

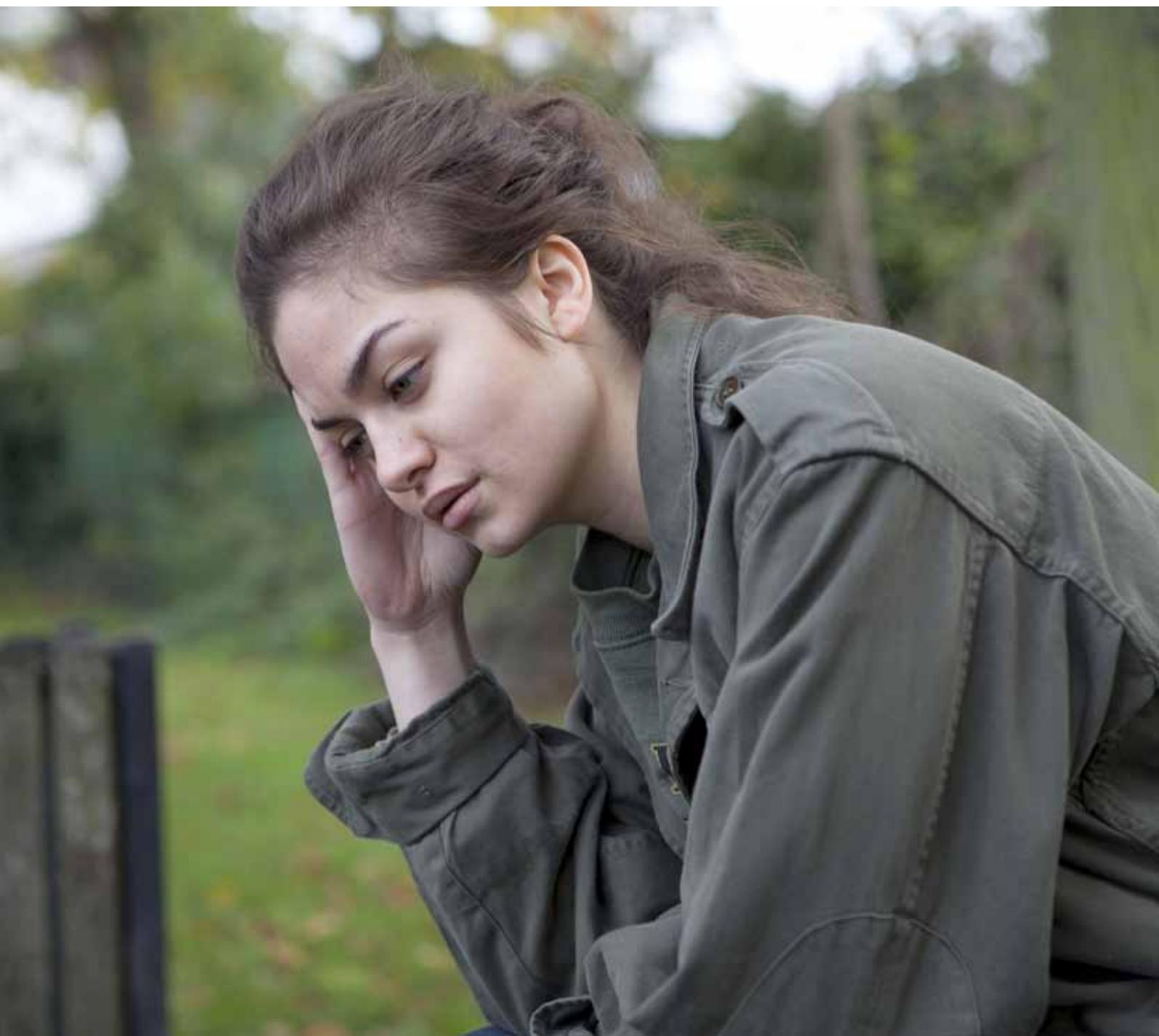
The costs of not caring: supporting English care leavers into independence

Believe in
children



Barnardo's

December 2014



We would like to thank the practitioners involved in this research, who worked with passion and diligence to form the recommendations of this report. Most importantly, we would like to thank each of the young people who took part in this research, for speaking so openly and honestly about their experiences, both while in care and now as care leavers.

Contents

Introduction	5
Barnardo's work with care leavers	6
Methodology	7
Policy context in England	8
Key findings	9
Main findings	10
Not ready yet – unprepared to live independently	10
Understanding the consequences – independence skills	13
Supporting care leavers: the roles of the personal adviser and the independent visitor	16
The impact of supported and unsupported journeys	23
Young people's expectations of independent living	32
Conclusion	35
Annex	37
Reference	41



Introduction

I moved into care when I was 13. I didn't want to go, but my mum couldn't look after me anymore. She was doing things she shouldn't be doing, especially with us around. I got moved all around the country, I never really felt settled, I kept running away. That was until they put me into a beautiful children's home, away in the countryside where the staff were great, you got everything you needed. You were cooked for, you were cleaned for, they used to pay for us to take part in activities and all sorts. Then I had to leave care and I had to move back to the area that I grew up in...

It was hard. I went to live in a semi-independent unit where the staff were supposed to help you to learn the skills to live independently. They didn't though, they just let us get on with things, we could do anything we wanted. I liked that at the time but I know now it wasn't good for me. I was lazy, I didn't bother going to college, I didn't get a job – nobody supported me to do any of that. Three years after leaving care, I'm still in the same situation.

I've lived in some horrible places, places you wouldn't want to live in. I haven't got any money and I've gotten into loads of debt because I can't afford to pay for my rent and bills, I'm being evicted from my house soon and I don't know what to do. I turned 21 and all the support I had before just stopped, they 'closed my case'. It's not fair. The government are supposed to be my parents but there's nobody helping me, I haven't got anybody.

Young person leaving care

Barnardo's work with care leavers

Barnardo's is one of the UK's largest children's charities, supporting over 200,000 children, young people and their families across 900 services. We work with around 2,000 care leavers every year in England through over 25 different services, including supported lodgings, tenancy support, advocacy, children's rights and supported accommodation.

A shortage of good quality, affordable accommodation means that it is often difficult for care leavers to find accommodation that is suitable to their needs, whether this is in the short, medium or long term. At Barnardo's, we are committed to supporting young people who have grown up in the care system; we believe that they should have choice and control over where they want to live. Without the safety net of a family, care leavers are among the young people most at risk of homelessness. Around a third of young people in the UK with care backgrounds experience homelessness at some point between six and 24 months after leaving care (Stein, 2010). Those care leavers who struggle with their accommodation and find that they are unable to maintain tenancies can often find themselves in emergency accommodation that is not suitable to their needs.

Barnardo's has been raising awareness about local authorities' provision of accommodation for care leavers in housing crisis situations. Our campaign, *Beyond Care*, has highlighted the use of bed and breakfasts in different local authority areas in England, identifying the scale of their use and providing local councillors with guidance for supporting care leavers with their accommodation needs.

We have also called for local authority departments to work more closely together to identify the long-term accommodation needs of care leavers, and to allow care leavers choice and a range of accommodation that meets their needs depending on their level of independence.

We know that many care leavers struggle with their accommodation, especially when they first move to live on their own. They leave care with little experience of what it is like to live independently, many without the support and guidance to enable them to make a long-term home for themselves. We must support care leavers better after they leave care, and Government at all levels must continue to fulfil its duty as a corporate parent.

'The values and ideals that should lie at the heart of any parental relationship should also lie in the relationship between the Government and local authorities as corporate parents and the care leavers they work to protect.'

Still Our Children, 2013

Methodology

Timeline interviews

This report is based on research with 20 care leavers (11 male and nine female) aged between 18 and 25, in four different regions of England: the north east, north west, south east and south west. At the time of the interviews, the care leavers to whom we spoke were living in a variety of different types of accommodation, supported and unsupported:

- 11 young people were living independently
- 4 young people were in 'Staying Put' arrangements
- 2 young people were living in a supported lodging
- 1 young person was living in a young person's hostel
- 1 young person was living in shared accommodation with other young people
- 1 young person was homeless at the time of the interview.

Each young person took part in a timeline interview (Adriansen, 2012), a method used to track the journey they had taken from the time they entered the care system up until their current living situation as a care leaver.

Timeline interviews are a participatory method used to assist the young person in talking about their life history and creating a map of their journey. Young people talked in great detail about their experiences in care and as care leavers, including the types of placements they had lived in and the level of support they had received. Many young people have extremely complex pathways through the care system as they move between different placements, with different carers, some with support from family, some without; each journey has a unique impact on each young person after leaving care. We have used some of the young people's timelines in the report to illustrate their experiences in the English care system.

For three of the young people interviewed, we have detailed the costs associated with their journeys, to illustrate the economic impact. Details of the costs used can be found in the annex.

Practitioner workshop

Six practitioners took part in a workshop that followed the completion of the interviews conducted with care leavers, playing a key role in forming the recommendations for this report. Practitioners including advocacy workers, participation workers, project workers and personal advisers took part in the workshop. Practitioners working with care leavers in varying capacities were selected to ensure a wide range of expertise. Two of the practitioners involved in the workshops grew up in foster care, and now advocate for care leavers living in the same area where they grew up.

Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the young people who took part in the research.

Policy context in England

In 2014, the number of children in care in England increased for the seventh successive year to 68,840. Sixty-two per cent of those entered the care system due to abuse or neglect (Department for Education (DfE), 2014). Around 10,000 of these young people aged between 16 and 18 years old will leave the English care system each year (HM Government, 2013), over a third of whom will go on to live independently (DfE, 2014), with minimal support¹.

Due to the environments that some children grow up in before moving into care, many have been exposed to responsibilities that their peers will not experience until much later in life, including looking after the family household by cooking and cleaning, or feeding and clothing younger siblings. Due to the exposure that children and young people sometimes have to such responsibilities, some are ready to live independently at 18 years old, however many are not. Making the transition from care into independence can be a complicated and not always smooth process (House of Commons Education Committee, 2014; The Prince's Trust, 2012; Care Quality Commission (CQC), 2014). As young people in care go from being 'looked-after children' to 'care leavers', different forms of support that they received before turning 18 have now gone, even though there might still be a need.

The need for support beyond 18 has been recognised by Government through the introduction of 'Staying Put', a new duty where young people in foster care who wish to remain with their foster carers now have the opportunity to do so until they turn 21, if this is what they and their foster carers want. The recognition that care leavers need support beyond 18 is an important step in the realisation that for many people, 18 is too young an age to be left to fend for themselves. The challenges that care leavers face in living independently are compounded by the availability of good-quality, safe and secure housing (Barnardo's, 2014a). In 2014, 39 per cent of care leavers aged between 19 and 21 were living independently (DfE, 2014). 'Children and young people living in independent living are also almost twice as likely to live in the most deprived areas of the country as children in other placement types' (Ofsted, 2014).

It is not just those settled in foster placements who are in need of support after they turn 18, as those from less settled backgrounds are often the ones most in need. The government has made important changes to the way in which care leavers are supported in England; providing bursaries to enable easier access to further and higher education, enabling early access to benefit support, and providing easier access to employment and training programmes through Jobcentre Plus and the FromCare2Work programme, to name a few. While these changes have been substantial in many areas, housing and accommodation is an area that is yet to see significant improvement. Having a stable place to live is the bedrock of being able to progress in other areas of life. Without somewhere safe and secure to come home to each night, being able to maintain a job or complete a college course is made even more challenging.

1. All care leavers have an entitlement to a personal adviser until they turn 21. For many care leavers this is their only form of support. If they do not have a good relationship with their social worker or personal adviser, it can be the case that they have no one else to turn to.

Key findings

Care leavers who go on to live independently straight from care struggle the most.

Care leavers do not receive adequate training and preparation for leaving care and living independently.

Supported lodgings are a vital intervention for young people who have experienced placement breakdown.

Inappropriate placements cause harm to a young person's emotional wellbeing and have significant cost implications on the public purse.

Care leavers need a more holistic support package, as currently too much is expected of statutory services such as personal advisers.

A lack of flexibility between local authority Children's and Housing services can cause unrealistic expectations for care leavers and contribute to breakdown in their accommodation.

A timeline completed with one care leaver



Main findings

When conducting the research, we talked to each of the care leavers about their journey through the care system, using the moment that they entered into care as the starting point. As the research progressed, it became more apparent that the types of experiences young people had while in care had a direct impact on their experiences after leaving the care system.

Following the paths young people take through care, the report is structured to shadow the journeys that care leavers have been on, from the time spent preparing to leave care, to their experiences of living independently.

1. Not ready yet – unprepared to live independently

'I thought I was ready to move out, but I wasn't, I should have been offered a supported lodging.'
(Young person)

Research by the Children's Rights Director has indicated that just under a quarter (24 per cent) of care leavers thought they had been prepared well or very well for independent life after leaving care, and another 27 per cent that their preparation had been 'OK'. Nearly half (49 per cent) thought they had been prepared badly or very badly (Ofsted, 2012a).

In England, if they choose, young people who have lived in the care of their local authority are able to leave that care at the age of 16. In 2012, 35 per cent of those living in children's homes and 22 per cent of those living in foster care left care at 16 (DfE, 2012). For many of those young people who have been in the care system for a significant period of time, especially those who have had disjointed and chaotic placements, leaving care at 16 can represent an opportunity to 'escape' and to become independent. While some choose to move into accommodation that is supported, such as a supported lodging or a semi-independent flat, or through moving back home with parents, there are others who choose to live on their own, without support. Two care leavers we spoke to had experienced over 25 different placements each while they were in the care system. Shortly after turning 16 they left care and moved to live alone, in independent accommodation.

Kate's aspiration for when she turned 16 was always to live alone. Never living in the same place for longer than six months, she did not feel she was able to build a personal connection with anyone, she did not understand what it was like to have someone else to rely on, and she had not seen her mother since she moved into care. She has a twin sister but they were split up after Kate's fourth placement due to Kate's challenging behaviour. Fending for herself and being independent was all she ever knew, and having a place where she didn't have to answer to anyone but herself seemed like the perfect solution. She didn't have a close relationship with her social worker, and talked a lot about the loneliness of being a child in care and the presumption that foster carers are always the people that children can turn to if they need support.

'If you had one point of contact... the foster carers have an emergency social worker that they can contact all the time, but, me, the only person I have is that foster carer, so if there's friction or you don't get on, it's like you've got no-one, it always felt like you had no-one.'
(Kate)

The prospect of living alone, for a young person who has never in their life felt settled before, can appear liberating; it can seem like a home without rules, without restrictions, a place to call their own.

The reality of living alone is different and often challenging. Understanding the different types of bills to pay, budgeting (typically on a low income) for food, clothes and cleaning products for the house are all new experiences. Often, care leavers also end up in poor quality or even unsafe housing (Action for Children, 2014), and living independently can be a very lonely and isolating experience (Barnardo's, 2014a).

'A house is somewhere, where if you've had a long day you can come and relax, chill out and refresh your mind but some of the places I lived, outside was better than coming home! That's not the benefit of having a house!'
(Young person)

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

Nine out of the 20 young people interviewed moved into unsupported accommodation after leaving care. Three of these moved into shared accommodation and the other six moved into accommodation on their own. Only one care leaver kept their placement for longer than a year. This young person's experience was unique, as he was removed from the area he grew up in, to live in a modern flat close to where his mother had recently moved to. Although he was removed from the care of his birth mother at the age of three due to his parents causing a risk to him, he has always had a close connection with her and often absconded to stay and 'hide' with her while in care. Originally from a large family, he moved into his own flat, close to his mother, and without his older brothers and sisters to compete with, he had the attention from his mother that he had always wanted. Throughout more than 25 care placements, he had always struggled to live with other people and cited this as the reason that he moved so much. Now that he was living in his own accommodation with the support of his mother, he had the environment he wanted with the support he had always wanted.

For all young people, leaving home and living independently represents a new challenge, but for young people leaving the care system, without the safety net of a parent for support, the significance of this challenge is much greater. Children and

young people who grow up in foster care or in a children's home move suddenly from being looked after by carers, always being provided for, to a brand new environment, where they are now required to provide for themselves and maintain their accommodation without the support that they have become so used to receiving.

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

Young people who go on to live independently, unprepared for the challenges ahead and without support, are often not equipped with the right knowledge, and this can lead to them making decisions that can have a detrimental impact on them for years to come.

When Kate moved into her first independent placement at 16 years old, she got into lots of debt, as she was not aware that she needed to use the small amount of money that she was receiving to pay for her food and clothes and for the things she needed for her flat. After moving into care at eight years old, Kate had found it difficult to develop relationships with adults or children, and said that she was never prepared to leave care as she was too busy moving from one placement to the next. She talked at length about how unsupported she felt during her time in care and how she just wanted to be left on her own.

'I'm still paying off debts now [nine years after living in her first independent placement], if somebody had have gone through these bills, bills I didn't even know existed, I've had to figure everything out myself, I've had to learn the hard way. If I had have had support with that it would have changed things.'
(Kate)

Kate was unaware of the consequences of getting into debt, and was not prepared for maintaining her own flat. Nine years on she is still paying off her debts. She continued to move from one independent placement to the next, where she found herself accruing more and more debt.

After amending 'Transition to Adulthood' guidance in May 2014, more councils than ever are providing care leavers with a leaving care grant at the recommended amount of £2,000, with some providing a grant of up to £3,000 (HM Government, 2014). While this entitlement is vital to help buy the essentials needed for a new home, providing this grant at a time when a care leaver is not ready to spend it sensibly can mean that the grant is not used to its intended potential. One young person told us that she wasted the grant she was given by buying items that she did not need in her first tenancy, and as a result did not have any of the grant remaining for her second tenancy.

'I got my first leaving care grant when I was 18, so I had none of that (to spend on my new flat). I sold everything that I bought with my leaving care grant and I put some of the stuff in the bin.'
(Young person)

Too many care leavers are leaving the care system before they are ready. In 2012, over a third (37 per cent) of care leavers left care before their 18th birthday (DfE, 2012). Under changes made in the Children and Families Act (2014), Directors of Children's Services are now required to 'sign off' care leavers before they leave care. This welcome change in policy has been made to prevent young people from leaving care before they are ready. However, it is critical that when a young person is signed off to leave care, the young person is supported to ensure that they are managing to live independently.

Recommendations to local authorities

Where a young person has been signed off to leave care before their 18th birthday:

- In the reviews conducted by personal advisers after care leavers are placed in independent accommodation, the personal adviser should assess their ability to live independently. The personal adviser should be prepared to provide more supportive opportunities and, if needed, assess the possibility of a move back into care.
- Personal advisers should visit care leavers in their accommodation a minimum of once per month for the first six months, and then continue to visit at least the statutory minimum of every two months after they have been assessed as being settled in their placement.

2. Understanding the consequences – independence skills

It has been well documented that many young people leave care too early and that children in care are not sufficiently well prepared to live independently (Barnardo's, 2014a; Barnardo's, 2014b; Action for Children, 2014). The average age of leaving home for a young person who has not been in care is 24 (Clarke, 2009). Nearly half of all 24-year-old men still live with their parents (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Equipping children in care with the skills needed to live independently is one of the care system's greatest challenges. If children in care are to be ready to live independently, there is a responsibility to ensure that young people are prepared for the challenge ahead. There is a need to rethink the way in which we prepare children in care for living on their own.

At 16, young people often find it difficult to understand the consequences of not paying rent on time, or of ignoring warning letters threatening to turn off their water supply if they do not pay an outstanding water bill. While in care, young people will usually not have needed to deal with these types of responsibilities, which are typically dealt with by carers, and as a consequence, when they leave care, they do not have the knowledge or experience to know how to manage by themselves.

For one young person, the prospect of living independently causes anxiety:

'I've been very protected, for a very long time, and now moving out, it makes it even more scary because I've been so protected.'

(Young person)

Without preparing young people who want to live independently for the consequences of not saving money for food and for paying quarterly bills, it should not come as a surprise that care leavers get into debt.

'If somebody back here (at a younger age) had have told me the consequences of my actions in my adult life, I think things would have been different and I think if somebody had have shown me how to be independent and run a flat, none of this (getting into debt) would have happened.'

(Young person)

Five of the young people whom we spoke to lived in residential care until they left care at 16. Out of these five, two said that they had some form of 'independence training' before they took on their own tenancy. Both young people felt that the training did not prepare them well enough to leave care. One of these young people reflected that the type of independence training they had experienced did not represent the circumstances that a care leaver has to live in today.

'There was no preparation, we had one workshop about rent and it wasn't realistic. It gave an example of a girl getting £240 a week. I mean, who is getting £240 a week?'

(Young person)

Of the other 15 young people interviewed, 13 lived in foster care with the remaining two not entering the care system until 16 after moving to the country to claim asylum. They were moved directly into shared accommodation. Of the 13 young people who lived in foster care, two felt that they had been taught the skills to live independently; the other 11 said they felt that they had not been prepared to live independently by the foster carers. The two young people who felt they were well equipped to live independently were both living in supported accommodation, one in a supported lodging and the other in a Staying Put arrangement.

There is not a specific requirement for children in care to be taught specific independence skills in preparation for leaving care, as this 'training' usually takes place informally. While there appears to be some form of independence training for young people living in residential care, on the whole, the young people we spoke to who live in foster care do not feel that they are being adequately prepared for life after care.

Peer mentoring as a way of preparing young people to leave care

So how can care leavers be better prepared to live independently, and engage in independence skills training that will have a lasting impact on them when they go on to live independently? We asked some of the care leavers how they thought this could be achieved...

'I think there should be someone who has had your experience, at a similar age as you to tell you what can happen.'

(Young person)

Upon asking young people how they felt they would better engage with independence training, one care leaver said that all the skills he had gained for living independently were from his friends who already lived on their own. Shortly after entering the country at age 17, Jake was introduced to a Barnardo's participation group with other care leavers, which he originally began to attend because there was another young person who was able to speak the same language as him. He has attended the group for the past five years and has met and made friends with care leavers of different ages and from different backgrounds. He says that it is his friends that he has learnt from, and that from the mistakes of other care leavers he has developed an understanding of the consequences of not budgeting and paying his bills on time. He maintains that these experiences provided him with context and showed him the real-life consequences of living alone.

'Because I knew other young people who were living independently, you can see what's happening and they used to tell me, this is what is going to happen so if you are someone who is conscious, you can learn and make sure you don't get into the same places.'

(Young person)

Children and young people in care have many professionals in their lives, including social workers, teachers, carers, independent reviewing officers, personal advisers, and so on. The young people we spoke to told us that being told about the consequences of not learning independence skills by another professional, who is paid to be there, in another workshop, does not have the same impact that speaking to another care leaver does. They said that they prefer to learn from other young people who have been in their position.

'I can see the temptations they have. When they [other care leavers] come and talk to me and we talk to each other, we don't always need some professional to come and talk to us. If one of us has a problem, we talk to one another! And you will often find that the person that you are talking to has the same issues and this is how I did it [learned to live independently].'

(Young person)

Four of the care leavers we spoke to attend a participation group where they are able to meet with other care leavers and talk about their experiences as young people who have left the care system. One care leaver, aged 23, remarked that he enjoyed going to the sessions and speaking to younger care leavers about his experiences of living independently. He feels that care leavers learn much more from talking to him than through advice given by professionals.

‘They knew I was from the same situation and so it’s easier for them because they can relate themselves to me.’
(Young person)

Recommendations

All young people who want to live independently should be offered substantial and up-to-date independence skills training. The training should be:

- designed and run either by, or in collaboration with, a young person who has experience of leaving care and living independently
- tailored to the area in which it is being provided, taking into consideration the level of provision available in that area
- provided to all young people, regardless of their placement.

It should not be assumed that children in foster care are being taught the skills and being equipped with the knowledge to live independently. This training will also provide a natural forum for care leavers to meet one another and provide opportunities for them to explore sharing accommodation with other young people. Independent visitors (see chapter 3) can play a role in signposting and supporting young people to take part in the training.

- When developing independence training skills programmes, local authorities should explore commissioning peer support programmes such as peer mentoring schemes.

3. Supporting care leavers: the roles of the personal adviser and the independent visitor

Currently, all care leavers are entitled to a personal adviser from the age of 16 or 17 until their 21st birthday, unless they are in education or training where they are then entitled to the support of a personal adviser until the age of 25. However, once they cease to be in education, the support provided from a personal adviser is removed. There have been calls from a number of voluntary organisations for the Department for Education to extend the use of personal advisers for all care leavers up until the age of 25, regardless of whether or not they are in education or training (Still Our Children, 2013). For some care leavers, a personal adviser is the one person they are able to turn to for support, and losing this support can be difficult.

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

Losing the support of a personal adviser can be particularly difficult for some young people, especially when their personal adviser is the only person they rely on for that support. Having someone there to provide practical information with regards to knowing what bills to pay for or getting advice on starting a new college course is key, but it is often the emotional support provided by personal advisers that, for some care leavers, matters the most.

‘I wasn’t in contact with her every day or anything like that, but even just ringing to check if I was alright, it makes a massive difference, even just a phone call checking in.’
(Young person)

As is the case with the care leavers in our research, some personal advisers play a significantly positive role in the lives of the young people they support, but these relationships take time to develop. Cuts to local authority budgets and reduced staff numbers lead to increased caseloads (National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) and Catch22, 2011), reducing the amount of time that a personal adviser can spend getting to know the young people who rely on them so greatly. Without the time to spend with the young people they work with, many personal advisers are unable to build these relationships. Of the 20 care leavers we interviewed, only the two care leavers above spoke of having a positive relationship that lasted for a period of two years or more.

Without getting to know a young person and understand their needs, it can be difficult for a personal adviser to make well-informed decisions and advocate for their care leavers, which can have an impact on that young person’s wellbeing. Ideally, relationships between young people in care and personal advisers should start at an earlier age, at a time when the personal adviser has a chance to get to know the young people they are going to work with; to understand their needs, where they have come from, what they want, and where they want to go when they leave care.

Meet Jane...

Jane's journey

AGE
11

Jane was taken into foster care at age 11 because her parents were misusing substances. She regularly absconded from foster care during her first placement.

AGE
12

At age 12 she moved into a short-term foster placement with her brother. She had a poor experience of care and did not feel supported by her social worker. The placement broke down due to her behaviour.

She was then placed with another foster family with whom she stayed for 6 years. Overall the experience was better. However, she didn't feel that she developed an emotional connection with her foster carers and would often eat separately to the rest of the family. This made living here difficult.

AGE
17

It was agreed in her pathway plan that when she turned 18 she would stay with her foster carers until she went to university.

AGE
18

Things didn't go to plan: Jane failed her A levels and was unable to go university. At this point her relationship with her foster carers broke down and she was asked to leave the home.

Jane's relationship with her partner became abusive. Finding things difficult, Jane attempted to take her own life by taking an overdose. She was admitted to hospital.

After 2 months Jane moved to live with her partner in her partner's parent's house. Shortly after moving she was diagnosed with split personality disorder.

She registered as homeless and returned to live with her birth parents. Her birth parents were still misusing substances and she found it difficult to live with them again.

"I went to the council, at this point I was the lowest of the low, I had nowhere to go or anything, they put me in a B&B for 2 weeks around prostitution, drug users, you name it, it all went on in that B&B"

Not wanting to return to her birth parents, Jane turned to her local authority to find her somewhere to live. She felt at her lowest point and that she had nowhere to go

The council placed her in a B&B for 2 weeks. During this time she was living with drug users, women working as prostitutes, alcoholics etc. The living conditions were very poor: everything was filthy and/or broken. She found this very difficult and continued to feel very low.

She was then placed in a young person's hostel. This was better. She had her own facilities and there were other young people around that were her age. She was in and out of hospital during this time and was assigned a key worker who would visit her whilst in hospital. She stayed in the hostel for 2 months

Jane felt she now wanted to be somewhere she could call her own and so was placed in her own flat without support. She received a leaving care grant of £1500. Living alone, in an unfamiliar area, she began to feel her mental health problems getting worse. The conditions in the flat were also very poor

"They just shovel you in wherever there is a place, they don't care about what it's like or the people that go there, or how it makes you"

"It was even worse than the B&B, not the state of the place but the people that were in it, there were lots of disturbances – it was the saddest ten days of my life"

She is now living in a young person's hostel and has re-joined the housing register. She feels frustrated about not having a say in where she lives and feels very vulnerable.

AGE
19

After 2 months of sofa surfing she was placed in a women's refuge. This was even worse than the B&B. She described this as 'the worst 10 days of my life.'

Jane then moved back in with her parents but her parents were evicted shortly after. Jane was forced to leave, losing everything she owned, including the possessions she had bought with her leaving care grant. She registered as homeless again.

Feeling low and alone, she reached out to her old partner who moved into the flat with her. The relationship became abusive again, forcing her to move out of the flat to escape her partner

Jane's chaotic journey after leaving the care system illustrates what can happen to a young person who does not have support and someone to offer her direction. While there were moments after Jane left care when she would have benefited from advice and support, the decision for her to continue to live with her foster parents after she turned 18 has had a detrimental impact on her emotional wellbeing.

Since the moment Jane left care she felt unsupported. She was unwilling to engage with her personal adviser and social worker as she felt that they did not have her best interests at heart. She had not developed an emotional connection with her foster carers after the six years that she had lived with them and, despite this, it was decided that she would continue to live with them after she turned 18.

Although staying with her former foster carers until she received her A Level grades allowed Jane continuity of support, it is clear from the journey that she went on after leaving her foster home that a contingency plan was not made when drawing up her pathway plan. The leaving care guidance (DfE, 2010) recommends that contingency plans should be made when a placement is at risk of breakdown. Jane's placement did not appear to be at risk of breakdown when her pathway plan was compiled, yet her placement broke down soon after she began her Staying Put arrangement.

Table 1: The costs associated with Jane's journey after leaving care

Description	Duration	Cost	Total cost
Register homeless	twice	£2,656.37	£5,312
Attempted suicide - NHS costs	once	£1,697.00	£1,697
B&B	2 weeks	£48.00	£672
Hotel	1 night	£100.00	£100
First young person's hostel	2 months	£48.00	£2,880
Mental health engagement + overnight stay in hospital once per week	3 months	£145.37	£1,890
Local housing allowance for independent living	3 months	£98.08	£1,275
Domestic violence incident (police costs)	once	£465.00	£465
Women's refuge	10 days	£27.00	£270
Second young person's hostel	2 months	£48.00	£2,880
Sofa surfing	2 months	£0.00	£0
TOTAL COST - 10 months			£17,441

Table 1 illustrates the costs that Jane has accumulated in the ten months since she left the home of her foster carers. Including the costs for the different places she has lived, along with costs related to incidents with the police and her mental health, Jane has accrued a total cost of £17,441 to the state.

*The costs for Jane's leaving care journey have been sourced from the 'Evaluation of the MEAM pilots' and the 'New economy Manchester unit cost database'. Links are available in the technical annex.



Since moving out of her foster carer's home, Jane has registered homeless twice, lived in an independent flat, moved back in with her parents (from whom she was originally removed) twice, lived with her partner in his parents' house, stayed in a hotel for a night, lived in a bed and breakfast for two weeks, sofa surfed for two months, and is now living in the second of two young person's hostels she has stayed in.

Jane did not have a close relationship with her personal adviser, who was responsible for planning her future with her. Her personal adviser did not fully understand her needs and as a consequence Jane has moved eight times in the last year, as well as a two-month period she spent sleeping on the sofas of friends and relatives. It was assumed that because Jane had lived in the same placement for six years it was stable and supportive.

If the relationship is to start at 16 or 17, personal advisers need greater input from people who know that young person better. For some personal advisers, the input from an independent visitor can be vital. An independent visitor is a volunteer who takes on the role of a befriender, someone to advise children and young people in care, to give practical support and act as an 'adult friend' in situations where the child or young person may have little contact with members of their own family.

Independent visitors provide support which is 'independent' of all other areas of a child or young person's care – they may often be one of very few (if any) people who are not 'paid in some way' to be in their lives. An independent visitor provides a consistent and stable influence when so many things and people in a 'looked after' young person's life are fluid and changing. Independent visitors are expected to commit to a minimum of two years in their role, with many continuing their relationship for longer, either formally or informally if that young person has left care. Compared with other types of support, independent visitors are inexpensive to train, supervise and provide funding to take part in activities with the child or young person. There is no limit to the age at which a child can start seeing an independent visitor, however, under current legislation their relationship must formally end when the young person reaches 18.

Ofsted reported that the two things children wanted the most from their independent visitor was to have help and support, and to have someone to talk to (Ofsted, 2012b). Currently a local authority must appoint an independent visitor for a child in care if they think it is in the best interests of the child, which is usually for children who do not have regular contact with anyone outside of care. These needs are not dissimilar from those of care leavers; without foster carers, residential carers or parents for support there is an even greater need for care leavers to have someone else to talk to.

'That's what normal people do, they depend on family and friends and get by, but I've got no-one to rely on. I really have got no-one, and then people that are supposed to be helping me, aren't helping me.'
(Young person)

Recommendations to local authorities

- In order to prevent care leavers falling into crisis with their accommodation, when completing pathway plans with young people, all personal advisers should make contingency plans for failed placements, regardless of whether their placements are assessed as being at risk of breakdown.
- All young people should be offered the opportunity to have an independent visitor, regardless of whether they are assessed as being 'in need'. This opens up the opportunity to build a relationship that could potentially continue after the young person leaves care, and could also provide personal advisers with greater support when making decisions on that child/young person's future.

Recommendations to the Department for Education

- The Department for Education should update current guidance to make it a requirement for all care leavers to have contingency plans made in their pathway plan for their accommodation.
- The Department for Education should extend the provision of independent visitors to young people up to the age of 21. Independent visitor services are relatively inexpensive to run, and volunteers play the role of a supportive adult that many care leavers need.

4. The impact of supported and unsupported journeys

Recognising the need for support when a care leaver's independent tenancy breaks down can have a substantial impact on a young person's chances of maintaining their next independent placement. Intervening early and providing support for young people at the earliest stage can not only have a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing, but it can also have a substantial impact on financial savings to local authorities. Below we compare the journeys of two young people, both of whom went to live independently after leaving care. The differences illustrated below show the impact that providing support has on both the young people's emotional wellbeing and on the public purse.

Meet Karen and Nicola

Karen's journey

AGE
4

Karen was taken into care with her brother at 4 years old, where she lived for 3 years

AGE
7

Aged 7, she moved back in with her mother. However, her mother became seriously ill with cancer and Karen was taken back into care.

"My supported lodging provider helped me get into my voluntary work, we went over cooking again... even though I lived on my own before, I never used to cook, I used to just go and buy stuff (food) which was costing me lots of money. I was daft and young and spent all my money"

Karen did not form close relationships with any of her foster carers and was eventually placed in a children's residential home. Karen experienced her longest placement in residential care, living there for 2.5 years. Karen was taught independent living skills whilst in residential care.

Karen's social worker referred her to Barnardo's floating support service. Her floating support worker provided a huge amount of support.

AGE
19

Through the help of her floating support worker, Karen was placed into a supported lodging. This was Karen's first stable placement. The supported lodging provider worked closely with Karen to boost her confidence and make her more independent.

She then moved to a second independent flat in a very small village. She was now close to her best friend. This was going well until her friend moved out of area, leaving Karen feeling isolated and lonely. She got very depressed during this time and took multiple overdoses and continually self harmed.

For the next 11 years Karen repeatedly moved in and out of foster care, periodically returning home to her mother. Her mother's behaviour and choice of partners often led to her children being taken into care. Karen repeatedly stayed in emergency placements and had multiple foster placements during her child and adolescent years.

AGE
18

Karen left care at 18 and had her first independent placement. She was placed in a flat far away from friends and family (her flat was decorated and she got a leaving care grant of £1500). This was a difficult experience. She had feelings of anxiety and loneliness and also had difficult neighbours.

She found living in her first independent flat very difficult. She was placed in an unfamiliar area away from her friends and places she knew. She described being very emotional and suicidal during this time.

"I found it easier to move myself in independently because of the skills that I had brushed up on. It was upstairs, I felt safer, I felt really safe and secure"

"I felt really lonely there, I had manic depression" "Felt completely empty, no-one around"

Her supported lodging provider helped her to search for volunteering opportunities and this helped her secure an apprenticeship scheme. This also helped her to develop routines and structure. She lived here for 18 months before moving into an independent flat.

AGE
21

Karen has now been living in her own flat for 6 months. She is happy in her flat and feels comfortable looking after herself. She stays in touch with her old supported lodgings provider who she can turn to if she needs someone to talk to.

She now works with Barnardo's to talk with care leavers and staff about the difficulties of living independently.

Karen has recently secured her first full-time paid job and is very proud of what she does, helping people who struggle with their housing

Nicola's journey

AGE
13

Nicola was taken into care at age 13 as her mum's behaviour meant that she could not take care of her anymore. She was placed in a children's home a long way from where she had grown up

In her first year in care Nicola lived in two children's homes and two secure children's homes. She had tried living in foster care as well but found it hard to settle - In every place she lived, Nicola ran away, trying to find her way back to her family

AGE
14

Nicola was then placed into a private semi-independent children's home that she felt much more settled in. She lived there for 2 years between the ages of 14 and 16. This was a very stable period. She was taught independence skills (e.g. how to budget for weekly shopping, washing and cooking etc.)

"I moved into my first semi-independent unit, I was on tag within the first two weeks, I was running riot, I was having drink ups in my house, boys in my house, boys and girls drinking and smoking"

AGE
16

However, previous absconding behaviour becomes present again and she loses her placement at the home and was then placed in her third secure children's home

After two years she moved to another semi-independent unit at age 18. After 2 months she became pregnant with partner's baby. Following more incidents of domestic abuse she was moved into mother and baby unit where she then lived for 7 months. During this time her mental health issues started to manifest further. She was not seen as fit to look after her son. Her son was placed into care and later adopted

AGE
18

During this time mental health problems started to manifest and she started to feel depressed, spending some days in bed. At other times she described herself as 'running riot', with lots of heavy drinking and smoking. She was not receiving any support for these difficulties.

During this placement she was not encouraged to take part in education, employment or training. She became involved with a partner who physically assaulted her, the police were called regularly concerning domestic abuse.

Nicola left care and moved into semi-independent accommodation at age 16 where she lived for two years. This was not a positive experience for her. She did not feel supported by staff to learn independence skills and didn't feel she could rely on anyone for emotional support. During this time she became involved in an abusive relationship and began smoking cannabis heavily

AGE
19

After her son is placed for adoption, Nicola moves to a bedsit for 2 months before then moving back to semi-independent accommodation. She lived in this semi-independent placement for a year. She is strongly affected by the loss of her son and feels her mental health problems getting worse, feeling suicidal.

AGE
20

After applying for a flat on the housing register, Nicola moves to a one bedroom flat in an area that she does not feel safe in. Gangs are present in the area. Regular complaints from neighbours are making her feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in her own home.

"This semi-independent unit was like a hostel with offices, I suffered domestic violence here, I was smoking (cannabis) heavily, you could smell it in the hallways but no one would say anything"

She is now being evicted from the flat that she has been living in for the past year due to discrepancies with her neighbours and is being moved to another one bedroom flat

"I didn't get into college again, I didn't look for work, I was lazy. I'd stay at home a lot, I'd get really depressed some days and stay in bed, and in that sense it started to go downhill"

AGE
21

Nicola is currently living off £50 a week and is finding it hard to look after herself. Nicola is unable to pay her bills and pay off loans. She feels isolated and her mental health problems are getting worse.

Nicola has been receiving support for her mental health for the past 15 months. She sees her key worker weekly and also attends group sessions which she feels is helping her emotionally.

She feels extremely vulnerable and feels that as a result of her mental health issues she is unable to find work

She feels better with the support she is getting for her mental health but does not feel that she can cope without it.

The costs associated with supporting care leavers

The two timelines above show the impact that providing support can have on a young person when they have struggled to live independently or in accommodation that does not offer a supportive environment. After leaving care, one of the young people moved into independent accommodation, while the other moved into semi-independent accommodation where she was receiving minimal support. During their first placements after leaving care, both young people began to have difficulties with their mental health. Karen attempted to take her own life and Nicola acknowledged issues with her mental health after being in an abusive relationship; her difficulties worsened after her son was placed into care. At the point at which both young people began to struggle on their own, the difference in the support that they receive had a contrasting impact on both their housing situation and their mental health.

Karen

After struggling with her first independent placement, Karen was moved to a placement that was closer to her best friend, and was provided with a floating support worker. She still found living independently difficult, and she began to self-harm and attempted to overdose on several occasions. With the aid of her floating support worker, she was referred to Barnardo's Supported Lodgings service. Finding it difficult to live alone, Karen was supported by her supported lodgings provider and began to feel more positive about her health and her ability to look after herself. She started to volunteer in local charity shops and got herself onto an apprenticeship scheme with the support of her supported lodgings provider. After 18 months of living in a supported lodging she felt ready to live on her own again, and has since moved into her own flat where she says that she can now manage her mental health. Karen has recently secured her first full-time job and is now able to pay her accommodation costs without any support.

Nicola

Nicola left care at 16 and moved into a semi-independent placement where she did not receive much support. Her mental health problems began to manifest when she became involved with an abusive partner. After giving birth to her son, she was moved with her son to a mother and baby unit where she was assessed as not being capable of keeping him in her care. Instead of receiving support, Nicola was moved to a bedsit for two months before being placed back into a semi-independent unit where she again felt unsupported. Her mental health worsened and as a result she has needed intensive support. She is now receiving support through a mental health service where she has been receiving 1:1 weekly support from a mental health worker for the past 15 months. Because of her mental health issues, Nicola does not feel that she is able to work and is finding it difficult to cope. She has got into arrears on her flat, has recently been served an eviction notice due to disputes with her neighbour, and is being moved to another property.

The difference in support

Both young people showed a need for support after leaving care: Karen in her first placement after she had begun to self-harm, and Nicola during her first placement when she became involved in an abusive relationship. Both young people left care after chaotic journeys through the care system. Nicola's has continued to be chaotic due to the lack of support she has received, whereas Karen experienced much greater stability as a result of the support that she has received. By placing Karen in a supported lodging, she began to be able to manage her mental health with the support of her supported lodgings provider and began to develop the skills and confidence to live independently again. She is now living independently and is working full-time. She is now contributing through paying tax and is no longer in need of financial support.

Estimating the costs of providing support to care leavers

The following sections detail some estimates of the likely costs incurred in supporting these young people in leaving care. Details of how these costs were estimated are included in Annex A.

Figure 1: The cost of Karen's journey to the public purse

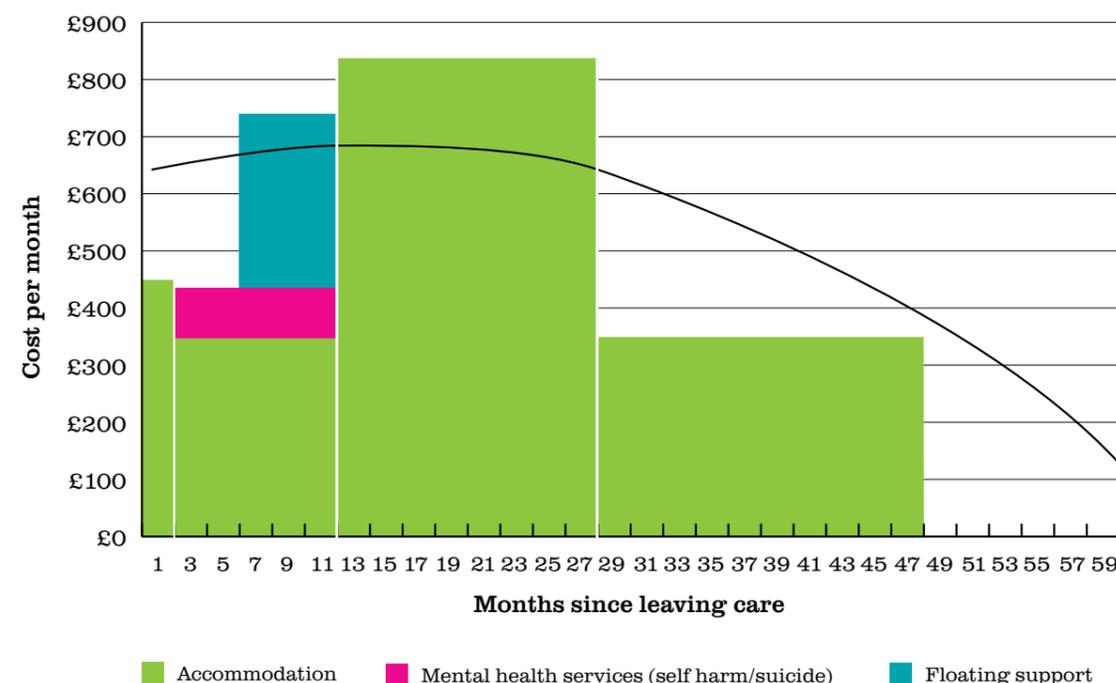


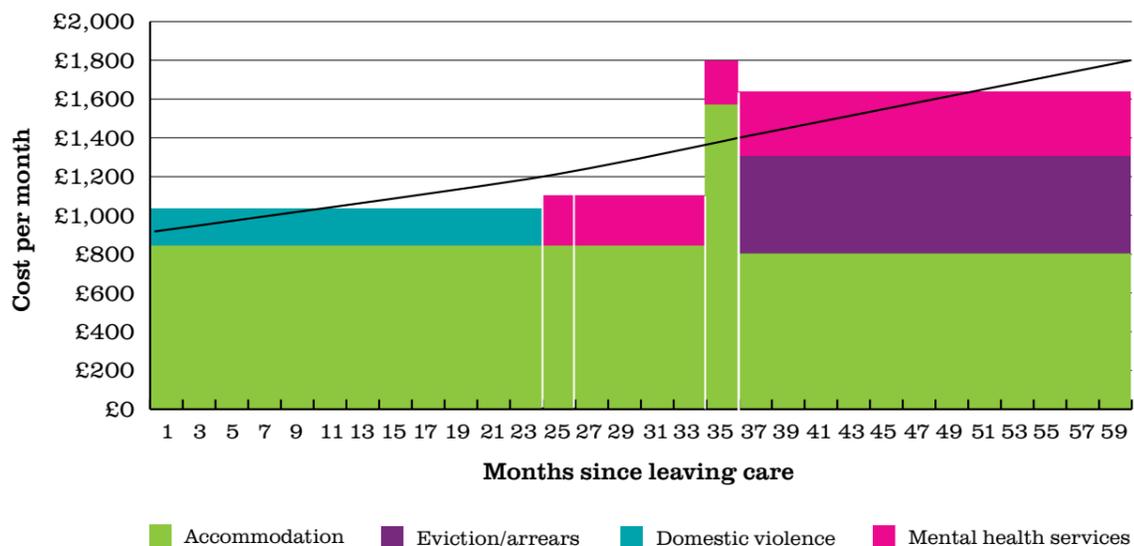
Figure 1 above shows the monthly costs of supporting Karen after she left care in the area where she lives. She is now living in her fourth placement since leaving care. The costs for Karen increased soon after leaving care, once her first placement broke down. Further costs were associated through the use of a floating support service and an 18-month period of living in a supported lodging where Karen was assisted with her mental health needs by her supported lodgings provider, who also helped her to prepare for living independently again. After her placement in a supported lodging, she moved into an independent placement where she was able to live unsupported; as a result, her monthly costs fell by over 60 per cent. Her final placement shows the costs associated with her claiming housing benefit. She no longer receives housing benefit as she is now employed full-time.

The cost of Nicola's journey to the public purse

In contrast, Nicola, who was not provided with support at an early stage, has incurred a greater cost to the state over time. After she was placed in a bedsit for two months and then into semi-independent accommodation where she did not feel supported and suffered domestic abuse, her mental health problems gradually began to worsen. She has now been receiving mental health support for the past 15 months. The cost of this service, which Nicola is continuing to use on a regular basis, is displayed in the graph below. The costs of moving from different placements, receiving benefits for her accommodation, falling into arrears and the costs associated with her eviction, as well as the costs of supporting her with her mental health, show how her support has incurred a greater cost to the state over time. By not providing her with support emotionally, and with a more supportive form of accommodation, she has incurred high expenses which she is still reliant on today.

The cost of placing Nicola's child into care and finding an adoptive home we estimate to have incurred a further expense of £21,000.

Figure 2: The cost of Nicola's journey to the public purse



In 2014, 39 per cent of care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 were living in independent living arrangements. This is compared to five per cent of care leavers of the same age who were living in a supported lodging (DfE, 2014). While many young people who leave the care system feel that they should be living independently, a majority will not yet be ready to do so and are in desperate need of support, both practically and emotionally. The two examples above show that providing support at the right time can have a significant impact on a young person, not just with their accommodation needs but with their emotional needs also.

Around 60 per cent of Looked After Children and 72 per cent of those in residential care have some level of emotional and mental health difficulty (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), 2010). Half of those with lifetime mental illness (excluding dementia) first experience symptoms by the age of 14, and three-quarters before their mid-20s (Kim-Cohen et al, 2003), demonstrating that many young people who have been in the care system will not experience issues with their mental health until after they leave care. By being provided with support at the right time, such as skilled, trained supported lodgings providers, care leavers can benefit by learning independence skills. Supported lodgings providers are not trained to deal with severe mental health issues, but they are trained to supply a stable setting where the young person can feel safe and supported.

'It [supported lodgings] has prepared me a lot better, you get a family around you that can help wonders, it really can, and it helps you develop a lot better.'
(Young person)

Further clarification is needed on the status of supported lodgings, such as those regarded as 'exempt accommodation'. Some prospective supported lodgings providers are reluctant to offer their home to young people as they are concerned that housing benefit may be paid to the young person instead of directly to the provider. Clarification is also needed on entitlements for supported lodgings providers as to whether they are exempt from paying 'bedroom tax' on the room occupied by the young person (an exemption that foster carers are entitled to), as well as on personal tax issues.

Supported lodgings are not currently an attractive enough option for prospective providers. Greater promotion and clarification of the benefits is needed to increase provision and ensure that more vulnerable young people who are not ready to live in independent accommodation after leaving care can access the support that is needed.

Recommendations

- Local authorities should have a range of supported accommodation options available to care leavers, including supported lodgings and Stepdown Floating Support, and should prioritise these forms of support after failed independent living placements.
- Greater clarification and opportunity of entitlements for Supported Lodging providers are needed to make this a more attractive option for prospective providers.

5. Young people's expectations of independent living

Depending on some local authorities' policies and available provision, some care leavers are placed in housing association tenancies. From the experiences of the young people we spoke with, the types of accommodation provided by housing associations are usually of a good standard, and depending on the area, support is available for young people to help with skills such as budgeting and maintaining the property. Three young people interviewed had experience of living independently in a house or flat provided by a housing association. Each of the young people commented on the high standard of the accommodation and the level of support that was provided to them through the housing association. Each young person was placed in housing association accommodation which was supported and fully paid for by Children's Services. Each enjoyed their experiences in housing association accommodation and felt comfortable. This was until they turned 18 and were no longer being supported by Children's Services. Each of the three young people were evicted from the properties as they were no longer able to afford to live there, because the housing benefit did not cover their cost.

We have detailed the cases of the three young people who were placed in housing association properties below.

Case 1

One young person, Sarah, shared her experience of first moving into the housing association accommodation at age 17. She had a support worker who she would see regularly.

'For the first few months I had someone coming down to see me each week and we would talk about my shopping and see what I'm spending my money on.'

She was comfortable living in the flat, Children's Services were paying for her to live in the accommodation, and she was being provided with an allowance each week. She was able to attend college and look after herself with the support of her support worker, who was employed through the housing association. That was until she turned 18...

Sarah did not understand that when she turned 18, if she wanted to continue living in the flat, she would have to start paying for the rent and the bills. She also lost her support worker. She got into arrears with her flat and was consequently evicted after falling behind on her rent for three consecutive months.

'I didn't have a support worker, I didn't have anyone telling me what to do, you know, rent wise and other stuff, the rent at the flat was £400 and I wasn't getting that from housing benefit, so I got into rent arrears with the flat.'

Case 2

Sarah's experience is not unique among the other young people who lived in housing supplied through housing associations to care leavers under 18. Another young person, Anthony, had also lived in a housing association flat which he was then unable to afford after Children's Services stopped paying for his rent.

'I felt angry about it (not being able to pay for bills) because I knew that to live here I should have to pay for it, but as a human being I need money for myself to sort myself out, to be able to feed myself what I need... I was getting into more arrears in the flat and it was really hard. I went to the housing association officer to tell them that I was struggling and for them to get me some help, but then after a while they just got me evicted and I was homeless.'

After Anthony was evicted from his housing association flat, he spent nine months living in two different hostels. The first three months were spent living in an all-age hostel which he found difficult:

'It was a really horrible experience there, you got bullied, you saw people using drugs, pins (needles) on the floor. I was able to use my brain, I didn't get involved in drugs and I was able to avoid it.'

'People were a lot older than me, there were people who have been to prison for drug abuse and that.'

After spending the first three months living in an all-age hostel, Anthony moved into a young person's hostel where he said he was supported by a key worker who helped him to find his own accommodation. With the help of his key worker in the young person's hostel he moved into his own flat supplied by the council, where he has now been living for the last three years. Anthony has since gone on to complete his degree and is now keen to continue his studies further.

Case 3

Alex moved into his flat supplied by a housing association at age 16, after experiencing over 25 different placements when he was in care. He lived in this property for two years, the longest period of time he had ever stayed in one place.

'Everything was going well for me, I had a job in a call centre, I went to college every single day, I was at work every single day, my life was absolutely amazing. And then I turned 18 and social services came to the decision that I had to move back to where I was born, unless I got someone else to move in with and me and sign on and pay the bills myself.'

Alex was unable to afford to pay the rent on his flat so he was evicted and

Conclusion

Children and young people in care are amongst some of the most vulnerable people in our society. When they make the transition to become care leavers, much of the support that has surrounded them during their time in care is no longer available, and because of a lack of supported accommodation options available, many go on to live independently, unprepared for the challenges ahead. The expectations surrounding young people in care to live independently once they have left the care of their local authority can encourage care leavers to want to live on their own, because that is what they think they should do, not understanding the consequences of holding their own tenancy. But for so many, living independently presents a huge challenge that some care leavers take a long time to recover from. Some get into significant amounts of debt that can take years to pay back, others develop serious mental health issues due to isolation, loneliness and unhealthy relationships, and all of this can have an enduring and detrimental impact on their wellbeing.

Support is available for care leavers with their accommodation. Personal advisers play an important role in supporting young people after they leave the care system, but often find meeting the needs of young people challenging due to high case loads. Independent visitors can also play a key role in being that independent, impartial advisor to children and young people in care – a relationship that so many care leavers need, and one which can provide an opportunity for support to personal advisers also. Support is key when a young person struggles with their accommodation. The use of supported lodgings as an intervention after failed placements can play a significant role in helping care leavers to become more independent, but the current lack of provision means that some care leavers will not be offered this support.

We must support care leavers better and listen to how they want to receive that support, whether that support should come from peer mentoring or by ensuring that they have a support figure such as an independent visitor or supported lodgings provider to turn to when things aren't going to plan. We must ensure that young people receive continuity both while they are in the care system and when they become care leavers.

consequently had to move back to the area where he was born and be placed in council accommodation that was of a much poorer standard to what he had been used to over the past two years. The accommodation was of contrasting condition:

'It was horrible, there was mould growing out of the walls, there were mushrooms growing out of the ceiling, there was water coming up through the sink, it was flooding everywhere... then my ceiling fell through.'

Upset that he had been evicted from his previous accommodation, and with the conditions of the new accommodation he was provided with, Alex purposefully broke the tenancy agreement and was consequently evicted. He is now homeless.

'Since I've turned 18 I haven't had any support.'

'I didn't walk into social services at the age of three and ask to be taken into care.'

Under the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 Regulations and Guidance, local authorities should take into account the diverse accommodation and support needs of care leavers, and provide a degree of choice in where that young person could live. Local authorities should also provide existing and planned provision of safe, affordable accommodation.

The three cases above show the consequences of placing young people into accommodation that is not affordable after they leave the care of Children's Services. Each of the young people was placed into accommodation that was appropriate for them, and none of the young people broke their tenancy agreements. Prior to his move to housing association accommodation, Alex had never spent a period of two years living in one home since he had been in the care of his local authority. He had even become so used to the quality of the accommodation that when he was then forced to move to accommodation that was affordable to Housing Services, he purposefully sabotaged his tenancy and as a result became homeless. Children's and Housing services are not currently working closely enough to ensure that care leavers are placed into accommodation that is affordable after they leave care.

Recommendations

- Children's and Housing services in local authorities should share budgets for affordable housing for care leavers. Care leavers should not have to move out of the accommodation that they have been living in because their benefits after turning 18 will not meet the costs. Children's and Housing services must work together to ensure greater continuity for care leavers with their accommodation

Recruitment of participants

Participatory research

The research was designed in collaboration with young people who have experience of growing up in the English care system. The timeline method was designed in collaboration with two care leavers who assisted in the formulation of themes and topics for the interviews. The timelines were then piloted on to care leavers who have not been included in the final study.

Recruitment of participants

Interviewees were recruited through different Barnardo's services – all of the young people interviewed were receiving support from Barnardo's services, including housing and homelessness, care leavers participation groups, children's rights and other advocacy services.

Consent and anonymity

All of the young people who took part in the research gave formal consent and were given the opportunity have any identifying information removed for this report. Although the majority of participants gave their consent to be identified in the research, all names have been changed to protect their identity.

Annex – Cost estimation

The figures presented in this paper are an attempt to quantify some of the costs to the public purse that are associated with the leaving care journeys of the young people described in this report.

Good cost data that refers specifically to every stage of a young person's journey is not always easy to find, so this analysis should be treated as indicative and partial. There may be some costs which are not completely considered, and other costs where the figure may vary, but they represent a relatively narrow and conservative estimate of costs incurred in terms of direct public service intervention. They exclude wider costs to society, the economy, and to the young person themselves.

References for each of the unit cost studies used are presented at the end of this annex.

Nicola

In the charts in the main section of the paper, Nicola's accommodation and placement set-up costs have been averaged across the first three placements, as specific data on costs relevant to each placement was not available.

These costs represent a good overall estimate of accommodation costs, but they probably do not account well for the differences in costs between placements, and so as to avoid misrepresenting variation in costs for different placements over time, we have averaged these costs.

Accommodation costs were modelled using the figure from the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) evaluation report for 'Second stage supported accommodation', and a cost for the process of finding and administering a new placement for this young person is also included from the Personal Social Services Research Unit reports on unit costs of health and social care.

The cost of finding new placements refers to the median cost scenario for a Children's Services department of finding a subsequent placement for a young person with emotional or behavioural difficulties. While this is not strictly applicable to this scenario, we felt that it covers the additional difficulties which might present themselves in placing these young people. While more up to date figures show that the value could be higher, we have chosen to use a lower figure in order to maintain a more conservative approach to estimating these costs (PSSRU unit costs 2010 – section 8.4.2).

These costs are included in the summary below.

First placement (24 months): semi-independent accommodation

- Finding the placement – £227 one-off cost (PSSRU 2010: cost of Children's Services finding a placement)
- Semi-independent accommodation – £27 per night (MEAM: second stage supported accommodation figure)

- Domestic violence incidents - £465 per incident, 10 incidents (New Economy Manchester unit cost tool: police costs associated with domestic violence – excludes criminal justice costs and NHS costs)
TOTAL PLACEMENT COST = £25k

Second placement (two months): semi-independent accommodation

- Finding the placement – £227 one-off cost (PSSRU 2010: cost of Children’s Services finding a placement)
- Semi-independent accommodation – £27 per night (MEAM: second stage supported accommodation figure)
- Mental health interventions – counselling services in primary medical care – £59 per consultation, one consultation per week (PSSRU: counselling and psychotherapy – umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies)
TOTAL PLACEMENT COST = £2.5k

Third placement (seven months): mother and baby unit

- Finding the placement – £227 one-off cost (PSSRU 2010: cost of Children’s Services finding a placement)
- Semi-independent accommodation – £27 per night (MEAM: second stage supported accommodation figure)
- Mental health interventions – counselling services in primary medical care – £59 per consultation, one consultation per week (PSSRU: counselling and psychotherapy – umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies)
TOTAL PLACEMENT COST = £8k

Fourth placement (two months) – bedsit

- Finding the placement – £227 one-off cost (PSSRU 2010: cost of Children’s Services finding a placement)
- Bedsit – £48 per night (MEAM: direct access hostel figure – includes B&Bs and other temporary accommodation)
- Mental health interventions – counselling services in primary medical care – £59 per consultation, one consultation per week (PSSRU: counselling and psychotherapy – umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies)
TOTAL PLACEMENT COST = £3.6k

Fifth placement (27 months) – independent accommodation

- Finding the placement – £227 one-off cost (PSSRU 2010: cost of Children’s Services finding a placement)
- Relevant local housing allowance in North London (£184 per week).
- Rent arrears – from the interview, this young person was behind on paying their rent. We have assumed a modest percentage of their rent (£20/wk). These costs would be incurred by the landlord where rent was not recovered.

- Eviction costs – based on average costs of eviction, excluding arrears (£4,904 – New Economy Manchester Unit cost tool)
- Mental health interventions – counselling services in primary medical care – £59 per consultation, one consultation per week (PSSRU: counselling and psychotherapy – umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies)
- Mental health interventions – twice weekly attendance at group therapy sessions (£14 per session) (PSSRU: counselling and psychotherapy – umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies)
TOTAL PLACEMENT COST = £44k

In the text, it is also mentioned that this young person had a child taken into care. The cost outlined in the paper suggests a total cost of around £21,400, which is based on the assumption that the child was taken into care for six months (cost taken from the NEM figures for ‘Child taken into care: median cost, overall annual cost’), and then adopted (cost figure taken from the PSSRU unit cost report for 2013 (£6,344 for the average cost to the adoption agency of adoption activities)).

Karen

First placement (two months) – independent accommodation

- Finding the placement – £227 one-off cost (PSSRU 2010: cost of Children’s Services finding a placement)
- Relevant local housing allowance for a local authority in the north east (£73 per week)
TOTAL PLACEMENT COST = £884

Second placement (ten months) – independent accommodation

- Finding the placement – £227 one-off cost (PSSRU 2010: cost of Children’s Services finding a placement)
- Relevant local housing allowance for a local authority in the north east (£73 per week)
- Referred to Barnardo’s Floating Support – £153 per hour of face-to-face contact, (assumed to be fortnightly over the last seven months of this placement)
- Multiple attempts at suicide – £163 per attendance, assumed five incidents (New Economy Manchester unit cost tool: average cost of A&E attendance, investigation with subsequent treatment, leading to admission)
TOTAL PLACEMENT COST = £6.5k

Third placement (18 months) – supported lodging

- Finding the placement – £227 one-off cost (PSSRU 2010: cost of Children’s Services finding a placement)
- Semi-independent accommodation – £27 per night (MEAM: second stage supported accommodation figure)
TOTAL PLACEMENT COST = £15k

Fourth placement (18 months) – independent flat

- Finding the placement – £227 one-off cost
(PSSRU 2010: cost of Children’s Services finding a placement)
- Relevant local housing allowance for a local authority in the north east
(£73 per week)

TOTAL PLACEMENT COST = £5.9k

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supporting English care
leavers into independence**

Written by Richard Brady

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