

Impact & Evaluation

New Belongings Programme: Final evaluation report

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Executive Summary

The New Belongings Programme

New Belongings was a three-year programme delivered by Coram Voice to support local authorities to better engage their care leavers in service improvements using a co-production approach. With funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Segelman Trust, the New Belongings Programme ran between July 2019 and July 2022.

Based on an approach developed by the Care Leavers' Foundation, Coram Voice refined the New Belongings model to work with a smaller cohort of eight local authorities over a longer period. Though better engagement and involvement of young people as experts in their own experience, the programme aimed to encourage local authorities to improve their support for young care leavers.

The evaluation

Carried out by Coram's Impact and Evaluation team, the independent evaluation of the New Belongings Programme was supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The evaluation used a pre- and post- methodology, with data collected at baseline (in 2020) and again at the end of the programme (in 2022). Using a range of evaluation and programme tools, including the Baker and Dixon self-assessment for local authorities and the Your Life Beyond Care survey for care leavers, as well as interviews with local authorities, this final evaluation report on the progress made by local authorities in implementing the model and its impact.

The participating local authorities

The eight local authorities who participated in the New Belongings Programme varied markedly in terms of their geographical location, type of local authority, size of their leaving care population and Ofsted rating. However, the programme application process emphasised local authorities' and their senior managers' commitment to embed the voice of care leavers in their decision-making processes from the outset.

The participating local authorities were Oldham, Stockport, Coventry, Dorset, Hertfordshire, North Tyneside, North Yorkshire, and Wandsworth.

Local authorities' self-assessment

Developed specifically for local authorities to self-assess performance and evaluate their leaving care services across ten 'gold standard' areas, the Baker and Dixon 'leaving care services self-assessment' also helped local authorities identify good practice and areas for development. All eight local authorities completed the assessment at baseline and again at follow-up.

All but one local authority improved their self-assessment score between baseline and follow-up, suggesting that performance had improved for the majority of participating local authorities during the programme.

Your Life Beyond Care survey

Care leavers in the eight local authorities completed the Your Life Beyond Care survey at baseline in 2020 (n=1,258) and again at follow-up in 2022 (n=1,233) – giving a response rate of 50% and 45% respectively.

When participating local authorities distributed the Your Life Beyond Care survey to care leavers at the beginning of the Covid pandemic in 2020, many expressed concerns about whether the findings would be an accurate or fair representation of how care leavers were feeling or how local authorities were doing, given the unprecedented challenges everyone was facing. However, contrary to expectations the baseline findings were remarkably similar or better compared to the national pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample of care leavers in 21 local authorities (n= 1,804).¹

The findings from the 2022 follow-up survey presented in this report, show that many, but not all, slight improvements seen in 2020, have reverted to pre-pandemic levels or even got slightly worse. In 2022, too many care leavers are still feeling lonely, stressed and anxious, or are struggling financially.

While these are somewhat disappointing findings, for the New Belongings Programme, and for the participating local authorities that have worked incredibly hard to make improvements for their care leavers, the post-pandemic context of pressure on support services highlights the ongoing challenges for individual local authorities and for the sector as a whole.

Local authority feedback on New Belongings

At the end of the programme, it is clear that local authorities have utilised the New Belongings Programme in different ways, depending on where they were in their co-production journey. Overall, all eight local authorities have stayed engaged throughout the programme and all have used the programme to make positive changes in their area for young care leavers.

Feedback from local authority leads show that local authorities highly valued the New Belongings model and its evidence-based approach. The two New Belongings tools – the self-assessment, and especially the Your Life Beyond Care survey – provided a richness and depth to their understanding of care leavers, their lives and experiences, and were described as an engine for change which had spurred local authorities on to make improvements for care leavers. The combination of a clear programme structure and peer support and learning was also valued, and appear to have been effective in keeping local authorities engaged and on track during some difficult years shaped by the pandemic.

In a small survey of participants attending the final New Belongings events across five of the participating local authorities, the vast majority of participants (98%)

¹ See '[What makes life good? Care leavers' views on their well-being](#)' for a comprehensive account of the Bright Spots study and findings.

agreed that the New Belongings Programme had helped their local authority listen to the views of a wider group of care leavers. A similar high proportion of respondents (92%) believed that their local authority at present used care leavers opinions to develop and improve services for care leavers. This is very encouraging feedback.

As a result of participating in the New Belongings Programme, local authorities felt they had achieved improvements in areas, such as:

- Increased funding for their leaving care service
- Improved relational practice and connectivity
- Additional opportunities and resources for care leavers
- A greater focus on suitable and affordable accommodation
- Greater understanding of young people's needs and views through their direct contribution
- Raised profile of care leavers across their local authority

Some local authorities perceived these achievements as rooted in a 'culture change' or new 'ethos' within their leaving care team, where involving young people felt more integrated and part of their core practice. Others were not there yet, in term of embedding this approach, but they recognised the benefits of co-production and were committed to continue their work with care leavers to improve services.

Based on interviews, the evaluation identified three key enablers that had supported local authorities to engage their care leavers most effectively:

- Consistency of staff across all levels
- Committed service managers supported by senior management
- Resources to do participation well

These findings are not surprising, but highlight the importance of ongoing commitment and resources, to embed the commitment to service improvements.

Conclusion

In many ways the positive feedback from participating local authorities about their involvement in the New Belongings Programme and its impact, do not match the less positive follow-up findings from the Your Life Beyond Care survey of care leavers. Despite three years of targeted effort to involve care leavers in service improvements, the cohort of care leavers did not necessarily feel safer, happier, less anxious or financially more secure. A number of reasons may explain this contradiction, including the post-pandemic context of pressure on services, withdrawal of additional support and financial help, as well as reduced staff capacity and staff turn-over. It could be that local authorities have started to implement changes, but that improvements are yet to be experienced by large numbers of their care leavers. Without further data we are unable to explore this issue in more detail.

Nevertheless, the evaluation findings highlight the perceived benefits of and local authorities' ongoing commitment to involving their care leavers in service development, as well as the importance of a continued focus on improving services for care leavers now, and in the future.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	6
1.1 The New Belongings Programme	6
1.2 Coram Voice	6
1.3 The New Belongings model	7
1.4 Participating local authorities	10
1.5 The evaluation	11
2. Local authorities' self-assessment.....	12
2.1 A 'leaving care service self-assessment tool' for local authorities.....	12
2.2 A cohort of eight local authorities' self-assessment scores.....	13
2.3 Individual local authorities' self-assessment scores.....	15
3. Care leavers' views about their well-being	16
3.1 The Your Life Beyond Care Survey	16
3.1.1 Completing the Your Life Beyond Care survey	16
3.2 Findings from Your Life Beyond Care Surveys	17
3.2.1 Participant profile	18
3.2.2 Living arrangements and safety	21
3.2.3 Leaving care worker relationship and support.....	24
3.2.4 Relationships and emotional support	25
3.2.5 Feelings, emotions and well-being	27
3.2.6 Survey findings in context	33
4. Local authorities' feedback on the New Belongings Programme.....	34
4.1 Programme activities and process.....	34
4.1.1 Evidence-gathering and action planning	34
4.1.2 Engaging care leavers in co-production	36
4.1.3 Programme and peer support	38
4.2 Enablers and barriers to progress.....	39
4.2.1 Achievements and impact	40
5. Wider local authority feedback	41
6. Conclusion.....	47
Appendix 1: The evaluation framework.....	50
Appendix 2: Baseline and follow-up data	53

1. Introduction

New Belongings was a three-year programme delivered by Coram Voice. The programme worked with eight local authorities across England, supporting them to engage care leavers in service improvements using a co-production approach. With funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Segelman Trust the programme ran between July 2019 and July 2022.

Coram's Impact and Evaluation team carried out an independent evaluation of the New Belongings Programme supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. This final evaluation report provides an overview of findings from the evaluation, such as the comparison of baseline and follow-up data gathered from young people and local authorities.

1.1 The New Belongings Programme

Developed by the Care Leavers' Foundation with funding from the Department of Education, the original New Belongings project ran in two phases in 2013-14 and 2015-16.² Working with 28 local authorities in phase two the primary aim was for local authorities to improve services for care leavers by applying the experience and expertise of care leavers themselves to facilitate change.

Having found a new home with Coram Voice, the New Belongings Programme was funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Segelman Trust to run a three-year programme with a smaller cohort of eight local authorities. The programme ran from July 2019 to July 2022.

Care leavers

Care leavers are young adults who have spent some of their childhood in the care of a local authority, for example, in foster care or a children's home. Some care leavers are entitled to support from the local authority that looked after them, and that support can continue until they are 25 years old.

1.2 Coram Voice

Established in 1975 as a children's rights organisation, Coram Voice became part of the Coram Group of charities in 2013. Coram Voice runs a range of programmes to enable care experienced children and young people to have their voice heard. The Bright Spots programme, for example, is a partnership between Coram Voice and University of Oxford that helps local authorities systematically listen to their children in care and care leavers about the things that are important to them through subjective well-being surveys.

² Care Leavers' Foundation (2016) [A guide to the New Belongings approach: a way forward for care leavers](#) (accessed 30 August 2022)

The Bright Spots survey for care leavers – Your Life Beyond Care – formed an important part of the New Belongings Programme. Another Bright Spots survey is aimed at children in care, and is called Your Life Your Care.

1.3 The New Belongings model

Based on an approach developed by the Care Leavers' Foundation, Coram Voice applied the previous project evaluation³ and learning to refine the current New Belongings Programme.

Working with a smaller cohort of eight local authorities over a longer period, using a range of mandatory tools, New Belongings is a model for improving support for care leavers based on engagement and involvement of young people as experts in their own experience.

Co-production

'Co-production is an approach to decision-making and service design, rather than a specific method. The term co-production refers to a way of working where service providers and users work together to reach a collective outcome. The approach is value-driven and built on the principle that those who are affected by a service are best placed to help design it'.⁴

The New Belongings team worked closely with each of the local authorities across three phases – (1) evidence and action planning; (2) implementation; (3) review and planning – supporting local authorities to:

- Collect baseline data of the experience of care leavers in their local authority using the Your Life Beyond Care survey and the 'Baker and Dixon leaving care services self-assessment' tool.
- Provide ongoing advice, guidance and support to local authorities to create an action plan, using the findings from baseline assessments to address areas for improvement.
- Support the local authority's Care Leaver Forum to help identify key areas for change and implement the changes in the local authority using a co-production approach.
- Support the collection of follow-up data by repeating the Your Life Beyond Care survey and the Baker and Dixon leaving care services self-assessment tool.

The New Belongings team consisted of a number of part-time members of staff, including a Programme Manager, a Senior Practice Adviser, a Participation Manager and a small number of Care Experienced Consultants.⁵

³ Dixon, J. & Baker, C. (2016) [New Belongings: an evaluation. Research report](#), Department for Education. October 2016 (accessed 30 August 2022)

⁴ Involve (no date) [Co-production](#) (accessed 30 September 2022)

⁵ For more information about the New Belongings Programme and related resource bank see: <https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/>

Together the team engaged with senior leaders, leaving care workers and care leavers in each of the eight local authorities. In 2019, the New Belongings team, together with Coram's Impact & Evaluation team, articulated the programme's Theory of Change, setting out how programme activities would lead to the goals and outcomes described below.⁶

⁶ See Appendix 1 for more detail.

New Belongings Programme Theory of Change

The overall aim of the New Belongings Programme is to amplify and embed the voices of care leavers to create lasting improvements in local authority services for young care leavers. Through programme activities and engagement with local authorities and their care leavers, the programme aims to achieve the following goals and outcomes:

Ultimate goals

- The learning from New Belongings means care leavers in England are well supported
- Care leavers have good subjective well-being
- Care leavers have good health and employment, education and training outcomes
- A successful methodology of embedding the voice of care leavers into local authority service improvements is created and can be scaled and replicated

Long term outcomes

- Children and young people have a good experience of leaving care in participating local authorities
- Participating local authorities provide a good service to children and young people leaving care
- Care leavers have trusting relationships with participating local authorities' personal advisers and key staff
- Local and national standards for care leavers are less varied and better reflect what is important to care leavers

Short term outcomes

- Care leavers are embedded in participating local authorities service decisions and developments
- Participating local authorities have established systematic processes of using co-production approaches to make decisions about services for care leavers
- Participating local authorities effectively co-produce decisions and developments to leaving care services with care leavers
- Care leavers feel included in the participating local authorities' decisions and developments to services
- Participating local authorities have good knowledge of what makes a good care leaving service and care leavers' needs

1.4 Participating local authorities

Eight local authorities in England were selected to take part in the New Belongings Programme.⁷ The participating local authorities varied significantly in terms of type of council, their geographical location and whether they serve a mainly rural or urban population.

Table 1. New Belongings local authorities

Local authority	Type of local authority ⁸	Region	Urban / rural classification ⁹
Coventry City Council	Metropolitan	West Midlands	Urban with city and town
Stockport Borough Council	Metropolitan	North West	Urban with major conurbation
Oldham Borough Council	Metropolitan	North West	Urban with major conurbation
North Tyneside Borough Council	Metropolitan	North East	Urban with major conurbation
North Yorkshire County Council	County council with seven district councils	North East	Largely rural
Hertfordshire County Council	County council with ten district councils	East of England	Urban with city and town
Dorset Council	Unitary	South West	Urban with significant rural / Mainly rural ¹⁰
Wandsworth Council	London Borough	London	Urban with major conurbation

The size of the care leaver population, as reported in government statistics, also varied between participating local authorities. It ranged from 135 to 694 (in 2019), as did the level of effectiveness as indicated by their Ofsted inspection results.

At the beginning of the programme, six out of the eight local authorities were rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' for their care leaver service. Another two 'required improvements' to be good. This suggested that, as a cohort, the participating local authorities were in a good position to commit to a programme like New Belongings and to be able to implement programme actions to engage young care leavers in service development.

⁷ For more details about the selection process see: Ludvigsen, A. and Taylor, S (2021) [New Belongings Programme: baseline evaluation report](#), Coram (accessed 15 September 2022)

⁸ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2021) [List of councils in England by type](#), (accessed 30 August 2022)

⁹ ONS (2019) [Rural Urban Classification \(2011\) of Local authority Districts in England](#) (accessed 15 September 2022)

¹⁰ Dorset council is a new unitary council, hence not yet registered in the rural urban classification. East Dorset was classified as 'Urban with significant rural', while West and North Dorset were 'Mainly rural'.

During the New Belongings Programme, four local authorities were re-assessed by Ofsted, and in 2022 seven of the eight local authorities were rated 'good' or 'outstanding' and one as 'requiring improvements' to be good.

Among the eight participating local authorities, Stockport had previously been involved in the New Belongings Programme (2013-2016), while Hertfordshire and Wandsworth have carried out the Bright Spots survey with their children in care (Your Life Your Care). Prior to the baseline survey, none of the eight local authorities had undertaken the Your Life Beyond Care survey.

1.5 The evaluation

Coram's Impact and Evaluation team carried out an independent process evaluation of the New Belongings Programme over three years. The evaluation was supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

We considered the following three main questions:

1. Does New Belongings support local authorities to embed care leavers' opinions and experiences in the decisions and service developments made by participating local authorities?
 - What helps a local authority do this successfully?
 - What hinders a local authority?
2. Does New Belongings improve the participating local authorities' knowledge of what makes a good care leaving service for care leavers?
3. Does New Belongings improve the service that care leavers receive in the participating local authority?
 - Do care leavers have a better experience of leaving care support?

To help address these questions, the evaluation used a mixture of secondary data analysis, questionnaires and qualitative interviews with key local authority staff. The evaluation used a pre- and post- programme approach, where data was collected at baseline (2020) and again at the end of the programme (2022).

The New Belongings Programme itself used a range of tools and were responsible (in partnership with local authorities) for collecting data to inform both the programme delivery and to support the evaluation. While the Baker and Dixon self-assessment tool was designed both as a programme tool and an evaluation tool¹¹, the Your Life Beyond Care survey was not designed specifically as an evaluation tool.¹² As far as we are aware this is the first time that the Your Life Beyond Care survey has been used pre- and post-programme to measure change.

¹¹ Dixon, J. & Baker, C. (2016) [New Belongings: an evaluation. Research report](#), Department for Education. October 2016 (accessed 30 August 2022)

¹² For more details about the development of the 'Your Life Beyond Care' survey, see: Briheim-Crookall, L. et al. (2020) [What makes life good? Care leavers' views on their well-being](#), 10,000 Voices Publication (accessed 12th October 2022)

For this final report the following evaluation data was included:

- Analysis of care leavers' responses to the Your Life Beyond Care survey – at baseline in 2020 (n=1,258) and follow-up in 2022 (n=1,233)
- Analysis of the Baker and Dixon Leaving Care Service Self-assessment tool – at baseline in 2020 (n=8) and a shorter follow-up version in 2022 (n=8)
- Interviews with local authority leads – at baseline in 2020 (n=5) and follow-up in 2022 (n=10)
- Interviews with the New Belongings team in 2022 (n=3)
- Observation of final online dissemination meetings (n=2)
- Analysis of feedback questionnaire following final dissemination meetings (n=57)

Some data collected relied on what local authorities told us. We have not been able to verify or quantify all the claims. For further details about the data collected and analysed for this report, please see Appendix 2. Taken together this provides a comprehensive data-set.

While local authorities are named as partners of the New Belongings Programme, any findings reported in this evaluation report has been anonymised (LA 1-8). The numbering remains constant throughout the report.

KEY FINDINGS

2. Local authorities' self-assessment

2.1 A 'leaving care service self-assessment tool' for local authorities

The Baker and Dixon 'leaving care services self-assessment' framework, published in 2016, was originally developed to evaluate the previous round of the New Belongings Programme, involving 28 local authorities in England.¹³ Based on the New Belongings Programme's ten 'gold standard' areas, the framework was developed to help local authorities self-assess their leaving care services in order to identify both good practice and areas for development. The tool was also used to evaluate the New Belongings Programme.¹⁴

The self-assessment tool comprises ten areas identified by the New Belongings Programme as reflecting young people's pathways to adulthood. For this third phase of New Belongings, the self-assessment tool was updated to include new legal duties and policies that local authorities should have in place.¹⁵

The New Belongings Gold Standard Areas are:

¹³ Dixon, J. & Baker, C. (2016) [New Belongings: an evaluation. Research report](#), Department for Education. October 2016 (accessed 30 August 2022)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The wording of the gold standards has changed slightly between 2020 and 2022, but the meaning is consistent.

1. Listening to care leaver views and doing something about it
2. Relationships: having people to count on for emotional support
3. Entitlements: knowing your rights as a care leaver
4. Supporting care leavers with their education
5. Employment: helping care leavers into work
6. Having good health and wellbeing
7. Being in safe and settled accommodation
8. Supporting care leavers to manage money
9. Managing day to day living
10. Making sure support works for all care leavers

Within each of these ten areas, the assessment listed between 8 and 15 indicator statements (or items). In the baseline version of the Baker and Dixon (2020) tool there were a total of 106 separate statements. Local authorities said to what extent they agreed or disagreed with these.¹⁶ The answers were translated into scores, and summed. A high score indicated that local authorities were doing well in terms of their leaving care service, while a low score suggested that improvements could be made. In addition, local authorities also provided a 'global' or overall score (out of 10) for each of the ten gold standard areas.

While it was up to each local authority to decide how and who completed the self-assessment form, the New Belongings team recommended bringing together representatives from a range of roles and positions to debate and evidence the score provided. Most of the participating local authorities did this and sought feedback from both internal and external partner agencies to complete their assessment. The detailed written responses at baseline highlighted the significant resources and time local authorities committed to completing the self-assessment. At the outset, this demonstrated a high level of commitment to the New Belongings Programme among the participating local authorities.

For the follow-up assessment in 2022, the assessment was simplified and local authorities were only asked to assess each of the ten areas by providing a global or overall score (out of 10), rather than score all 106 separate statements. Again, many of the local authorities invited feedback from a range of roles and positions, including some external partners, to help score and evidence progress.

This final evaluation focuses on the global scores within each of the ten gold standards and compares pre- and post- scores.

2.2 A cohort of eight local authorities' self-assessment scores

The data submitted by the eight local authorities was used to explore how well the cohort was delivering the ten gold standard areas at baseline and again at the follow-up to identify any change in performance.

Using the cohorts' self-assessment scores, we calculated the average score for each gold standard area (out of 10) at baseline and at follow-up. The differences between

¹⁶ Agree at present (4), Mostly agree (3), Mostly disagree (2), Disagree at present (1).

the two time points were used to rank the gold standard areas in order of improvement, with higher average differences indicating greater progress.

For the cohort, table 2 below shows that improvements were perceived across all ten gold standard areas. This is a positive finding for the New Belongings Programme as it indicates that the cohort felt positive progress had been achieved over the duration of the programme.

The areas 'Entitlements: knowing your rights as a care leaver' and 'Education: supporting care leavers with their education' on average improved the most between baseline and follow-up. Positive developments in these areas highlighted by local authorities in their assessments include for example, newly developed entitlement booklets and co-produced care leaver standards leaflet, and priority or ringfenced apprenticeships for care leavers.

The areas 'Managing day to day life' and 'Listening to care leavers views' show the least improvement between baseline and follow-up. However, the gold standard area 'Listening to care leavers views' was already among the highest performing areas at baseline, and in the follow-up assessment all but one local authority assessed their performance as improved.

The area 'Relationships: having people to count on for emotional support' had the highest performance score at baseline and continued to score highly at the follow-up assessment. To evidence their high assessment scores in this area, some local authorities mentioned the positive feedback leaving care workers had received from care leavers through the Your Life Beyond Care survey, while others mentioned the development or strengthening of provision such as drop-in facilities or their post-25 offer.

While the overall score for 'Having good health and well-being' shows that progress was perceived to have been achieved since the baseline assessment, it remained the lowest scoring area both at baseline and at follow-up. Health, and particularly emotional health, was a focus for most participating local authorities in their action plans. While some local authorities had introduced valuable improvements, such as doubling care leavers' nurse time or launching a care leavers' mental health framework, others highlighted external pressures on services as a barrier. Health and well-being were also among the poorer performing areas in the 2015-16 evaluation, which suggests a more widespread pattern beyond the New Belongings local authorities.

Table 2. Gold standard areas in order of most improved between baseline and follow-up (n=8)

Rank	Gold standard area	Mean (average score out of 10)		Difference
		Baseline	Follow-up	
1	Area 3. Entitlements: knowing your rights as a care leaver	6.9	7.9	+1.0
2	Area 4. Supporting care leavers with their education	6.9	7.9	+1.0

3	Area 10. Making sure support works for all care leavers	6.9	7.8	+0.9
4	Area 5. Employment: helping care leavers into work	6.8	7.5	+0.8
5	Area 6. Having good health and well-being	5.9	6.6	+0.8
6	Area 7. Being in safe and settled accommodation	6.9	7.6	+0.8
7	Area 2. Relationships: having people to count on for emotional support	7.5	8.1	+0.6
8	Area 8. Supporting care leavers to manage money	6.6	7.3	+0.6
9	Area 1. Listening to care leaver views and doing something about it	7.3	7.8	+0.5
10	Area 9. Managing day to day living	6.9	7.4	+0.5

2.3 Individual local authorities' self-assessment scores

The overall analysis of the Baker and Dixon self-assessment scores showed variations between the participating eight local authorities at baseline and again at follow-up, with some local authority scoring better overall and within the ten 'gold standard' areas.

Our original calculation of the average performance at baseline, according to the local authorities' self-assessment, suggested that local authorities with an 'outstanding' Ofsted rating for their care leavers services also had the highest Baker Dixon score, while those local authorities who 'require improvements' according to their Ofsted rating scored the least. However, a few local authorities appeared to deliberately assess themselves harshly at baseline, in order to highlight areas where improvements were needed.

Overall, all but one local authority improved their combined assessment score between baseline and follow-up, suggesting that performance had improved for the majority of participating local authorities. The two local authorities with the lowest score at baseline made the most progress, while the four local authorities with the highest initial score made the least progress (table 3). One local authority saw stalled progress in most areas. The reasons provided to explain this stalled progress emphasised that many actions involving external partners had been difficult to progress, as well as limited senior leadership support for the leaving care service.

Table 3. Local authorities' performance across 10 'gold standard' areas (out of 100) in order of most improved between baseline and follow-up

Local authority	Baseline	Follow-up	Difference	Review of scores
Local authority 2	57	75	+18	Progress across all areas
Local authority 6	58	75	+17	Progress across all areas
Local authority 8	68	81	+13	Progress across all areas
Local authority 1	63	73	+10	Progress in most areas (7 out of 10)
Local authority 7	76	81	+5	Progress in most areas (6 out of 10)

Local authority 5	75	79	+4	Progress in some areas (3 out of 10)
Local authority 3	76	79	+3	Progress in some areas (3 out of 10)
Local authority 4	74	63	-11	Stalled progress in most areas (8 out of 10)
Average	68.4	75.8	7.4	

3. Care leavers' views about their well-being

3.1 The Your Life Beyond Care Survey

The Your Life Beyond Care survey was originally developed in 2017 by Coram Voice for the Bright Spots programme to measure the well-being of care experienced young adults. Based on a literature review, seminars with professionals and a series of workshops with young care leavers, the programme developed and tested a survey to capture care leavers' views about their own well-being.¹⁷

The survey focuses on four key well-being domains (people in your life; life as a care leaver; day-to-day life; and feelings and aspirations)¹⁸ and includes well-being scales used, for example by the Office for National Statistics, as part of annual population surveys. This allows many survey findings to be compared to the well-being of young people in the general population.

As part of the Bright Spots programme, the survey was completed by 1,804 care leavers across 21 other local authorities in England between 2017-2019. This national and pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample provides a useful comparison for the baseline and follow-up findings coming out of the New Belongings Programme.

3.1.1 Completing the Your Life Beyond Care survey

Care leavers in New Belongings local authorities completed the baseline survey between March and September 2020 – during unprecedented Covid lockdown restrictions. Within the eight local authorities, 2,492 care leavers had the opportunity to complete the baseline survey, and 1,258 responded – an overall response rate of 50% (ranging from 29% to 81%) (table 4). The follow-up survey was distributed in January 2022 and completed by an average of 45% of care leavers invited (ranging from 26% to 81%).

The survey is anonymous so it is not possible to say how many care leavers responded on both occasions, but the two samples are likely to overlap to some extent.

¹⁷ For more details about the development of the 'Your Life Beyond Care' survey, see: Briheim-Crookall, L. et al. (2020) [What makes life good? Care leavers' views on their well-being](#), 10,000 Voices Publication (accessed 12th October 2022)

¹⁸ These domains address areas, such as the people in your life, being a care leaver, housing, living independently, taking part in society, feelings and well-being.

Table 4. Your Life Beyond Care baseline survey response rate (2020 and 2022)

	Baseline (2020)		Follow-up (2022)	
	Surveys completed	Response rate (%)	Surveys completed	Response rate (%)
Local authority 1	251	66%	163	37%
Local authority 2	75	33%	170	60%
Local authority 3	216	29%	225	26%
Local authority 4	75	46%	49	37%
Local authority 5	180	72%	133	45%
Local authority 6	123	65%	144	81%
Local authority 7	161	81%	171	80%
Local authority 8	177	53%	178	52%
Total	1,258	50%	1,233	45%

Both New Belongings surveys achieved a higher overall response rate compared to the national Bright Spots sample of 21 other local authorities, where an average of 39% completed the survey.¹⁹

As part of the New Belongings Programme, participating local authorities received an individual report with baseline findings which fed into the development of their action plan. Findings from the follow-up survey were presented to local authorities at their final dissemination meeting during summer 2022, as well as in an individual report and video for young people.

3.2 Findings from Your Life Beyond Care Surveys

This section looks at the findings for all the responding care leavers in the eight local authorities at baseline (n=1,258) and follow-up (n=1,233).

Where possible, survey findings are compared to data on young people in the general population, and more specifically to the average responses of care leavers across 21 local authorities who participated in Your Life Beyond Care in 2017-19 (n=1,804).²⁰

Key findings from the Your Life Beyond Care surveys are summarised in table 5, setting out comparable figures across the three surveys.

¹⁹ Briheim-Crookall, L. et al. (2020) '[What makes life good? Care leavers' views on their well-being](#)', 10,000 Voices Publication (accessed 28th February 2021)

²⁰ See '[What makes life good? Care leavers' views on their well-being](#)' for a comprehensive account of the study and findings, including comments written by care leavers.

Table 5. Summary of key survey findings

	Bright Spots (2017-2019)	New Belongings Baseline (2020)	New Belongings Follow-up (2022)
Always feel safe in their home	64%	68%	64%
Is where you live now right for you? (Mainly yes)	68%	70%	67%
Could access the internet from their home	83%	88%	89%
Had a smart phone	91%	94%	95%
Coping financially (living comfortably + doing alright)	56%	62%	56%
Know who their leaving care worker is	93%	96%	92%
Had the same leaving care worker for the last 12 months	60%	64%	61%
Feel able to get in touch with leaving care worker all / most of the time	71%	75%	79%
Trusted leaving care worker all or most of the time	78%	83%	80%
Felt leaving care worker gave emotional support	45%	54%	46%
Feel involved in pathway planning all or most of the time	62%	65%	63%
Have a pet	28%	33%	37%
Felt lonely always or often	22%	21%	18%
High or moderate levels of positivity about the future	80%	80%	76%
Low scores on how happy you felt yesterday	26%	27%	27%
Low scores on life satisfaction	26%	26%	27%
Low scores on feeling the things you do in life are worthwhile	23%	23%	25%
High scores on how anxious you felt yesterday	34%	34%	36%

Bright Spots (n=1,804); New Belongings Baseline (n=1,258); New Belongings Follow-up (n=1,233)

3.2.1 Participant profile

Overall, the demographic profile of young care leavers who responded to the Your Life Beyond Care survey in 2020, and again in 2022, was broadly similar to the national Bright Spots sample in terms of their demographic profile.

Age

Two-thirds of the care leavers who responded to the baseline survey in 2020 were 18 to 20 years old (65%). This is a larger proportion of 18 to 20-year-olds compared to the follow-up survey (60%). Approximately one-third were in the older 21 to 25-year age-group (33% in 2020 and 36% in 2022).

Table 6: Age of young people

	% in baseline sample (n)	% in follow-up sample (n)
16 to 17 years	1% (14)	3% (41)
18 to 20 years	65% (806)	60% (715)

21 to 25 years	33% (405)	36% (433)
26 years or older	1% (7)	0.3% (3)
Total	100% (1,232)	99.3% (1,192)

Gender

At baseline the same proportion of female and male care leavers completed the survey (49%). At the follow-up survey the proportion of female care leavers increased (51%), while the proportion of male decreased (44%). The proportion of care leavers who identified as 'other' increased from 1% to 3%.

Table 7: Gender of young people

	% in baseline sample (n)	% in follow-up sample (n)
Female	49% (612)	51% (612)
Male	49% (605)	44% (534)
Other	1% (12)	3% (38)
Prefer not to say	1% (17)	2% (25)
Total	100% (1,246)	100% (1,211)

Ethnicity

The majority of young people who completed both surveys identified as white (65% in 2020 and 68% in 2022) - both higher proportions compared to the national Bright Spots sample (62%).

Table 8: Ethnicity of young people

	% in baseline sample (n)	% in follow-up sample (n)
White	65% (822)	68% (823)
Black	13% (161)	12% (141)
Asian	8% (100)	7% (87)
Mixed background	5% (62)	6% (73)
Other	5% (62)	3% (33)
Prefer not to say	3% (37)	4% (51)
Total	99% (1,244)	100% (1,208)

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Long-term health problems or disabilities

Care leavers were asked if they had a long-term health condition or disability that limited their day-to-day activities.

In 2020, 26% of young people wrote that they had a long-term health condition or disability. This increased slightly to 28% in 2022.

The proportion of young care leavers with a disability in the two New Belongings samples were higher than the national Bright Spots sample (24%), and markedly higher than the 16% of young people in the general population of England in 2020.²¹

Care leavers who were parents or pregnant

More than one in five carer leavers (21% in 2020 and 23% in 2022) wrote that they were parents and/or were expecting a child – both higher proportions of parents compared to the national Bright Spots sample (19%).

Employment, education and training

Care leavers were asked ‘right now, are you in education, employment or training?’. In both the New Belongings surveys (2020 and 2022) a large proportion of respondents (39%) were not in education, employment or training (NEET). Slightly smaller proportions of care leavers were engaged in education (35% in 2020 and 33% in 2022), while almost one-in-four were working (22% in 2020 and 24% in 2022).

Those care leavers who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) were asked why. In both samples, more than one-in-four wrote that they had an illness or a disability that prevented them from working (28% in 2020 and 29% in 2022). Others were caring for their children. However, more than half who responded to this question provided another reason for why they were not in education, employment or training.

Length of time spent in care

Care leavers were asked how many years they had been in care for. Over half of care leavers who responded to both surveys (59% in 2020 and 60% in 2022) had been looked after for four or more years, with almost one-third (31%) of care leavers having been looked after for more than seven years. This distribution was similar to the national Bright Spots sample.

Table 9. Number of years spent in care

	% in baseline sample (n)	% in follow-up sample (n)
Less than a year	4% (53)	6% (70)
1 to 3 years	32% (403)	30% (362)
4 to 7 years	28% (351)	29% (355)
More than 7 years	31% (389)	31% (374)
I don't know	5% (58)	5% (61)
Total	101% (1,254)	101% (1,222)

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

²¹ ONS (2020) [Young people's well-being measures](#). Office for National Statistics (accessed 20 September 2022).

3.2.2 Living arrangements and safety

Recognising the importance of where we live and the impact that living conditions can have on our health and well-being, care leavers were asked several questions about their living arrangements and how they felt about their home.

In terms of the types of housing that young people lived in, the two New Belongings samples were relatively similar. There were, however, some differences between the two New Belongings samples (baseline and follow-up) and the Bright Spots sample (based on 15 local authorities as the question was changed in 2019-20). In 2017-19, 38% of care leavers rented their house or flat. This differs markedly to 46% of young people renting in 2020 and 48% in 2022 within the New Belongings' local authorities.

The proportion of care leavers who lived in supported accommodation was 21% in the Bright Spots sample (2017-19) and 12% in both the New Belongings samples (2020 and 2022). Again, this is a considerable difference.

Table 10. Type of housing

	% in baseline sample (n)	% in follow-up sample (n)
Rented flat or house	46% (580)	48% (583)
Supported accommodation	12% (153)	12% (150)
With foster carers ('stay put')	11% (138)	11% (139)
With parents or other relatives	10% (120)	9% (103)
Supported lodgings	4% (44)	4% (46)
College or university	4% (34)	4% (43)
Homeless	2% (26)	2% (27)
Short stay or emergency accommodation	1% (18)	1% (12)
Home or flat owner	1% (18)	1% (15)
In custody	1% (12)	1% (11)
Other	9% (111)	7% (86)
Total	101% (1,254)	100% (1,215)

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Feeling safe and settled

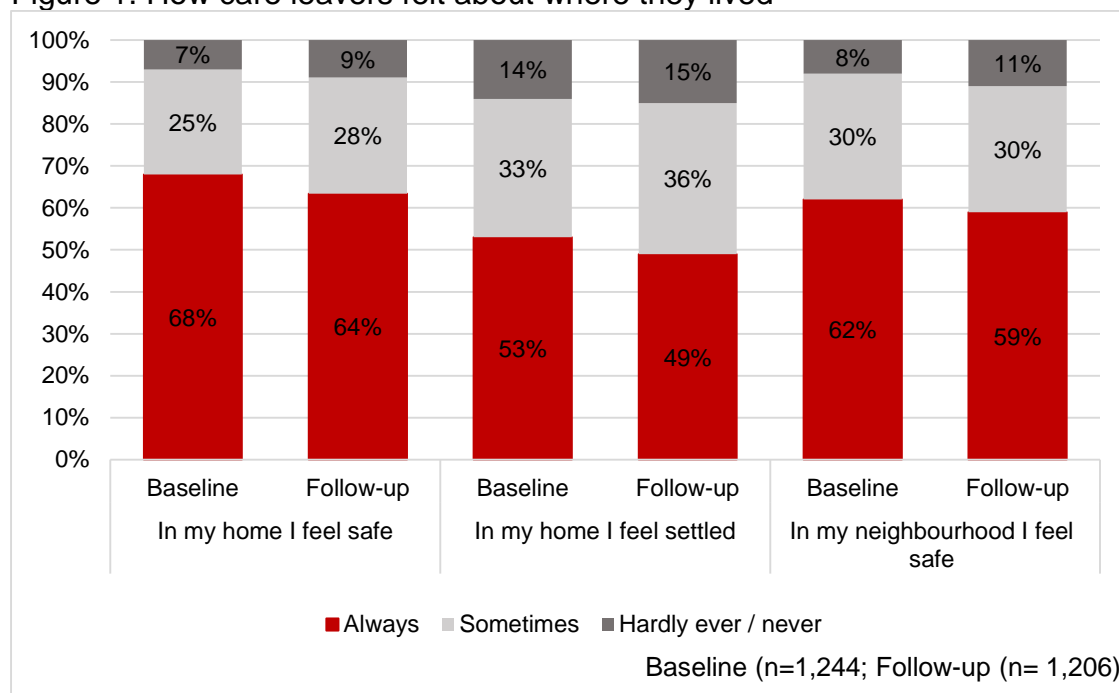
Feeling safe and settled in the accommodation you live is important to general well-being, but safety is also one of the key matters considered during local authorities' assessment of the quality of care leavers' accommodation.

The majority of care leavers did feel safe in their homes. In 2020, 68% of care leavers 'always' felt safe where they lived. This fell to 64% in 2022 – the same proportion as care leavers in the pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample (64%).

However, over a quarter (27%) reported in 2022 that they only 'sometimes' felt safe in their homes – this was marginally up from 25% in the 2020 baseline sample, but similar to the national Bright Spots sample (27%).

Across the three samples, a similar proportion of young people ‘hardly ever or never’ felt safe where they lived (7% to 8%).

Figure 1. How care leavers felt about where they lived



When it came to feeling settled in their home, just over half of care leavers ‘always’ felt settled in 2020 (53%). This figure fell slightly to 50% in 2022 – comparable to the pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample (51%). The proportion of young people who ‘hardly ever or never’ felt settled were similar across the three samples (14% - 15%).

The proportion of care leavers who ‘always’ felt safe in their neighbourhood fell between 2020 and 2022 from 62% to 59%. This latest figure is in line with the Bright Spots sample (60%). The proportion of young people who ‘hardly ever or never’ felt safe in their neighbourhood went up from 8% in 2020 to 11% in 2022 – slightly above the 2017-19 Bright Spots sample (10%).

Suitability of accommodation

To find out whether care leavers perceived their current accommodation as suitable, the survey asked ‘is where you live now right for you?’. In 2020, 70% of care leavers felt where they lived were mainly right for them, this fell slightly to 67% in 2020. Again, this latest figure is comparable to the Bright Spots pre-pandemic sample (68%).

Access to smartphones and the internet

Having access to the internet and a smartphone can help care leavers connect with their friends and family, as well as provide access to information, advice and entertainment. This would have been particularly important to young people during

the national Covid-19 lockdown, which placed severe restrictions on face-to-face contact.

Among the care leavers who responded to both New Belongings surveys, smartphone ownership and internet usage were high. At baseline the vast majority of care leavers had a smartphone (94%). This increased to 95% in the follow-up survey – marginally below their peers aged 16 to 24 years in the general population (98% in 2020).²²

Access to the internet at home increased slightly from 88% to 89% between 2020 and 2022, which is a statistically significant difference compared to the Bright Spots sample (83%). However, care leavers in the New Belongings' local authorities remained less likely to be able to access the internet at home compared to the general population – 96% of UK households had internet access in 2020.²³

Financial well-being

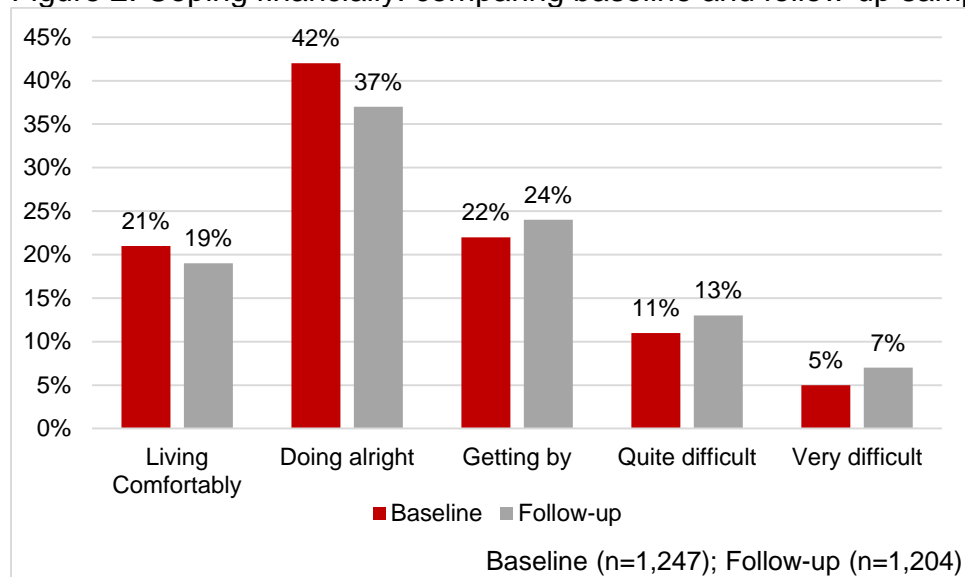
Feeling worried about money can significantly impact young people's well-being. Care leavers were asked if they were able to cope financially. At baseline the majority of respondents (62%) wrote that they were 'doing alright' or 'living comfortably'. This proportion fell to 56% in the 2022 follow-up survey – a similar proportion to care leavers in the pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample (56%). The difference between the baseline and follow-up samples is small, but statistically significant.

By 2022, one-in-five respondents (20%) was finding it 'quite difficult' or 'very difficult' to cope financially, compared to one-in-six (16%) in 2020. This increase may in part be the result of the withdrawal of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit in October 2021, as well as rising cost of living.

²² Statista (2020) [Smartphone ownership penetration in the United Kingdom \(UK\) in 2012- 2020, by age](#) (accessed 20 September 2022)

²³ ONS (2020) [Internet access - households and individuals](#), Office for National Statistics (accessed 20 September 2022).

Figure 2. Coping financially: comparing baseline and follow-up samples



3.2.3 Leaving care worker relationship and support

Knowing your leaving care worker

Leaving care workers (also known as Personal Advisers or PAs) have an important role in terms of providing advice and support, and co-ordinating services for young people leaving care. As part of the survey, all care leavers were asked if they knew who their current leaving care worker was.

While the vast majority of young people did know, the proportion fell between 2020 and 2022, from 96% to 92%. This most recent 2022 figure was in line with the proportion of care leavers who knew their leaving care worker in the national Bright Spots sample (93%).

Getting in touch with leaving care workers

The proportion of care leavers who thought it was easy to get in touch with their leaving care worker 'all or most of the time', increased between the baseline survey in 2020 and the follow-up survey in 2022 – from 75% to 79%. This is a statistically significant improvement compared to the Bright Spots sample (2017-19) where 71% of care leavers found it easy to get in touch with their leaving care worker.

Considering the challenges of the past few years, this is an encouraging finding for the New Belongings local authorities, which they as a cohort have been able to sustain following the pandemic.

Trusting leaving care worker

During the development of the survey, care experienced young people identified 'trust' as an important factor in their relationship with leaving care workers. The proportion of care leavers who trusted their leaving care worker 'all or most of the time' fell slightly between baseline and follow-up from 83% to 80%. This is, however,

still a greater proportion of care leavers who trust their worker compared to the Bright Spots sample (78%).

The proportion of young people who 'hardly ever or never' trust their worker has remained stable across the three samples (3% to 4% or 37-62 care leavers).

Stability of leaving care worker

As well as knowing, trusting and being able to get in touch with their leaving care worker, the continuity of workers is also important. Hence, the survey asked how many workers respondents had had in the past 12 months.

The proportion of care leavers who had had 'one' leaving care worker in the past 12 months fell slightly between 2020 and 2022 (from 64% to 61%). During the same time period the proportion who did *not* have a leaving care worker went up from 2% to 5% (28 young people in 2020 and 60 young people in 2022).

While this is a somewhat disappointing finding, this may reflect the post-pandemic context which has seen a greater turnover of frontline staff in some local authorities.

Table 11. Number of leaving care workers in the last 12 months

	% in baseline sample (n)	% in follow-up sample (n)
One worker	64% (796)	61% (738)
Two workers	25% (309)	25% (299)
Three or more workers	10% (119)	10% (121)
No worker allocated	2% (28)	5% (60)
Total	101% (1,252)	101% (1,218)

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Pathway planning

Pathway planning involves a local authority and young person setting goals and outlining the support needed to reach those goals. Together with young people, leaving care workers develop and review the young person's pathway plan.

When asked how involved they felt in their pathway planning, most care leavers felt involved in their pathway planning 'all or most of the time', although the proportion fell marginally between 2020 and 2022 from 65% to 63%. This most recent figure corresponds with pre-pandemic figures (62%) as reported in the Bright Spots sample.

A similar proportion of care leavers in 2020 and 2022 knew all they wanted to know about why they had been in care (80% vs. 79%). This is a slightly larger proportion compared to young people pre-pandemic (77% in 2017-19).

3.2.4 Relationships and emotional support

Having good and supportive relationships are important for emotional well-being, quality of life and can help reduce social isolation. A lack of friendship is furthermore associated with loneliness, anxiety and a range of adverse mental health

outcomes.²⁴ The survey asked a range of questions about the people (and animals) in care leavers' lives, and their relationships. One such question was, 'do you have a really good friend?'.

The majority of care leavers in both New Belongings surveys felt that they had a really good friend, although this figure dropped from 86% in 2020 to 83% in 2022. Meanwhile, the proportion of care leavers who felt they did not have a really good friend went up from 14% to 17% - one-in-six of those who responded to the survey in 2022. This recent figure is slightly above the proportion of care leavers (15%) who felt they did not have a good friend in the national Bright Spots sample.

Focusing on young people's resilience, having a trusted person in your life can act as a protective factor when experiencing stressful life events. Again, the majority of care leavers felt that they had a person they could trust, who helped them and who would stick by them no matter what (87% in 2020 and 85% in 2022), but some young people did not have such a person in their life – 165 young people (13%) in 2020 and 182 young people (15%) in 2022.

When asked who gave them emotional support, the three most frequently selected categories of relationships in both New Belongings surveys were 'friends', 'leaving care worker' and 'partner'.²⁵

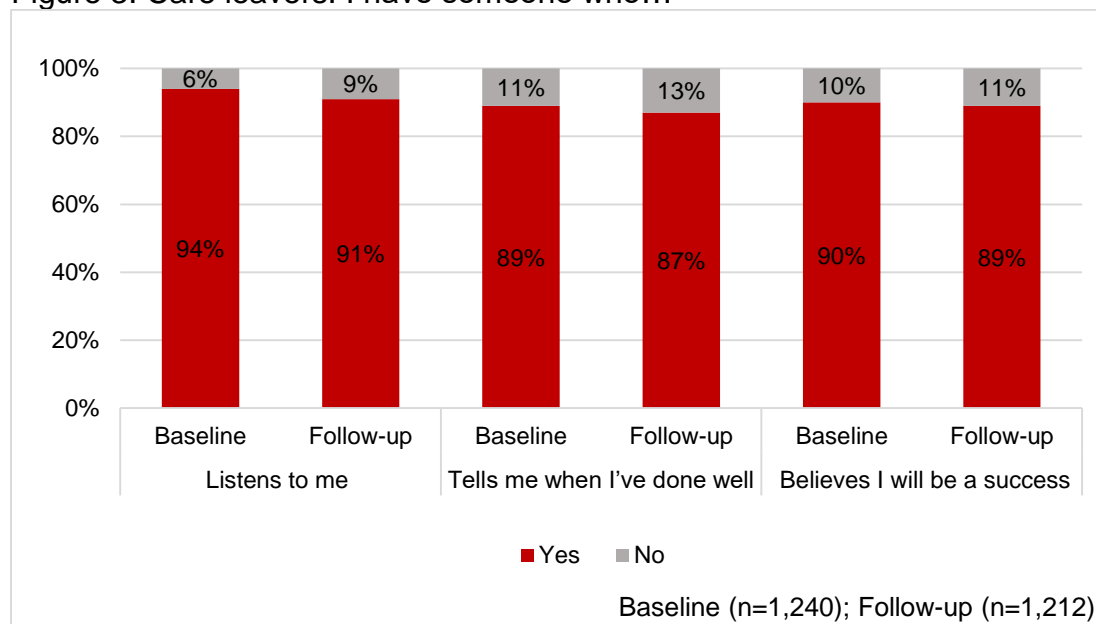
The proportion of young people who mentioned their leaving care worker as a source of emotional support went down markedly between the baseline survey in 2020 (54%) and the follow-up in 2022 (46%). This latest 2022 figure, however, correlates closely with the proportion of care leavers in the pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample (45%) who mentioned their leaving care worker as a source of emotional support. This indicates that leaving care workers played a more active role in many care leavers' lives during the pandemic and national lockdown, and consequently were a source of emotional support to more than half of care leavers (54% in 2020) during this time.

The survey also asked about other protective factors, such as having someone who listens to you. As figure 3 below shows, the vast majority of care experienced young people felt, both at baseline and follow-up, that they had someone in their life who listened to them; told them when they had done well; and believed that they would be a success.

²⁴ Baker (2017) [*Care leavers' views on their transition to adulthood: a rapid review of evidence*](#), London: Coram Voice (accessed 20 September 2022)

²⁵ The 14 categories were: foster carer; residential staff; leaving care worker; counsellor/mental health professional; education professional; other care leaver; friends; partner; mum; dad; brother /sister; other relative; own child(ren); pet; and 'I don't have anyone'.

Figure 3. Care leavers: I have someone who...



Finally, recognising that some people find pets to be a source of comfort and companionship, care leavers were also asked whether they had a pet or not. The proportion of care leavers who are pet owners has gone up considerably since the pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample (28%), the 2020 baseline survey (33%) – and the 2022 follow-up survey (37%). However, pet ownership among the general proportion has also gone up over the same period, and in 2022, it was estimated that 52% of UK adults had a pet.²⁶

3.2.5 Feelings, emotions and well-being

The Your Life Beyond Care survey explores a range of feelings and emotions that are linked to young people's overall sense of well-being, including stress, loneliness and anxiety.

This section also focuses on a range of other positive and negative emotions, such as feeling optimistic, proud, lonely and angry, as well as addressing levels of happiness and how care leavers feel about their future.

Stress

Leaving care and gaining independence can bring both freedom and stress, as young people have to take responsibility for all aspects of their life. The survey therefore included a validated stress scale, comprised of four questions (see figure 4 below) to explore how well young people thought they were coping.²⁷ These questions cover feeling able to control the important things in your life; feeling that difficulties are piling up; feeling confident in being able to handle problems; and feeling things were going one's way.

²⁶ PDSA (2022) [Animal Wellbeing \(PAW\) 2022 report](#) (accessed 20 September 2022)

²⁷ Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24, 385-396.

- Feeling unable to control important things

At baseline, one-third of care leavers (32%) felt unable to control the important things in life 'very or fairly often'. This figure improved markedly to 25% in the 2022 follow-up sample. This latest figure is a remarkable improvement on the pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample (33%).

At the other end of the spectrum, proportionally more care leavers 'almost never or never' felt unable to control the important things in their life in 2022, compared to 2020 (baseline 28% vs follow-up 32%). While these are encouraging findings, feeling more in control in 2022, compared to 2020, may say more about the lack of choice and freedom that national lockdowns imposed on the whole population during this period.

- Feeling that difficulties pile up

In the follow-up sample, proportionally fewer care leavers wrote that they 'very or fairly often' felt that 'difficulties were piling up higher than they could solve them', compared to the baseline findings (baseline 31% vs follow-up 22%). This is a remarkable improvement – especially compared to the national Bright Spots sample (35%).

- Feeling confident about ability to handle problems

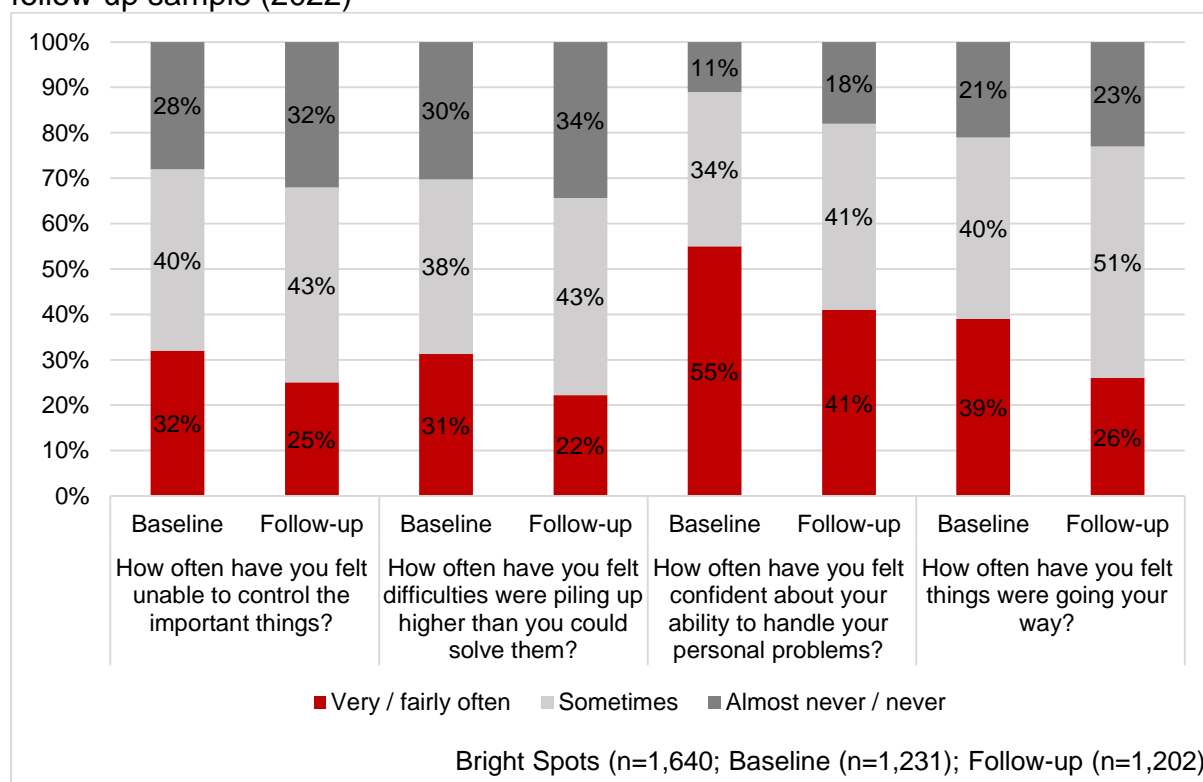
Interestingly, in 2020 during the pandemic, over half of care leavers (55%) felt confident about their ability to handle personal problems – this was a higher proportion than care leavers (50%) in the national Bright Spots sample who felt confident about handling their problems.

Since then, in the follow-up sample, the proportion of care leavers who felt 'very or fairly often' confident fell markedly to 41%, while those who 'almost never or never' felt confident increased from 11% to 18%.

- Felt that things were going their way

The final question relating to stress highlights that between the baseline in 2020 and the follow-up in 2022, substantially fewer care leavers 'often' felt that things were going their way (baseline 39% vs follow-up 26%). While this is a remarkable downward trend between the two surveys, the national Bright Spots sample shows that only 23% of care leavers pre-pandemic often felt that things were going their way.

Figure 4. Comparison of measures of stress between baseline sample (2020) and follow-up sample (2022)



We did not carry out fieldwork with care leavers to explore in more depth what may explain these somewhat contradictory patterns.

Loneliness

A key element of well-being is the presence of positive social connections and chronic loneliness, as in 'always' feeling lonely, has been linked with poor physical and mental health and low well-being.²⁸ At the early stages of the pandemic, 'lockdown loneliness' was found to be far more prevalent among young people (16 to 24-year-olds) compared to the overall adult population (51% vs 31%).²⁹

However, in the New Belongings baseline sample marginally fewer care leavers reported feeling lonely 'often or always', compared to the pre- pandemic Bright Spots sample (21% vs 22%). In the follow-up sample, the proportion of care leavers who often or always felt lonely fell further to 18%.

While this is a positive development, the gap between care leavers and young people in the general population remains stark. In April 2022, 26% of those aged 16-26 year in the general population reported feeling lonely 'always, often or some of the time'³⁰ compared to 45% of care leavers in the 2022 follow-up sample.

²⁸ ONS (2018) [Loneliness - What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?](#) Office for National Statistics (accessed 20 September 2022)

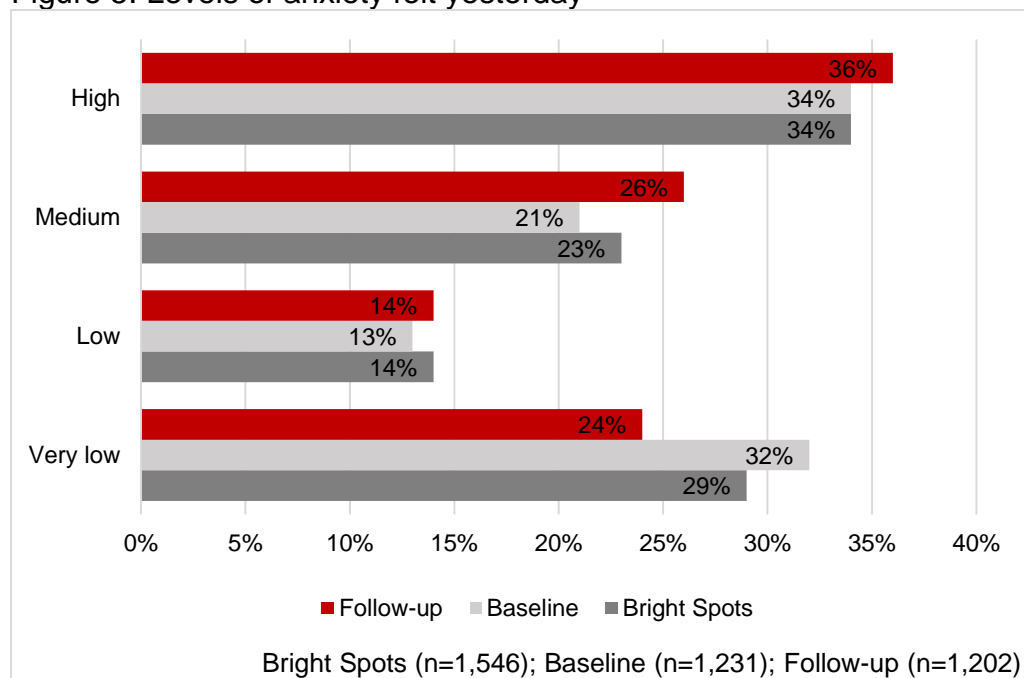
²⁹ ONS (2020) [Coronavirus and loneliness, Great Britain: 3 April to 3 May 2020](#), (accessed 20 September 2022).

³⁰ ONS (2022) [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: 27 April to 8 May 2022](#) (accessed 20 September 2022).

Anxiety

Care leavers were asked on an 11-point scale ‘how anxious did you feel yesterday?’ One-third of young people who responded to the question reported high levels of anxiety yesterday (Figure 5).³¹ This figure has remained relatively unchanged across the three samples (34% to 36%), but is considerably larger than the 22% of young people (aged 16 to 24 years) in the general population who felt highly anxious in 2019-20.³²

Figure 5. Levels of anxiety felt yesterday



Other emotions

To explore the range of different positive and negative emotions care leavers experience, they were also asked ‘in the past few weeks how often have you felt...’ ‘full of energy’, ‘optimistic’, ‘proud’, ‘angry’ and ‘afraid’.

In terms of positive emotions, the baseline and follow-up findings were remarkably similar. The majority of care leavers in both samples (baseline vs follow-up) felt at least occasionally ‘full of energy’ (80% vs 79%), optimistic (83% vs 83%) and proud (77% vs 77%).

Two-thirds of respondents at least occasionally felt ‘angry’ (68% vs 69%), while almost half felt ‘afraid’ at least occasionally (44% vs 50%) in the last few weeks.

³¹ The 11-point anxiety scale: low (0-4); medium (5-6); high (7-8); very high (9-10).

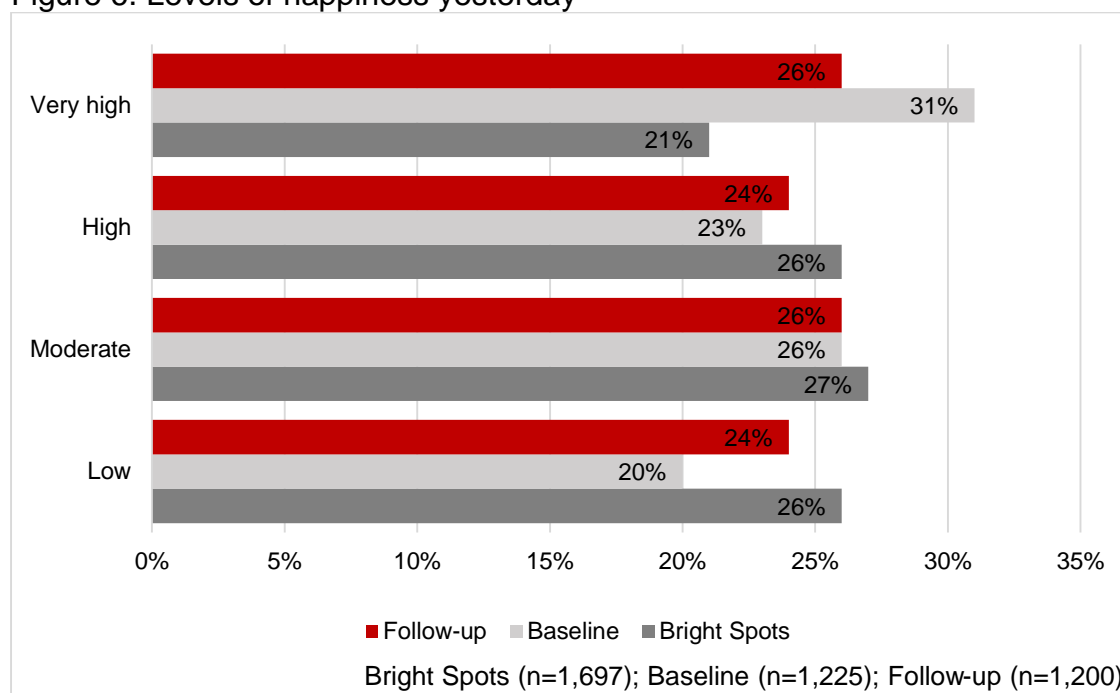
³² ONS (2020) [Young people's well-being measures](#) (accessed 20 September 2022).

Happiness and life satisfaction

The survey explored a range of well-being factors through questions that are also used by the Office for National Statistics to measure well-being in the general population. Care leavers were asked about how satisfied they were with their life, how happy they felt yesterday, and to what extent they felt that the things they do in life are worthwhile.

In 2022, half of care leavers (50%) scored themselves 'high' or 'very high' on the happiness measure (How happy did you feel yesterday?) – this is a smaller proportion compared to the 2020 lockdown (54%), but above the Bright Spots sample (47%).

Figure 6. Levels of happiness yesterday



The majority of care leavers scored moderate – high or very high on well-being measures, but unfortunately a sizeable proportion did not. Approximately one-quarter of care leavers across the three samples responded in a negative way to these well-being questions (table 12).

One-quarter of young people (26%) rated themselves as having low levels of life satisfaction (0 to 4 on the 11-point scale). Prior to the pandemic (2019-20), 3% of young people aged 16-24 years scored low on the same scale for life satisfaction. While more recent figures have yet to be published for this age group, 6% of adults rated their life satisfaction low in 2020-21 – a slight increase (1% to 2%) in the percentage of the general population reporting low well-being measures.³³

When young care leavers were asked 'to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?', the same proportion of care leavers (23%) across the

³³ Chandra, A, Taylor, S, Shorto, S, Patel, V and L Gilbert (2022) [The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on care leavers' well-being](#), Coram Impact and Evaluation (accessed 20 September 2022).

three samples scored themselves low (0 to 4 out of 10) on feeling life was worthwhile. In comparison, 4% of 16 to 24-year-olds in the general population had a similar low score (2019-20).

The final well-being question focused on happiness. One-quarter of care leavers had low scores on happiness (26% to 27%), answering 0 to 4 out of 10 to the question 'How happy did you feel yesterday?' In 2019-20, 8% young people aged 16 to 24 years in the general population scored low on the same scale.

Table 12. How care leavers feel about their life

	Bright Spots (2017-19)	Baseline (2020)	Follow-up (2022)
Low life satisfaction	26%	26%	26%
Low life worthwhile	23%	23%	23%
Low happiness yesterday	26%	27%	26%
High anxiety	34%	35%	36%

Bright Spots (n=1,694; Baseline (n=1,225); Follow-up (n=1,200)

Although these figures have remained stable between the baseline and follow-up sample, they highlight the significant gap in well-being between the cohort of care leavers and young people in the general population. Addressing this disparity will continue to be a critical and ongoing challenge for local authorities working to improve the lives of young care leavers.

Positivity about the future

Research has shown that optimism is linked with good mental and physical health, well-being, and lower levels of depression, as well as confidence in one's ability to achieve personal goals.³⁴

Hence, care leavers were asked 'how positive are you about your future?'. Their answers, on a scale from 0 to 10 (where 0 was not at all positive and 10 was completely positive), show that the majority of care leavers across the three care leavers' samples reported feeling moderate to high levels of positivity about their future (76% to 80%).

However, in 2022, one-in-five (20%) care leavers reported low levels of positivity (answering 0 to 4 out of 10). While this was down from 24% of care leavers during the 2020 baseline sample, it matches the pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample (20%). This is a sizeable proportion of care leavers who do not feel positive about their future. Our previous research shows that the financial situation of care leavers plays

³⁴ Bouchard, L. C., Carver, C. S., Mens, M. C., & Scheier, M. F. (2018). Optimism, health, and well-being. In D. S. Dunn (Ed.), *Frontiers of social psychology. Positive psychology: Established and emerging issues* (p. 112–130). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

a role in how positive they feel about their future, with those finding it difficult to cope financially more likely to report low levels of positivity.³⁵

3.2.6 Survey findings in context

At the time of the baseline survey in 2020, at the beginning of the worldwide Covid pandemic, many discussions were had about whether the findings from the Your Life Beyond Care survey would be an accurate or fair representation of how care leavers were feeling or how local authorities were doing, given the challenges people were experiencing as a result of the national lockdown. At the time we suspected that care leavers as a cohort would feel more stressed, anxious and more likely to struggle financially as a result of the pandemic.

However, while some care leavers were experiencing all of those emotions, the baseline findings were remarkably similar or better compared to the national, pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample (2017-19). Care leavers' responses to, for example, well-being questions, such as anxiety, loneliness, happiness and life satisfaction showed very similar scores, while there were marginal improvements in other areas, such as feeling able to cope financially and always feeling safe in their home.

On the face of it these findings were surprising, but as our report 'The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on care leavers' well-being' highlights about this particular time:

'Some of the additional support that was put in place by local authorities, charities, communities and central government may have helped to stave off crisis for some. Financial and practical support and increased contact may have led some care leavers to feel more financially secure, ensured better digital access and helped prevent increases in loneliness and anxiety. Care leavers' own hard-won personal resilience may also explain this... The pandemic highlighted the strengths of local authorities and practitioners in responding to the needs of care leavers in challenging times.'³⁶

With additional support, frequent contact with leaving care workers and a societal acceptance that it was okay not to feel okay, many care leavers were coping during the pandemic. The findings from the 2022 follow-up survey presented in this report, show that many, but not all, slight improvements seen in 2020, have reverted to pre-pandemic levels or even got slightly worse.

While this is disappointing, the post-pandemic context of extraordinary pressure on services, withdrawal of additional support and financial help, as well staffing capacity and turn-over, these findings highlight the ongoing challenges for the sector as a whole in meeting care leavers' needs now, and in the future.

³⁵ Chandra, A, Taylor, S, Shorto, S, Patel, V and L Gilbert (2022) The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on care leavers' well-being', Coram Impact and Evaluation, <https://www.coram.org.uk/resource/impact-covid-19-pandemic-care-leavers'-well-being-2022> (accessed 20 September 2022).

³⁶ Chandra, A, Taylor, S, Shorto, S, Patel, V and L Gilbert (2022) [The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on care leavers' well-being](#)', Coram Impact and Evaluation, p.p. 39 (accessed 20 September 2022).

4. Local authorities' feedback on the New Belongings Programme

As part of the evaluation, we interviewed lead contacts within the participating local authorities at the beginning of the programme in 2020 (n=5) and again in 2022 at the end (n=10). Interviews were carried out either over the phone or via video conferencing, and addressed a range of topics, including what local authorities had done as a part of the programme, mechanisms for listening to care leavers and involving them in co-production, as well as any perceived impact and learning as a result of being involved. The lead contacts we spoke to had a range of roles and responsibilities in their local authorities, such as team manager of the leaving care service, principal lead, service manager or operational manager. This section focuses on feedback from these baseline and follow-up interviews, as well as observations of programme meetings and events.

4.1 Programme activities and process

4.1.1 Evidence-gathering and action planning

A key feature of the New Belongings model was to support local authorities in gaining better knowledge about their care leavers at the outset of the programme. Historically, local authorities often have very limited information about their care leavers besides the most rudimentary data, such as how many care leavers they have, the type of accommodation they live in, and whether they are in education, employment and training. While this may be adequate to report to central government, it provides little insight into the lives of care leavers – whether they feel safe, lonely, stigmatised against or if they have supportive and loving relationships in their lives – the type of information that can help a local authority understand and better meet their needs.

Using an evidence-based approach, the New Belongings Programme provided participating local authorities with the tools and the support to collect more nuanced information about their care leavers, as well as to better understand their current provision to young care leavers.

The Your Life Beyond Care survey was described by most of the local authority leads as one of the strengths of the New Belongings Programme. The survey enabled them to increase their reach to a wider group of care leavers than they would commonly reach through smaller-scale surveys and consultations. Although response rates varied between local authorities across both surveys (26% to 81%), all mentioned that they had worked hard to promote the survey to their care leavers, using a range of channels, such as personal encouragement, newsletters and social media. During the 2020 national Covid lockdown, Personal Advisers reportedly also used the survey as a way to have different conversations with their care leavers. Some local authorities offered incentives, such as prize draws or direct payments (e.g. £10 for 10 minutes). The latter especially was described as having been very effective.

According to lead contacts, the data gathered provided a richness and depth to their understanding of care leavers, their lives and experiences, which helped them tune into young people's needs. And across the local authorities, the survey findings often

provided powerful and hard to ignore information about *their* care leavers, which helped raise the profile of care leavers within their local authority and with partner agencies. Most local authorities had shared the findings more widely, and some mentioned how they had used survey findings to evidence funding bids, often successfully, both externally and internally.

Your Life Beyond Care's comparison of survey findings with data about young people in the general population and with care leavers in other local authorities was highlighted as an additional strength. This allowed local authorities to view their findings within a broader context, although there were some frustrations about the lack of post-pandemic comparison data available at the time of the follow-up survey in 2022.

Overall, local authorities found the Your Life Beyond Care survey and accompanying reports very useful. However, some local authorities highlighted that the language used to describe stalled or marginally downward trends in the follow-up report could have been more sensitive to the political context that local authorities have to navigate. Terms, such as 'decreased' and 'worse' when comparing 2020 and 2022 was described as unhelpful and had caused setbacks in at least one local authority. The New Belongings team has acknowledged this feedback and will work with local authorities to address this in the future.

The Baker and Dixon 'leaving care services self-assessment' tool was completed twice by all eight local authorities – a full assessment in 2020 and a shorter follow-up review in 2022. This is an improved 100% completion rate compared to the previous phase of the New Belongings Programme (68% at baseline and 53% at follow-up).³⁷

Local authority leads highlighted that while the initial assessment had been time-consuming, especially as it was done online during lockdown, the self-assessment exercise had been a very useful process that offered a rare opportunity to take stock, identify gaps and reflect on their local authority's care leavers' provision. As recommended by the New Belongings team, all participating local authorities had engaged a range of services, managers and partner agencies across children's services, housing, health and employment, as well as the leaving care team. Many local authorities also engaged young people in the self-assessment process.

The opportunity to engage with partner agencies had been especially beneficial, as the process had brought people together – often for the first time. This had given other services and partner agencies' a better understanding of what the leaving care service did, and it also gave an opportunity for the leaving care team to learn about partners' other responsibilities.

For some partner agencies this was a real eye opener. Adult health services in one local authority reportedly acknowledged that they did not offer care leavers much in terms of support and was keen to rectify this in the future. Other local authorities were also able to develop new ways of working with partners, such as Job Centre

³⁷ Dixon, J. & Baker, C. (2016) [New Belongings: an evaluation. Research report](#), Department for Education. October 2016 (accessed 30 August 2022)

Plus allocating dedicated time to support care leavers with CV writing, as a result of partners coming together to complete the assessment.

Consequently, the two New Belongings tools – the self-assessment, and especially the Your Life Beyond Care survey – were described as an engine for change which had spurred local authorities on to make improvements for care leavers.

The data gathered from these two initial activities played a key role in informing and shaping their localised action plan, as local authorities reviewed the findings and prioritised actions. Local authorities were encouraged to involve young people at every opportunity, and all the participating local authorities engaged with care leavers as part of their action planning.

‘[The data] really drove things, for example with the housing. There were things being thought about, but it helped push things over the line, because the evidence was there for what we were doing, rather than it seems like a good idea... the survey really helped, that was one of the key things. We had a really good response rate in the first survey, of care leavers responding to that, it’s harder to argue with that when several hundred care leavers say they need support with that’. (Local authority lead)

Action plans took longer to develop than anticipated. The considerable pressure on leaving care services post lockdown in late 2020 to early 2021 continued, together with all meetings and communication having to take place online, slowed down this process. However, all eight local authorities produced an individualised action plan setting out a range of short-term and long-term priorities.

While all action plans were localised, based on their care leavers views and priorities, there were overlaps between local authorities in terms of what they wanted to achieve. Common themes included accommodation, emotional health and well-being, finance, relationships, the local offer, understanding own history and the leaving care service.

4.1.2 Engaging care leavers in co-production

At the outset of the New Belongings Programme, most of the participating local authorities had a leaving care council or were in the process of developing it. This was indeed a criterion of the New Belonging programme. However, the Covid pandemic altered this and some local authorities struggled to sustain their children in care and leaving carers forum. Nevertheless, all the participating local authorities engaged care leavers as part their involvement with New Belongings Programme.

Throughout the programme, local authorities tried out different mechanisms for listening, and introduced new ways of engaging their care leavers, for example through specific groups, like the so-called ‘task-force’ of young people in one local authority or though more informal teatime chats in another. During Covid lockdown and national restrictions such sessions took place online.

For most local authorities the Your Life Beyond Care survey was key in terms of reaching care leavers more widely and for raising specific issues, such as safety and emotional well-being. However, local authority leads also told us that they had recognised that to listen to and engage care leavers required multiple means, as ‘one size doesn’t fit all’. Some young people were, for example, interested in one issue and were keen to get involved with that, but not other issues. Some liked being part of a more formally-run group like the leaving care council, while others preferred sharing their opinions through more informal sessions, social media or through their Personal Adviser.

However, listening to care leavers was merely one aspect of the programme. Critical to the co-production approach, was a move away from *just* ‘listening to’ young people and adults coming up with the solutions, to working directly with care leavers to find solutions and develop plans to address the issues raised. Across the eight local authorities, staff worked creatively and actively together with care leavers to make improvements to services in their area. Some co-produced specific documents, such as their care leaver standards or their corporate parenting strategy, while others worked together to identify and develop specific schemes that could help address difficulties highlighted by care leavers.

Making care leavers part of the leaving care team, through additional or new apprenticeship roles, was for some local authorities both a way to increase the number of opportunities available to their care leavers, and a commitment to embed care leavers’ experiences within the team.

In previous phases of the New Belongings Programme, the Care Experienced Consultants had been a valued feature, as they worked with and offered peer-support to care leavers in the participating local authorities.³⁸ The less active role of Care Experienced Consultants in this phase of the programme was described as a disappointment by some local authority leads. Coram Voice recognised that this part of the programme did not work as intended, as they struggled to keep their Care Experienced Consultants engaged and to develop a format that suited both the young adults and programme work. The impact of Covid was also highlighted as many of the face-to-face groups did not take place as planned. Instead, local authorities played a greater role in engaging their own care leavers, which for some was described as an advantage as they were able to develop ongoing and positive relationships.

Nevertheless, at the end of the programme, all local authority leads were very committed to a co-production approach and were positive about the process. In terms of learning, one local authority lead mentioned that being able ‘to let go of control’ and feeling more confident to do so, had been an important learning.

Local authorities also acknowledged that it could be difficult when young people who had been closely involved with the programme or specific pieces of work moved on due to changing circumstances and commitments in their lives, whether it being starting university, becoming a parent or personal issues. While this is a common

³⁸ Dixon, J. & Baker, C. (2016) [New Belongings: an evaluation. Research report](#), Department for Education. October 2016 (accessed 30 August 2022)

feature of youth participation, local authorities occasionally found it hard to maintain consistency and momentum when new young people were recruited and engaged, especially when improvement work required a longer-term focus.

4.1.3 Programme and peer support

The New Belonging programme provided a structure of activities and actions, which proceeded according to a clear format. For leaving care services with multiple obligations and priorities, this was key to the programme, and the local authority leads we spoke to all valued having a clear structure in place, as this helped them progress and kept them on a schedule of improvements.

Working with an external organisation, such as Coram Voice, was also described as a lever to get internal decisions made and to progress action, as no senior leaders wanted to be seen to let the programme down or progress less than other participating local authorities. One local authority lead described the programme as a 'rocket pack' that had turbo-charged progress and made it easier to get things done. Another highlighted how a well worded letter from a senior Coram Voice contact in the DfE addressed directly to a senior leader within their local authority had raised the profile of care leavers and helped progress the programme in a way that had not previously been possible.

The New Belongings Programme had from the outset planned to run a few learning events for participating local authorities. However, the Covid pandemic and local authorities' subsequent embrace of online communication, enabled the New Belongings team to establish regular managers' meetings. Local authority leads met every 6-8 weeks online with the New Belongings team to discuss progress, share learning and best practice, and discuss and solve challenges experienced. We were told that these regular and well-attended meetings became an effective way to share information about the programme with participating local authorities and to keep the programme on track. The peer-support element was described as a beneficial element of the programme.

The New Belongings team also organised similar learning and peer-sharing meetings for Personal Advisers, to which local authorities nominated workers to attend. Feedback was reportedly good, but as we did not speak to any leaving care workers as part of the evaluation, we are not able to verify this.

The combination of programme and peer support appear to have been effective in keeping local authorities engaged and on track with programme activities, as they learnt from each other and from the programme team. A few local authority leads stressed how this support had been crucial to their progress during some difficult years.

Towards the end of the programme, many local authorities mentioned that they had either joined or maintained their membership of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, in part because they had recognised the value of peer-support and learning.

4.2 Enablers and barriers to progress

Learning from earlier phases of New Belongings³⁹ identified a range of factors that helped local authorities deliver the New Belongings Programme most effectively. These factors played an important role in shaping the application process for this phase of the programme, as the aim was to ensure that participating local authorities had the following in place from the outset:

- A commitment to embed the voice of care leavers in the local authority decision-making process;
- The commitment of senior management to the programme, including at Director and Councillor level;
- An existing forum for care leavers, or the commitment to set one up, and coordinate this;
- Dedicated staff time to coordinate programme activities and to engage with care leavers;
- A commitment to join up services across the local authority and with external partners to support care leavers and create new opportunities;
- An identified local authority lead, with access to senior managers, to manage local authority engagement in the programme.

Overall, these factors still appear to be valid, as local authorities with all or most of these conditions in place seemed to deliver the programme more effectively.

Based on interviews with local authority leads and the New Belongings team in this phase, we identified three key enablers to deliver co-production with young people:

- Consistency of staff

The consistency of staff at all levels including Personal Advisers, leaving care managers and senior leaders, as well as partner agencies was perceived as an important factor in progressing what local authorities set out to do. In the majority of local authorities, the lead contact was consistent throughout the programme. This consistency helped local authorities stay focused on the improvement- and co-production agenda.

Where local authorities had experienced staff changes, for example in the participation team, this had inevitably led to some delay and drift, as new members of staff and managers often had to play catch-up both in terms of understanding the programme and progressing actions.

Staff turnover and other internal pressures also ran the risk of local authorities losing their momentum for change, as limited capacity often meant that remaining staff had to concentrate on more pressing issues. As one local authority highlighted it had been difficult to regain momentum once it was lost, but that a re-brand had helped them re-focus to push forward with the co-production and improvement agenda.

³⁹ Dixon, J. & Baker, C. (2016) [New Belongings: an evaluation. Research report](#), Department for Education. October 2016 (accessed 30 August 2022)

- Committed service managers supported by senior management

Local authorities with a committed service manager, who was supported by senior managers and directors were generally better able to make co-production work well.

A key New Belongings principle is that the well-being of care leavers is the responsibility of the whole council, as their corporate parents, not merely the leaving care service. Hence, the active support of senior leaders and directors, and their ongoing commitment to engaging care leavers in solutions was crucial to improvements.

The rapid turnover of senior leaders in at least two local authorities meant that the leaving care service often worked in isolation, and whilst the service had made strides to implement improvements, the lack of senior support, and support from the wider council was perceived as a barrier to progress.

- Resources to do participation well

Local authorities that invested in participation or recognised the need for dedicated staff to engage care leavers were frequently better able to push the co-production agenda. Having a strong participation team that were responsible for supporting care leavers' ongoing engagement was perceived as crucial to embedding care leavers voices within local authority structures longer term.

Local authorities that mainly relied on Personal Advisers to drive participation often found it harder to sustain it over a period of time, as the urgency of other matters, rightly, took priority. In one interview, the local authority lead emphasised the importance of senior leaders recognising that genuine participation takes time and resources, and that effective participation and co-production cannot be done on a shoestring. In this local authority, all staff and managers welcomed care leavers voices and input, but many did not fully appreciate the high level of participation support required to make, for example, making attending corporate meetings a meaningful and beneficial experience for care leavers.

4.2.1 Achievements and impact

At the time of the first national Covid lockdown in March 2020, the New Belongings Programme was still getting going, and for a while it felt it may have to be abandoned. However, with local authorities' encouragement, Coram Voice decided to proceed with the programme. In July 2022, following some very difficult years for all local authorities, all eight local authorities remained actively involved with the programme and had stayed committed to improving provision for care leavers through co-production. This is a very encouraging finding for both the New Belongings Programme and for the participating local authorities.

At the end of the programme, at least two local authority leads spontaneously mentioned they would re-apply again given the opportunity – one even joked they would follow the New Belongings Programme to where it went next.

In terms of what local authorities felt they had achieved through the New Belongings Programme, local authorities emphasised a range of areas, including:

- Increased funding for the leaving care service (e.g. gaining funding for new posts or targeted provision benefitting care leavers)
- Improved relational practice and connectivity (e.g. building trusting relationships between leaving care workers and young people, as well as improving social activities for care leavers)
- Additional opportunities and resources for care leavers (e.g. through the Local Offer, as well as education and workplace opportunities)
- A greater focus on suitable and affordable accommodation (e.g. working with partners to improve housing stock, choice and safety, specific solutions to issues identified, such as Ring Doorbell and Guarantor scheme)
- Greater awareness of young people's needs and views through their direct contribution (e.g. developing mechanism to listen to care leavers voices, providing paid opportunities for care leavers to engage, such as Task Force leaders or care leaver Champions)
- Increased co-production with young people (e.g. to identify solutions to problems and develop specific documents, such as the Care Leaver Standard)

For some local authorities these achievements were rooted in a 'culture change' or new 'ethos' within their leaving care team, where involving young people felt more integrated and less like lip service. One local authority mentioned how co-production was now part of their core practice – 'this is how we do it now'.

At the end of the programme, all the participating local authorities confirmed their continued commitment to actively involve care leavers in service development. However, it was evident that local authorities had utilised the New Belongings Programme in different ways, depending on where they were in their co-production journey. Some have used the New Belongings' programme structure to get the basics of co-production right, while others have been able to aim higher and embed co-production more widely within their decision-making structures.

5. Wider local authority feedback

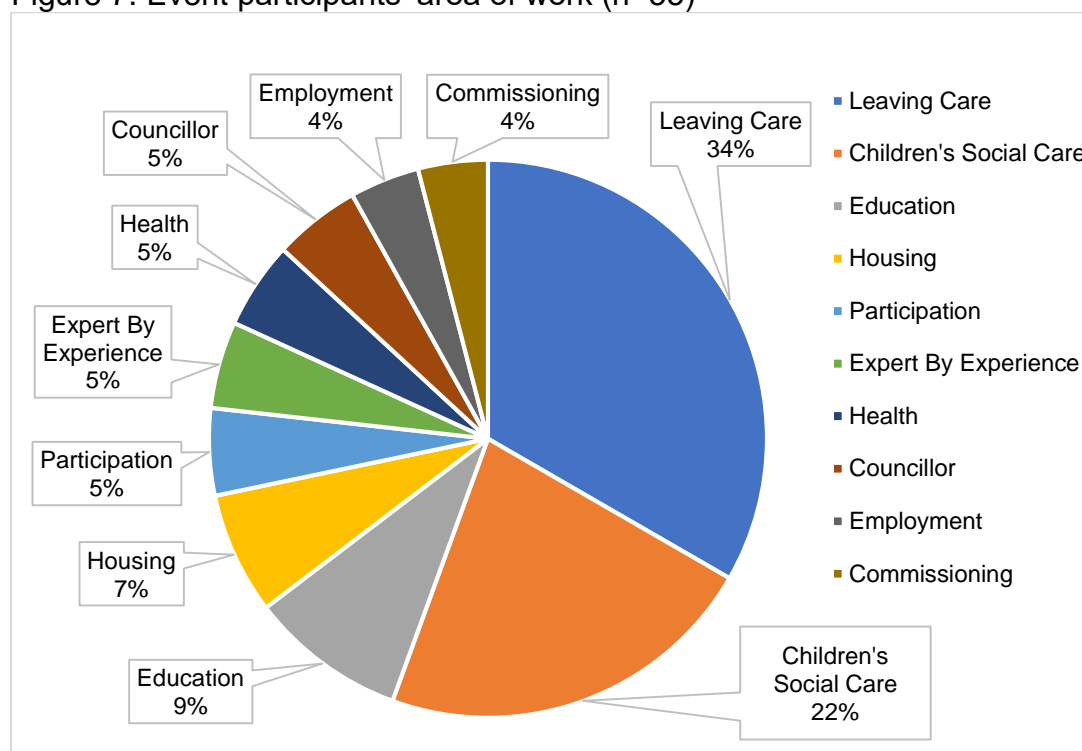
In six of the eight local authorities the New Belongings team, together with the lead local authority contacts, presented the findings from the follow-up survey and the self-assessment to an invited audience in summer 2022. These final six events provided an opportunity to share and celebrate what had been achieved over the past three years as part of the New Belongings Programme, as well as discuss and plan future actions to build on the co-production approach to ultimately improve the lives of care leavers. Most events were held in-person – often for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic – but two were held online. Some local authorities invited both internal and external partners and agencies, including local councillors. In at least one local authority the dissemination event was primarily for the leaving care team and its managers.

Following the dissemination events, participants were invited to complete a feedback questionnaire either online or as a paper copy. A total of 57 questionnaires were

completed across five local authorities. Respondents came from a range of roles and departments, primarily leaving care (33%) and children's social care (22%). Three people who completed the questionnaire were care leavers themselves.

Over three-quarters were employed by the local authorities (77%), and almost half (45%) had been in the same or similar post for five years or longer. A third (34%) had held their post for less than two years.

Figure 7. Event participants' area of work (n=55)



When asked to rate the dissemination event, all but one said it was 'good' (54%) or 'excellent' (44%). One person thought it was average.

Participants primarily found it useful to hear the findings from the Your Life Beyond Care survey, to hear the voices of care leavers and gain a better insight into care leavers lives and priorities. The dissemination events were also described as a useful opportunity to network, see the picture from both a local and national context, as well as reflect on progress and to plan ahead.

'It gave the chance to highlight where we can improve but also celebrate what we're doing well'. (Participant)

'[The event was] collaborative, informative and thought provoking'. (Participant)

'[It was an] opportunity to hear voice of young people – directly and indirectly, and an opportunity to see and talk to colleagues face to face'. (Participant)

In terms of what could have made the events better, many comments related to the venue, but other participants would have liked the session to be longer to allow for

more discussion. Some participants mentioned that they would have liked to see more external partner agencies, other directorates, corporate partners or senior leaders to attend. But overall, the event feedback was very positive.

Wider impact of the New Belongings Programme

The final dissemination events provided an opportunity to gain wider feedback on the New Belongings Programme and its work with local authorities. Participants were asked whether they, besides the final dissemination event, had attended any other activities or meetings, such as online seminars, self-assessment meetings or action planning as part of the New Belongings Programme – and the impact such activities had had on them. Almost two-thirds of respondents (63%, n=33) said they had attended other meetings or events relating to the New Belongings Programme.

In terms of the personal impact of attending such sessions or events, many highlighted that it had offered them an opportunity to reflect on both their own practice and that of their local authority's service to care leavers.

'Hearing some of the developments in other authorities has made me consider how [our local authority] could develop these ideas within our own authority. The survey has been brilliant in ensuring we really know what our young people feel about our service and making sure our service responds to their needs'. (Participant)

'It made me motivated to improve aspects of the leaving care service' (Participant)

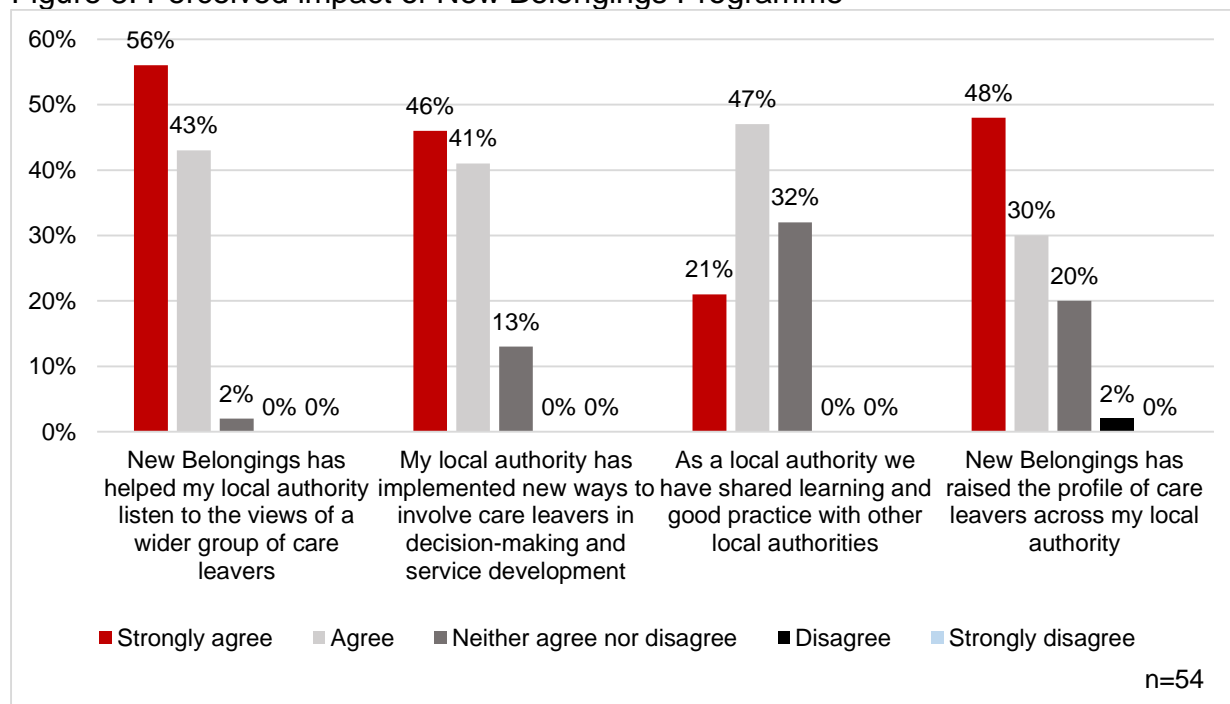
'I've had my voice heard and have seen evidence that my voice has been heard' (Expert by experience Participant)

More broadly speaking, the vast majority (98%) of participants 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'New Belongings has helped my local authority listen to the views of a wider group of care leavers' (figure 8). This is a very positive finding for the New Belongings Programme and for the participating local authorities.

The majority of participants also agreed or strongly agreed that their 'local authority had implemented new ways to involve care leavers in decision-making and service development' (87%) and that 'New Belongings has raised the profile of care leavers across my local authority' (78%). Two-thirds (68%) believed that 'as a local authority we have shared learning and good practice with other local authorities.'

Together these findings indicate that local authorities recognise they have taken important steps towards implementing new and better ways to listen to their care leavers and to involve them in service development and decision-making – and thereby fulfilling key aims of the New Belongings Programme.

Figure 8. Perceived impact of New Belongings Programme



Changes to services for care leavers

Participants were asked what changes they had seen to services for care leavers over the past two years. Three mentioned negative changes, mainly due to the Covid pandemic, but the majority highlighted positive changes, including the development of specific services or provision that had been introduced over the past two years:

- Expand and build consistency around post-25 support
- Improvements to health provision, such as doubling of nurse time
- More supported accommodation
- Focus on safety, such as the introduction of ring video doorbells
- Better financial support, such as Wi-Fi offer; council tax exceptions; and a guarantor scheme for care leavers renting accommodation from private sector landlords
- Free pantry scheme

Many also mentioned that they had seen their local authority getting better at listening to young people or become more informed as a result of involving young people in decision making and planning.

'The impact of having more care experienced young people embedded within our service has helped with a longer-term change in culture. This is quite subtle but immensely important'. (Participant)

'[Care leavers] have been more involved in corporate parenting board and we have heard their voices'. (Participant)

'I think Covid forced us to become more creative about seeing young people and I am glad we are continuing with some of these ideas'. (Participant)

Final, some participants identified that their local authority had more understanding of care leavers' needs, and that there was a better visibility and ownership for care leavers across the council

When asked why these changes happened, the New Belongings Programme appears to have played a role in embedding the importance of involving young people:

'I think we were able to think about things differently and challenge ourselves by having an external organisation involved in our plans. The conversations with other authorities and need to ensure our plans were moving forward helped change how we respond to our young people as colleagues. We and the wider organisation aren't there yet but progress is being made'.

(Participant)

'It's been an excellent programme to be part of and extremely valuable'

(Senor leader participant)

'We realised that services are better for young people when informed by young people's views'. (Participant)

Barriers to improving services for care leavers

Participants at the final dissemination events highlighted a range of areas which in their view had been the biggest barriers to improving services for care leavers in their local authority.

Limited resources or funding was frequently mentioned as a barrier, alongside staffing issues, especially around capacity, the high turnover and pressure on staff following the pandemic, as well as recruitment difficulties. Lack of suitable and affordable housing for care leavers, together with choice, was also mentioned as a barrier to improving services for care leavers. Pressure on other services, such as mental health services was also a hindrance to progress.

'Suitable Housing options – these are limited / major shortage – Covid has further impacted upon this relating to the responsibilities of LA's to homeless people. Difficulties in accessing more specialist provision through adult services'. (Leaving care participant)

'Nationally, the lack of mental health support services has really impacted on care leavers. The council are trying to recruit staff to help with this, but struggling to find staff'. (Employment and education participants)

'Staffing issues impacting momentum for change and Covid'. (Social worker participant)

Three participants based in two different local authorities highlighted a lack of senior buy-in or lack of management time and focus as a barrier to progress. However,

interestingly, no one mentioned their local authority's unwillingness engage with and to listen to care leavers as a barrier for change.

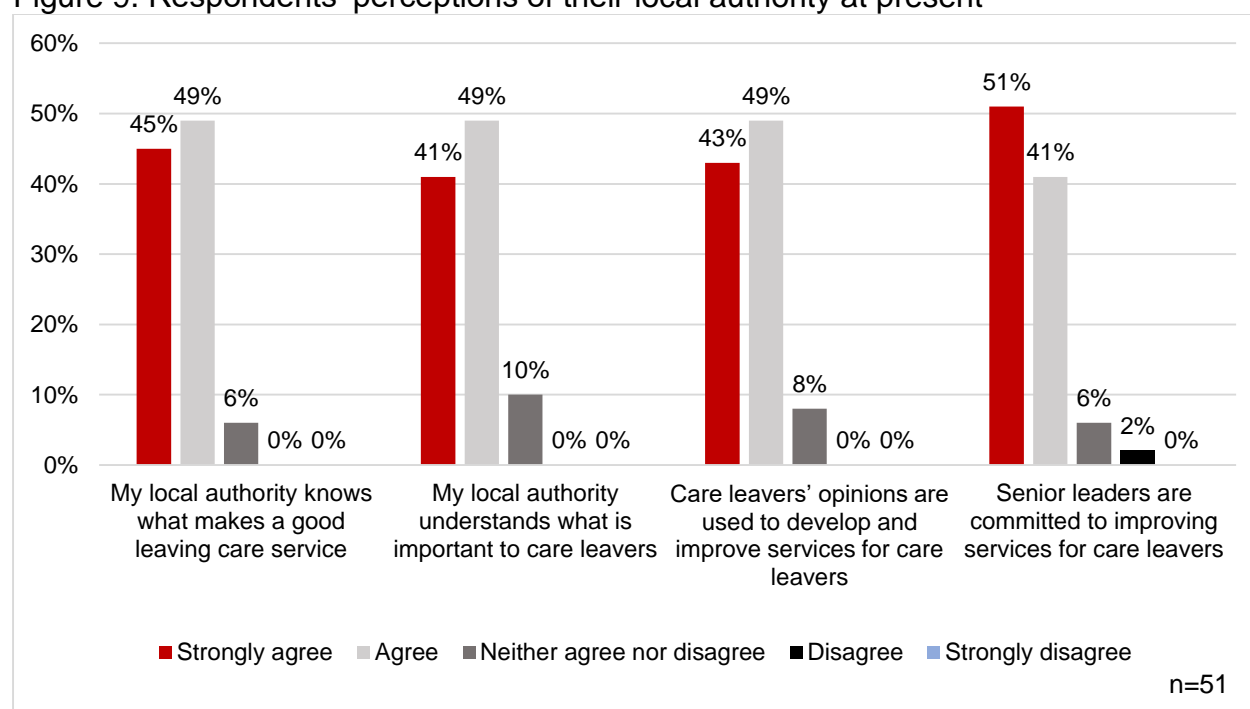
Commitment to their care leavers

At the conclusion of the New Belongings Programme respondents were positive about their local authority's commitment to and understanding of their care leavers. The vast majority agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'my local authority knows what makes a good leaving care service' (94%) and 'my local authority understands what is important to care leavers' (90%) – no one disagreed. Ninety-two percent agreed or strongly agreed that their local authority at present used care leavers opinions to develop and improve services for care leavers.

The vast majority of respondents also believed that senior leaders were committed to improving services for care leavers (92%) – although one person disagreed.

Though we do not have the equivalent views of care leavers themselves, these are very encouraging findings for the New Belongings Programme and for the participating local authorities.

Figure 9. Respondents' perceptions of their local authority at present



Building on the New Belongings Programme

We were interested in how participants viewed their local authority's commitment to involving care leavers in the future. We therefore asked them to rate the likelihood of their local authority actively engaging care leavers in decision-making when developing services for care leavers in the future. Overall, respondents were very

positive with almost half (46%) giving the greatest likelihood rating of 10.⁴⁰ Another 39% rated the likelihood 8 or 9, while seven respondents (15%) rated the likelihood 7 or less. Again, this is an encouraging finding, which suggests that most participants strongly believe that their local authority will strive to actively engage care leavers in the future.

In terms of priorities going forward for improving services for care leavers, the respondents highlighted a range of areas they think their local authority should focus on or continue to focus on next:

- Mental health support dedicated to care leavers
- Strategic improvements to housing options and choices, including more supported accommodation
- Focus on transition into adulthood, including accommodation and mental health services for young people with complex needs
- Build partnerships to engage the whole council more widely
- Improve financial support within the local offer, including considering a minimum income
- Increase the capacity of leaving care workers by reducing case load
- Offer a mentoring scheme for care leavers
- Involve more young people in discussions about services
- Create more social opportunities for care leavers

Although the results from the events questionnaire are based on a relatively small sample of respondents (n=57) with an existing investment or interest in the leaving care service, the findings are nevertheless encouraging and demonstrate a commitment to improving services for care leavers and an acceptance of the importance of actively engaging care leavers in order to do so.

6. Conclusion

The New Belongings Programme, in its third phase, worked with local authorities to engage care leavers in service improvements using a co-production approach. The programme, delivered by Coram Voice, worked with a small cohort of eight local authorities over three years, using a range of mandatory data collection tools, with the overall aim of improving support for care leavers based on engagement and the involvement of young people as experts in their own experience.

Care leavers

When participating local authorities distributed the Your Life Beyond Care survey to care leavers, at the beginning of the Covid pandemic in 2020, many discussions were had about whether the findings from the survey would be an accurate representation of how care leavers were feeling or how local authorities were doing, given the unprecedented challenges everyone was facing. However, contrary to

⁴⁰ 'How likely is your local authority to actively engage care leavers in decision-making when developing services for care leavers in the future? (1 = Not at all likely and 10 = extremely likely)'

expectations the baseline findings were remarkably similar or better compared to the national pre-pandemic Bright Spots sample of care leavers (2017-19). The findings from the 2022 follow-up survey presented in this report, show that many, but not all, slight improvements seen in 2020, have reverted to pre-pandemic levels or even got slightly worse. In 2022, too many care leavers are still feeling lonely, stressed and anxious, or are struggling financially.

These are somewhat disappointing findings, for the New Belongings Programme, and for the local authorities that have worked incredibly hard to make improvements for their care leavers. However, the post-pandemic context of extraordinary pressure on services both highlights the ongoing challenges for the sector as a whole and for individual local authorities.

Local authorities

At the end of the programme, it is clear that local authorities have utilised the New Belongings Programme in different ways, depending on where they were in their co-production journey. Overall, all eight local authorities stayed engaged throughout the programme and all have used the programme to make positive changes in their area for young care leavers. This report highlighted some of the benefits of the programme as reported by participating local authorities:

- The programme and its use of mandatory tools, such as the Your Life Beyond Care survey and the self-assessment, provided a structure of activities and actions that spurred local authorities on, made change happen and kept local authorities focused on their commitment to involving care leavers.
- The findings from the Your Life Beyond Care survey were central to increasing local authorities' knowledge about *their* care leavers – their lives, experiences and well-being. The availability of such nuanced evidence meant that local authorities were better positioned to understand and support care leavers, but also to champion more widely for care leavers' needs to be prioritised within their local authority.
- The programme helped raise the profile of care leavers and the leaving care service within participating local authorities.

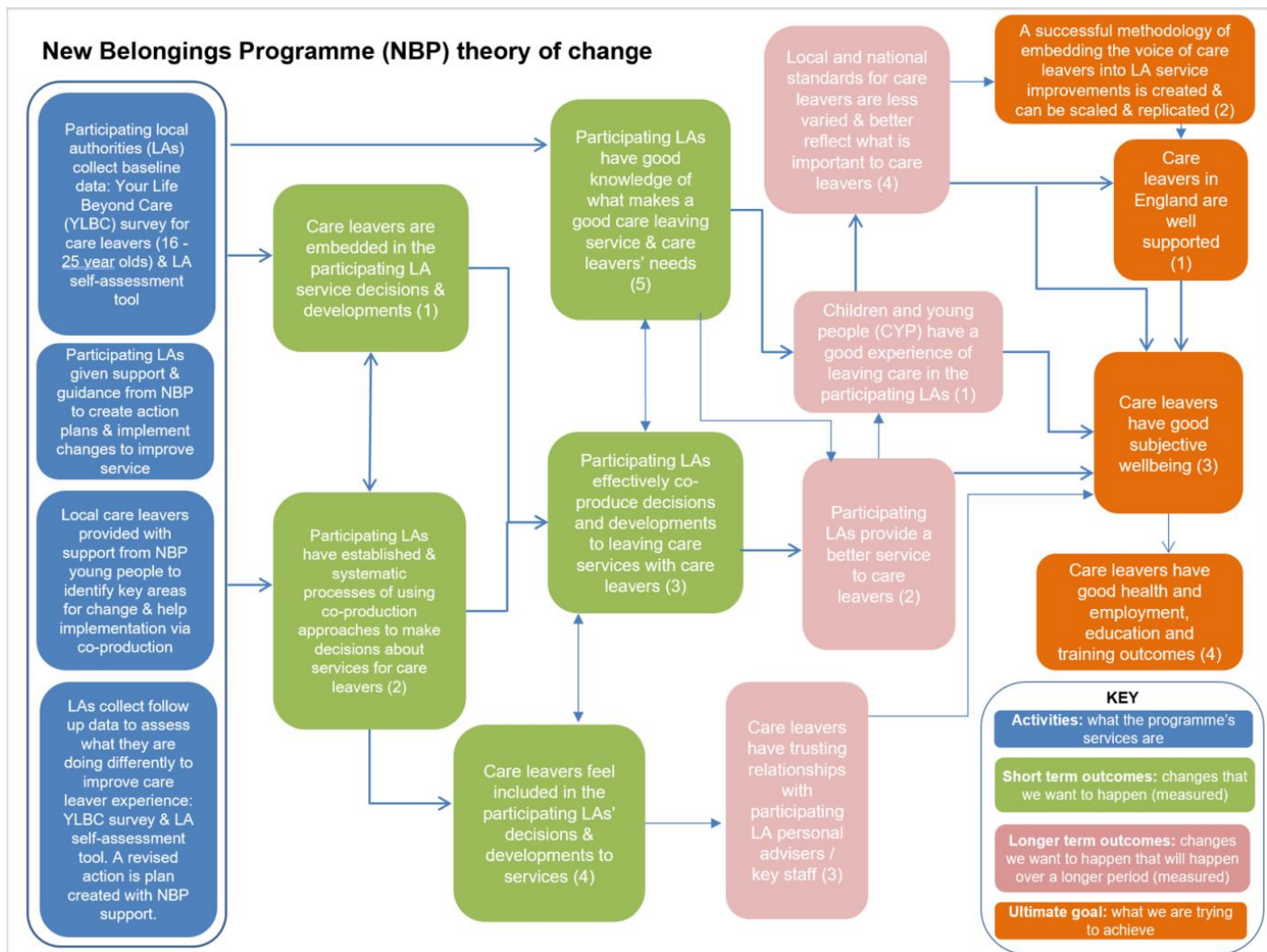
As a result of participating in the New Belongings Programme, local authorities felt they had achieved improvements in a range of areas. Some local authorities perceived these achievements as rooted in a 'culture change' or new 'ethos' within their leaving care team, where involving young people felt more integrated and part of their core practice. Others were not there yet, in term of embedding this approach, but they recognised the benefits of co-production and were committed to continue to work with care leavers to improve services.

In many ways the positive feedback from participating local authorities about their involvement with the New Belongings Programme and its impact, do not correlate with the less positive follow-up findings from the Your Life Beyond Care survey for care leavers. Despite three years of targeted effort to involve care leavers in service improvements, the cohort of care leavers did not necessarily feel safer, happier, less anxious or financially more secure. A number of reasons may explain this contradiction, including the post-pandemic context of pressure on services,

withdrawal of additional support and financial help, as well as reduced staff capacity and staff turn-over. Or it could be that local authorities have started to implement changes, but that improvements are yet to be experienced by a large number of their care leavers. However, without further data we are currently unable to explore this issue in more details.

Nevertheless, the evaluation findings highlight the perceived benefits of and local authorities' ongoing commitment to involving their care leavers in service development, as well as the importance of a continued focus on improving services for care leavers now, and in the future.

Appendix 1: The evaluation framework



New Belongings Programme (NBP) logic model

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION: The Coram Voice NBP will support 8 local authorities (LAs) to engage care leavers in service improvement using a co-production approach teamed with the Bright Spots methodology. The project is funded for 3 years (2019 to 2022) by the Esmée Fairburn Foundation and the Segelman Trust (£350K). The 8 LAs taking part in the programme are: 1. Coventry City Council 2. Dorset Council 3. Hertfordshire County Council 4. North Tyneside Council 5. North Yorkshire County Council 6. Oldham Council 7. Stockport Council 8. Wandsworth Borough Council.



AIM	DELIVERY	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	ULTIMATE GOAL
To amplify & embed the voice of care leavers to create lasting improvements in local authority (LA) services for young people leaving care	<p>Project team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Head of Policy & Practice Development NBP manager 6 – 8 trained, care experienced young people (16 – 26 years old) <p>Key deliverables</p> <p>Collect 8 sets of baseline data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each LA will complete a baseline Your Life Beyond Care (YLBC) survey and LA self-assessment tool NBP will support each LA with dissemination & data collection, analyse results and write report <p>Create 8 initial action plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After baseline data collection, NBP will support each LA to write an action plan to address improvement areas <p>Provide ongoing support, advice and guidance to each LA over 2 years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NBP young people (supported by NBP participation lead) will support local care leavers groups through 8 workshops NBP team will provide ongoing support to LA leads <p>Collect follow up data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each LA will complete a follow up YLBC survey & LA self-assessment tool approximately 24 months on to assess differences in results <p>Review and revise action plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NBP team will support each LA to review their action plans & develop 8 revised action plans <p>Local, regional and national learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The NBP team will hold 3 national peer learning seminars & write 1 report about findings from the 8 LAs to disseminate nationally 	<p>Locally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 baseline YLBC survey reports & LA self-assessments 8 initial action plans 64 workshops run by NBP young people (8 per LA) for local care leavers to understand key issues, develop action plans, support implementation & establish co-production approaches 8 follow up YLBC survey reports & LA self-assessments 8 revised action plans <p>Nationally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 national peer learning seminars 1 final national report of findings & learning 	<p>Short term</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Care leavers are embedded in participating LA service decisions & developments (2) Participating LAs have established & systematic processes of using co-production approaches to make decisions about services for care leavers (3) Participating LAs effectively co-produce decisions & developments to leaving care services with care leavers (4) Care leavers feel included in the participating LAs' decisions & developments to services (5) Participating LAs have good knowledge of what makes a good care leaving service & care leavers' needs <p>Long term</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Children & young people (CYP) have a good experience of leaving care in participating LAs (2) Participating LAs provide a good service to CYP leaving care (3) Care leavers have trusting relationships with participating LA personal advisers/ key staff (4) Local and national standards for care leavers are less varied & better reflect what is important to care leavers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The learning from NBP means care leavers in England are well supported (2) Care leavers have good subjective wellbeing (3) Care leavers have good health and employment, education and training outcomes (4) A successful methodology of embedding the voice of care leavers into LA service improvements is created & can be scaled & replicated

POLICY CONTEXT: At year ending 31 March 2017, there were 35,710 care leavers aged 18 to 21 years old in England. This increased from 33,650 in 2015. There is a lot of variation in the experience and service care leavers receive across England. For example, in 2018 over 50% of local authority care leaver services required improvement (LAIT, 2018).

New Belongings Programme outcomes measurement framework for short term outcomes

Short term outcome	Indicators	Measurements
(1) Care leavers are embedded in the participating LA service decisions & developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Care leavers feel involved in decisions and improvements to LA services b. Care leavers' opinions are used systematically to develop and improve LA services for care leavers c. Evidence of care leaver input into LA action plans and reviews d. LA has effective processes in place that successfully include care leavers in decision making & implementing change e. Small differences between the results of the Baker Dixon LA self-assessment tool completed by LA staff & version completed by care leavers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Areas 1 (service responsiveness to views of carer leavers) and 2 (entitlements: being informed and supported) of Baker Dixon LA self-assessment tool completed by LA b. Areas 1 (service responsiveness to views of carer leavers) and 2 (entitlements: being informed and supported) of Baker Dixon LA self-assessment tool completed by care leavers c. Findings from evaluation questions used in workshops with care leavers (3 workshops per LA run by NBP) d. Qualitative interviews with key LA staff in each local authority at two time points (middle and end of programme). Some of these interviews will be developed into two case studies with more details about the effect of the NB programme
(2) Participating LAs have established & systematic processes of using co-production approaches to make decisions about services for care leavers	Same indicators as outcome (1)	Same measurements as outcome (1).
(3) Participating LAs effectively co-produce decisions & developments to leaving care services with care leavers	Same indicators as outcome (1).	Same measurements as outcome (1).
(4) Care leavers feel included in the participating LAs' decisions & developments to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Care leavers feel involved in decisions and improvements to LA services b. Small differences between the results of the Baker Dixon LA self-assessment tool completed by LA staff & version completed by care leavers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Findings from evaluation questions used in workshops with care leavers (3 workshops per LA run by NBP) b. Areas 1 (service responsiveness to views of carer leavers) and 2 (entitlements: being informed and supported) of Baker Dixon LA self-assessment tool completed by care leavers
(5) Participating LAs have good knowledge of what makes a good care leaving service & care leavers' needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. LA can say what is important to local care leavers b. LA can say what the needs of local care leavers are c. Findings from YLBC are embedded into LA action plans and service changes d. Small differences between the results of the Baker Dixon LA self-assessment tool completed by LA staff & version completed by care leavers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Qualitative interviews with key LA staff in each local authority at two time points (middle and end of programme) b. Baker Dixon LA self-assessment tool completed by LA (all areas)

New Belongings Programme outcomes measurement framework for long term outcomes

Long term outcome	Indicators	Measurements
(1) Children & young people (CYP) have a good experience of leaving care in participating LAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Young people feel happy with their experience of leaving care b. Young people have a good relationship with their LA personal adviser (and other relevant staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Areas 2 to 10 in the Baker Dixon LA self-assessment tool (below) completed by care leavers b. YLBC survey results from questions 3 and 4 c. Findings from evaluation questions used in workshops with care leavers (3 workshops per LA run by NBP) <p>Areas 2 to 10 of Baker Dixon tool:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Entitlements: being informed and supported 3. Educated to their potential 4. Helped into work (employability) 5. Having good health and wellbeing 6. Being in safe and settled accommodation 7. Having an adequate level of income 8. Having people to count on for emotional support 9. Being able to manage day to day life 10. Services that are used by more vulnerable care leavers
(2) Participating LAs provide a good service to CYP leaving care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Young people feel happy with their experience of leaving care b. Young people have a good relationship with their LA personal adviser (and other relevant staff) c. LA provides a service to care leavers that meets or exceeds minimum statutory requirements i.e. financial support, housing support, education and employment support etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Areas 2 to 10 in the Baker Dixon LA self-assessment tool (above) completed by LA b. YLBC survey results from questions 3 and 4 c. Findings from evaluation questions used in workshops with care leavers (3 workshops per LA run by NBP)
(3) Care leavers have trusting relationships with participating LAs personal advisers / key LA staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Young people have a good relationship with their LA personal adviser (and other relevant staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. YLBC survey results from questions 7 and 8 b. Findings from evaluation questions used in workshops with care leavers (3 workshops per LA run by NBP)
(4) Local and national standards for children in care are less varied & better reflect what is important to care leavers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. There is less variation in the service provided to care leavers across different LAs b. Participating local authorities share learning and good practice between them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Analysis of consistency of Dixon Baker LA self-assessment tool responses between participating LAs (completed by LAs) b. Monitoring of the three national peer learning seminars – do they take place? How well were they attended? What was the feedback?

Appendix 2: Baseline and follow-up data

Baseline data gathered about each local authority								
	Coventry	Dorset	Hertford-shire	North Tyne-side	North York-shire	Old-ham	Stock-port	Wands-worth
Ofsted information	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LAC / Care leavers statistics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local Offer details	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Initial LA / NB meeting evaluation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EOI document	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evaluation interview with LA lead	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Baker and Dixon assessment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bright spots survey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Follow-up data gathered about each local authority								
Evaluation interview with LA lead	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baker and Dixon assessment (short)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bright spots survey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observation of online dissemination meeting			✓		✓			
LA post dissemination meeting feedback survey		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	