



NATIONAL CARE LEAVERS' WEEK 2008

Sunday 26 October to Friday 31 October 2008

'EVERY Care Leaver Matters'

Life after care – new survey results
Good intentions, brighter futures?
Interview – leaving care in Wales

Every legislator, manager, worker, doctor, employer can change things within their sphere of influence to make every care leaver matter



Every Care Leaver Matters

Martin Hazelhurst reflects on his 14 years of making friends and influencing people.

By way of introduction to National Care Leavers' Week 2008 Every Care Leaver Matters, Martin Hazelhurst, a popular and well known figure in the leaving care world, bids farewell to the sector and reflects on his 14 years of making friends and influencing people.



After 14 years working to advocate for and support care leavers I am moving on. It is hard to imagine that my daily working life will not be around all the incredibly committed people I have had the pleasure of working with, or the young people whose determination and resilience I have always been in awe of and humbled by.

I have been asked to reflect on these 14 years. I joined First Key

in January 1994. I had been working in supported housing for care leavers for a decade before that. I had plenty of experience both of the problems young people faced, of the failings of the care system and of how many, both young people and professionals, were determined to make improvements.

In 1994 we were just getting used to the new duties in the Children Act that had come into force 2 years before. Raising awareness of what was needed to translate these duties into concrete improvements for young people was hard. Few local authorities had formal leaving care services. In many support for young people who had left care was provided by residential homes, and the driver for the creation of dedicated leaving care services was often the closure of these homes and the availability of staff to be redeployed. Politically, there was no importance given to leaving care. It is hard to imagine now the excitement we felt when one of the many transient ministers agreed to meet us.

We were preoccupied by accommodation. First Key had originally been established by Shelter. When we were not talking about accommodation we were talking about benefits - how to get and maximise them. Education was something of an afterthought; qualifications were for other young people who were not living on their own at 16 or 17.

Thinking back, we have come a long way. It started with a change of Government in 1997. For the first time we had a minister determined to grapple with the issues we faced. The famous Dobson letter to elected members sparked an explosion of interest, Me, Survive, Out There? set out the new Government's intentions. Eventually we got the Children (Leaving Care) Act and perhaps more importantly, cash, through Quality Protects and the ringfenced budgets. The developments in specific services that had been going on through the 1990s became the norm in all authorities.

The years since have seen steady improvements in young people's achievements, more are in education or training and the expectation that they will be is firmly established in Government policy. 16 and 17 year olds no longer have to go through the humiliation of claiming benefits and there is a greater understanding of the emotional needs of young people as they make the transition to adult life. Leaving care services are stronger, they no longer have to argue for their existence. They have joined the social services mainstream. We are now arguing for support to 25, for fostering arrangements to continue as

long as young people need and want them and Government proposes additional help for young people at university. This is a far cry from 1994.

However, some things have not changed. Young people, usually the most damaged and demanding, are still leaving at 16, the responses to emotional and mental health issues are still a scandal and education performance of both children in care and care leavers lags behind other young people.

Most importantly, the care system has not resolved the fundamental problem at its core – how can a state agency perform the functions of a parent? Young people understand this, they talk about the individuals in their lives, not the structures that support them, yet we still chop and change social workers and teams, put barriers in the way of young people maintaining the relationships they value whether they be with social workers, carers or residential workers.

Some things have not changed. Young people, usually the most damaged and demanding, are still leaving at 16, the responses to emotional and mental health issues are still a scandal and education performance of both children in care and care leavers lags behind other young people.

Maybe the problem has no solution, but in an attempt at resolution a new concept has been invented– the corporate parent. Who is this corporate parent, what does s/he/it do and how is the knowledge that they are the subject of a responsibility held by the apparatus of local government supposed to reassure young people that they will not be moved to a bed and breakfast or be given the opportunity to play football on a Saturday morning?

Let's get rid of the corporate. What is wrong with simply concentrating on the need for parenting? Every young person is entitled to know that if there is someone in their life who they trust, and has a positive impact on their well being, heaven and earth will be moved to help them maintain that relationship. It is the role of government both local and national to make sure the cash young people need is there, to make sure everyone in young people's lives is equipped for their role and to set workers and carers free to do what they do best – work directly with young people.

Maybe in the next 14 years we will get there.



National Care Leavers' Week
26th – 31st October 2008

Every Care Leaver Matters

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Life After Care

www.qaresearch.co.uk

Angela Browne of QA research surveyed the views of 50 young care leavers aged between 18 and 23 for National Care Leavers' Week.

We know that there are lots of examples of good practice now taking place throughout the country, but a selection of the views presented by the cohort demonstrate that there is still a long way to go in improving services for every care leaver. The group expressed housing, relationships, training and education, safety and stability as primary issues affecting their wellbeing and future prospects and offered some solutions:

ON CHOICE AND STABILITY



"There is very little choice. On this pathway plan they were saying 'when you leave care you'll either go into supported lodgings.. you'll do this or you'll do that' and I thought wow I can't wait. You get there and its like those options where have they gone?" (Denise, 19)

"I've been tossed left, right and centre, I've never really been anywhere for longer than six months ... no matter where I live I still feel unsettled .." (Zaina, 21)

"If you've ... been moving around for that long, you just sort of get into the habit of doing it." (Andy, 23)

"The amount of addresses that I've lived at since being 16 to now is unbelievable... I've not had a permanent address, the longest I've probably lived somewhere is about 4 months... you're staying on people's couches. The housing aren't helping you cos they're saying well you're in care till you're 18." (Natasha, 19)

ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND BENEFITS



"Why do they say to you go on benefits? That's not the only option, is it? ... when you're young, when you're 18, if you've just ... left care if someone tells you to do something, like a personal advisor who is a professional at doing their job and they tell you to go on benefits you're going to think that's right, but actually its wrong ... because once you go on benefits you're going to depend on benefits for the rest of your life" (Sandra, 20)

"As soon as I hit the eighteen mark [my personal advisor] walked me to the job centre, why didn't she take me elsewhere get loads of leaflets for courses or a job?" (Ruth, 21)

"You're on next to nothing... I'm on £47 a week paying every single bill, then after all my bills I have £2.57 to feed myself" (Haru, 19)

"... when I had nowhere to live ... you have to be at the job centre by a certain time otherwise you don't get paid, and I tried to explain to her that I had to walk from quite far [her reply was] why didn't you get the bus? [I replied] because I'm homeless and I'm on benefits!" (Emma, 20)

"Finding yourself somewhere to live, that's your priority... obviously you do care about getting your education but that's not your main priority... by the time you try to get yourself back into [education] it's difficult." (Adhaya, 19) "When I went to college last year it made me feel well better about myself 'cos I was actually doing something for myself." (Louise, 20)

ON LEAVING CARE WORKERS & RELATIONSHIPS

"The other day I phoned to speak to my after care worker, and they just said 'he's left'. He had been gone three weeks and nobody told me." (Chloe, 22)

"[it's good] if their heart's there and their heart's in the job and they're there for you, but they're not able to do the best they can because they haven't got the funding or they haven't got whatever they need to do the support to the best of their ability". (Hayley, 19)

"If you've got a problem you come [to the project], it's most likely that they can help you with it, no matter what." (Ashleigh, 21)

"My social worker was really good... she took the time out to help me get ready for my flat... It prepared me enough to set me up on my own." (Jo, 23)

"Christmas day, in my kids home – this is something that I'll never ever forget, this member of staff

ON HOW TO IMPROVE LIFE AFTER CARE

"All the agencies ... should all work together .. people don't want to deal with them separately." (Stephen, 23)

"Having your own support worker to listen to what you individually want." (Ricky, 21)

"Support in general just like... basically preparing you for the big wide world and I think it would help having that extra support covering those emotional needs and everything and I think that's the main thing, just knowing someone's there for you." (Sarab, 19)

"There needs to be more simulation young people need to be given more of a simulation of what it is like [when you leave care] It can be quite scary.....whilst in care there is a sense of security." (Male, 20)

ON FEAR, DRUGS, AND HOMELESSNESS



"[you worry] about a gang of youths trying to stop you going into your own flat because apparently it's their flat." (Linda, 21)

"Most places you need a reference, or most places don't accept housing benefits, so you're really lucky to get some places." (Stephanie, 21)

"When I went in and told [the council] I was pregnant and everything they told me I had to come back in 4 weeks to prove that I was still homeless because they were getting so many people coming in and lying that they were homeless. So I had to carry on staying on other peoples couches for 4 weeks and because I went back on the deadline and said I'm still homeless they believed me. I shouldn't have to do stuff like that." (Denise, 19)

"People think that if you [don't look like] a tramp, then you're not homeless." (Fiona, 17)

"[Alcohol and drugs] was a way of escaping from the problems that were going on after leaving care." (Kate, 18)

"From being 16 that's when they just start giving up basically... the amount of people I've met at 16 who've just been thrown out of care and they've gone straight onto drugs, the ways to make money is drug dealing... and when you come to try and get your own place it's like... you can't come here because we can't support the stuff like that." (Christine, 19)

"It's not appropriate to put a mother and a child in a crack den." (Morayu, 22)

ON HOUSING



"At 16 I don't know why but they were gonna put me in my own council flat, now what person at 16 who leaves a children's home where they've been looked after is ready to go into a flat on their own and pay gas and electric?" (Shelley, 18)

"It's a big transition, from being in foster care or a residential unit to being in your own semi-independent flat. I don't think a lot of people are ready at 16." (Ashleigh, 21)

"The windows were rotten and there was a wasps nest which took ages to be sorted out" (Mitch 21)

"When you move into a council flat it's all tatty and all crap, no heating on whatsoever, big holes in your walls and doors, wallpaper not done." (Lee, 20)

has his own children and this was my best Christmas ever, we were all together and he was with us on Christmas morning and we said 'well why aren't you at home with your children?' And he said 'because I'd prefer to see you lot smiling', and it was just the way he said it, his heart was there and you knew, it was nice." (Nadia, 19)



"I went back to visit my kids home about 3 weeks after I left and I wasn't allowed in, I was on the doorstep.. I was just someone who'd gone and knocked on the door, I wasn't nothing to them anymore because I'd left and I'd moved out... they shouldn't just forget about you once you've moved out... even if it's just a phone call or a letter from them. (Martine, 19)

"I had a foster carer from the age of four, up until I was ten, I haven't lived with her for seven years, but I still keep in touch with her ... if you can't fall back on your own family it's nice to have a family to fall back on, and if you've had a good foster carer ... at least you've got someone to say 'oh you know I'm a bit stuck this week, can I borrow a pound?" (Lou, 20)

"Some people need help past twenty one, but they're just finished with." (Rakesh, 23)



"A lot more semi-independent housing because you need to be prepared to go into the big wide world on your own and there's nothing there; half of these problems wouldn't happen if you were settled." (Donna, 19)

"I think all Boroughs should work together... all benefits, all the support and everything should all be the same and all work together. They're gonna make it a lot stronger by all of them working together." (Nicola, 19)

"The more settled you are the more settled you're going to be with your education, with your work, with your money... you're not going to feel lost." (Danni, 19)



Good Intentions and the Road to... ...Brighter Futures for Care Leavers?

Pam Hibbert, Assistant Director for Policy at Barnardo's, considers the real benefits and the missed opportunities in the Children and Young Person's Act 2008

Barnardo's believes that the values and philosophy that should underpin how we work with children in the care of the state is that they should be given the same opportunities that we would expect our own children to have; this means paying attention to the small things as well as changes to legislation and policy.

Children and young people in care tell us that the things that can make a real difference to their feelings of self worth and self esteem are not necessarily those that can be legislated for – having photographs, someone attending sports day, parents evening or out of school activities. These measures cost very little, but require workers and professionals to put the same value on them as young people do. Care Matters aims, in the words of Government 'transform the lives of children in care'. While one can only commend the intention behind this, there are significant gaps in the new legislation.

Neglected areas and omissions relate to important issues which could also make a real difference to children's lives. We welcome the acknowledgement that children in care need a 'champion' and advocate but would strongly argue that the differences between the role of social worker as lead professional, an independent visitor and an independent advocate need to be much more clearly defined.

There is a role for all of them. However a volunteer acting as an independent visitor would not have the time, specialist knowledge or access to other networks and services to act as an effective advocate for children in relation to local authority decisions. Those who are making a judgment about the child's welfare cannot also argue the child's case.

Barnardo's welcomes many of the proposals in Care Matters aimed at improving educational outcomes for children in care, particularly placing the designated teacher on a statutory footing and ensuring that the best schools should admit children in care, even when they are fully subscribed. However, if the best schools are to take children in care, there must be structures in place to ensure that these schools understand the care system, and the needs of individual children placed there. This package should include resources to ensure that children do not feel 'out of place', e.g. that they have the right equipment and clothing and finances for after school activities. The transition to adulthood for young people leaving care is very different to that of most young people and notwithstanding the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, the current system for supporting young people leaving the care system is still lacking the appropriate and necessary support to enable them to make the transition to independent adult life. The age at which they leave care and lack of ongoing and sustained support does not promote the wellbeing of many of these young people and has implications for their longer term wellbeing.

This should be contrasted with the experiences of most young people who do not 'leave' home as a single act – the normal transition is graduated and characterised by frequent returns to the family home and continuing support from parents/carers, with young people generally not living independently until aged 24 or later. Barnardo's acknowledges that it is not feasible for local authorities to exactly replicate the transition process that most families experience, but believes that they could do more to support young people who leave care for independent living – particularly those who leave before the age of 18. We would like to see a different approach taken to supporting young people leaving care – one which demonstrates a commitment to promoting their well being in both the short and longer term.

While the current Children and Young Persons Bill extends the entitlement to support for some young people leaving care, in particular it still does not provide long term support networks for many young people beyond the age of 18; it will not improve



the transition between children's and adult services and does not change the expectation that mainstream homelessness supported accommodation provides the right levels and types of support for young people leaving care, as distinct from other young people in need of accommodation.

We acknowledge that it may not be possible for local authorities to exactly replicate the transition process that most families experience, but believe that they could do more to ensure that children who leave care for independent living – particularly those who leave before the age of 19 – do not drop into a spiral of moves of accommodation because of a single mistake or failure.

Finally I would like to look at a particularly vulnerable group of young people in care, those who become involved in offending behaviour and end up in the custodial system. Children in care are over represented in the secure estate population, approximately 40% to 49% of children and young people in custody have been in local authority care at some point and about 18% are still on statutory Care Orders. These are a particularly vulnerable group of children and are those most likely to experience resettlement problems on their release.

I am particularly disappointed that the original good intentions outlined in the original Care Matters green paper have been diluted. The proposal that: *local authorities should carry out an assessment of needs of those young people in their care on a voluntary basis who enter youth custody, with an expectation that they will continue to be supported as a child in care. In most cases this will entail a social worker, a care plan and continued support as a child in care on leaving custody* has been reduced in the Bill to a responsibility for them to be visited by a representative of the children's services department. This is not good enough, and I would argue that Local Authorities continue to have a duty of care for these children and should work within the spirit of the original proposals.





Leaving Care – Still a Postcode Lottery?

An interview with Carol Floris, Voices from Care Cymru



As England prepares to pass the Children and Young Persons Bill, the Welsh Assembly Government is considering its Vulnerable Children's Strategy. We Asked Carol Floris, Advice and Support Manager at campaigning and advocacy organisation Voices from Care Cymru, what difference this will make.

Q. What are your current pressing concerns for care leavers in Wales?

Ensuring that policies and processes already agreed are properly implemented is important too. That would go a long way to improving services for care leavers without any new legislation.

Q. What are your particular concerns for care leavers in Wales at the moment?

Based on the contact I have with young care leavers, I am particularly concerned about the provision of quality services for care leavers who are young parents, the development of recognised advocacy services which are independent and robust enough to challenge decisions and systems on behalf of young people and ensuring that policies and processes already agreed are properly implemented.

Q. What is the vulnerable children's strategy and what will it achieve for looked after children and care leavers?.

The Strategy is part of a drive by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) to develop a distinct policy agenda serving the interests of vulnerable children, young people and families in Wales, improving delivery of social care and health services to the most vulnerable. As a stakeholder Voices is involved representing children and young people looked after and leaving care in Wales. Key focus points include supporting the whole family, not just focusing on individuals; improved working between child and adult services, early intervention, and a strategy for looked after children and care leavers.

Q. Is WAG consulting publicly on this?

Yes: one of the elements of the Strategy now out for consultation focuses on support to families where there is substance misuse and the family require social care intervention. It is hoped that with a good quality of services families can be supported to deal with their issues and their children will not have to enter the care system.

Q. What do you most want to see included in this strategy in relation to care leavers?

We want care leavers to be able to receive support from their local authority for longer (up until 25), to be able to stay in foster care for longer (up until 21), and for a range of accommodation to be available. Preventing homelessness for care leavers and making extra money available for care leavers going to university are also important.

Voices From Care would like to see a strengthening of the provisions in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 as we believe that care leavers currently receive very variable services depending on which area of Wales they live in. There needs to be consistency in the role of a Personal Advisor, Pathway Plans, and the reviewing process, building on the best practice that already exists in parts of Wales. We welcome the suggested themes of the Strategy for care leavers, however these may only benefit care leavers who are relatively settled and achieving. There needs to be provision for those care leavers who are most vulnerable and who do not find it easy to engage with services or who have complex service needs.

Q. 7 years on from the Children (Leaving Care) Act how different is the experience of a young person leaving care in Wales today than in 2001?

There have been many improvements in the leaving care experience, for example young people can remain in care until they are 18, and for some agreement can be reached to finish a course of study, there is more support available via personal advisors and a process of planning for care leavers. The process of leaving care has been extended - previously once someone left care that was pretty much it. There was no looking back and little access to support of any kind

Q. What has been the impact on devolution on the kind of services that children in Wales receive?

The Welsh Assembly Government and local authorities can look at what is happening to children and young people they are responsible for in a much more focused way and adapt services to meet their needs, taking into account some of the geographical, economic and social features of life in Wales.

Q. What have been your main achievements in relation to care leavers and what are the key issues you are still campaigning on?

We have worked closely with WAG to ensure young people are heard in policy and planning decisions. Voices from Care was amongst the first organisations to insist that children and young people should be listened to - and show that the consequences of not listening can be devastating. Young people at Voices from Care campaigned hard pre the 2000 Act to show that the lack of available services left care leavers struggling against the odds. We continue to work to ensure that both on an individual and collective level that young people leaving care are listened to, to ensure that the Act is working as it was intended.

Q. Are WAG and the local authorities in Wales demonstrating in their policies and actions that every care leaver matters, or are there groups and individuals that are still falling by the wayside?

As I said earlier, there needs to be a concentration on all care leavers not just those who are settled and achieving. Young people have said that loneliness and feeling low are one of their biggest issues. There need to be services and support out of hours and weekends, and support for young people to build up their own networks. There needs to be a guaranteed safety net, particularly in relation to housing where some care leavers can find themselves very vulnerable to eviction for a number of reasons. Young people's vulnerability and the absolute need to find them the right accommodation needs to be recognised.

Q. What is your key message to MPs and Assembly members for National Care Leavers' Week in 2008?

More attention needs to be paid to what is measured and why we are measuring it - performance indicators need to be more qualitative and analytical to reflect what does and doesn't work. This data can then be used to ensure that care leavers receive the best service. We need to make sure that the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 is working for all care leavers whatever their needs and that new measures brought in to enhance this act are effective and properly resourced.

The All Wales Leaving Care Forum 'WHAT WORKS FOR CARE LEAVERS CONFERENCE' takes place on 14th October 2008 at The Pavilion, Llandrindod Wells.

www.voicesfromcarecymru.org.uk



Our History - Our Past

www.careleavers.com

Family tree, baby photos, first school report, family holiday photos, Uncle Eric's stories from when he was a boy that he tells every Christmas, every year.... These are just some of the things that most people have, are familiar with and perhaps even take for granted.

However, for many people who lived in care as children, whether with foster families or in children's homes, these things often do not exist at all. Imagine not having a single photograph of yourself as a child, or of your sister, your mother, your father. That is a reality for many of the 350,000 or so care leavers in the UK. At first, such simple things may not seem particularly important, but they form a crucial link with a person's past and identity.

As a part of this campaign the CLA surveyed over 150 local authorities, using the Freedom of Information Act, to find out about the current level of practice in access to records across the UK. What emerged from the results of that research, was a very varied picture. The range, in the number of requests to access files that local authorities received over the period (2003-7), was huge: from 0 to 896. There were big differences in approach, with some local authorities displaying good practice and awareness of how significant these files can be and others reporting no monitoring system for requests of this kind and admitting to not publicising care leavers' rights to access their files in any way.

Throughout 2008, the Care Leavers' Association (CLA) has been running a campaign to raise awareness about the rights of care leavers to access their childhood care files. The campaign, 'It's Our History, It's Our Right: Reclaiming Our Past', has three aims: 1. To promote awareness of care leavers' rights to access their files; 2. To promote awareness of the importance of these personal records to care leavers and 3. To promote best practice on accessing these vital documents amongst professionals working in this area. The CLA has travelled around the UK with the campaign, meeting up with care leavers and also with professionals working in this area.

From this research and from speaking with their members and networks of care leavers, the CLA have developed a guideline for a basic level of good practice in access to records. This includes the need for local authorities to:

- Advertise in the largest paper in the local press at least once per year and in the council newspaper in every issue



- Recognise the positive importance of accessing files and have a monitoring system on requests received and responses made (or to be demonstrably working towards such a system).

CLA will launch its new quality mark based on these basic requirements during National Care Leavers' Week 2008. The aim is to work with local authorities so that professionals fully understand the needs of care leavers in this area and achieve the best possible service.

Foundation Rebrands!




The Bryn Melyn Group Foundation, founded in 1999 to provide financial support for care leavers in need has finally decided to opt for a name that everyone can spell and better reflects what it is for!

From October BMGF will be known as The Care Leavers' Foundation. An independent registered charity, Bryn Melyn Group Foundation was created with the blessing and backing of the Bryn Melyn children's home in North Wales. Trustee Janet Rich said "things have moved on since 1999. A lot of people are confused between the two organisations, and the name doesn't reflect our activities across the UK." The Care Leavers' Foundation will continue with its core mission of making small grants to care leavers aged up to 29 based on a twin track approach of supporting aspiration and ameliorating hardship, as well as coordinating National Care Leavers' Week events and activities. National Care Leavers' Week is now in its seventh year and has become an important part of the calendar, keeping the issues alive, promoting good practice and providing a focus for celebrating care leavers' successes in local teams. Brendan McNutt, owner of Bryn Melyn – which is now known as Bryn Melyn Care – was made a Patron of the Foundation in 2007, reflecting his contribution to its origins. The Care Leavers' Foundation relies entirely on the donations of individuals and small companies for its work.

For further details of how the trust fund operates, and how you can donate, please visit:

www.thecareleaversfoundation.org




The Leaving Care Company is dedicated to providing accommodation and support for care leavers in the community throughout the North and South West of England.

- We have an experienced and dedicated team
- Consistent support from an Outreach worker dedicated to each young person
- Committed to excellence and good outcomes for all our young people

We currently work with young people aged between 16 and 21 years who may have emotional, behavioural, psycho-social or learning difficulties.

A Service as individual as our young people... because we know one size doesn't fit all.



YOUNG PEOPLES GUIDE

The Leaving Care Company is dedicated to providing accommodation and support for care leavers in the community. We provide support throughout the North and South West of England.

Feel free to visit our Website www.theleavingcarecompany.co.uk

For referrals or more information please call 0161 6330003 or email: info@theleavingcarecompany.co.uk



Accommodating Care Leavers

www.go-wm.gov.uk

It isn't all down to housing. Mandy Smith from GOWM talks about how a little flexibility from other agencies could make a big difference to achieving stable housing for more children leaving care.

Mandy Smith is Policy Officer for vulnerable children at the Government Office in the West Midlands, one of 9 Regional Offices responsible for joining up Government departments to deliver and support local agendas. The complex issues surrounding suitable and sustainable accommodation for care leavers coupled with central Government focus on PSA16 was enough to get Mandy's creative mind thinking about how better to get agencies working together to do more. During National Care Leavers' Week GOWM, Shelter and the Care Advisory Service (formerly NLCAS) are running a seminar to start the conversation off. Smith aims to pull together Supporting People and Leaving Care team managers, third sector providers and job centre plus teams, to bring a coordinated approach to what has historically been an intransigent problem. Good practice in the region includes Jobcentre Plus offices are working towards providing a 'one stop shop' service for

young people preparing to leave care, enabling them to make an appointment to meet an advisor, talk about their benefit entitlements and complete application forms four weeks ahead of their 18th birthday. This prevents the limbo period when support via leaving care teams stops and claims are still being processed, a gap that also affects housing and rent. Warwickshire has one of the 'staying put' pilots – the only one in the West Midlands region – enabling care leavers to stay with their foster carers instead of moving out straightaway when they leave care. What does Mandy Smith hope to achieve? "More care leavers who are benefiting from being in stable accommodation as a direct result of receiving a more joined up service. On a practical note this means more suitable accommodations and support available to care leavers across the West Midlands. On a more aspirational level, I hope we will also be able to develop a good practice guide and champions identified

from authorities that are doing well to support those still struggling.

Housing has such a big impact on every aspect of care leavers' lives – we have to get this right if we want to see improvements in their outcomes. If we can educate and support some of the other agencies involved to think more about the particular needs of this group, we can start to think about where flexibilities in the systems can make their transitions smoother."

PSA 16 is the Public Service Delivery Agreement that aims to increase the proportion of socially excluded adults in settled accommodation and employment, education or training. DWP is currently looking specifically at care leavers as an important sub group within the target beneficiaries of PSA 16.

Seminar: Accommodating Care Leavers, Tuesday 28 October, Birmingham.

Contact: catherine.ellis@gwom.gsi.gov.uk Tel: 0121 352 5396

North West

www.theleavingcarecompany.co.uk

Focus on practice: Company for care leavers.

25 year old Stephen Norman is a care leaver and a graduate in Community and Citizenship. Stephen worked in a foyer in Blackburn for care leavers which he found depressing.



"A room and a sink and a shared bathroom. It was absolutely awful. It scares me that I could have been in a place like that. Living with 7 or 8 youngsters drinking or off their face all the time." Stephen doesn't think there should be an age when you have to leave care: "kids in care don't mature until years later than their peers. I should know – I was one! You realise later when you grow up a bit you think 'oh crap - why did I behave like that?'" Stephen now works as a support worker for the Leaving Care company and sits on the Executive Board for the Care Leavers' Association (CLA). At The Leaving Care Company we work with high end high risk cases. They have their issues and can be quite challenging. We can give them two or three hours every day if they need it and operate a key worker system so there is that consistency. It still isn't enough though and I feel bad about that sometimes."

"I've just spent a couple of hours with one of my young people and then I had to go. And I know he's got the whole day and the whole weekend on his own and he's going to be lonely, and he's going to start drinking over the weekend. I need to realise that I can't change things for everyone, and care leavers need to make their own mistakes, just like I did. I can just sustain them and give a bit more of an insight."

"As a support worker I can make a difference to individual care leavers, but the campaigning and policy side of it is important too. There is still a lot that needs to be changed to make systems work for care leavers. Care leavers shouldn't just be involved in responding – giving their views through consultation. They should be at the top table developing policy. I'm learning about this side of things through the CLA."

"I feel privileged to be able to be involved. When I left care I had no idea what I wanted to do. Halfway through my course I realised that working with care leavers is something I am really passionate about. Sometimes I think we are really letting kids down but unfortunately there is only so much that can be done."

"Within the Leaving Care Company I am our own biggest critic. I can still see things from both sides. I hope I don't lose that! Leaving care is really tough – it can be scary and very confusing and often you have to deal with a lot of different people and different appointments. One for housing – one for benefits – go here to the job centre – go and see this person about drug and alcohol counselling. Sometimes its no wonder that young care leavers think 'I can't be bothered – I think I'll just go off and get blathered instead!'"

"If there was one thing I could give to every single child in care and care leavers it would be the loving stability and ongoing support I had from the one foster family I had when I was 11 who are still there for me now."



The Prince's Trust

www.princes-trust.org.uk

Leaving Care Mentor programmes

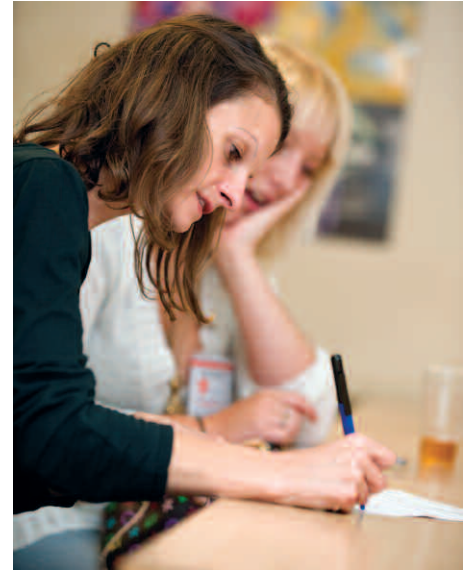
Mentoring can provide young care leavers with an essential lifeline and vital companionship and consistency as they move through their transition into young adulthood and independence.

A mentor is independent of the statutory services and mentoring relationships can last many years. Many care leavers have benefited from the support of Mentors like Maria, and during National Care Leavers' Week The Prince's Trust begins the process of reviewing their Leaving Care Mentoring Strategy to see how their expertise and experience can be spread to help support more care leavers into adult life. Experts in the field have been invited to support The Princes Trust with this process on Monday 27th October in London as Care Leavers' Week events get underway.

My name is Maria and I am a Leaving Care Mentor. I'm not able to work full time so I wanted to do something that was rewarding and helps young people. We talk about what's going on in their life and about education, work and benefits. It's just a general chat really to discuss anything that they need

help with. Frankie finished school last month; she's recently turned 16 and moved into her first supported accommodation. She's had to move areas to do this. It's such a huge period of change for her. I am nervous about meeting Frankie for the first time – I think about whether we're going to get on, whether she'll like me, whether I'll like her. It turns out great. Frankie's really got her head screwed on. She's very mature for a 16-year old. I think we're going to get on very well. We'll meet again in a couple of weeks to have a general chat and find out what support she would like from a mentor. It's great watching a young person progress and get a job or into education. It's rewarding to know that you're helping someone.

Read more about mentoring for care leavers, and find out how to volunteer or refer a young care leaver at www.nationalcareleaversweek.org



Work in Progress

www.pureinnovations.co.uk

Hard to reach care leavers are not turned around overnight. Dave Ferrier from Pure Innovations on how to make the most vulnerable employment-ready.

Pure Innovations Limited is a not for profit provider of employability services supporting hard to reach groups. Dave Ferrier looks after the care leaver team.

"We work with young people who have not been able to receive an appropriate service with Connexions. Our mission is reaching the hard to reach and we pride ourselves on going the extra mile." Many employment schemes, funded by Government on a results based tariff, have been accused of cherry picking – only taking on clients that seem likely to make it into employment to guarantee a return. We asked Dave how Innovations addresses this issue.

"Our job here is to make young people employment ready – however long it takes. We follow through on everything we say we will do. Eventually most of our youngsters come to trust us. We recognise this can take time and that's okay with us."

"There really are not too many people that have no potential. It just takes time to build their confidence and

discover what they can take an interest in. We have options from construction to media – there is something for everyone out there. It takes patience to keep plugging away until together you identify what is right for that person. We have high aspirations for everyone who walks through our door, but we don't pressure them. Sometimes if they have disengaged you need to find out what's going on. Most of our young people are more afraid of success than they are of failure. So just when things seem to be going swimmingly, they will press the self destruct button."

"We are looking out for that. We know our clients and we can be proactive about putting extra support in when it's needed most. In a lot of projects, as soon as the person starts a job they are on their own. We see that as just the beginning. If someone isn't turning up for work, or missing appointments we will go round, knock their door, have a chat. There is usually a reason and most times we can get them focussed again. Clients are individually referred by Connexions or the care leaving team because

they haven't managed on other schemes."

"We are there for as long as they need us. We first got involved with Luke when he was 15 and skipping school. We got him on an apprenticeship and he learned catering then drifted away from that into more outdoor based activities; things were okay for a while then he did a couple of short spells in prison. "

We were there to get him back on track before he came out the second time. He's twenty-one now and we still get the odd phone call. Last time he rung it was to say he was going for a new job 'but I don't need your help now, I can do it myself'. So it takes time. It's not the end of the world if they make a mistake. We just come back at them and keep putting in the support and the encouragement – and the skills building of course – we might be in touch for a few months, or a few years with some of our clients. We try and be there for them like a parent would.

Seminar: Work in Progress, Tuesday 28 October, details from: rachel.roberts@pureinnovations.co.uk

For extended articles and full NCLW programme, visit: www.nationalcareleaversweek.org