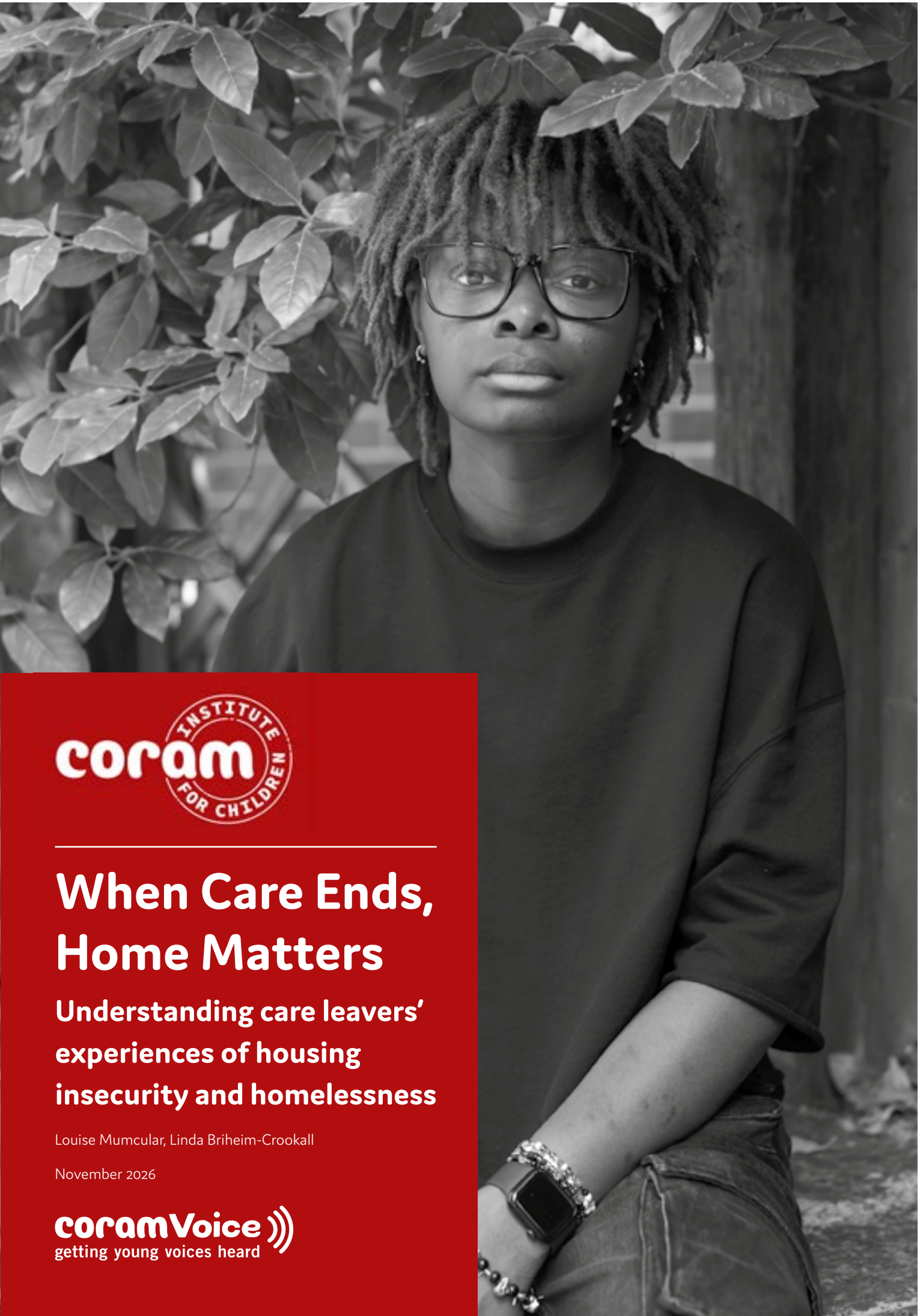


coram Institute for Children

When Care Ends, Home Matters

Understanding care leavers' experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness

Louise Mumcular, Linda Briheim-Crookall

November 2026

coramVoice
getting young voices heard

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the young people and professionals, in particular the Youth Advocates and Specialist Advocates from Coram Voice, who contributed their views to inform the findings and recommendations in this report.

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About this report

This report draws on evidence from Coram Voice's Advocacy Service casework and existing data from tens of thousands of Bright Spots survey responses from young people. It is grounded in the experiences and perspectives of care leavers and places their voices at the centre of the findings, rather than relying on adult interpretations of their lives.

We are extremely grateful to the young people who gave us their time through participating in focus groups, workshops and individual interviews. This included Voices in Action Housing Rights Ambassadors, A National Voice Ambassadors and Care Experienced Consultants. It is the voices of these young people, along with the voices of young people who have responded to Bright Spots surveys, that you will see quoted throughout. We have also included anonymised case studies about young people who have received support from a Coram Voice Advocate.

The report is published by the Coram Institute for Children, the dedicated research and development organisation for children at the heart of the Coram Group.

About us

Coram and the Coram Institute

Coram's vision for children is a society where every child has the best possible chance in life, regardless of their background or circumstances. Building on our legacy as the first and longest continuing children's charity, the Coram Institute for Children is instrumental in realising this vision by acting as a catalyst for change and collaboration, seeking evidence-based solutions to the challenges facing children in the 21st century in policy, law and practice.

The Coram Institute for Children is the only Independent Research Organisation dedicated to the future of children, working with partners and young people to learn from the past, examine current needs, improve practice and create better chances for the next generation. More information about Coram and the work of the Institute can be found here: www.coram.org.uk

Coram Voice

Founded 50 years ago as Voice for the Child in Care and now part of the Coram group, Coram Voice champions the rights of children by getting young voices heard in decisions that matter to them and working to improve the lives of children in care, care leavers and others who depend upon the help of the state.

Bright Spots Programme

The Bright Spots Programme has been working with children in care and care leavers for over a decade to understand what they feel is important to have a good life. The Bright Spots Programme was developed by Coram Voice together with Professor Julie Selwyn at the Rees Centre, Department of Education, University of Oxford and funding from the Hadley Trust.

Voices in Action

Coram's Voices in Action youth homelessness programme empowers young people with lived experienced of homelessness or housing insecurity to influence change. The Housing Rights Ambassadors do this through campaigning locally and nationally to change policy and practice, designing and delivering training to frontline professionals, and empowering their peers with knowledge of their rights through workshop delivery and content creation.



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Abandoned, ignored, silenced

A poem by Sophie, Housing Rights Ambassador, Voices in Action

You stare. No, you assess.
Like property. Like risk. Like something to be controlled.
Measure me. Label me.
Decide what I'm worth before
I ever speak.
Abandoned.
Ignored.
Silenced.
Scan the room for value, like predators of power,
searching for weakness,
for something easy to control,
For something you can own.
My hope gives you away. A mistake.
My wishes make me visible. A liability.
And you use that. Exploit both.
You don't ask who I am.
You already decided.
That's the mistake.
That's the opening.
Glimpse by glimpse,
you exploit my vulnerability.

A room full of people
and not one asks who I am—
yet everyone knows my name.
On files.
On forms.
Whispered in corridors.
Like a title in a hall of fame
etched on paperwork,
passed around like gossip—
but my story is inconvenient.
none attached.
I am not a person to you.
I am a number.
A case. A risk. A problem.
A responsibility you resent.
An object you shove
from place to place
until it cracks.
Passed hand to hand
until I crack.

You smile and promise care.
Person-centred, you chant.
We listen.
We help.
Lies said softly
sound professional.
One unsafe place
after another.
You call it housing.
You call it care.
You call it safe.
You see a roof over my head yet decide its home

A borrowed bed cannot be called home.
A friend's couch cannot be labelled home.
That roof over my head is not home.
Listen to me, don't be deceived.
"This place is safe," you say.
Say it again.
Say it louder.
If you repeat it enough,
Maybe you'll believe it.
Safe for you.
Unsafe for me.
Silenced anyway.
Abandoned. Ignored. Silenced.

Summary

For most young people, leaving home is a gradual process supported by family, financial help and a safety net to fall back on. For many care leavers, it is very different. Despite significant developments in law, policy and guidance over the last 25 years, too many young people continue to leave care without the stable foundation that a safe and suitable home provides. Data shows that care leavers are six times more likely to face homelessness compared to other young people.[1]

> "The biggest change [needed] isn't just building more homes, it's ensuring that no care leaver is ever forced to live alone before they are ready! When I turned 18 years old, I felt abandoned."

The Government has recently made clear its ambition to ensure that no young person becomes homeless when leaving care.[2]The recommendations in our report call for further change, in both national policy and local practice, to support delivery of the Government's ambition. They focus on strengthening planning, improving access to suitable accommodation, increasing financial and practical support, promoting enduring relationships, and ensuring local systems work together around the needs of young people. We shine a light on examples of good practice, demonstrating that the Government's ambition is achievable.

The evidence presented in this report is grounded in Coram Voice Advocacy Service casework, reflecting the lived experiences of care leavers supported by our advocates to have their voices heard and rights upheld. It is further informed by focus groups and interviews with care-experienced young people, data from tens of thousands of responses from young people to our Bright Spots surveys, and wider existing research.

The evidence is clear. Care leavers are significantly more likely to experience homelessness than their peers, yet this is neither inevitable nor acceptable. Where young people live after care has a profound impact on their well-being, mental and physical health, education, employment, relationships and financial security. A safe and stable home is not simply somewhere to sleep. For care leavers, it represents security, belonging, consistency and the opportunity to build a positive adult life.

> "Looking at my home makes me so proud, my home is how I want it and has such a homely cosy feel. There is something about looking at the past to where I am now and having my own home has really helped me move past my childhood and look forward to the future!"

Our advocacy casework shows that housing is the issue care leavers most commonly seek support with. Young people describe planning for leaving care coming too late, inadequate information about their rights and housing options, and feeling excluded from decisions about their future. Some leave care without a clear accommodation plan. Others are placed in accommodation that does not meet their needs, leaves them feeling unsafe, or separates them from important support networks and relationships.

Our report highlights the importance of a joined-up approach. **Housing outcomes depend on effective partnership working between housing services, leaving care teams, adult social care, health services, education providers and the voluntary sector.** Recent reforms offer an opportunity to improve accountability and ensure local practice matches national expectations.

We identify three priorities for improving outcomes for care leavers:

- First, **care leavers must be fully informed about their rights and options and be meaningfully involved in planning for their future.** Pathway planning should begin early, be personalised, and include realistic information about housing options and challenges. Young people should have access to trusted adults, specialist advice and independent advocacy to help them understand, exercise and uphold their rights.
- Second, **care leavers need access to safe, suitable and affordable homes.** Housing decisions must be driven by young people's individual needs and aspirations, not simply by the availability of accommodation. This includes ensuring access to social housing, maintaining support networks, considering neighbourhood safety, addressing barriers faced by disabled care leavers, and recognising the importance of relationships, including those with pets, to young people's well-being.
- Third, **care leavers need ongoing support to secure and sustain a home.** Stable housing is closely linked to trusted relationships, practical help and financial security. Many care leavers continue to face cliff-edge reductions in support, financial hardship and inconsistent access to assistance. Young people need gradual transitions to adulthood, strong relationships with trusted professionals, and financial support that reflects the realities of independent living.

Achieving the Government's ambition that no young person becomes homeless when leaving care will require sustained commitment, accountability and collaboration across national and local systems. It will also require consistent measurement of outcomes to ensure progress is tracked and organisations are held to account.

Most importantly, it will require us to listen to what care leavers have told us for years they need – when care ends, home matters. No young person should leave care without one.


VANS

Our recommendations

1: "Make sure I know my rights and plan with me"

Recommendations – national policy

The Department for Education should

- Amend Chapter 3 (Pathway Planning) of Volume 3 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations to set out more explicitly the expectations on leaving care teams to ensure care leavers understand their personal housing options. This should include:
  - Requiring Pathway Plans to set out the housing options available to the young person, reflecting the accommodation information contained within the Local Offer for Care Leavers.
  - Reinforcing the requirement in the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 for Pathway Plans to include clear actions, timescales and named individuals responsible for delivery.
  - Strengthening expectations that young people are informed, involved and at the centre of all stages of pathway planning.
  - Providing more detailed guidance on developing high-quality Pathway Plans, including examples of effective practice and templates co-produced with care-experienced young people.

Recommendations – local practice

Local authorities should

- Embed specialist housing advisers in all leaving care teams to support care leavers and to upskill Personal Advisers (PAs), ensuring they can give advice to care leavers grounded in knowledge of housing options.
- Co-produce information about accommodation options and housing support with care leavers to ensure information is delivered in ways that are meaningful and understandable to young people.
- Review pathway planning practice together with care leavers to ensure all young people have high quality plans that are developed and regularly reviewed with young people.
- Proactively offer care leavers access to independent advocacy when preparing to leave care and when experiencing homelessness or housing issues. This should be delivered in line with National Standards for the Provision of Children's and Young People's Advocacy Services[3] and include access to non-instructed advocacy and advocacy in a language they understand.

2: "I need a home that's right for me"

Recommendations – national policy

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should

- Amend the Allocation of Accommodation Guidance[4] to require local authorities to prioritise care leavers within their social housing allocation schemes, minimise gatekeeping barriers, and publish clear, accessible information on eligibility criteria and nomination processes. The guidance should also require, rather than strongly encourage, local authorities to give the same level of priority to care leavers placed in their area by another authority who wish to remain there, as they would to their own care leavers.
- Introduce a care leaver exemption from local connection requirements in homelessness legislation, mirroring the exemption already available in social housing allocations. This would enable care leavers to access homelessness assistance in the area where they have established support networks and choose to live.
- Extend priority need status within homelessness legislation to all care leavers, regardless of age.

The Department for Education should

- Require Regional Care Cooperatives to include care leavers in regional sufficiency strategies, including forecasts of need, commissioning intentions and plans for care leavers' accommodation, to complement local authorities' existing duties. These should include family-based options available for young people in adulthood including Supported Lodgings and Shared Lives, in addition to Staying Put for young people who have been in foster care.
- Ensure the barriers to increasing the numbers of Staying Put arrangements, including financial disincentives, are understood and addressed as part of the revision of the Staying Put guidance.
- Extend Staying Put arrangements to age 25 to provide greater stability and parity with the experiences of other young adults.
- Ensure services are needs led rather than age led, enabling care leavers to have gradual and extended transitions. In relation to housing, this could mean removing blanket rules that mean only those under 18 can live in a particular setting or access a certain service.

Recommendations – local practice

Local authorities should

- Design housing pathways that recognise transitions to adulthood are rarely linear. Care-experienced young people should have the option to step back into higher levels of support, including returning to previous homes or supported living arrangements where suitable. Decisions such as declining a Staying Put arrangement should not prevent young people from accessing support later if independent living proves challenging.
- Consider care leavers' needs holistically when assessing accommodation suitability. In particular, local authorities should consider how safe a young person feels (both in their homes and in their neighbourhoods) and how housing policies can enable care leavers to maintain positive relationships, including with their pets if this is identified as a support need.

3: "Help me to secure and keep a home"

Recommendations – national policy

The Department for Work and Pensions should

- Give care leavers entitlement to the over-25 rate of Universal Credit from the age of 18.
- Extend the exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate for care leavers from age 25 to 35, to align with the age threshold at which the Shared Accommodation Rate applies.

The Department for Education should

- End the postcode lottery of financial support by creating a national offer for care leavers that is mirrored in care leaver local offers to provide all care leavers with council tax exemptions, rent deposit and rent guarantor schemes.
- Develop and implement a national strategy to equip the leaving care workforce with the time, resources, skills, knowledge and confidence to provide all young people leaving care with the support they need. This should be rooted in relational practice and an expectation that local authorities operate a model that allocates care leavers a PA at age 16 who stays alongside them until age 25.

The Department for Education and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should

- Work with Kings College London to develop an extended, large-scale pilot of the Randomised Controlled Trial Cash Transfer Pilot for Care Leavers.

Recommendations – local practice

Local authorities should

- Structure leaving care services so that PAs have the capacity to spend time with young people to develop trusting and supportive relationships with them.
- Put in place arrangements to ensure care leavers experience no gap in income when they turn 18, including providing financial support during the five-week wait for a first Universal Credit payment.
- Have clear, published information on care leaver entitlement to the Setting Up Home Allowance and guidelines for how it can be spent. Young people should also have freedom to choose how it is spent.



4: Making it happen: a joined-up system around care leavers

Recommendations – national policy

The Department for Education and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should

- Monitor and publish data on the local implementation of new care leaver housing and homelessness duties, including the application of local connection in social housing and on intentional homelessness decisions for care leavers.
- Share effective practice where implementation of new duties is making a difference to care leavers.

The Department for Education should

- Ensure leaving care support is not removed from care-experienced young people based on immigration status, including former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people whose immigration status remains unresolved when they reach adulthood.[5]

Ofsted should

- Maintain a focus within the revised ILACS inspection framework on the quality of PA support, effective pathway planning, and ensuring care leavers have safe and stable homes. This should include how local authorities assess care leavers' accommodation and support needs and commission services to meet current and future demand.

Recommendations – local practice

Local authorities should

- Work with care leavers as partners in the design, review and improvement of housing and leaving care services, including the development of joint housing protocols. Participation and co-production activities should be accessible and inclusive, with proactive steps taken to ensure disabled care leavers are able to contribute their views and influence decisions about services that affect them.
- Include accommodation outcomes, as defined by young people (for example, whether young people feel safe where they live) within local corporate parenting strategies and frameworks.
- Strengthen transition planning and multi-agency working so that disabled care leavers can move into suitable accommodation with the support needed to sustain it. Local authorities should start planning early and coordinate children's services, adult social care, housing, health and mental health services to assess needs, secure appropriate accommodation and establish clear responsibilities. Timely Care Act assessments, joint transition plans and effective information-sharing arrangements should be in place before a young person leaves care, with accessible information, communication support and advocacy available throughout the process.
- Identify young people who are not eligible for adult social care but have disability-related support needs that may affect their housing outcomes and ensure they are supported through pathway planning and Staying Close. Accommodation decisions should be based on a young person's needs and required support, not solely on Care Act eligibility.
- Commission specialist housing, independent living and tenancy sustainment support to address gaps in provision and reduce the risk of unsuitable accommodation or homelessness.



Introduction

Every year, thousands of young people in care become 'care leavers' on their 18th birthday. For some, it can be even sooner. Widely referred to as their transition to adulthood, young people face significant changes in the care and support to which they are entitled. Where they will live can be the most significant change.

For the professionals in young people's lives, these changes are no surprise; they should be anticipated and planned for, and in the last 25 years the Government has increased local authority responsibilities towards young people leaving care through the introduction of new legislation and guidance.[6] Care leavers should receive ongoing support from leaving care services at least until age 21 and up to 25 if they request this. This includes support from a Personal Adviser (PA) to help plan and assist with the transition to adulthood, including finding suitable accommodation.

Furthermore, since 2017, corporate parenting was placed on a statutory footing for the first time in England, introducing seven corporate parenting principles that local authorities must have regard to, requiring them to support care leavers up to the age of 25 as if they were their own children. This includes duties to ensure young people are safe, have stability in their home life and are prepared for adulthood and independent living[7]

The Children's Well-being and Schools Act 2026[8] extended corporate parenting responsibilities beyond local authorities to a wider range of public services, requiring them to collaborate when carrying out corporate parenting functions. The Act also strengthens responsibilities towards care leavers by requiring local authorities to provide increased support as young people transition to adulthood.

The current picture

Government statistics indicate that care leavers face an increased and growing risk of homelessness compared to other young people. In 2024-25, at least 1 in 10 young care leavers faced homelessness[9] compared to 1 in 60 young people.[10]

Care leavers are six times more likely to face homelessness compared to other young people.

It is particularly worrying that Government statistics show 600 of these young people faced homelessness straight after leaving a care placement, for example foster care or a children's home.[11] Statutory guidance is clear – there should be no expectation that care leavers' housing needs will be met through recourse to local authority homelessness duties.[12] These statistics suggest inadequate planning, or lack of planning altogether, as young people are leaving care placements without a new home to move into.

In recent years, a growing number of young people enter care at an older age[13] Young people who enter care as teenagers are much more likely to experience placement instability and be housed in 'out of area' placements.[14]

At Coram Voice, we support hundreds of care leavers every year to have their voice heard and their rights upheld through our advocacy helpline, local advocacy and homeless outreach services.

Our advocacy casework indicates that housing is the top issue care leavers seek help with.

For care-experienced young people this is about more than providing a roof over their head. Ensuring care leavers have a home that's right for them provides the foundation for a positive start to adulthood, supporting them to thrive in all areas of their life, including education, employment, relationships, and mental and physical health.

> "Looking at my home makes me so proud, my home is how I want it and has such a homely cosy feel. There is something about looking at the past to where I am now and having my own home has really helped me move past my childhood and look forward to the future!"

The importance of home to care leaver well-being

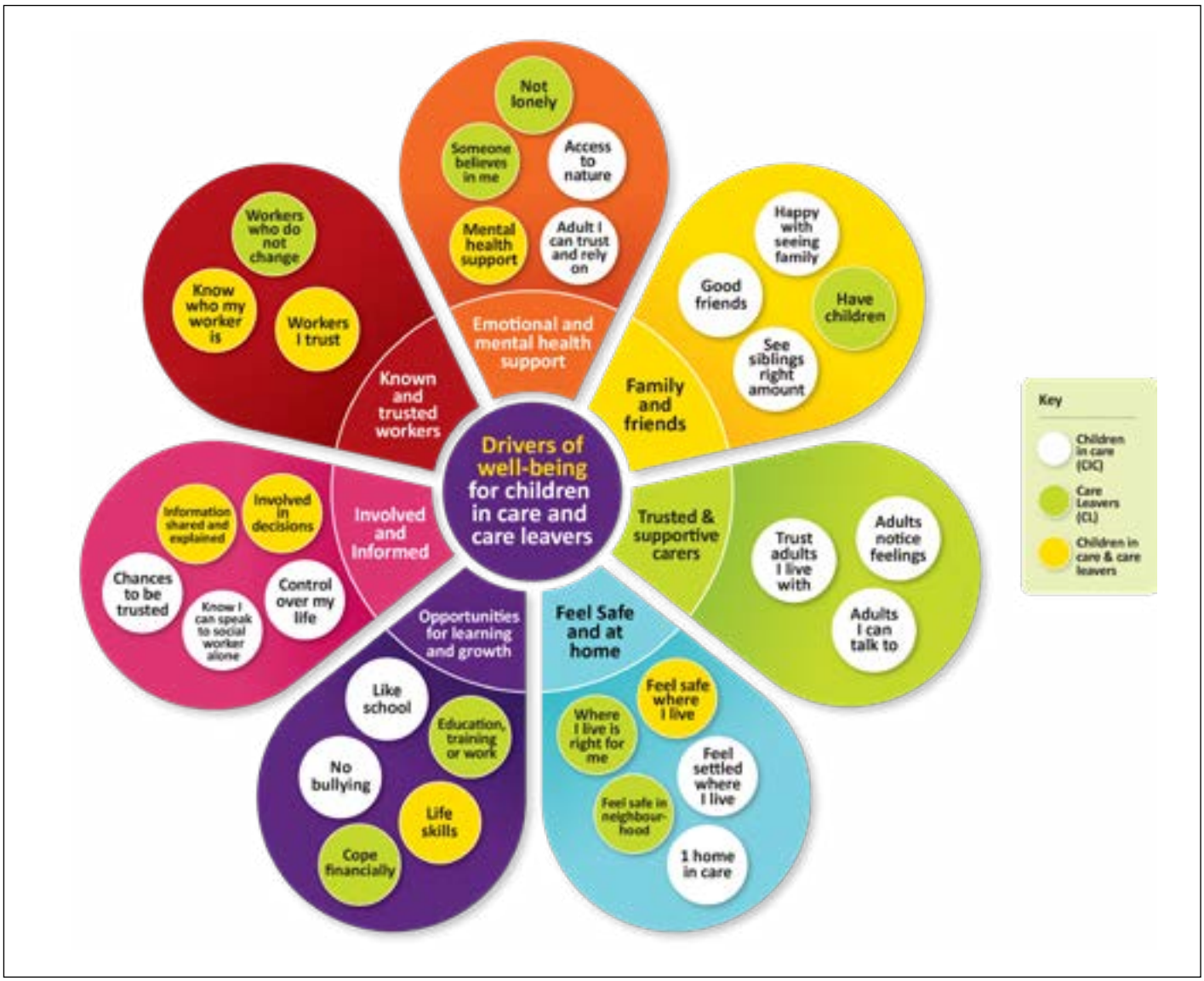
Our recent research on the well-being of care experienced children and young people is clear that having a home that is right for you and feeling safe where you live are important determinants of care leavers' well-being.

From Surviving to Thriving: The seven drivers of well-being for children in care and care leavers[15] draws on 10 years of data gathered from tens of thousands of 'Bright Spots' surveys of children and young people about what matters to them.[16]

The report identifies seven interrelated drivers of well-being (see Figure 1). For care leavers, where a young person lives can enable or undermine many of the other drivers of well-being, including mental and physical health, financial security, relationships and support networks, and opportunities for education and employment.

Figure 1: The drivers of well-being for children in care and care leavers

Coram Voice's Bright Spots surveys identify things that that children in care and care leavers say make their lives good. We found that key drivers of well-being can be grouped into seven interrelated areas. Feeling safe and at home is a key driver of well-being and also linked to other areas of well-being.



> "I'm now being evicted over a year on and in loads of debt. I just want somewhere I feel safe and I can call mine to make the best for my mental and physical well-being as well as my future."

A safe and stable home plays a key role for young people as they grow up, including during their move into adulthood.

A third of care leavers do not always feel safe in their home.

Our research shows the importance of feeling safe and at home to care leavers. We found the odds of low well-being are 1.5 times higher for care leavers who did not feel safe where they live. This could include feeling unsafe at home, or feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood due to, for example, antisocial behaviour, noisy neighbours, criminality, or drug use. Some care leavers also wanted support to move away from people they were scared of, including abusive ex-partners. The lowest well-being was reported by care leavers who were homeless or living in temporary or emergency accommodation. Additionally, care leavers who self-reported disability or long-term health problems were significantly less likely to feel safe at home compared with care leavers who were not disabled.

Government statistics suggest that around 9 in 10 care leavers are in suitable accommodation, yet only 7 in 10 care leavers report where they live is right for them.

Conversely, we also know that many care leavers do feel that where they live is right for them.[17] Care leavers who lived with former carers, parents or in supported lodgings reported higher well-being and those who were 'Staying Put' (living with former foster carers) scored highest on all well-being measures.

We asked a group of care leavers 'What does home mean to you?'[18]

These responses are in line with the responses from over 300 children and young people who fed into the Independent Review of Children's Social care in 2021.[19]



2026 responses

Housing insecurity and homelessness should not be, and is not, inevitable for young people leaving care. In theory, the support care leavers are legally entitled to should mean they never face the risk of homelessness.



2021 responses - from *'Home is not a placement': What makes a home and what does not. What children and young people wanted to say to the Care Review - A National Voice.* [20]

The Government's ambition for care leavers

Over the past year, the Government has significantly strengthened its commitment to improving housing outcomes for care leavers. A growing body of legislation, policy and statutory guidance has set out a clear expectation that care leavers should be supported to access safe, stable and suitable housing and protected from homelessness. This includes the National Plan to End Homelessness,[21] which identifies care leavers as a priority group, updated guidance on the care leaver local offer[22] and good practice guidance on joint housing protocols.[23] The Children's Well-being and Schools Act 2026 further strengthens support for care leavers through measures including an exemption from intentional homelessness rules and the national rollout of Staying Close support. Together, these developments signal a clear ambition that no young person should leave care without the foundations that a safe and secure home provides.

In November 2026 the Government published its Care Leaver Homelessness Reduction Plan.[24] The plan sets out a programme of action across Government and partners to reduce homelessness among care leavers and improve access to stable housing and support. The introduction of ambitious targets to end homelessness among young people leaving care placements and halve homelessness among care leavers under 25 is a significant step forward. The critical challenge now is implementation.

This report is intended as a practical contribution to achieving the Government's ambition. Drawing on the experiences of care leavers, evidence from advocacy casework and existing research, it explores why too many young people still experience housing instability despite an increasingly strong policy framework. It identifies the barriers that continue to prevent care leavers from accessing safe, stable homes and recommends further national and local action, along with practice examples, to ensure that every care leaver has the foundations they need to thrive.

Our report is grounded in the experiences and perspectives of care leavers, placing their voices at the centre of the findings rather than relying on adult interpretations of their lives.

1: "Make sure I know my rights and plan with me"

Care leavers should be fully informed about their rights and options relating to housing and at the centre of planning for their future



Driver of well-being for care leavers:

- Involved in decisions
- Information shared and explained

Involved

For care leavers, having a say in decisions about their care and understanding future plans is essential for positive well-being and ensuring they have a home that's right for them. Pathway Plans are an important part of this, setting out plans for their transition from care to adulthood, identifying their needs, setting goals, and coordinating the support required to achieve them. Our *From Surviving to Thriving* report found care leavers who felt involved in pathway planning had greater odds of high well-being, whereas not being involved was linked to low well-being.

Although many young people leaving care do feel involved in planning, our advocacy casework shows that despite national guidance,[25] planning for young people can come too late and too many have poor quality pathway plans.

Advocates describe a lack of long-term planning, focusing only on the immediate needs of the young person; a lack of timescales for delivery of actions in the plan; a lack of contingency planning in relation to housing, leaving a young person at risk of homelessness if the stated plan does not work out; and a lack of involving young people in the development of their plan. Shockingly, our advocates support some young people who have never seen their Pathway Plan or simply do not have one. These findings reflect data in our *From Surviving to Thriving* report, that identifies a mixed picture of care leaver involvement.

3 in 5 (60%) of care leavers felt involved in their pathway planning all or most of the time and 10% of care leavers either did not have a plan or did not know what one was.

Further analysis of the same Bright Spots data showed that care leavers who are homeless or in temporary accommodation less often report feeling involved in pathway planning.

Coram Voice case study 1

Pathway planning

Isaac was referred to Coram Voice by his college. Aged 20 and a former relevant child, Isaac told his advocate that he had moved between six properties in the last two years since leaving care. He said, "I have no idea where I'm going to be, or for how long, so I don't even bother trying to buy stuff for it".

Isaac had moved from group homes to semi-independent accommodation, to hostels, and was now sofa surfing with friends. He did not realise that, legally, he was considered homeless. He had told his PA that he was sleeping amongst friends, but his PA had not raised concerns.

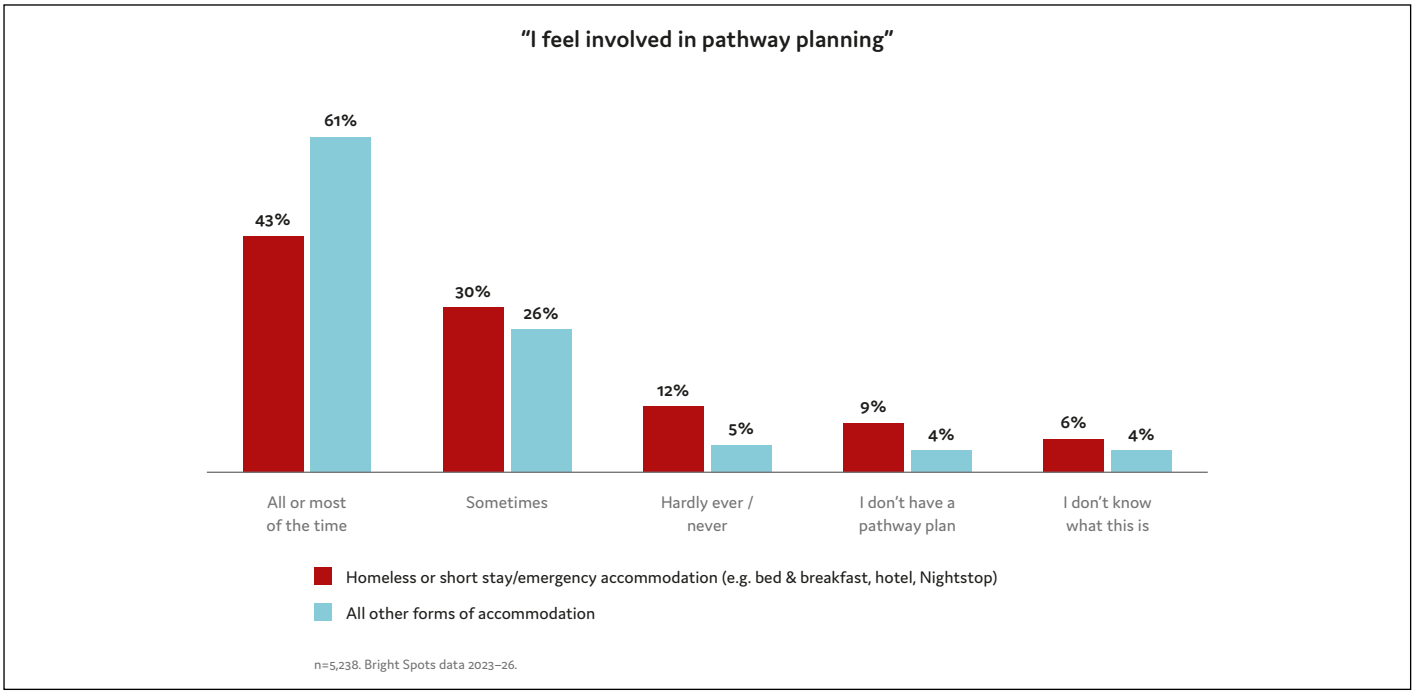
Isaac's advocate explained what a Pathway Plan was, his entitlement to one, and the importance of being involved in developing a clear plan for his future. Isaac said he had seen a plan a long time ago but did not think he currently had one. He also found it difficult to contact his PA and had been told to speak directly to housing.

With support from his advocate, Isaac asked for a new Pathway Plan. He was able to explain what he wanted, where he wanted to live, and the importance of having clear SMART goals. His PA prepared a new plan with Isaac's involvement and documented the PA duty to liaise with housing and support Isaac to make a homelessness application.

For now Isaac remains in temporary accommodation, but he does now have a Pathway Plan that he helped create and can use to hold the local authority accountable. This plan includes reapplying to the housing department for long term secure accommodation. With the support of his advocate, Isaacs issues are not entirely resolved but he has gained the confidence to advocate for himself and challenge whether he is receiving the support he is entitled to.

Isaac's advocate will continue working with Isaac, discussing his rights, entitlements and options and support Isaac to find a resolution.

Figure 2: Pathway planning



> "Pathway Plans are usually done without us. I had to fight to find out what is in it."

Informed

One of the biggest issues our advocates help care leavers with is knowing what their local authority accommodation options are and their rights to support.

> "The number one challenge for young people is lack of information."
>
> "I want young people to know about their options before they turn 18."
>
> "I was given inaccurate advice – I was told I had to be age 23-25 to get a council house."
>
> "It should be taught in schools and colleges where to go for help in a crisis so you know before it happens."

Our advocates report a common misconception among many young people that when they turn 18, they will immediately have entitlement to social housing. While care leavers may be given priority, access to social housing remains constrained by limited supply and local eligibility criteria.

This misconception has been exacerbated by the growing use of AI. Although it has provided opportunities for young people to digest complex information and seek to understand their rights, it has also created new challenges in instances where AI tools give inaccurate or misleading information.

Our advocates and legal services report having to support young people to sort fact from fiction, sometimes creating friction with services when care leavers are disappointed that they cannot access the support they believed was available.

Despite the requirement for care leaver local offers to include clear and accessible information about accommodation and housing support available, advocates report that care leavers are often insufficiently aware of the realities of the housing system. This includes understanding the short and long-term accommodation options available, the likely timescales for securing permanent properties, social housing waiting lists and financial responsibilities they will need to take on once they are 18.

Access to realistic, accurate and timely information about accommodation options is vital for care leavers to secure a safe and suitable home. It helps them understand their choices, prepare for moving, address concerns and make informed decisions.

Young people have said that in relation to housing in particular, information needs to be shared and explained earlier and in more detail. Our Voices in Action Housing Rights Ambassadors are clear that whilst written information is important, it can be "full of jargon", "non-specific to their needs"[26] and "feel cold". Even more important to them is that young people have a trusted adult they can turn to for accurate and specialist knowledge when required. Speaking to "someone who has already been through it" is also highly valued. They recognise the complexities of the housing system, and feel their carers or PAs may not always have the information they need.

> "We need collaborative support and someone we can rely on."

Our Ambassadors also identify barriers to young people seeking out information or asking for help:

> "Asking for help makes you vulnerable."
>
> "You're used to things being sh*t and dealing with things on your own."
>
> "You have low expectations and might not believe there is a solution or a way to get help."

Advocacy

At Coram Voice we know the value of advocacy to ensure care leavers are informed and understand their rights (see Coram Voice Case Study 2 on p16). We provide commissioned advocacy services for children and young people in 23 local authorities, and our specialist advocacy projects support young people who are homeless, in crisis or have a disability. Advocates empower young people to have their views, wishes and feelings heard in decisions being made about their lives.

The Government's recently updated National Standards for the Provision of Children's and Young People's Advocacy Services[27] recognise that there are key points in leaving care when support from an advocate will be particularly important: when preparations are being made for a young person to leave care, when a young person is navigating the children's social care and housing systems and when a young person is transitioning from children's to adult services.

Young people leaving care up to age 25 have a legal right to advocacy support.[28] However a number of independent and government-commissioned reports consistently find that the provision of advocacy services by local authorities are inconsistent and that looked-after children, children in need and care leavers do not always feel listened to or receive the support they are entitled to.[29]

Our *Always Heard*[30] report found some care-experienced young people continue to face barriers to accessing advocacy including: local services restricting access by age (often resulting in older care leavers not meeting eligibility criteria), a lack of non-instructed advocacy for young people with disabilities, lack of provision in alternative languages for young people who are migrants or refugees and services unable to support young people living outside of the local authority area.

Recommendations – national policy

The Department for Education should

- Amend Chapter 3 (Pathway Planning) of Volume 3 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations to strengthen expectations for pathway planning and housing preparation for care leavers. This should include:
  - Requiring Pathway Plans to set out the housing options available to the young person, reflecting the accommodation information contained within the Local Offer for Care Leavers.
  - Reinforcing the requirement in the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 for Pathway Plans to include clear actions, timescales and named individuals responsible for delivery.
  - Strengthening expectations that young people are informed, involved and at the centre of all stages of pathway planning.
  - Providing more detailed guidance on developing high-quality Pathway Plans, including examples of effective practice and templates co-produced with care-experienced young people.

Recommendations – local practice

Local authorities should

- Embed specialist housing advisers in all leaving care teams to support care leavers and to upskill PAs, ensuring they can give advice to care leavers grounded in knowledge of housing options.
- Co-produce information about accommodation options and housing support with care leavers to ensure information is delivered in ways that are meaningful and understandable to young people.
- Review pathway planning practice together with care leavers to ensure all young people have high quality plans that are developed and regularly reviewed with young people.
- Proactively offer care leavers access to independent advocacy when preparing to leave care and when experiencing homelessness or housing issues. This should be delivered in line with National Standards for the Provision of Children's and Young People's Advocacy Services and include access to non-instructed advocacy and advocacy in a language they understand.



Coram Voice case study 2

The difference an advocate can make

Sophia was referred to Coram Voice's advocacy service when she was 22 years old. A care leaver and full-time university student, Sophia had been living with her former foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement since turning 18. She told her advocate that she felt the local authority had not supported her to live independently and was frustrated that important decisions affecting her future had been made without clear communication.

Sophia explained that she had been told by a previous Personal Advisor (PA) that she would be offered social housing, and this was reflected in her Pathway Plan. However, she was later told that the process for accessing social housing had changed and that she would need to live in shared private rented accommodation first. She also received conflicting information about her financial entitlements as a care leaver, including support for driving lessons and setting up her own home.

Sophia was concerned that changes were being made to the local authority's Local Offer, but she had not been provided with an updated version. She felt unsure about what support she was entitled to and found it difficult to challenge decisions without understanding her rights. She also wanted a new PA, as she felt her needs and concerns were not being heard.

Sophia's advocate helped her understand her rights and entitlements as a care leaver, including the purpose of the Local Offer and the importance of her Pathway Plan. With support from her advocate, Sophia was able to clearly express her views and concerns in meetings about housing, financial support and her future plans.

Her advocate also helped her make representations to senior managers and supported her to raise a formal complaint.

Through the advocacy process, Sophia gained a better understanding of her rights and felt more confident challenging decisions that affected her. Her Pathway Plan was reviewed and updated, and she was allocated a new PA. Following further discussions and escalation, Sophia received a direct offer of social housing and successfully moved into her new home.

As part of her support, Sophia received enhanced assistance to help her settle into independent living, including essential household items such as white goods, curtains, a bed and a sofa. She also received support to set up her home and was awarded previously disputed financial entitlements, including funding for driving lessons.

Reflecting on her experience, Sophia described feeling unheard by professionals for many years and said she had struggled with frequent changes of PA. However, she said that having an advocate made a significant difference. She explained that advocacy helped her understand her rights, regain confidence, and challenge decisions that she previously felt powerless to question.

While Sophia continues to navigate some aspects of her transition to independent adulthood, she now has secure housing, a clearer plan for the future, and greater confidence in advocating for herself. Through advocacy, she was able to ensure her voice was heard and secure the support she was entitled to as a care leaver.

Practice example

Integrating Bright Spots questions into pathway planning in East Sussex

East Sussex County Council wanted to ensure that Pathway Plans focused more clearly on the issues that matter most to care-experienced young people. Drawing on learning from the Bright Spots Programme, they embedded a selection of Your Life Beyond Care survey questions directly into their pathway planning process.

The challenge
PAs, managers and young people felt that the existing Pathway Plan was overly repetitive and did not always capture young people's lived experiences or well-being. While Bright Spots survey findings provided valuable insight at a service level, they did not help practitioners understand the experiences of individual young people.

What they did
East Sussex worked with young people and PAs to redesign the Pathway Plan, incorporating questions that encourage conversations about well-being and relationships, including:

- Feeling safe where they live
- Financial well-being
- Long-term health conditions or disabilities
- Having someone they trust
- Questions about their time in care
- Satisfaction with their appearance
- Whether they have a pet

Rather than treating these as a one-off questionnaire, the questions are explored through ongoing conversations, visits and reviews.

Impact
The new approach has led to richer and more meaningful discussions between young people and PAs, helping to identify needs and agree actions earlier. For example, conversations about unanswered questions regarding time in care have led to referrals for Life Long Links support.

Managers report that Pathway Plans now provide a deeper understanding of young people's experiences and have improved the quality of planning. Young people have also said the new format helps them hold the local authority to account for responding to issues they raise.

The information gathered has informed both individual support and wider service improvement. Insights from young people have been shared with housing and community safety colleagues, helping services respond more effectively to issues such as housing concerns and feelings of safety in the local area.

By embedding well-being-focused questions into routine pathway planning, East Sussex has strengthened young people's voice within care-leaving services and created a more personalised approach to planning for adulthood.

Practice example

Accommodation guide for care leavers in Wandsworth

Care leavers in Wandsworth were uncertain about their accommodation options and felt there was a lack of transparency in the process. Wandsworth produced an accessible and engaging accommodation guide,[31] written in language young people can relate to.

The guide includes answers to the five biggest questions care leavers ask about housing, and aims to bust commonly-held myths such as the belief that care leavers will get their own flat on their 18th birthday and that the best flats go to young people who have good relationships with their workers.

Young people are supported to understand this information by Future House, the specialist housing team within Future First, Wandsworth's Leaving Care Service.



2: "I need a home that's right for me"

Care leavers need safe, suitable and affordable housing



Driver of well-being for care leavers:

- Feel safe where I live
- Feel safe in neighbourhood
- Where I live is right for me

Having a safe and suitable home has a direct impact on outcomes for care leavers, not only in relation to well-being but also physical health and wider life chances.

Only a third of care leavers who are homeless or in temporary accommodation always feel safe where they live compared to two thirds of other care leavers.[32]

Evidence from our advocacy casework shows many care leavers struggle to find and secure suitable and affordable housing; especially from the private rented sector, youth-specific housing and one-bedroom homes, and move on options that build independence and maintain stability. Whilst all young people face barriers to accessing safe and suitable housing,[33] care leavers are particularly disadvantaged because they are frequently required to transition to independent living without the financial, practical, and emotional support that many other young people receive from their families and at an earlier age than many of their peers.

Safety

From Surviving to Thriving found that care leavers not feeling safe where they live and in their neighbourhood increases the odds of low well-being.

A third of care leavers do not always feel safe in their home.

Young people have described exposure to crime, violence, drug-related activity, antisocial behaviour and intimidation in the communities where they were housed.

1 in 10 care leavers never felt safe in their neighbourhood.

There is also recent evidence that rising levels of racism, misinformation, far-right mobilisation, and public hostility towards migrants has led to separated and displaced young people who are care leavers experiencing additional discrimination, fear, and social isolation.[34]

> "I live in a troublesome area... Last week a shopkeeper was attacked by knifepoint... I am frightened to go out by myself."

Care leavers can also feel unsafe due to experiences of domestic abuse and difficulties accessing alternative accommodation.

> "I want to relocate to be away from my daughter's father who was abusive. Although relocating is proving to be difficult."

In *From Surviving to Thriving* we found that 69% of care leavers report that where they live is right for them. In written comments, some care leavers expressed their satisfaction with where they were living. They appreciated having their own space, or a sense of security; they liked the area or living near people they cared about.

> "It's a really nice council flat which is out of the way and has a nice view."

This shows that it is possible to get it right for care leavers, but that too many (31%) still do not have a home that is right for them. We can learn from where things are working to support those who are not yet in safe and settled accommodation.

Disrepair

Our advocates support many care leavers to deal with disrepair issues after they have been told by their leaving care service to contact their landlord directly. Anecdotal feedback from local authority leaving care teams points to a shared frustration about delays to repairs, highlighting the need for stronger accountability of housing providers. Problems such as damp and mould can negatively affect young people's physical and mental health, and lead to additional financial costs.

> "When I turned 18, I had no say in where I moved to, and I was forced out into a horrible rat-infested s**t show. The repairs were never fixed. It took over a year to move."

> "My flat has a mould and damp problem which has been ongoing for two years and it is very frustrating and not good for my health or well-being."

Pets

Pets can play a significant role in care leavers' emotional well-being, providing companionship, routine, comfort and a sense



Coram Voice case study 3

Accommodation that meets individual need

Lucy, an 18-year-old care leaver, was made two direct offers by the local authority housing department but declined both because they had a "no pets" policy and she would not be able to keep her cat. Lucy had explained both to her PA, and to the housing officer prior to the offers being made, that her cat provided important emotional and therapeutic support and she would not be able to accept a home without her cat.

The housing department said that, having refused two offers, no further offers would be made. Lucy said this was unfair as they knew about her cat, and her desire to remain with her cat. Lucy's advocate from Coram Voice wrote to Lucy's PA, who said there was little she (the PA) could do and suggested that Lucy's cat could live with her aunt instead.

Lucy's advocate supported Lucy to put into writing her dissatisfaction with the rigid policy. Lucy had not known she could email her PA's manager before. After discussing her options, the advocate then supported Lucy to access a housing solicitor. The solicitor challenged the decision, arguing that the authority had not properly considered Lucy's individual circumstances, well-being and the importance of her cat.

Following legal representation, the local authority conceded and agreed to make further direct offers, with the condition that future properties would allow Lucy to keep her cat.

of responsibility (see Coram Voice case study 3). Pets can therefore be a very significant relationship for a young person.

Data from our *From Surviving to Thriving* report shows that when we asked care leavers about who provides them with emotional support, a higher percentage of care leavers report that their pets provide emotional support (18%) than their foster carers (17%).

Almost 1 in 5 care leavers feel their pets provide emotional support.

Coram Voice advocates have supported some care leavers who have said they would rather sleep in a tent with their beloved pet than accept accommodation where pets are not permitted. For some care leavers, particularly those who lack trusted and supported human relationships, pets can provide an important source of companionship and support.

> "Council properties suck and it's not the most disability accessible. It's hard to find one suitable for me at my age range with pets near my support network"

Accommodation options

Our advocacy casework and direct work with young people also highlights the problematic nature of linear housing pathways within policy and practice models for care leavers. For example, pathways may assume young people will move on from care to semi-independent accommodation, then to an independent tenancy and into a stable adulthood. A recent evidence review finds the reality for care leavers is periods of stability and instability, moves between different kinds of housing, returns to family or friends, and periods of homelessness. It also highlights the importance of avoiding the assumption that independence is the desired end point for all care leavers, as their need for support is likely to fluctuate through their life.[35]

Staying Put

Whilst their care status changes, young people should not have to automatically leave where they are living just because they turn 18. Staying Put is a scheme that enables young people to remain with their foster carers, if both parties agree, from the age of 18 to 21. Our *From Surviving to Thriving* report found that almost nine in ten (89%) of care leavers who remained with their former foster carers through Staying Put were in education, training or employment, compared with just over half of those living in supported accommodation. Evidence from the Centre for Homelessness Impact found that Staying Put significantly lowers the risk of homelessness for care leavers, yet participation rates of foster carers have remained low.[36]

> "Accommodation should be matched to individual needs, for example proximity to workplace or education."

Supported accommodation and shared lives

Some young people will not be ready to live independently when they leave care, and it is important to have a range of accommodation options to meet their needs. Our Specialist Advocacy Service for young people with disabilities supports disabled care leavers who face additional barriers to accessing suitable accommodation (see Coram Voice case study 4).

Local authorities must include more specialist accommodation providers in their range of housing options and consider models such as Shared Lives[37] to provide care and support for care leavers who could benefit from living in a family environment.

> "There are blanket rules. They don't look at individual circumstances. For example if want to move out of accommodation because it's not right."

> "The biggest change [needed] isn't just building more homes, it's ensuring that no care leaver is ever forced to live alone before they are ready! When I turned 18 years old, I felt abandoned."

Social homes

We recognise the acute shortage of social rented homes is a systemic challenge, with many local authorities operating waiting lists of several years. We welcome the removal of the social housing local connection test to enable care leavers to access social housing no matter where they choose to live. However, we are concerned that local authorities are 'strongly encouraged', and not required, to give the same level of priority to care leavers who are not the responsibility of the local authority where they live.

Given almost half of children in care live out of area, a significant proportion of care leavers who were placed out of area as children in care, may still face this additional barrier to achieving a permanent home in the area they have settled in.

We also know from our advocacy work and direct work with young people that it is vital to help young people settle in communities where they have established connections. Indeed, the Government's *Enduring Relationships* policy paper[38] recognises this, stating 'enduring, trusted relationships provide stability and belonging into adulthood'. As it stands, current social housing policy risks undermining this welcome ambition to prioritise care leaver relationships.

Homelessness support

While the removal of local connection requirements from social housing allocation rules is a welcome step, a similar barrier remains within homelessness legislation. Care leavers can still be referred to another local authority under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 on local connection grounds. This also risks separating young people from trusted relationships, education,

employment and support networks at exactly the point they need stability. This will be particularly problematic for the many care leavers who were placed away from their home area whilst in care, through decisions outside their control. This risks both undermining the Government's ambition to strengthen enduring relationships and prevent care leaver homelessness.

Current homelessness legislation recognises that care leavers may face heightened vulnerability by granting automatic priority need status up to the age of 21. However, the experiences described throughout this report demonstrate that the challenges associated with leaving care do not abruptly end at 21. Many care leavers continue to experience housing insecurity, low incomes, poor mental health and limited family support well into adulthood. Restricting enhanced homelessness protections to younger care leavers risks creating a further cliff-edge in support at age 21, and fails to reflect the realities of care leavers lives.

Recommendations – national policy

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should

- Amend the Allocation of Accommodation Guidance[39] to require local authorities to prioritise care leavers within their social housing allocation schemes, minimise gatekeeping barriers, and publish clear, accessible information on eligibility criteria and nomination processes. The guidance should also require, rather than strongly encourage, local authorities to give the same level of priority to care leavers placed in their area by another authority who wish to remain there, as they would to their own care leavers.
- Introduce a care leaver exemption from local connection requirements in homelessness legislation, mirroring the exemption already available in social housing allocations. This would enable care leavers to access homelessness assistance in the area where they have established support networks and choose to live.
- Extend priority need status within homelessness legislation to all care leavers, regardless of age.

The Department for Education should

- Require Regional Care Cooperatives to include care leavers in regional sufficiency strategies, including forecasts of need, commissioning intentions and plans for care leavers' accommodation, to complement local authorities' existing duties. These should include family-based options available for young people in adulthood including Supported Lodgings and Shared Lives, in addition to Staying Put for young people who have been in foster care.
- Ensure the barriers to increasing the numbers of Staying Put arrangements, including financial disincentives, are understood and addressed as part of the revision of the Staying Put guidance.
- Extend Staying Put arrangements to age 25 to provide greater stability and parity with the experiences of other young adults.
- Ensure services are needs led rather than age led, enabling care leavers to have gradual and extended transitions. In relation to housing, this could mean removing blanket rules that mean only those under 18 can live in a particular setting or access a certain service.

Recommendations – local practice

Local authorities should

- Design housing pathways that recognise transitions to adulthood are rarely linear. Care-experienced young people should have the option to step back into higher levels of support, including returning to previous homes or supported living arrangements where suitable. Decisions such as declining a Staying Put arrangement should not prevent young people from accessing support later if independent living proves challenging.
- Consider care leavers' needs holistically when assessing accommodation suitability. In particular, local authorities should consider how safe a young person feels (both in their homes and in their neighbourhoods) and how housing policies can enable care leavers to maintain positive relationships, including with their pets if this is identified as a support need.



Practice example

Improving housing options for care leavers in Dorset

Dorset Council has developed a comprehensive housing pathway after care-experienced young people told the local authority they did not always feel safe where they lived and wanted a wider range of suitable accommodation options. In response, Dorset has worked with young people to strengthen housing provision, increase stability and prevent homelessness.

The council has expanded the range of accommodation available to care leavers, including increasing Staying Put arrangements and encouraging young people to remain in their homes through supported lodgings arrangements beyond 21 where appropriate.

It has also invested in its own accommodation provision, including a repurposed building specifically designed to support care-experienced young people. The ground floor is a community hub where young people can access practical support, develop independent living skills and build relationships. Facilities include a training kitchen, laundry facilities, space for learning and events, and opportunities for young people to come together for celebrations and communal meals. The hub aims to create a sense of belonging while helping young people develop skills such as budgeting, cooking and managing a tenancy.

Above the hub are nine self-contained flats; 4 single-occupancy, 4 dual-occupancy and one dedicated 'crash pad' which provides short-term emergency accommodation for care leavers facing a housing crisis. This was developed to reduce reliance on unsuitable emergency placements such as bed and breakfast accommodation.

Young people can typically remain in the accommodation for up to two years before moving on to longer-term housing. However, the pathway remains flexible, recognising that some young people may need additional support before progressing to greater independence.

Alongside this, Dorset has developed additional shared houses and flats, creating a wider range of options that reflect local housing market conditions and young people's differing support needs. Young people can move through different types of accommodation as their independence grows, while retaining access to support when needed.

Recognising that access to housing is only one part of the challenge, Dorset has also focused on helping care leavers sustain tenancies. The council operates a rent guarantor scheme and works closely with private landlords, estate agents and housing associations to increase accommodation opportunities. Care leavers are offered pre-tenancy training before they move into independent accommodation, covering practical skills such as budgeting and managing a home. A dedicated housing officer works alongside the leaving care service, and a senior PA role focuses on homelessness prevention and emotional well-being.

To prevent tenancy breakdown and homelessness, Dorset has introduced a quick-response support service that provides help when difficulties arise. Short-term emergency accommodation is available while longer-term solutions are identified, and enhanced support is provided to young people at particular risk of homelessness, including those living out of area, placed in temporary accommodation or preparing to leave custody.

Dorset's approach demonstrates how local authorities can combine a wider range of accommodation options with practical support and early intervention to help care leavers achieve and maintain stable housing. Dorset has a strong commitment to listening to young people and ensuring they have access to safe, sustainable homes as they move into adulthood.

Practice example

Coventry's co-produced approach to housing support for care leavers

Coventry City Council has developed a collaborative approach to improving housing outcomes for care leavers by placing young people's voices at the centre of service design and decision-making.

Participation work with Coventry's Care Leaver Empowerment Forum highlighted concerns about housing experiences and accommodation suitability. Findings from the Bright Spots Your Life Beyond Care survey showed that one-third of care leavers did not feel safe in their home. Young people also reported that they sometimes felt pressured to accept accommodation that did not meet their needs and wanted greater involvement in decisions about where they lived.

In response, Coventry worked with care leavers to better understand the challenges they faced and co-produce solutions. Young people helped develop a housing suitability checklist that is now used when care leavers are viewing potential accommodation. The checklist supports informed decision-making and encourages detailed discussions about factors such as safety, privacy, security and access to emergency support.

In addition to shaping improvements to accommodation processes, forum members successfully campaigned for care leavers to receive a council tax exemption until the age of 25, which was agreed by the council this year. This provides a further example of how young people's voices have directly informed local decision-making and led to tangible improvements in support for care leavers.

Recognising that transitions to independence are rarely linear, the leaving care service has developed strong partnership working with the local housing team, including a dedicated Housing Liaison Officer who helps oversee move-on planning and monitors housing outcomes for care leavers. Where young people are not ready to move into independent accommodation or are experiencing difficulties with the move-on process, cases can be reviewed through a multi-agency resource panel. This enables barriers to be identified, plans to be adapted and additional support to be put in place.

A key element of Coventry's approach is its participation in The House Project, which supports care leavers to develop the skills, confidence and support networks needed to move directly into and sustain their own tenancies. The programme combines practical preparation for independent living with peer support and relationship-building. Care leavers have played a central role in shaping the project and young people who have previously completed the programme now act as mentors for new participants. Now



in its fifth year, no young people participating in The House Project have experienced a tenancy breakdown.

Alongside The House Project, Coventry offers a training flat where young people can experience independent living in a supported environment, helping them build confidence with budgeting, shopping, managing bills and understanding tenancy responsibilities before moving into their own home.

The local authority has also developed a shorter Pathways Programme, co-produced with care leavers, which provides many of the same benefits around independence, well-being and peer support for young people whose housing plans do not involve an immediate move into their own tenancy.

Coventry has additionally introduced a second-chance tenancy approach, ensuring that young people whose first tenancy breaks down are not disadvantaged in accessing future housing opportunities. This include a guarantee that they will retain the banding priority they were given when first applying for social housing.

For young people moving on from council children's homes, Staying Close support offers ongoing practical and emotional support to ensure relationships between staff and young people can continue post-18. Examples include visiting the home once a week for dinner or phoning staff for support if something happens. If a young person is in custody, workers will visit. This approach means out of hours and weekend support is available to young people, outside of usual PA working hours.



3: "Help me to secure and keep a home"

Care leavers need ongoing support underpinned by enduring relationships

Drivers of well-being for care leavers:



- Know who my workers are
- Workers who do not change
- Workers I trust



- Education training or work
- Life skills
- Cope financially

Too often care leavers experience what Professor Mike Stein coined 'accelerated and compressed transitions to adulthood', to describe the way many care-experienced young people are required to move into adulthood far more quickly than their peers.[40] While most young people can rely on ongoing emotional, practical and financial support from family well into their twenties, care leavers are often expected to become independent at a much younger age and within a much shorter timeframe.

> "Care leavers are often pushed to become adult too quickly."

Trusted relationships

Stable housing and positive life chances depend on care leavers having sustained and flexible support that is rooted in trusted relationships, not just having accommodation or a 'roof over their head'. Housing outcomes are strongly linked to continued caring relationships and support.[41]

> One person can change everything. My after-care worker (actual role was supported lodgings co-ordinator) supported me for 2 years. She took me on temporarily and actually became permanent. I knew I could speak to her anytime, she checked in on me, she helped me move. She also completed the necessary referrals I needed such as an advocate, mental health support and so much more. This should be standard for all young people."

Wider support networks help give young people stability and support to thrive. Our *From Surviving to Thriving* report found almost 9 in 10 of young people who remained with their foster carers after 18 were in education, training or employment, compared with just over half in supported accommodation. Family and friends can also provide both direct and indirect support, so it is important that the care system helps children maintain and develop relationships rather than break them.

> "I am really happy where I live, I'm so proud of myself with how I have got my house. It's on a new housing estate in an area where I want to be. I rent the house off my brother who I am very close to."

Personal Advisers

Our research also found that PAs were the second most common source of emotional support for care leavers, second only to friends.

45% of care leavers reported that their PAs gave them emotional support.

Through the Bright Spots survey data, we can see that there is a link between trusting your worker and stability of workers, and how you feel about where you live. Among care leavers who always trust their worker, 85% reported always feeling safe at home. Among those who do not always trust their worker, this decreases to 68%.[42]

> "When I got my new aftercare worker, for once in my life I finally felt heard... having a stable person... she was my reason to live."

Coram Voice advocates support many care leavers who miss out on the opportunity to build connection and trust with their PA. This can be due to staff high staff turnover resulting in multiple changes in PA, delayed allocation of PA to the young person, or unsustainable caseloads that mean PAs don't have time to provide young people with the relationship-based support they need.

Too many care leavers continue to experience abrupt withdrawal of support at multiple stages, in addition to the well-documented cliff-edge when leaving care at age 18.[43] For example, it is common for a local authority policy to significantly reduce PA support from age 21.

> "Don't keep changing professionals with us, we need one person who's going to stick with us and be that stability and encouragement."

The recent independent review into care leaver deaths found the main source of support provided to young people who

have left care comes from their PA. However, the review found 'the support provided by PAs can vary greatly from place to place... there really is huge variation in quality of practice.'[44] It highlighted how the PA role has traditionally been to deal with practicalities rather than support young people emotionally to deal with complex and traumatic life experiences. However, *From Surviving to Thriving* showed that care leavers feel that where the PA role is working well, they can also be an important source of emotional support. These experiences should be built on and extended, so that all young people can benefit.

> "My PA visited me every six months for the first two years of my tenancy. She had a quality assurance framework that she followed to check on things like cleanliness, repairs."
>
> "More information and support is needed with practical advice like setting up accounts and paying bills."

Financial security

Care leavers need adequate financial support to achieve housing stability. We know too many care leavers have no financial safety net and face financial insecurity; one of the factors placing them at an increased risk of homelessness.

Over 1 in 5 care leavers struggle to cope financially

Whilst the local authority is responsible for looked after children and providing accommodation and maintenance to 16- and 17-year-old relevant children,[45] currently too many young people face an abrupt ending to this support on their 18th birthday and are generally expected to support themselves financially, either through employment or claiming benefits. With no additional support from family to fall back on care leavers can find it particularly challenging to cope on benefits. Due to the five-week waiting period after claiming Universal Credit, our advocates support young people facing debt or rent arrears before they even move into their first independent home.

We know that many local authorities include housing-related financial support within their Local Offer for Care Leavers, such as council tax exemptions, rent deposit schemes and rent guarantor arrangements. Some local authorities also provide additional financial support during the five-week wait before receiving their first Universal Credit payment. However, access to and the scope of this support varies considerably between areas, leaving care leavers' entitlements dependent on local policy.

Care leavers also face a postcode lottery in relation to the administration of the Setting Up Home Allowance by local authorities, a payment made to support care leavers moving into their first independent home to purchase essential equipment and household items. We welcomed the updated Government guidance published last year,[46] which clarified that all care leavers should receive a minimum £3,000 Setting Up Home Allowance (SUHA). This reflected a recommendation from A National Voice (the national council for children in care and care leavers in England) in *The Grand Campaign* for clear guidelines on entitlements, following our finding that more than a year after the increase was announced, 1 in 10 local authorities had still not changed local practice.[47] However our advocates continue to support young people who face difficulties in how the SUHA is administered locally. This has included payments being made late, resulting in young people being unable to pay for essentials at the point of moving into their new home. We also know young people experience variations and restrictions in what it can be spent on, often leading to a prolonged dispute between young people and leaving care services over essential purchases, creating additional stress at a critical point in their transition to independent living.

There is evidence to indicate that giving care leavers direct financial support results in both improved housing stability and improved levels of well-being. Our report on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on care leavers' well-being found the proportion of care leavers struggling financially during the pandemic decreased.[48] Many local authorities put in place additional support for care leavers during this period and national initiatives including the uplift to Universal Credit and free laptops and internet access for care leavers eased financial pressure. More recently, research from the Policy Institute at Kings College London found care leavers who were given a one-off £2,000 cash lump sum, with no strings attached, were more likely to be in stable housing and less likely to be sofa-surfing than their peers. They were also happier and had stronger relationships.[49]

Recommendations – national policy

The Department for Work and Pensions should

- Give care leavers entitlement to the over-25 rate of Universal Credit from the age of 18.
- Extend the exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate for care leavers from age 25 to 35, to align with the age threshold at which the Shared Accommodation Rate applies.

The Department for Education should

- End the postcode lottery of financial support by creating a national offer for care leavers that is mirrored in care leaver local offers to provide all care leavers with council tax exemptions, rent deposit and rent guarantor schemes.
- Develop and implement a national strategy to equip the leaving care workforce with the time, resources, skills, knowledge and confidence to provide all young people leaving care with the support they need. This should be rooted in relational practice and an expectation that local authorities operate a model that allocates care leavers a PA at age 16 who stays alongside them until age 25.

The Department for Education and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should

- Work with Kings College London to develop an extended, large-scale pilot of the Randomised Controlled Trial Cash Transfer Pilot for Care Leavers.

Recommendations – local practice

Local authorities should

- Structure leaving care services so that PAs have the capacity to spend time with young people to develop trusting and supportive relationships with care leavers.
- Put in place arrangements to ensure care leavers experience no gap in income when they turn 18, including providing financial support during the five-week wait for a first Universal Credit payment.
- Have clear, published information on care leaver entitlement to the Setting Up Home Allowance and guidelines for how it can be spent. Young people should also have freedom to choose how it is spent.



Practice example

Stay and Grow: training flats to prepare young people for independence on the Isle of Wight

A 12-month training programme helping young people practice real-life skills like paying bills, budgeting, cooking, cleaning and managing a tenancy.

Why?
Through findings from their Bright Spots survey, Isle of Wight identified that many young people leaving care did not feel ready for independent living. Young people said that they wanted more time and practical preparation before moving into their own accommodation, particularly around managing a tenancy, dealing with landlords and neighbours, budgeting, and building everyday life skills such as cooking and maintaining a home. Too often, care leavers were expected to manage adult responsibilities too quickly, which increased anxiety and the risk of tenancy breakdown.

What did they do?
In response, Isle of Wight developed 'Stay and Grow', which now has three 2-bedroom training flats for young people transitioning from being looked after to leaving care. Young people live in a flat under clear expectations and receive structured support from a dedicated Housing PA alongside their allocated PA.

During their stay, they practice real-life skills including paying bills, budgeting and saving, cooking, cleaning, engaging in education, employment or training, and managing a tenancy. Progress is reviewed regularly, via 12-week reviews, and young people are supported to apply for social housing through Island Homefinder and explore private rented options, building confidence before moving on.

What impact has it had?
Stay and Grow has given young people a safe, realistic stepping stone into independence, helping them feel more confident and prepared for adult life. By experiencing the responsibilities of a tenancy with support in place, young people develop practical skills, stronger routines, and a better understanding of what is expected of them as tenants and neighbours.

The approach supports smoother transitions into independent accommodation, reduces the risk of placement breakdown or homelessness, and helps young people leave care feeling more capable, informed, and ready to succeed.



Practice example

Providing financial stability for care leavers in Stockport

Recognising that the move into independent accommodation can leave care leavers financially vulnerable, Stockport Council has developed a practical approach to ensure young people do not begin a tenancy in debt.

A key feature of the approach is financial support during the waiting period for a first Universal Credit payment. When a care leaver moves into a tenancy, the council covers any rent shortfall until Universal Credit housing support is in place. This means that young people avoid building up rent arrears while waiting for their benefit claim to be processed. Depending on when the tenancy begins and how quickly a claim is processed, this support may cover several weeks of rent. The council's principle is clear: no care leaver should start a tenancy already in debt.

Stockport also helps young people meet upfront housing costs. Where landlords or housing associations require a deposit or advance rent, the council meets these costs so that young people can move into accommodation without financial barriers and begin their tenancy on a secure footing.

Alongside preventing debt, Stockport's approach seeks to make employment financially worthwhile. The council recognises that some young people can be discouraged from taking up full-time work if the transition from benefits leaves them little better off financially. To address this, Stockport guarantees that care leavers moving into employment will be at least £37 per week better off than they would have been while receiving Universal Credit. This provides a clear financial incentive to enter work while reducing the risk that young people are disadvantaged during the transition.

By combining practical tenancy support with measures that make employment financially viable, Stockport's approach helps care leavers avoid debt, sustain accommodation and build financial independence as they move into adulthood.

4: Making it happen: a joined-up system around care leavers

Translating national expectations into local reality

> "There is a lack of joint working between housing and leaving care team. [I experienced] an abdication of responsibility by leaving care – saying it is a housing policy."

There is a substantial national framework of legislation, policy and guidance that sets out clear expectations on local authorities to work across housing, children's services and wider partners to plan accommodation early, prevent homelessness and provide coordinated support to care leavers.

Indeed, since the Children and Social Work Act 2017, local authorities have had a clear legal duty to have regard to seven corporate parenting principles,[50] and these principles apply not only to children's services, but across local authority functions, including housing services.

The Children's Well-being and Schools Act 2026 strengthened this requirement, including through a stronger expectation that councils translate those principles into concrete support in relation to housing and prevention of homelessness for care leavers. The Government has recently updated statutory guidance and good practice guidance[51] to reinforce the expectation that housing departments are corporate parents and are expected to work jointly with children's services. There is also a clear expectation in the guidance[52] on joint housing protocols for care leavers that young people's lived experience should shape the development, review and improvement of protocols, including learning from those who have faced challenges accessing or sustaining accommodation.

The recently published Care Leaver Homelessness Reduction Action Plan[53] 'strongly encourages' local authorities to include care leaver homelessness reduction targets in their local homelessness action plans. The Plan sets out monitoring arrangements for both the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Education to monitor progress against these targets and in addition Ofsted inspectors will consider local authority arrangements for supporting care leavers as part of their wider pre-inspection activity and inspection frameworks.

It will be important these mechanisms are used effectively to hold all local authority partners to account, ensuring the new duties and principles are consistently and effectively translated into effective local practice.

A shared responsibility

It is clear that whether care leavers understand their rights, access suitable accommodation, or receive support to sustain a tenancy depends on housing, leaving care, health providers, education, employment services and the voluntary sector working together. Achieving better housing outcomes therefore requires shared responsibility and a whole-system response.

> "Wider support is interlinked with housing. PAs and jobcentre staff should work together to alert if young people are at risk of being NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and put in support to avoid sanctions that can lead to arrears and then homelessness."

Coram Voice advocates support many care leavers who report being passed between their leaving care service and housing service, making it difficult for them to know where to turn for support. For example, one advocate described how a young person was supported by their leaving care service with the administration process to get a bidding number for a social home, but not with the bidding process itself, having been told this was the responsibility of the housing service.

Care leavers with disabilities

Local authorities' responsibilities towards disabled care leavers are the same as for all other care leavers. Because of their additional needs, some young people may draw on several services, receive support from several professionals and have multiple plans (see Coram Voice case study 4). Local authorities are expected to ensure these processes are streamlined as much as possible, and roles and responsibilities discussed with the young person and their carers.[54]

However, due to responsibilities being shared across multiple services and agencies, care leavers with disabilities face a greater risk of poor outcomes when agencies or services operate in silos. Coram Voice's research report *Disability, Disparity and Demand*[55] found that disabled care leavers can experience poor transitions from care to adulthood due to failures in communication and coordination between agencies. It highlights evidence that transition planning is often undermined by a failure of services to work together, a failure to communicate between agencies, a separation and disconnect between children's services and adult services and disagreements between professionals and lack of coordinated planning. These issues are seen in the casework of Coram Voice's Specialist Advocate, who supports young people with disabilities. They see young people experiencing a lack of planning, drift in planning and rushed professional-centred



Coram Voice case study 4

Suitable accommodation for disabled care leavers

Sarah was a 17-year-old looked after child when she was referred for advocacy support. There was a lack of clarity about where she would live when she turned 18. At this time, Sarah was in the process of being assessed for autism and ADHD.

An advocate met with Sarah and they discussed that staff at Sarah's children's home were providing her with a lot of day-to-day support. This included help with cooking, cleaning, and budgeting, as well as managing social situations, and staying safe from exploitation.

Sarah's housing officer identified some potential post 18 accommodation. Sarah went to visit with her key worker, and did not like the accommodation: It was in a "rough area" and there would be only very limited support available.

Sarah and her advocate asked the local authority to complete a transition assessment, as it seemed that Sarah would have eligible needs for Care Act support, as a disabled adult. However, the local authority refused to undertake this assessment, on the basis that Sarah did not yet have a confirmed diagnosis. Sarah also did not have an up-to-date Pathway Plan.

Adult accommodation was not identified in time for Sarah's 18th birthday, so it was agreed that Sarah could continue to remain at her current children's home for a few months longer. However there remained a lack of clarity over who would be providing Sarah's adult accommodation and support long term: Would this be adult social care, the housing department, or the leaving care team?

By this time Sarah was a care leaver, and still had no accommodation plan. Sarah asked her advocate to escalate her concerns, and refer her for legal advice. A solicitor wrote to the local authority and asked them to undertake a Care Act assessment, update Sarah's pathway plan, and explain how they would be meeting Sarah's needs going forward.

Following the letter from the solicitor, the local authority completed their assessments and updated Sarah's Pathway Plan. They confirmed Sarah was eligible for adult social care support. They identified supported living accommodation for Sarah, with a consistent staff team on site. Sarah visited and agreed she would like to move there. At this point, Sarah decided she no longer needed an advocate, as the issues around transition planning were resolved.

decisions, due to a lack of joint working between services.

> "Young people are being bounced between services in the same council."

Care leavers with disabilities are also at risk of not having their voice heard and views acted on. Coram Voice's research found that disabled care leavers' views and perspectives may not be routinely sought. This could relate to both their own disability and support needs and wider service design.

All of these factors can leave disabled care leavers at greater risk of being offered unsuitable accommodation or experiencing homelessness.

Non-British children and young people

Care leavers with unresolved immigration status and former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children can face additional barriers to securing stable housing and support. It is particularly important for these young people that national policy from both the Home Office and the Department for Education is joined up.

These young people often face multiple and overlapping risks. Coram Voice's advocacy work has highlighted how these young people often experience difficulties accessing services, understanding their rights and navigating complex legal and immigration processes. Language barriers, uncertainty around immigration status, age disputes and challenges accessing specialist advice can leave young people particularly vulnerable at key transition points. Coram Children's Legal Centre's partnerships with local authorities show that even UK-born or long-resident children's immigration status and nationality are too often left unresolved while looked after.

Leaving care support acts as a critical safeguard against homelessness. Any reduction in support based on immigration status would create a heightened risk of homelessness and destitution among some of the most vulnerable care-experienced young people, undermining both corporate parenting responsibilities and wider efforts to end care leaver homelessness.

Recommendations – national policy

The Department for Education and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should

- Monitor and publish data on the local implementation of new care leaver housing and homelessness duties, including the application of local connection in social housing and on intentional homelessness decisions for care leavers.
- Share effective practice where implementation of new duties is making a difference to care leavers.

The Department for Education should

- Ensure leaving care support is not removed from care-experienced young people based on immigration status, including former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people whose immigration status remains unresolved when they reach adulthood.[56]

Ofsted should

- Maintain a focus in the revised ILACS inspection framework on PA support for effective pathway planning and ensuring all care leavers have safe and stable homes. This should include how the local authority assesses current and future accommodation and support needs for care leavers and has robust commissioning plans reflecting current and future needs.

Recommendations – local practice

Local authorities should

- Work with care leavers as partners in the design, review and improvement of housing and leaving care services, including the development of joint housing protocols. Participation and co-production activities should be accessible and inclusive, with proactive steps taken to ensure disabled care leavers are able to contribute their views and influence decisions about services that affect them.
- Include accommodation outcomes, as defined by young people (for example whether young people feel safe where they live) within local corporate parenting strategies and frameworks.
- Strengthen transition planning and multi-agency working to ensure disabled care leavers can access suitable accommodation and the support needed to sustain it. Local authorities should start planning early and coordinate children's services, adult social care, housing, health and mental health services to assess needs, secure appropriate accommodation and establish clear responsibilities. Timely Care Act assessments, joint transition plans and effective information-sharing arrangements should be in place before a young person leaves care, with accessible information, communication support and advocacy available throughout.
- Identify young people who are not eligible for adult social care but have disability-related support needs that may affect their housing outcomes and ensure they are supported through pathway planning and Staying Close. Accommodation decisions should be based on a young person's needs and required support, not solely on Care Act eligibility.
- Commission specialist housing, independent living and tenancy sustainment support to address gaps in provision and reduce the risk of unsuitable accommodation or homelessness.



Practice example

Future House – The Specialist Housing Team for Care Leavers in Wandsworth

Future House is the dedicated housing team within Future First, Wandsworth's Leaving Care Service. It brings together specialist housing support and independent living skills to help care leavers access and sustain stable accommodation.

The service is delivered through four key roles:

- Supported Accommodation Pathway Officer – manages commissioned supported accommodation and helps young people move through accommodation pathways towards greater independence.
- Settled Accommodation Lead – supports access to housing registers, social housing and other settled accommodation options.
- Tenancy Support Officer – provides specialist support alongside PAs to help care leavers maintain tenancies and prevent homelessness.
- Life Skills Development Officer – equips young people with practical skills such as budgeting, cooking, managing bills and maintaining a home.

By combining accommodation expertise with practical support, Future House provides a coordinated approach that helps care leavers secure stable housing, build independence and make a successful transition to adulthood.

The housing team sits alongside other specialists in the Leaving Care Service, including a Virtual School worker, employment workers, a participation specialist and a detached youth worker. This integrated model enables care leavers to access tailored support in one place while allowing PAs to focus on building trusted relationships with young people.

Practice example

Care leavers influencing local housing policy in York

York's care leaver forum, I Still Matter, used their voice to challenge senior managers and elected members to work together more effectively and improve housing for care leavers.

Why?
Based on listening to the lived experiences of others, York's care leavers felt the housing service did not fully understand their corporate parenting responsibilities.

What?
York's care leaver forum were "confident and bold in changing policy and challenging decision-makers in relation to housing."

Impact
A new housing protocol, informed by young people, was introduced, aiming to make the housing experiences of care leavers locally much better.

- It clearly emphasises the corporate parenting duties of housing colleagues
- It explains the roles and responsibilities towards care experienced young people
- It identifies how the needs of young people can be met by the pathway team and housing service working together.

To make sure the work is embedded in practice, young people have developed training on corporate parenting which they have delivered to housing staff.

Conclusion

There are experiences in this report that paint a concerning picture. Too many care leavers continue to experience housing insecurity, instability and homelessness. Some leave care with no settled accommodation to move into. Others struggle to access suitable housing, feel unsafe where they live, or lose the support they need to sustain a tenancy and navigate adulthood.

Yet across the country there are examples of excellent practice showing what is possible when services work together, listen to young people and place relationships at the centre of support. These examples demonstrate that homelessness is not an inevitable outcome of leaving care. With effective planning, suitable housing options, skilled practitioners, strong partnership working and ongoing support, care leavers can make successful transitions to adulthood and thrive.

The voices of young people also remind us that housing is about far more than accommodation. They consistently describe home as somewhere safe, secure, stable and supportive. A home is the foundation that allows them to pursue education, sustain employment, build relationships, maintain their well-being and recover from the challenges many have experienced before and during care. When housing is insecure, every other aspect of life becomes harder.

For care-experienced young people, housing should never be seen as solely the responsibility of a housing department, just as leaving care should never be viewed solely as the responsibility of a leaving care team. Achieving lasting change requires all partners to act as corporate parents and work together to ensure young people receive the coordinated support they need. It also requires listening to care leavers themselves, recognising them as experts in their own lives and involving them in the design and improvement of services.

A society that takes its responsibilities as a corporate parent seriously should expect for care leavers what any loving family would want for their own children: a safe place to live, someone to turn to when things go wrong, and support that does not disappear when they reach an arbitrary age.

Over recent years, the framework designed to support care leavers has grown significantly stronger. The Government has reinforced corporate parenting responsibilities, strengthened guidance on housing and homelessness, extended support for care leavers and set out a clear ambition to end care leaver homelessness. This is both necessary and achievable.

Delivery will require sustained commitment, accountability and collaboration across national and local systems. At Coram Voice we will continue to support care-experienced children and young people through our commissioned advocacy services and specialist advocacy projects supporting young people who are homeless, in crisis or have a disability.

Most importantly, everyone who works with and for care leavers must listen what they have told us for years they need.

When care ends, home matters. No young person should leave care without one.



Endnotes

1. Based on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government statistics showing the number of care leavers assessed by their local authority and found to be owed a homelessness prevention duty or a homelessness relief duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. *Tables on homelessness* available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness compared with the number of all homeless young people from Centrepoint (2025) *Databank 2025: The state of youth homelessness in the UK*. London: Centrepoint. Available at: https://centrepoint.org.uk/sites/default/files/2026-02/CP017_Databank%20Report%202026_260212%20COMPRESSED.pdf Note that due to many care leavers not presenting to their local authority as homeless or due to so-called 'gatekeeping' practices, the real number of homeless care leavers is likely to be higher than Government statistics indicate.
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6. In particular the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, The Children and Young Person's Act 2008, the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers.
7. Corporate Parenting Duties are set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents
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10. Centrepoint (2025), op. cit.
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15. Briheim-Crookall, L. et al. (2025) *From surviving to thriving: The seven drivers of well-being for children in care and care leavers*. London: Coram Institute. Available at: https://coramvoice.org.uk/resource-library/from-surviving-to-thriving-the-seven-drivers-of-well-being-for-children-in-care-and-care-leavers/
16. The Bright Spots Programme has been working with children in care since 2013, and care leavers from 2017, to understand what needs to be in place to enable these children and young people to flourish. The Programme helps local authorities to systematically gather the views of their children and young people. Findings are used to influence practice, service development and strategic thinking, which is essential in ensuring that children's wellbeing is at the heart of delivering high-quality services. The Programme uses four online surveys of well-being to capture the views of children and young people in care (a survey called 'Your Life, Your Care' for each of the ages 4-7 years, 8-10 years and 11-17 years), and a survey called 'Your Life Beyond Care' for care leavers. To date, the Bright Spots surveys have been completed by over 25,000 children and young people from 80+ local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland. https://coramvoice.org.uk/bright-spots-programme/
17. 7 in 10 care leavers report where they live is mainly right for them: Briheim-Crookall, L. et al. (2025), op. cit.

18. Focus groups were held in March 2026 with young ambassadors from 'A National Voice' and 'Voices in Action' programmes and Coram Voice Care Experienced Consultants.
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24. Department for Education and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025) op. cit.
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26. It is important for care leavers to be informed of the range of accommodation options that may be available, and also the likelihood of them being able to achieve their preferred option. For example, they may be put on the social housing register but may not actually have an offer of a social home for several years, if at all.
27. Department for Education (2026) *National standards for the provision of children's and young people's advocacy services*, op. cit.
28. The statutory entitlement arises from the Children Act 1989 and associated guidance, which requires local authorities to arrange independent advocacy for care leavers who wish to make, or are considering making, a complaint or representation about children's social care services.
29. As stated in Department for Education (2026) *Effective advocacy for children and young people: statutory guidance*. London: Department for Education. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advocacy-services-for-children-and-young-people
30. Dickie, A. (2022) *Always Heard: children and young people's views on advocacy*. London: Coram Voice. Available at: https://coramvoice.org.uk/resource-library/alway-heard-report-2022/
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43. Briheim-Crookall, L. et al. (2025) op. cit.
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