by young people, including disrupted and/or negative school experiences; low self-esteem and confidence and changes in circumstances such as bereavement, family problems or becoming a parent (31, 36; 49; 28; 60).

**After the rent, the council tax and oyster, there's nothing left... I want to do [the apprenticeship] because of the opportunity, but it means home life's not good.** (83)

Care leavers' participation in further education or work was promoted by: a personal drive to succeed, being motivated by others, having the right information and support, and opportunities to experience work or college.





*I chose to do this course, I did it myself, I went to college on my own and enrolled ... it is the person who has to be motivated and want to do it otherwise social services cannot help. (31)*

*For me I wanted to do that, I didn't want to be different and everyone else going to university and going to college and I didn't want to be the 'Leaving Care girl' who didn't do it. I wanted to be the girl who did do it. And I know you don't do that in other things but I think in that kind of context you kind of sometimes want to. You want to fit in a bit more. (31)*

*Reading about hairdressing isn't much fun. If you could go out and see more stuff ... that would've made me more intrigued. (28)*

When young people were asked what their best achievement to date had been, education engagement or success was the most common answer in one study (31). This was particularly evident when young people felt they had overcome difficulties to succeed.

*I was on a mission ... for a better life. I've been taken out from a situation that was really bad and I'm here... but I thought you know what I'm going to give my best in education and I'm going to try and make something good out of myself. (16)*

*I have just come to a point where I want more from life, and I think I'm going to get that in the next six months. I'm going to go back to college and I'm going to make a better life for myself. (2a)*

Research has found that generally, barriers and facilitators to participation in education and training are often closely related (31). For example, some young people said access to support enabled participation, others said a lack of support proved a barrier for them.

*I want to gain qualifications within social services to become a social worker. (60)*

## Enjoying free time



Young people in a few studies discussed the social and leisure activities they enjoyed including spending time with friends, sport and physical exercise, music, gaming and bowling (26; 49). Care leavers identified time, money and motivation as barriers to maintaining and pursuing activities and hobbies since leaving care (26).

In one study, the majority of the 32 care leavers interviewed were engaged in a wide range of social and leisure activities; the most popular activity was sport (47). Having things to do that they enjoyed had facilitated access to social opportunities and friendship networks. Taking part in these activities could also boost confidence. Other activities young people mentioned were arts-based or involved volunteering.

*I spent a lot of time drinking and experimenting with drugs and I wasn't that happy. And then I just decided that like it wasn't really fun and I didn't really want to be involved in that stuff ... dancing kind of got me through all that because like when I stopped drinking and stuff a lot of friends didn't want to be around me anymore ... dancing's pretty much all I have. If I didn't do dance I don't really know what I'd do. (47)*

## Digital communication



One exploratory study interviewed care leavers about their use of digital media (defined as 'any use of a mobile phone or the Internet for any purpose') (69). Care leavers' experiences appeared to be not markedly more negative than those of young people who did not have a care background. Those taking part in the research were keen to emphasise that they had other social activities, not just online interactions (69).

*... The Internet it's like a big part of my social life is there because usually when I switch the computer on it's like right MSN, check my emails, Facebook to see what's going on.* (69)

## Being healthy



In several studies young people have said that the experience of leaving care had an adverse effect on their general health and some experienced a rise in mental health problems after leaving care (26; 27; 52).

*I don't think I had any health needs when I came out of care, 'cos my depression happened after, well actually it didn't ... um, I guess it happened when I moved into my own place, and I was alone, I had to deal with it.* (52)

Despite the risk that health could deteriorate after leaving care, health was not a top priority identified by the care leavers (n=24) who participated in one research project. When these young people were asked to map out the services that were important to them during transition, health services were largely missing from their suggestions (51). Young people felt that housing, financial support and education took priority.

This viewpoint is reflected in other research which identifies that leaving care projects often focus primarily on employment and housing issues rather than prioritising the mental health and well-being needs of young people (71).

Responding to the health issues (including mental health) faced by care leavers is central to their future prosperity, but evidence from care leavers suggested that their needs can remain unaddressed (63).

*I suffered really badly with depression. I ended up in hospital after an overdose. I've really suffered with isolation and loneliness.* (37)

One study focused on young people's views of their mental health (73). It was important to young people to be able to exercise choice and control when receiving professional support. Respectful treatment of personal data and information alongside confidentiality was also key to young people (73).

Young people had strong views about what kind of health (including mental health) services they wanted. Services needed to be user-friendly, accessible, flexible and discreet. Some young people noted that they would welcome being able to consult these services without the knowledge of their care staff. Many children in care and care leavers stated that they felt angry at the failure of health professionals to respect the confidentiality of their health information (53).

## CARE LEAVERS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

It is important to include the views of different groups of care leavers, such as disabled young people, young parents, those in custody and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, as their experiences reinforce the need for flexible and responsive services which meet different young people's needs.

### Vulnerability to abuse



International research shows a high proportion of young people were subject to physical and sexual abuse within a short period of leaving care (59).

Vulnerability of care leavers to negative peer influence, abuse in the community and financial or sexual exploitation after leaving care was evident from the interviews with young people in a few studies (37; 38; 49).

*A fella ... that lives upstairs, his electric wasn't working so I let him stay on the sofa and he just hasn't left and I'm just too nice a person to tell him to 'Get to f\*\*\*'. And then my girlfriend is living with me too and I don't think it's doing our relationship any good... I need my own space. (49)*

*I took on a lot of bad relationships over that time. I had my own flat, I let people abuse that fact as well because I thought it was the cool thing to do to have parties all the time and have friends live there. (37)*

*Well, before I went into care I didn't really used to smoke skunk, but the first time when I went into care I started smoking skunk and went onto whiz and that ... It was because all the people around me were doing it, I didn't want to do it but because I went into care, I had a lot of depression, so I just wanted something to get rid of it. (49)*

Experiences of bullying or discriminatory treatment could negatively affect care leavers' self-esteem which potentially meant young people were more socially isolated due to fears of harassment or abuse (49).

*Care leavers are usually more vulnerable and placing me above him in a flat had a massive impact on my mental health because he was bullying me so much. A lot of people in social housing can be vulnerable and have health issues. (37)*

At times, young people did not always agree when others, such as their workers, had concerns about their circumstances and vulnerability (49).

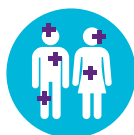
*They think you are putting yourself at risk ... of sexual exploitation... and they get people lifted and all ... Sometimes I take herbal [legal highs] ... but you feel like a villain... You walk to the shop and you get accused of prostituting yourself for herbal. (37)*

Care leavers and/or those with care experience feature prominently in statistics of sexual exploitation and adult sex workers (17; 40). Nine care leavers who took part in a small-scale study of sexual exploitation felt that people took advantage of their vulnerability (40).

*I was SO lonely at the time, nobody was listening to me or anything like that and I think part of me was like sod it, and that's why, stuff started and I ended up in trouble. (40)*

*I never got nothing, no support, no money, so I had to turn to the game ... because of the life I've been through, it's all I could turn to. (17)*

## Disabled young people



A small number of studies included the views of disabled care leavers. In a study of care leavers with mental health problems or disabilities, young people reported feeling inadequately prepared for living independently and described their leaving care experience as a sudden change from being dependent on carers or residential staff to having to rely on themselves (49).

*Pathway plans are still very childish ... Make it more grown up because they seem to forget it's adults they are dealing with ... Stop using cartoons that a pre-schooler would use on a document ... Don't treat them like children ... because I have had social workers that will speak down to me like I am a child just because I have got a mental disability. And I am sitting there and I said to them 'I am coming 20. I'm not five'. (49)*

Many disabled young people had a desire to feel the same as non-disabled people in society and were keen to achieve independence and make self-determined choices about their lives.

Young people said they experienced difficulties in pursuing hobbies; hampered by mental health and disability related needs, limited independence, bullying and risk aversion (49).

*When I was diagnosed it was always everything bad... It was like 'you can't do this, you can't do that'. 'You'll not understand this, you'll not understand that'... 'You won't understand jokes unless they're very very simple'... 'You won't understand people's facial expressions' ... There was never a positive. (49)*

In another study of disabled care leavers, the issues that were most important to the young people were ones common across studies: family contact, friends, accommodation, information, access to education and employment, sexuality, health, independence skills and money (62).

## Young parents



Some care leavers become parents in the early years after leaving care; for example, in one study just over a quarter (26%) had, or were expecting, a child (26). Research looking specifically at the views and experiences of young women who become parents found that their pregnancy was not always planned (50). Young parents interviewed in a range of studies described many of their positive experiences; having a child brought enjoyment and pride to their lives (8; 26). At times, it was described as a turning point which led to a change in their lives that, at times, had previously been unsettled (8).

*I love everything about it ... I couldn't live without her. (26)*

*... when I had my daughter ... that was the happiest moment of my life ... when I'm down I just look at her and think that's my daughter, she's the only thing I've got. I know she can't understand anything but I talk to her. Now I can say I've got her as a family, the closest thing because I've lost my mum, my dad and all my sisters and brothers, they don't live here, most of them moved to (name of country) now. She's the only flesh and blood I've got. She's the only thing I'm happy about. (8)*

Some young women talked about their hesitations and fears about their ability to parent. Something they felt, they only had their birth family as a negative model and expressed a desire to be better parents than their own parents had been.

*... cos I don't want to be like my mum. I want to give my daughter what I never had. I want to be the mum that I wanted when I was little. But there's one thing that does scare me, I'm scared I'm going to try and live my life through her eyes ... I want to get her all the nice things, and I'm scared I'm going to sort of like push her to be what I want her to be and I want her to be herself and who she is and let her grow. (8)*

Support networks were critical in terms of providing help with child-care and practical and emotional support.

*My sister helped me out a lot when he was born... I didn't have a clue ... She let me live with her... She just helped me out a lot. And then I finally got the hang of it myself ... and the course I'm doing is brilliant. It helps me. He goes to a wee crèche and I just talk about his behaviour and how to deal with it and his diet and all that. It's good... It's all wee girls that have wee babies too and they were in care. (49)*

Young people acknowledged that they could find the new responsibilities challenging and described some of the difficulties they encountered (26).

Some felt their parenting was more closely observed than that of their peers; they expressed that they had sometimes been unfairly pre-judged as parents because of their own care history and at times their age (49). Such stigmatisation left young people feeling they had to work harder than other parents to show their parenting capabilities. Some young people avoided asking for help from services due to negative experiences.

*The social workers assumed I was going to be like my parents which I am not... I have never done anything wrong. It is just because I have a social worker myself... My son's first social worker ... told me to give him up for adoption ... because I was too young to be a dad... They were not going to give me the chance, I had to fight for that... I think her problem was she didn't think fellas could raise kids. (49)*

*They [social services] think that because of our past we are going to do that to our children ... She was in care, she's this and she's that... And it's not like that. We want a better life for our children than what we have been through... I'm trying to be a good mummy but it's like they're not letting me be ... They just be involved straight away and they don't give you a chance... They scare me. I don't want my child took off me ... It's like they're ruling my life ... I cracked up the last time they were out... then they realised then what they were doing to me. (49)*

Some care leavers who were parents did not live with their children:

*My child was adopted, not my choice. (18)*

*Young mums are not being given the choice of whether they want to keep their kid. (18)*

*Money is nothing – I don't want compensation, I want my kid back. (18)*

***My kids are going through the same thing. History is repeating itself.*** (18)

There was limited research on the experiences of care leavers who were young fathers. One study interviewed 16 young men. Commonly they described they had felt 'shock' when they found out they were to become a parent. Most of the young men expressed strong and positive feelings towards their child and they associated becoming a father with the love and enjoyment they got from their child(/ren) (79).

***[I enjoy] just seeing my daughter growing up... playing with her, taking her to the park – to tell you the truth I'm a big kid at heart.*** (79)

Some reflected that having a baby had 'calmed down' their behaviour. A number in the study described attempting to learn more about parenting, as this young man explains:

***I read books and watched videos about [bringing up children], but it was more hit and miss. You find out about what's best for your child. You learn by mistakes and purely by intuition. Being caring emotionally was not inherited from my family.*** (79)

However, the research identified a '*lack of fit between the spoken desire expressed by some young fathers interviewed to live up to contemporary ideals of fatherhood, and the lived reality of often poor or non-existent relationships with their children*'. (79). Difficulties in maintaining their role as a father included access to their children (when estranged from their partner), drug use, housing problems, and contact with criminal justice services. Many of those interviewed had concerns about financially supporting their child.

***I was on the streets at a time, when me and my 'ex' were talking [getting on OK]. And she was going to offer me to have the kids every couple of weeks... But I only had the hostel or night shelter. They won't give me a council property so that I can have my kids. It's a catch 22 situation with the government... If you are young, single and a father you don't get anything.*** (79)

Lots of those taking part in the study explained they found it difficult to trust others which could affect their relationships and their access to support.

***She (baby's mother) is hard-headed. I want to see my son... she'll let me, but make it awkward ... I can't take the hassle... I have enough problems, so I will probably just leave it.*** (79)

## Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people



Asylum-seeking young people may be particularly vulnerable to negative stereotyping and racism (7).

***I'm settled in the community, but it's just the racial abuse that I get which I think can never make me settle properly. There are some things in life which are unchangeable.*** (7)

There can be specific issues in pathway planning with unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people due to a complicated asylum seeking decision-making process, with uncertainty causing young people to worry about the future (81). This young person spoke about the anxiety they felt, not knowing what was going to happen with their asylum application:

*It's one of the most stressful things ever – going to bed, not knowing if there is a letter going to come in the morning saying you need to leave the country. It's always at the back of your mind.* (83)

## Young people in contact with the criminal justice system



Research has previously shown that children with care experience are over-represented in prisons and the criminal justice system (45). Young people's views on whether being in care might contribute to the likelihood of offending were diverse and often complex or contradictory. Young people in care said that in their view the following factors were likely to be influential in terms of the chances of someone in care offending:

- The contact(s) they had (or did not have) with birth families;
- The quality of their relationships with workers and carers;
- The amount of stability they had experienced; and
- The exposure to peer pressure.

*I just think that being in care, yeah, is too controlled ... it's like there's no freedom so some of the young kids here probably even take the piss on purpose, try and break the law on purpose because they feel like they've got no freedom ... they have to do bad things to get their speech across because when they talk no-one's listening to them, so they feel like they need to do bad things for people to hear them ... it's probably why young people in care do more bad things than people generally.* (45)

*I feel like maybe if social services had not dumped me at the age of 16 and expect me to stand on my own two feet as a child, maybe I could of made different choices.* (61)

Looking at the views and experiences of young people in custody showed that not all of them had been visited by their worker, but those who had been generally found it useful.

*I'm just so happy to see someone! I can't stop smiling when my social worker is here because I don't get any other visits and it's just nice to keep in touch with the outside world.* (45)

In contrast, this young person had not had visits from their worker whilst in custody which left them uncertain about their future.

*I haven't had any [visits]. I would like to see [my social worker] because I would like to be kept up to date with what's going on outside. I don't know what is happening.* (45)

The major concern for care leavers in custody in one study was uncertainty of what would happen once they were released; they were worried about what support would be available, where they would live, and who would collect them (45).

*I have lots of time in here to worry about what will happen when I leave.* (45)

*My main worry is that I still have so many questions like 'will I get a job now that I've been in prison? What's it going to be like out there?'* (45)

## LIMITATIONS OF THE REVIEW

**In this review, we have looked at evidence sources that speak from young people's perspectives. Given the large volume of research on care leavers it is likely we have missed some individual research studies. At times it was difficult to quantify the number and proportions of young people reporting issues and experiences. We have attempted to strike a balance; we have included views that were common across studies, whilst not excluding minority viewpoints from those who raised individual issues as all views are valid and help us understand what is important to young people in their transitions from care.**

## CONCLUSIONS

**We believe young people with direct experience of leaving care are best placed to evaluate and comment on the care system and how it has worked for them. This rapid review sought to place their voices at the forefront of our development work on well-being and care leavers.**

We have heard their eloquent views on their experiences of leaving care; we have heard them say they had faced a sudden exit for which they often felt unprepared. Many reported they were not ready for such a big move and approached it with trepidation. Others eagerly looked forward to it.

Once they had left care significant issues could arise in relation to financial security and availability of emotional support. Some faced disruption to their support networks, being placed in poor quality accommodation and unsafe areas and a big problem for lots of care leavers was loneliness and isolation.

Several factors were identified that, from care leavers' points of view, contributed to better transitions. Essential to this was good relationships with the people that mattered to them, being supported in decisions and help with achieving what mattered to them whether it was education or enjoying their free time.

Looking across the review strongly reinforces the message that effective services must always start with, and continue to champion, the voice of young people.





## APPENDIX 1 - REVIEW APPROACH

**This rapid review of existing research examined the findings from research literature on care leavers' views of transitions to adulthood. Sources of evidence were only included if the young person's own views were presented by the authors. Policy documents were included if they contained young people's views. Quotes used throughout are from the young people interviewed or consulted in the various studies. The review is selective (not systematic); it included only research and reports based in the UK over a 15-year period between 2002 and 2017.**

Electronic databases were searched including Social Services Abstracts and Social Care online. In addition, websites of key research organisations were searched for relevant publications and the authors' own substantial collection of resources checked. Search terms included: 'care leaver'; 'leaving care'; 'transition to adulthood'. Abstracts and/or information about each study were scrutinised to ensure they included voice of young people and duplicates removed. In total 67 research reports, journal articles and books which included care leavers' views formed the basis for this review (see Appendix 2). In addition, a number of research reviews were included.

The sources of evidence reflecting the views of care leavers varied in the number of young people involved; the smallest number was 6 and largest 792. Table 1 gives an overview.

**Table 1 Sample sizes in reviewed evidence sources**

SAMPLE SIZE	FREQUENCY
1-10	10
11-20	12
21-50	12
51-100	10
101-500	8
501+	4

NB: total does not equal number of evidence sources used in review as some sources did not give number of young people included and some evidence sources were research reviews.

**Table 2 Information on how care leavers' views were elicited in studies included in review**

METHOD	FREQUENCY
Interview (face to face)	33
Questionnaire (online or paper)	18
Focus group	10
Consultation events e.g. voting session	4

NB: some studies used more than one method so numbers will not total the number of studies reviewed and some evidence sources did not include information on methodology

## APPENDIX 2 - DETAILS OF STUDIES INCLUDED IN REVIEW (Number of young people and methodology for eliciting young people's views)

NB. Research reviews not included in table

REFERENCE	METHODOLOGY	NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE
Access All Areas, 2015	9 care leaver participation groups	50
Action for Children, 2009	Interview with care leavers (as part of wider set of interviews)	n/a
Action for Children, 2014	Interviews	28
Adley, 2017	In-depth semi-structured interviews	6
Amaral, 2014	Interviews	27
ANV, 2005	Questionnaire (including online questionnaire)	271
Barn, 2005	Questionnaire & interviews (36 YP)	261
Barn, 2007	Self-completion questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus groups; questionnaires and 9 interviews	55 55
Barnardos, 2014a	Timeline interviews	20
Barnardos, 2014b	Interviews	62
Care Inquiry, 2013a	4 focus groups; online consultation; small number of one to one interviews	n/a
Children's Commissioner, 2015	Survey (18% of these care leavers)	2936
Children's Society, 2015	n/a	
Children's Society, 2016	Focus groups with care leavers	n/a
Colbridge, 2017	Semi-structured interviews with care leavers (all female)	8
Coram Voice, 2017	Online survey children in care (age 4-18)	611
Coy, 2008	Interviews	14
CRD, 2012a	Survey, discussion groups and voting sessions	308
CRD, 2012b	n/a	123
Devereux, 2014	Survey and interview	100
Dixon, 2004	Baseline interviews were conducted with young people on average 2-3 months after leaving care and were repeated at 9-10 months	106
Dixon, 2008	Interviews at 2 points in time (same as Dixon 2004)	106
Dixon, 2014	Survey of 27 care leavers; 3 focus groups were undertaken; 3 interviews	55
Dixon, 2017	Questionnaire; interviews; focus group	11
Dixon and Baker, 2016	Questionnaire	792

REFERENCE	METHODOLOGY	NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE
Dixon and Lee, 2015	Questionnaire administered during a face to face meeting with a peer researcher, some follow up with YP and focus group with YP to test out findings	579
Duncalf, 2010	Online questionnaire	310
Entitlements Inquiry, 2013	Various consultation activities inc. 31 care leavers in survey. Sample included children in care	324
Entitlements Inquiry, 2014	Various consultation activities. Sample included children in care	181
Gaskell, 2010	Interviews	10
Gibb, 2017	Surveys, monitoring forms and interviews with staff and young people	735; 31 interviews
Gill, 2017	Survey and case study interviews	87
Goddard, 2008	Postal questionnaires (70 responses), face-to-face interviews (30) and focus groups (two)	100
Hallett, 2016	Interviews	9
Hannon, 2010	Interviews and review of research	23
Happer, 2006	Interviews	32
Hiles, 2014	Focus group with care leavers (all male participants)	6
HMP, 2011	Interviews	12
Holland, 2010	n/a	16
Hollingworth, 2012	Interview with care leavers showed 'educational promise' (defined for the purposes of the research as having achieved at least one school leaving qualification); 27 of young people later interviewed for 2nd time 1 year	32
Hung, 2016	Interviews	9
Kelly, 2016	Semi-structured interview with each young person was carried out by a peer researcher and/or a professional researcher at three separate points over the course of the study (the mid-point mostly by telephone interview).	29
Knight, 2006	Interviews	20
Liabo, 2016	Participatory meetings (including pictorial methods) and individual interviews	24
Matthews, 2012	Interviews	9

## APPENDIX 2 - DETAILS OF STUDIES INCLUDED IN REVIEW

(Number of young people and methodology for eliciting young people's views)

REFERENCE	METHODOLOGY	NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE
NCAS, 2010	Survey	93
NCAS, 2012	Peer research interviews with those Staying Put and those not Staying Put	32
NCB, 2014	Online survey and focus group	98
NIACE, 2013	n/a	11
Prince's Trust, 2017	Young researchers gathered data from care leavers - a mixture of focus groups, face-to-face interviews, and online questionnaires	13
Prison Reform Trust, 2011	23 in-depth face to face interview	23
Rabiee, 2001	28 disabled care leavers involved in project	28
Rahilly, 2014	11 'life story' interviews with children in care and care leavers and a focus group with representatives from children in care councils	23
Ridley, 2013	Interviews; 35% of sample care leavers	169
Rogers, 2011	In-depth biographical interviews	5
Rohan, 2016	Various consultation activities	n/a
Sen, 2016	n/a	6
Simon, 2008	80 care leavers, and, for comparison, a group of 59 young people (termed 'in difficulty') who met research certain criteria of 'disadvantage'	80
Sims-Schouten, 2017	Semi-structured in-depth interviews	22
Sinclair, 2005	Postal survey of young people over 18 in independent living	49
Stanley, 2007	14 young people participated in 4 focus groups	14
Stein, 2006	Survey	107
Swain, 2016	Questionnaire for children in care and care leavers	179
Tyrer, 2005	In-depth semi-structured interviews using a pre-tested discussion tool (young fathers)	16
Wade, 2006	Interviews at 2 points in time (same study as Dixon 2004)	106
Wade and Dixon, 2006	Interviews at 2 points in time (same study as Dixon 2004)	106
Winterburn 2015	Interviews	n/a

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Funded by Coram-i via a DfE  
Social Care Innovation grant

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