

LONDONASSEMBLY

February 2025

Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

This document contains the written evidence received by the Committee in response to its Call for Evidence, which formed part of its investigation into Care Leavers not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).

Calls for Evidence are open to anyone to respond to. In November 2024, the Committee published a number of questions related to its investigation, which can be found on page 2. The Call for Evidence was open from 1 November 2024 to 6 December 2024.

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LONDON ASSEMBLY

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Questions asked by the Committee

1. What are the key factors contributing to the greater likelihood of care-experienced young people becoming NEET, compared to the overall population?
2. For those young people with care experience who are in work, how does their pay, conditions and progression opportunities compare to the general population?
3. To what extent is the current service provision for care leavers in London meeting their needs in helping them access employment, education or training?
4. Are there any interventions which have proven particularly successful in helping care leavers access employment, education or training?
5. What could the Mayor, local and central government do to prevent care leavers in London from becoming NEET and help those who are NEET to progress into employment, education or training?

BECOME.

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

Become submission to the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, Call for Evidence: “Care Leavers Not in Employment, Education or Training”.

[Care Leavers and Employment - Call for Evidence.pdf](#)

December 2024.

About Become - Become is the national charity for children in care and young care leavers. Our vision is that care-experienced people have the same chances as everyone else to live happy, fulfilled lives. Our mission is to help children in care and young care leavers to believe in themselves and to heal, grow and unleash their potential. We work alongside them to make the care system the best it can be.

Introduction:

This is a submission written on behalf of Become – the national charity in England for children in care and young care leavers - to the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee’s Call for Evidence on Care Leavers who are Not in Employment, Education or Training.

The submission is drawn from views of London-based care leavers, as well as insight from the services – including [Propel into Work](#) and [Propel into \(Higher and Further\) Education](#) -that Become provides to care experienced young people, working alongside institutions and professionals. This response includes some of our policy positions to improve the children’s social care system, that are particularly relevant to this issue, and recent supporting data. Given the geographical focus of the committees’ work, this submission focuses on the experiences, opportunities and outcomes of care leavers in London accessing employment, education and training.

- 1. We have identified five key factors contributing to the greater likelihood of care-experienced young people becoming NEET – namely, additional and unique financial strains; housing insecurity; adverse mental health; poorer educational journeys; and a lack of a support network.**

Additional and unique financial strains & housing insecurity

Care leavers aged 18 or younger face a care cliff, where vital support and relationships fall away, and they are expected to become ‘independent’ overnight.

The average age that young people across England leave home has risen to 24, whilst the majority of young people leaving care will be expected to live independently from their 18th birthday: becoming responsible for paying rent and bills, budgeting and managing a tenancy, at a time when they may be in the middle of studying, exams or starting employment or training, all without a family safety net to fall back on. Forced to move out of their foster home or children’s home and into living situations they are often not ready for brings a cycle of housing insecurity, inappropriate or unsafe living conditions, and homelessness; young care leavers are nine times more likely to face homelessness than other young people.¹

Although local authorities have responsibility as corporate parents for care-experienced young people to the age of 25, often any additional priority given to care leavers for social housing

¹ [End the Care Cliff Report](#), Become

ends at the age of 18 or 21. This drop-off in support at such a critical stage in life has devastating long-term impacts on care leavers' access to and success in employment, education and training routes.

We know from our [Propel into Work](#) programme, and care-experienced young people that have worked with Become, that income is often a cause of worry and concern for care leavers and many care leavers opt to maintain lower paying roles so as to not infringe on benefit entitlements, as this would leave them worse off if entitlements were to be reduced as a result of employment. One care leaver described this as being “*penalised*” for working.

The costs of job-hunting, interviewing and university-prospecting present a further strain on care leavers' expenses, as non-care experienced young people would often be supported with costs of travelling to interviews or university open-days; clothes for a first job by family members, while care leavers often bear this financial burden themselves.

Adverse mental health

The long-term impacts of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are prevalent concerning employment, education and training – with research finding ACEs are linked to increased likelihood of unemployment and risk of committing crime.² Most care-experienced children and young people have lived through significant trauma and must navigate the impact of this through their childhood into adulthood, often with little support.

One young person said: “I’ve been in inpatient and outpatient services since I was six, related to ACEs and trauma. It has a huge impact on education and work. I’ve had to take multiple interruptions in my studies because of mental health but have luckily been able to return. In work, if you’re on sick leave too long or can’t perform effectively, you can get sacked.”

Poorer educational journeys

Care-experienced children and young people's time in and leaving care is often characterised by instability: experiencing significant disruption to their educational journeys, often moving schools' mid-term-time and at critical exam periods. It is common for care-experienced children and young people to have little confidence and ambition relating to their education. Children in care are much more likely to have an identified special educational need than the average for all pupils: 55% of children in care had an identified SEN in 2023, compared to 17% of all pupils.³

² [Adverse childhood experiences: What we know, what we don't know, and what should happen next](#), Early Intervention Foundation

³ [Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England](#), GOV.UK

And there remains a qualification and attainment gap between care-experienced children and the general population.⁴ This continues into further and higher education routes, as we see only 15% of children in care had progressed to Higher Education by the age of 19, compared to 47% of all other pupils.⁵ A notable cause for hesitation for care leavers to progress to HE can be the worry of losing housing entitlement if they were to join a university outside of their local authority area. Ultimately, care leavers who attend university face significant challenges compared to their peers. They are less likely to attend high-tariff universities and also less likely to progress into their second year of study.

Lack of a support network

As previously touched on, care leavers are often without the parental support that the general population typically have access to. This is especially important when considering the underlying interventions and remedial action that can be taken across the other four key factors if there were strong support networks in place.

2. For care-experienced young people who are in work, we heard three main ways in which their pay, conditions and progression opportunities compare to the general population – being limited starting points; discrimination and bias; and ill mental health impacts

The impact on educational journeys continues to affect care leavers in their employment, particularly concerning lower qualification attainment and the restricted entry level roles and corresponding pay-bands available to them as a result. The financial pressures that care leavers face also often leave them feeling as though they do not have the option to pursue career routes that require time-investment before financial returns are seen. We know from the young people we work with that there is an overwhelming feeling that they have to prioritise earning money and must focus on the immediate short-term rather than investing into their long-term prospects; entering fields that have limited progression opportunities and often start at a lower level.

Additionally, there is little public understanding of the care system and its impact on those who have experienced it, including among employers. Several of the care-experienced young people we spoke to described discrimination and bias as a barrier to progression in the workplace, especially where this intersects with other aspects of their identity.

Dealing with adverse mental health is relevant here too - which we know disproportionately impacts care-experienced children and young people - due to the way it impedes availability,

⁴ [Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England](#), GOV.UK

⁵ Widening participation in higher education, [GOV.UK](#)

flexibility, consistency and the ability to put forward your 'usual' self as an employee on a regular basis. Discrimination can compound here too, with employers not fully understanding and fostering suitable accommodations, as well as unconscious bias such as viewing an employee as unreliable or not hard-working.

3. Service provision for care leavers in London is not currently sufficiently meeting their needs in helping them access employment, education and training.

The majority of the young people we spoke to as part of this response felt the service provision in London currently could be doing more to better help care leavers access employment, education and training. This was principally attributed to ineffective signposting, and opportunities or programmes not reaching care leavers' attention and awareness. Many felt they navigated this without appropriate support from their local authorities; one 23-year-old care-experienced young person said they feel like they are no longer a priority to their LA regarding support into employment or education, due to their age.

We also know from our [Care Advice Line](#) that there is a significant gap in many care leavers' awareness of their rights and entitlements. This is relevant to accessing the support available to care leavers' including enablers to employment, education and training; for example, bursary entitlements. Which again indicates there is room for further action from local authorities to boost awareness and engagement amongst care leavers and what is available to them.

4. Successful interventions in helping care leavers to access employment, education and training.

Some of the successful interventions that care-experienced young people told us they engaged in included: Young navigators; Ealing Horizons; Connexions; Power of Parenting scheme; and Smartworks; Become's Coaching & Become's Propel into Work and Propel into Education.

'[Propel into Work](#)' is Become's service for care-experienced young people up to age 27. We provide information, advice and guidance to help them make confident choices about their career path, as well as providing 1:1 support with things like exploring different careers, job searching, creating or tailoring CV and cover letters, applying for jobs and apprenticeships and preparing for interviews. '[Propel into Education](#)' is Become's service to support care leavers into higher and further education. We provide help and advice for young people to apply, secure funding, accommodation, and more.

Become also offers [coaching](#) and training services; our coaching programme is a free, bespoke, future-focused service for care-experienced young people aged 16-27, to identify, build on and operate on their strengths, as opposed to focusing on problems. Additionally, our Young Trainers Programme includes a Train-the-Trainer course and provides opportunities for care-experienced

young people to co-deliver training sessions for professionals and workshops for young people. In 2023/24, 11 care-experienced young trainers supported the training of 833 professionals.

5. What the Mayor, local and central government could do to prevent care leavers in London from becoming NEET and helping those who are into employment, education, and training.

On a national level, there are existing schemes that can be strengthened to extend a greater continuity of care and support to care-experienced children and young people; including making the Staying Put and Staying Close schemes fully funded, opt-out legal entitlements for all young people in care up to 25, so young people can stay in their homes or connected to support. Care-experienced young people living in Staying Put arrangements report significantly higher emotional health and wellbeing scores than those not in Staying Put and are more likely to be in full-time education.⁶ Staying Close similarly has great impact in providing stability and support so it is important that the Government publish guidance on the implementation of the Staying Close scheme with clear operating principles and criteria. The benefits of the Staying Close scheme evidenced in its pilot include support to enter and remain in education, employment and training, which could include help with childcare, internet access or providing a space to work.⁷

Additionally, the Government is proposing to extend Corporate Parenting responsibilities to wider public bodies across England. We believe these responsibilities should be extended to educational institutions including universities and colleges; the Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions.

To help mitigate the unique financial pressures that care leavers face, Government should improve financial support by extending the over-25 rate of universal credit to care leavers under the age of 25, increasing financial entitlements with inflation; and exempting care leavers from council tax.

At local government level, maintaining stability and security in children's lives is critical; this is why placement moves, unless for safety reasons, should be outside of term-time and crucial educational periods such as exam season. Moving out of care into independent living is a significant and often difficult process which should also not coincide with what is already a stressful and important time for young people setting up their futures. Care leavers should be afforded the opportunity and space to fully invest their attention, efforts and time into their education - and moving during critical term-time periods disrupts this.

⁶ [End the Care Cliff Report 2024](#), Become

⁷ [End the Care Cliff Report 2024](#), Become

When considering educational institutions, we understand there are external pressures to achieve and maintain high attendance and achievement in its pupils. This can result in institutions withdrawing pupils who appear to have low engagement, however, we believe there should be protocols in place regarding care-experienced students, such as checking in with social workers before withdrawing those with care-experience. As established, there can be various external stressors and logistical matters impacting care-experienced students that might lower their engagement and attendance in ways non-care-experienced students do not face.

Care-experienced young people we heard from would like to see more local mentor schemes for care leavers to both receive and provide support; boosting access to virtual schools and post-16 teachers; for TfL and travel discounts to go further to better financially support care leavers; wider access to entry courses, apprenticeships and training; and some care-experienced young people we heard from noted that some local authorities were treating care-experience as a protected characteristic and told us that they would like to see this more widely spread across local authorities.

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Call for evidence: Care Leavers not in Employment, Education, or Training
Dr Cornelis Rijneveld, Policy & Research Officer, Centrepont

1. What are the key factors contributing to the greater likelihood of care-experienced young becoming NEET, compared to the overall population?

Care-experienced young people are at a high and increasing risk of becoming homeless, which poses several barriers to accessing EET. At least 40% of homeless young people currently supported by Centrepont are care-experienced. This reflects the overrepresentation of care-experienced people in the population of young homeless people in the UK - the charity Become found that 10.7 per cent of care leavers aged 18 to 20 were homeless or threatened with homelessness in 2022/23 (based on local authority presentations for housing support).¹ Centrepont analysis of homelessness statistics released in November this year revealed that the number of 18–20-year-old care leavers owed homelessness support is the highest since records began in 2018. This quarter, April – June 2024, 1,200 18–20-year-olds were recorded as being owed homelessness support - almost double the number of care leavers recorded in the same quarter of 2018 (630) and a 12% increase on the number of people (1,070) assessed in the same quarter last year.

Negative experiences of education

The impact of homelessness on young people's educational achievement includes higher rates of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), absenteeism, and expulsion related to emotional and social difficulties.² An educational psychologist researching the education experiences of young people supported by Centrepont (almost half of whom are care-experienced, as mentioned) found that young people expressed a lack of motivation, due in part to the absence of a responsible adult providing external pressure or support. Young people also reported perceiving school as inaccessible due to previous experiences of poor performance in academic settings, which reinforced their lack of motivation to attend classes. These experiences are often related to the lack of support around SEND and mental health difficulties resulting from trauma and adverse childhood experiences. This may be due to the absence of a responsible adult advocating for young people experiencing homelessness to get the support and paperwork they need³ as many will have lived through family breakdown and/or grown up in care. Care-experienced young people have often been moved from place to place and will have attended multiple schools, which exacerbates these issues. In a separate Centrepont research project on

¹ <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/content/news/homelessness-among-care-leavers-rises-by-a-third-over-last-five-years/>

² https://www.nccp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/text_888.pdf

³ <https://drhelenmiles.medium.com/removing-the-barriers-to-education-for-homeless-young-people-utilising-a-psychologically-informed-997f0d6223a8>

family breakdown (report forthcoming early 2025), one young person who grew up in care and now lives at a Centrepont supported accommodation explained he has learning needs related to fetal alcohol syndrome, personality disorder and mental health difficulties. Yet these needs were not identified until he was adopted at the age of 16, by which point he had been excluded many times at school. “I was just a blip in the care system that got unnoticed,” he told the researcher, “they never saw the full story behind anything. My problems could’ve been intercepted and changed, if the support was there when I needed it.” Instead, the young person felt he had been passed around “like a parcel”. This partially explains why many of the young people supported by Centrepont lack the literacy skills, qualifications and self-esteem required to access educational and employment opportunities.

Mental health

Care-experienced young people and young people experiencing homelessness are two groups that report above-average levels of mental health difficulties⁴⁵, and Centrepont staff confirmed that poor mental health can act as a barrier to accessing EET for care-experienced young people. In a survey about employment aspirations among homeless young people conducted by Centrepont early in 2024, 39% of care-experienced young people reported mental health posed an extreme or moderate barrier to achieving their career goals (as compared to 34% of the general population). One member of CP Works, the Centrepont team that supports young people with accessing and remaining in EET, gave the example of a young person who was struggling with his mental health and as a result stopped engaging with his Leaving Care Coach and had become very unkempt in appearance, which impacted on their chances in job interviews. More generally, Centrepont staff observe that young people who struggle with their mental health tend to take the “path of least resistance” – e.g., avoiding EET - out of an emotional reaction to challenges rather than as a pragmatic decision.

This is echoed by young people themselves. In interviews about young people’s employment aspirations, a Centrepont researcher found that homeless young people often need to work on their mental wellbeing before they are ready to enter employment. This preparation regularly takes the form of attending therapy sessions, working on keeping to a routine and practicing healthy living such as eating well and exercising. Many young people also recognised the importance of focusing on their mental wellbeing to prepare themselves for work – enabling them to build self-efficacy and ensure that their transition into employment is sustainable. “I’m trying to build myself up a little bit at the moment,” one young person told the researcher.⁶

Substance use

Staff report that drug and alcohol use by Centrepont young people in general can also be a barrier to engaging with EET, as some young people do not understand the impact of drugs on their state of mind, their ability to hold down routines, and their ability to meet requirements

⁴ [The mental health and wellbeing needs of care leavers | Research in Practice](#)

⁵ [The mental health needs of homeless young people | Centrepont](#)

⁶ [Untapped Resource: Homeless young people’s employment experiences and aspirations | Centrepont](#)

enforced in certain jobs (such as drug testing on construction sites). Several care-experienced young people interviewed by a the educational psychologist previously mentioned related frequent cannabis and drug use more generally to their negative experiences in care and the need to self-soothe.

Lack of job availability

Recent research by Centrepont found that young people with experience of homelessness are less likely than young people in the general population to feel confident that they can achieve their career goals and that there are jobs in their local area for them.^[4] The quality of available jobs is another area of concern. Recent research found that one in four adverts listed on the “Find a Job” website between October 26 and November 27 this year were for temporary or fixed-term contract jobs, offering no guarantee of long-term employment⁷. Young people in general are more likely to be working in these types of precarious jobs, and this proportion is likely even higher for care-experienced young people facing homelessness.

One major barrier for homeless young people to accessing employment is the limited availability of jobs or work experience placements that don’t require previous work experience. One way in which CP Works supports young people is by identifying skills and life experiences that can count towards work experience, such as caring for a younger sibling. Yet there is also a perception among both young people and staff that stigma prevents young people living in support accommodation from gaining employment. “There is a thing that happens to people's faces when they hear the word homeless,” one young person told a Centrepont researcher, “and it isn't exactly a pleasant face to see.”⁸ And a care-experienced person previously supported by Centrepont shared that employers and co-workers might assume all care-leavers have behavioural problems and are difficult to work with. This stigma might be exacerbated if the young person also has a criminal record. Young people who are in employment report struggling with the formality of workplaces and the stress of being in an unfamiliar environment.

Lack of useful contacts

Lack of useful contacts was seen as a moderate or extreme barrier to achieving employment goals by 42 per cent of care-experienced young people, a slightly higher proportion than young homeless people generally. One out of four care-experienced people facing homelessness have sought or would seek help from family member to get a job, as compared to nearly one in two of general population of young people surveyed in a Centrepont-commissioned poll on employment aspirations.⁹ The fact that care-experienced young people are less likely to feel they can seek help from family members when it comes to finding employment clearly puts them at a disadvantage.

⁷ [The UK wants to guarantee work or training for all young people – first it needs good jobs](#)

⁸ [Untapped Resource: Homeless young people’s employment experiences and aspirations | Centrepont](#)

⁹ *ibid*

Financial pressures

The cost of living crisis was the most common barrier to achieving employment goals identified by care-experienced young people, one in four of whom ranked it as an extreme barrier¹⁰. The current benefit rules discourage many young people who have left the care system and experienced homelessness from working more hours and becoming financially independent. More than a third (36 per cent) of care-experienced young people indicate they were unable to get a job or take on more hours because of the effect it would have had on their benefits. Young people living in supported accommodation receive benefits through Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit (HB) rules, while only UC rules, which include a housing element, are applied to their peers in the private rented sector. When a young person starts working, a 55% taper rate is applied to their UC entitlement. Until the UC is tapered to £0, HB covers their rent in supported accommodation in full. However, when UC is tapered to £0, a similar process starts for HB, but using HB rules. When a young person earns more than £137.28 per week – roughly equivalent to 13 hours of work at the minimum wage for a 21-22 year old (17 hours for an 18-20 year old or 24 hours for a 16-17 year old) - their Universal Credit will be tapered to nil and they will face a financial disincentive when working additional hours.¹¹ Young people tell Centrepont staff that concerns about losing out financially and going into rent arrears make them less willing to engage in employment.

These barriers explain why 42 per cent of care-experienced young people currently supported by Centrepont are NEET, as data gathered internally by Centrepont (which is not publicly available) shows. Fifteen per cent of this group indicated that they do not want to engage in EET, as compared to 35 per cent who indicated they do want to engage in EET and are ready to. A fifth (21 per cent) of care-experienced young people currently supported by Centrepont who are NEET indicated that they would like to engage in EET but currently do not feel able to. This shows that while there are issues around motivation, this is only a part of the story. The vast majority of care-experienced young people supported by Centrepont do want to engage in EET, but are unable to access EET or do not feel ready to access EET for the reasons highlighted above.

2. For those young people with care experience who are in work, how does their pay, conditions and progression opportunities compare to the general population?

Pay and progression opportunities are severely limited by current benefit rules that mean that care-experienced young people who are in supported accommodation are discouraged from taking on more hours or accepting certain job offers, even if they would like to. This might make the young person appear unmotivated in the eyes of their employer, when actually they are

¹⁰ [Untapped Resource: Homeless young people's employment experiences and aspirations | Centrepont](#)

¹¹ [Making Work Pay in supported accommodation | Centrepont](#)

making a rational decision to avoid going into rent arrears. This problem and its solution are elaborated upon in our answer to question 4 (first recommendation).

Of care-experienced young people surveyed by Centrepont, 43 per cent reported not being paid enough in their current or last job¹². Nearly one in four of those care-experienced young people who reported not being paid enough said that this meant they were unable to buy food and 43 per cent said they could not keep up with housing bills. This resonates with concerns that the success of the Government's recently announced plans for a "youth guarantee" for EET if the quality of jobs they can access is poor. Many of the employment options that are available to young people are insecure, precarious and low-paying jobs in hospitality, construction, or retail. These jobs can be stepping stones to better-paying, more secure employment – but they can also prevent young people from developing themselves personally or professionally¹³. One care-experienced young person who told a Centrepont researcher working on family breakdown that he had to quit his job in a warehouse because it was exacerbating his mental health problems (this resulted in him being made to leave home by his adoptive family). Among young people surveyed by Centrepont, enjoyment ranked high among the things young people look for in work¹⁴.

What are the main interventions currently in place and how effective are they at helping young care-experienced people progress into employment, education or training?

Centrepont's internal data suggests that grants for care-leavers have been effective in supporting care-experienced young people to access educational opportunities, at least relative to young people who are experiencing homelessness but are not care-experienced. Care leavers supported by Centrepont are more likely to be in full- or part-time education (66%) than in full- or part-time employment, (20%) whereas it's the other way around for general population young people supported by Centrepont (44% and 35% respectively). A relatively small proportion of both are in training.

However, there was a sense among staff that there might be a mismatch between the support care-experienced young people are receiving and their aspirations, as many young people in general express a desire to start working rather than attend college or university.

Young people supported by Centrepont have access to in-house psychologists and may be referred to relevant substance use services if needed. Staff emphasize the importance of supporting young people with any mental health or substance use needs as a prerequisite for EET engagement. More generally, young people supported by CP largely view pressure from staff to engage in EET positively. Many say they need support with the first step into EET in the form of advice or encouragement.

¹² [Untapped Resource: Homeless young people's employment experiences and aspirations | Centrepont](#)

¹³ [The UK wants to guarantee work or training for all young people – first it needs good jobs](#)

¹⁴ [Untapped Resource: Homeless young people's employment experiences and aspirations | Centrepont](#)

Centrepoint staff also advise young people on benefits-related issues, using a tool that calculates at what point (e.g. number of hours) a young person in employment begins to lose out financially due to the tapering rate.

Additionally, young people can access CP Works, a team dedicated to supporting young people access EET. They offer the following services:

Work placements. The Get Set Go programme is a work-focused scheme providing unemployed young people aged 16-24 with a package of tailored support to develop their skills and confidence. This is a blend of individual interventions, small group work, and an industry placement. Young people enroll in Get Set Go knowing that the types of companies they would like to forge a career with endorse the scheme. They gain relevant experience and learn up-to-date skills. Young people are given a feedback interview and character reference at the end of their placement, and may be given the opportunity to apply for vacancies within the organisation.

Vocational courses. Many young people come to Centrepoint without the skills required for accessing employment opportunities, and CPWorks offers courses on job searching, CV writing, team working, and confidence building to remedy this. Additionally, CP works also provides courses aimed at helping young people develop skills relevant to specific sectors, namely hospitality and catering, warehousing and storage, and construction.

Maths and English courses. CP Works offers young people courses that allow them to learn at their own pace, with the support of our trainers. This is particularly important given the barriers to educational achievement associated with homelessness and being care-experienced previously mentioned. The functional skills courses provide practical uses of English and Maths. They help build young people's confidence in learning and prepare them for the next step in their learning, lives and careers. CPWorks also offers two digital skills courses.

Enrichment activities. Together with the support of employers, CPWorks also provides activities that help young people develop resilience and motivation. These include business carousels, external speakers, site visits, and mock opportunities.

Apprenticeships. We employ young people into suitable roles within Centrepoint that can provide worthwhile qualifications and real on-the-job experience, alongside a living wage.

Bursaries. CPWorks provides several bursaries to cover the cost of essentials needed to access education, employment and training, such as laptops, travel, childcare, interview clothes or course fees.

These services are in place for all young people supported by Centrepoint, though care-experienced young people are slightly more likely to engage with CPWorks (38 per cent and 32 per cent respectively). When advising young people, CPWorks staff use a skills mapper to help identify relevant experiences. For example, someone might have cared for a younger sibling while growing up: this counts as childcare experience. There is a specific section on care-experienced young people in the skills mapper tool used by CPWorks staff.

What can the Mayor, local and central government do to prevent young care-experienced people in London from becoming NEET and help those who are NEET to progress into employment, education or training?

1. Make work pay. As part of its upcoming review of benefit rules, we need the Government to end the benefit trap for young people in supported accommodation so they can succeed, rather than be set up to fail. **For care-experienced homeless young people, having a job is a crucial step towards becoming independent and building a stable future.**

The Government must increase the applicable amount within Housing Benefit for young people in supported accommodation to £111.32 a week, either by raising the personal allowance or introducing a new premium. This would mean that a young person's HB would begin to be tapered after they earn £107.97 per week (with the £5 earnings disregard), rather than £66.05, and remove the steep drop off between entitlements. By giving parity with UC claimants, HB would only be tapered from the point that their UC claim finished and more work would always mean more pay for young people in supported housing. This simple change could be made by adding a separate personal allowance category for young people in supported accommodation, as already exists for ESA claimants, or introducing a new premium in their applicable amount.

The Government must also reduce the Housing Benefit taper rate to 55% to bring it in line with Universal Credit. To ensure that young people in supported accommodation are not worse off than young people in other forms of accommodation, we encourage the government to reduce the HB taper rate to 55% to bring it in line with UC. This measure could either be applied across the board or targeted at those in supported accommodation. While the national HB caseload will continue to fall over time as more claimants move over to UC, HB will continue to be paid to claimants in supported accommodation as it is outside the scope of UC. It is therefore vital that the HB rules are addressed to ensure that young people in supported accommodation can afford to take on progress in work and move away from using benefits.

2. The Department for Work and Pensions should introduce a new Youth Independence Payment for homeless young people and care leavers. This would raise their overall Universal Credit entitlement to the rate that over 25s receive in recognition that they face the same living costs. Additionally, continue to uprate benefits in line with inflation.

3. The Department for Work and Pensions should increase the number of Youth Hubs to ensure that homeless young people and care leavers are able to access multiple forms of essential support under one roof and are successfully prepared for employment.

4. The Department for Work and Pensions should introduce innovative employment schemes and apprenticeships specifically designed to suit the needs of young people living in supported accommodation. This will include a large number of care-experienced young people (as mentioned, this group makes up nearly half of all residents in Centrepont supported accommodation).

5. The Department for Health and Social Care’s recently announced reform of the care system should include a focus on preparing young people for EET. Provision of life skills courses (CV writing, opportunity searching, confidence, literacy, etc.) should be included as a requirement in contracts with care home providers, and these providers must demonstrate that they offer adequate support around mental health and neurodivergence. Foster families should be offered support related to the young person’s life skills, mental health and any Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
6. The Department for Education must support schools to prioritize care-experienced young people for identification of SEND and the provision of related support.
7. The Department for Work and Pensions Get Britain Working policy should include a focus on the quality of jobs available to young people and address the rise of zero-hour contracts. Benefit sanctions should not be used to pressure young people into accepting precarious and/or unhealthy jobs or placements that might harm their employment opportunities in the long-term¹⁵.
8. The Mayor of London should ensure the implementation of the Housing group’s recommendations in the Care-Leavers Compact published in 2023, including council tax exemptions for care-leavers, avoiding “intentional homelessness” assessments, and rent deposit schemes¹⁶ across all London boroughs.
9. The Mayor of London should increase awareness across all London boroughs of the benefit tapering rate issue described above and how this impacts on young people in supported accommodation, many of whom are care-experienced. Local authorities within London should be encouraged to accept this issue as a valid reason to claim Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) so that it can be used on an ad-hoc basis to support young people in supported accommodation who want to work more hours. And where possible, local authorities should be encouraged to proactively use DHP to support young people living in supported accommodation who have fallen into arrears as a result of entering employment.

How are care leavers impacted by intersectionality with other issues such as ethnicity, disability and special educational needs?

CP Works staff pointed out racism might negatively impact on some care-experienced young people’s employment opportunities. And if a workplace or place of learning is overwhelmingly white, this might exacerbate the sense of being out of place or feelings of low self-esteem among care-leavers of colour. Of care-experienced young people surveyed by Centrepont, 16 per cent

¹⁵ <https://theconversation.com/the-uk-wants-to-guarantee-work-or-training-for-all-young-people-first-it-needs-good-jobs-244693>

¹⁶ [The Pan London Care Leavers Compact](#)

felt ethnicity and race would have a negative effect on their employment goals, and a similar proportion indicated the same for class.¹⁷

As mentioned previously, care-experienced young people who are neurodivergent and/or have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities might not have received the support they needed in school. This can impact negatively on their qualifications and self-esteem, such that they might feel that they are not “academic” or “intelligent” enough to pursue educational opportunities - which, in turn, limits their employment prospects. Neurodiversity ranked highest among the personal characteristics that care-experienced young people felt might have a strong negative effect on their employment goals (15 per cent), followed by disability (12 per cent).

¹⁷ [Untapped Resource: Homeless young people’s employment experiences and aspirations | Centrepont](#)

London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee
9th December 2024

**Investigation into care leavers' access to employment, education
and training**

Introduction and Background

This submission is on behalf of the Care Leavers Trust Board, the partnership board that oversees London's regional programme (Pan London Care Leavers Compact) to improve the experience and outcomes of care experienced young people in the capital.

Trust Board Partners include London Local Authorities, Partnership for Young London (which also hosts the London Children in Care Council), the GLA, and the Care Leaver Covenant. The London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA) supports the work programme in its role as the collective work programme for London's 33 LA Children's Services.

Sources of information in this submission include:

- Data from 2023 Local Authority Children Looked After Data Returns SSDA903 provided by London Local Authorities to the Department for Education
- A comprehensive 2024 survey of Local Authority care leaving practice and views undertaken by LIIA
- The views and activity of the Pan London Care Leavers Compact Education, Training and Employment working group

**The experiences of care-experienced young people aged 16-24 in
trying to access employment, education or training**

The landmark Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022) states that 'the disadvantage faced by our care experienced community 'should be the civil rights issue of our time'. This is borne out in care-experienced people's access to employment, education, and training. The review goes on to report that "data shows that 41% of care leavers aged 19-21 were not in education, employment or training (NEET), which is more than three times higher than all young people at the same age (Department for Education, 2021a)."

In London, the picture is a close mirror of the national position. From 2023 Local Authority data we know that:

- London has 19,067 18-24 y/o Care Leavers (who have been in the care of London LA's)

- Of these, 6377 are former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (with potential restrictions on their activity).
- 6,244 Care Leavers are 'out of contact' with their Local Authority, meaning their ETE position is not known (this is mostly over the age of 21)
- *5,066 are in Education
- *2,987 are in Training or Employment
- *236 are in apprenticeships
- *4528 are confirmed as being Not in Education, Training or Employment

*True figures for these categories will be higher as the positions of 'out of contact' care leavers are not known

In summary, we should be highly concerned about the number of care experienced young people who are not entering ETE, with the figures being largely unchanged over several years. Not only is this devastating for individual lives, but it has huge social and economic costs – the National Audit Office estimated the lifetime cost of 19 year old care leavers who were NEET in 2015 was £240 million (NAO, 2015). Put simply, we need to do more and better.

The reasons care-experienced young people aged 16-24 in London find themselves not in employment, training or education (NEET)

The reasons care-experienced young people are not in ETE are varied and complex. Above all they are intersecting – entering and sustaining ETE cannot be separated from issues of childhood trauma, health (especially emotional and mental health), housing, relationships, and the quality of information, support and guidance. The 2024 Local Authority survey identified the following as key factors:

- Intersecting needs, especially mental health, housing, financial barriers, and a lack of familial / social role modelling and support
- Previously negative experiences of education, in particular school. Linked with lower levels of qualification and skills.
- Discrimination and stigma, including a lack of understanding around the experiences and needs of care leavers
- Former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children face language and legal barriers
- Geographic displacement – being out of borough and away from support sources
- Financial disincentives to progress into employment from benefits
- Lack of co-ordination and quality in ETE offers – which can feel hurriedly put together without a proper understanding of CL needs.

The adequacy of current programmes aimed at helping young people with care experience progress into employment, education or training

This is difficult to answer definitively as there are an extremely wide range of programmes, with different evaluation processes (and sometimes none). Some key points would be:

- Youth Futures Foundation are undertaking a randomised control trial of the Drive Forward ETE programme, which should provide a clear view of effectiveness of one of London's largest commissioned ETE programmes.
- More does not automatically equate with better. Local Authorities comment that some offers are put together without a proper understanding of care leaver needs and wants, as well as lacking wrap around support. Success should be gauged by not just entering ETE, but sustaining and flourishing within it.
- To support the above, care experienced young people should be part of designing and developing offers.
- The LA survey also indicates a communication and co-ordination issue. Many Personal Advisors and care leavers are not aware of offers, including those from the GLA or brokered by the Care Leaver Covenant.

Which interventions have proven effective at supporting young people with care experience into employment, education or training and why

Existing actions have been ineffective at reducing NEET numbers amongst London or national care experienced cohorts – certainly on any wide scale basis. It is helpful that organisations like Youth Futures Foundation are looking to evaluate programmes and build an evidence base for what is effective. And there does seem to be good practice that could be scaled. The best approaches seem to involve:

- Programmes that are co-designed by care experienced young people and/or designed with an expert understanding of their needs.
- Wrap around support, including around intersecting needs such as housing, health, finances, and supportive relationships
- Good communication and co-ordination across partners, including the employer, the LA Personal Advisor, and any commissioned or voluntary sector support.
- Better promotion of offers to care experienced young people.

Specific examples that we should look more closely at include:

- DWP advisors being co-located or working closely with care leaving teams (e.g. Newham)

- The ICAN partnership between a Health Integrated Care Board, Roehampton University, and Health Employers, working closely with Local Authorities, to build a co-ordinated offer into a variety of health careers.
- Hammersmith and Fulham's PACL project, which was subject to external evaluation and links with a strong whole council approach and links with local employers.
- Proactive engagement between Local Authorities and Business communities, such as in Bromley and Redbridge

What actions the Mayor, local and central government can take to support care-experienced young people into employment, education or training

- A better co-ordinated and targeted regional strategy across the GLA, LAs, HE/FE, and the VCS to improve care leaver experiences and outcomes of education, training and employment.
- Co-ordination of approach between the GLA, LAs and national government on the development of the Youth Guarantee
- A clear, targeted and well-communicated skills and training offer for care leavers from the GLA, which administers UKSPF funding for the region
- Strategy and the design of interventions to be led/influenced by those with lived experience.
- Increased use of the Care Leaver Covenant as a single platform to host details of offers/programmes that are available to London's Care Leavers
- Increased reciprocity of offers so that care leavers can access local ETE support regardless of whether they live in their 'responsible borough'
- Local Authorities, the GLA and Anchor Institutions to develop 'family firm' offers to support care experienced young people to develop careers within their organisations.
- Higher and Further Education Institutions in London to adopt "best practice" standards in their admission and support of care leavers.
- Adoption of 'best practice' partnership working across the DWP and LA care leaving teams.
- Effective engagement with the business community at a regional level to support care leavers.

Matthew Blood (Islington Virtual School Head)

Debbie Jones (Croydon Directors of Children's Services)

Sharon Long (Strategic Director, Partnership for Young London)

Matthew Raleigh (Programme Lead, London Innovation and Improvement Alliance)

03.12.20204



NNECL response to Call for evidence: Care Leavers not in Employment, Education or Training. November 2024

In this response to the Call for Evidence: Care Leavers not in Employment, Education or Training, NNECL replies to each of the 5 questions though the lens of further and higher education:

1. What are the key factors contributing to the greater likelihood of care-experienced young people becoming NEET, compared to the overall population?
2. For those young people with care experience who are in work, how does their pay, conditions and progression opportunities compare to the general population?
3. o what extent is the current service provision for care leavers in London meeting their needs in helping them access employment, education or training?
4. Are there any interventions which have proven particularly successful in helping care leavers access employment, education or training?
5. What could the Mayor, local and central government do to prevent care leavers in London from becoming NEET and help those who are NEET to progress into employment, education or training?

About NNECL

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) is a charity working UK-wide with education practitioners and care system professionals to transform the progression of young people from care, estranged or sanctuary seeking backgrounds into and through further and higher education. Since 2013 our work has been supporting, connecting, and empowering our community with whom we share our overarching ambition, for more young people with care backgrounds to consider, access and flourish through apprenticeships, further and higher education into fulfilling careers which will sustain them for life. We are one the few organisations in this space to be led by an Executive Director with lived experience of care from the global majority. This gives NNECL a unique opportunity to shape our questions and analysis leading to more reliable and impactful results for the community we serve.

Our National Strategy Group (NSG) is made up of regional groups drawn from national organisations and universities, each laser focused on understanding and responding to the needs of practitioners in a systemic way. By working collaboratively, they identify and find solutions to emerging problems and feed back to NNECL policy challenges. Our NSG members update our 8 Regional Networks, ensuring they are safe and inclusive spaces for practitioners to continuously develop, identify opportunities and challenges, and work collaboratively.

NNECL have over 100 organisations in active membership, including universities and colleges, foster agencies, local authority leaving care teams, virtual schools and charities. Over 300 individual practitioners are supported via these organisations enabling us to reach a community of more than 750 dynamic professionals who participate in our events and benefit from our regular policy and practice updates.

- 1 What are the key factors contributing to the greater likelihood of care-experienced young people becoming NEET, compared to the overall population?**

Government data records that of the 10,000 young people leaving care each year, only 14% enter into higher education by the age of 19, compared to 47% of the general population. NNECL recognises the reasons for this are complex and multi-layered;

- the impact of early childhood trauma;
- the stark difference in attainment between children in care and their peers;
- having a disrupted education, sometimes young people have several placements and school moves, often leaving with no notice and no time to say goodbye or plan;
- low expectations from key influencers in a young person's network; social workers, teachers, foster carers and staff in leaving care teams;
- In a 2022 UCAS survey of 500 care experienced applicants to university, 60% of respondents said they received no specific information about the support available to them in higher education.

We also note choices of subject and where to study are heavily influenced by being care experienced. There is a stark lack of awareness on the range of opportunities available resulting in many young people choosing to study locally and focus on vocational subjects such as health care and social work. Ongoing support for mental health and well-being, as well as the availability of all-year round accommodation and additional financial support, are also significant factors which may limit the range of study options care leavers consider.

Children in local authority care and their supporters often talk about the “cliff edge” of leaving care. For those entering higher education, effective and supported transition is crucial and the need for support does not end once students are enrolled.

Our research shows care experienced students are more likely to withdraw or interrupt their studies, (38% nationally, compared to 6% for non-care experienced students) and that care leavers are less likely to achieve a good honour's degree enabling them to move into graduate employment. This is because of lack of support, including emotional, financial obligations and difficulties and understanding of systems. Without the building blocks offered by post-16 and 18 education these young people so not go on to develop fulfilling and rewarding careers and become at risk of entering low paid insecure work, or not working at all.

2 For those young people with care experience who are in work, how does their pay, conditions and progression opportunities compare to the general population?

For people with care backgrounds going to university is proven to level up career success.

- By age 27, 22% of care leavers are in employment compared to 57% of non-care leavers
- For university graduates, 71% of care leavers are in full time employment compared to 77% of non-care experienced graduates

Care leavers who graduate from university earn, on average £660 less than non-care leavers, just 18 months after graduation.

In addition to qualifications young people in post-16 and post-18 education have access to the mental health support they say they need as well as the support systems that help their transition to adulthood. Without this wrap around support our young people are at too high a risk of becoming homeless or falling into debt as they do not yet have experience in managing money, bills, or reading meters and budgeting for food and do not have family to fall back on.

Lack of social capital, the networks, relationships and connections that support career development is a huge issue for care leavers progression. NNECL members work hard to help care leavers build confidence and connections with future employers and mentors so they can transition well into the workplace after graduation.

3 To what extent is the current service provision for care leavers in London meeting their needs in helping them access employment, education or training?

While there are pockets of success, currently London universities of similar size or in close proximity, do not provide a unified offer for students with care backgrounds. London could learn from the progressive work being done in other regions:

The 5 North East universities - Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside – who together form the [North East Raising Aspiration Partnership](#) (NERAP) are the first regional Higher Education partnership to collaboratively sign up to the [Care Leaver Covenant](#). Each university are NNECL members and either hold or are committed to achieving our Quality Mark. Each are committed to offering support that is consistent across each institution, so all care experienced students get the same access to support throughout their higher education journey. The [Regional Care Leaver Covenant core offer](#) provides support for students at both at pre-entry and post-entry level and includes areas such as finance, accommodation, wellbeing and employment. This approach means learners only need think about which course and campus suits them best and which they will enjoy more, like their non-care experienced peers, rather than which offers accommodation all year round and has the best financial bursary.

At the end of 2023/24 Sunderland's retention rate for students with care experience, supported by the We Care team was 89%. The team supported 89 students, 9 withdrew and one was 'on leave' from their course. This is a dropout rate of just 11% compared to the 38% national average and we are confident that for those who did leave their course it was the right thing for them at that juncture. The majority of learners with care backgrounds at Sunderland are achieving a 2:1 or first-class honours degree.

In the 2024 We Care survey, when asked what the most valuable aspect of support was, students said:

"Emotional support, I came to the uni with no confidence and the help I've received has been amazing I wouldn't be where I am without the we care teams support"

"The check ins are most valuable as well as the we care bursary and a massive thank you to Safeenah as she has been the one to keep me going at all times and help get me through my degree and now I'm finally graduating!"

"The emotional support someone I can talk to about anything whether that's great news or just having a moan, they are there for you no matter what and then genuinely care for us all, from pick me up cards to congratulations and everything in between."

"Literally life support!! They aren't just staff they become family celebrating life and key milestones and graduations with you!"

In 2021 GMCA provided funds for 8 education institutions to work with NNECL to achieve the Quality Mark. Due to the resounding success of that initiative GMCA have agreed to joint fund post-16 education providers across the region to achieve the Quality Mark with the aim of Greater Manchester being the first region to have all colleges (with an annual intake of approximately 300+ pupils) and universities accredited by NNECL within the next 3 years. Andy Burnham's commitment to the GM Care Leaver Guarantee will give these

young people the best chance to access and thrive through further and higher education and go on to have a successful and rewarding career.

Each approach spotlighted has its merits, but we recognise there is no one way of building a strong offer to propel young people into and through post-16 and post-18 education. However, London, the key driver of the UK economy, with the biggest economic growth is lagging behind regions who have found ways to create strong region wide support for care leavers, even with smaller GDP growth.

Students tell us Personal Assistants have inconsistent knowledge on pathways to higher education and we understand no baseline training is provided to them. This leaves our young people (and care givers) often exploring options alone, if they even think post-18 education is an option for them, while knowing their support from the local authority is coming to an end and dealing with that emotional insecurity and fear. All PA's should be able to confidently sign post their young people towards further and higher education, know what the local authority offer of support is and recognise young people need ambitious support during this moment of making critical life choices.

The snapshot below (informed by desk research) demonstrates the variance of local offers between London local authorities. A child in the care of Croydon should have access to the same support and aspiration as a child in the care of Westminster. Access to higher education should be based on ability and attainment not individual local authority models of support so that no child is left behind.

	Camden	Tower Hamlets	Croydon	Ealing	Westminster
Easy signposting to post-18 ed (uni & app) on LA website	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Ringfenced apprenticeships for care leavers	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Offer work experience within the council	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
In principle will act as guarantor for private rented property in HE	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Will in principle assist with broadband (essential for study)	No	No	No	?	?
Care leavers get to practice independent living	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Care leaver mentoring scheme with Senior Leaders in LA	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Named contact for Local Offer	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Has made care experience a protected characteristic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

4 Are there any interventions which have proven particularly successful in helping care leavers access employment, education or training?

One of NNECL's major achievements is the development of our Quality Mark which launched in 2022, following two successful pilots. To achieve the NNECL Quality Mark, which the sector describes as "gold standard," universities and colleges must evidence the holistic and practical support they provide to care leavers including: a designated contact, financial bursaries, well-being and pastoral care, help with accommodation, work placements and careers guidance. The Quality Mark framework was designed with care leaver graduates and our Trustee Board, including Dr Neil Harrison, a leading academic who's work in widening participation began in the early 2000's.

Institutions must allocate time, dedication and capacity to work towards achieving the Quality Mark. These levers create the best conditions for the institution to work proactively

with a NNECL assessor so improvements and agreed plans can be achieved alongside senior leadership engagement. This change management programme approach generates space for deep dives into the institutions provision for learners with care experience and brings together a specialist team from across the establishment, all focused on addressing strengths and weaknesses to find workable and impactful solutions. We have found this approach is transformational, resulting in embedding deep and lasting change within institutions, which in turn result in better outcomes for care experienced learners as well as the wider university community.

The Quality Mark is currently being independently evaluated. We will publish findings in January 2025. Using information from our Quality Mark progress reports and feedback from published research we are developing a new programme 'Inspire' which aims to deliver early awareness on the pathways to further and higher education to children in care from the age of 11, their care givers, leaving care teams, community champions and other trusted adults. We have received a small pot of funding to run a pilot of this project in Southwark from 2024 to 2025.

Our collaborative work with the sector, sharing effective practice, providing professional development webinars and a proactive peer to peer support, was cited as good practice in the final recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England. Our work was also positively reviewed in the 'Invest in higher education for care experienced and estranged students' report published by Social Market Foundation on 2 December 2024. We support the recommendations in the report that all higher education providers should work towards our Quality Mark.

5 What could the Mayor, local and central government do to prevent care leavers in London from becoming NEET and help those who are NEET to progress into employment, education or training?

It is imperative to understand the data on the progression and success of care experienced students in London colleges and universities. The data on care leaver entry to FE and HE is freely available, the data on retention and graduation is not. Those in recruitment and widening participation teams in colleges and universities often don't speak with those in their data teams resulting in both operating in silos and the focus being on getting care leavers into university, but not getting those learners through university well and into a career. Without analysing and deeply understanding which post-16 learning institutions and which local authorities are providing good support for care leavers and which need to improve it is not possible to begin an honest conversation or measure any change.

Central government should:

- Make committing to the Care Leavers Covenant mandatory for all sixth forms, further education colleges and higher education providers
- Make the NNECL Quality Mark, or equivalent change management programme, mandatory for HE and FE institutions.
- Introduce a revised UK-wide minimum offer from local authorities so that all young people know what support they can access to further their education post-16.
- Increase the minimum local authority offer of support for students entering post-16 education from 25 to 30 recognising care leavers challenges
- Share the anonymised education progression data collected on care experience and estranged people by UK Government with researchers and charitable organisations so outcomes can be tracked and addressed by the practitioners working in this space.

The Mayor should:

- Conduct a comprehensive review LA local offers to care leavers and understand the reasons behind the variance
- Conduct a comprehensive review of support offered by all post-16 education institutions and education progression data for care leavers and share the anonymised data with researchers and charitable organisations so outcomes can be tracked and addressed by the practitioners working in this space
- Require all post-16 learning environments to sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant and be members of NNECL with the ambition of achieving the NNECL Quality Mark within this parliament
- NNECL suggest the Mayor work with specialists within the sector to develop a realistic starting point London offer of support that reflects high aspiration and ambition for all young people and this is approached in terms of groupings of types of university, i.e. Russell Group, intake size or applications taking a similar route to career to reflect the diversity of London universities and that the whole cohort do not have the same range of accommodation or bursary. It is essential this work is developed with care experienced graduates who are paid for their contribution

Overall, NNECL urge the Mayor to be unashamedly ambitious for all children in care and care leavers, and to cut off at source the poor practices leaving people with care backgrounds without the opportunities needed to thrive into adulthood and enjoy the security of a career which sustains them for life. We are optimistic the Mayor will lean into the excellent work already in place and boldly work with the sector to enable significant and lasting change to drastically improve care experienced children's educational outcomes.

Denise Rawls
Executive Director
NNECL
6 December 2024

London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

Call For Evidence - Care Leavers not in Employment, Education or Training - Ofsted response

Introduction

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. We inspect services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. We also inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people.

We look at the experiences and progress of care leavers as part of our inspections of local authority children's services ([ILACS](#)). In January 2023, we introduced a new standalone judgement on the experiences and progress of care leavers for standard and short ILACS inspections.

Inspection outcomes in London

Since the separate care leavers judgement was implemented in January 2023, Ofsted has carried out 22 short or standard inspections in London.

20 (91%) of these inspections led to a judgement of good or outstanding for the care leavers judgement (for comparison, 66% of non-London local authorities have received a good or outstanding judgement). No London local authorities have been judged as inadequate for care leavers, although one has been judged to be inadequate for overall effectiveness.

The experiences of care leavers – employment, education and training

Typically, good outcomes for care leavers' employment, education and training of care leavers are underpinned by the following:

- A settled, skilled workforce who have manageable workloads – in particular, young people highly value long-lasting, supportive relationships with their personal advisers
- High aspirations for all care leavers from senior corporate parents, while working productively with key partners (e.g. health, education, employers)
- Stable, good quality accommodation that is accessible to their workplace or education setting, and is close to the people who are important to them
- Timely access to good health services, including good, individualised support for young people's emotional and mental health.

As part of our work to develop arrangements for inspecting supported accommodation, care-experienced young people consistently stressed how important it was to have good support for their mental health, help to develop life skills and to have clear plans for their future, including plans for their next move.

Good practice examples highlighted in reports

In good and outstanding local authorities, we have regularly seen a wide range of specific initiatives that have built on firm foundations of wider good practice and have demonstrably improved the lives of young people:

*When young people are not in education, employment or training, they are offered effective help from the virtual college at **the drop-in based at the Turnaround Centre** to support them to achieve this. **The Ambassadors scheme, which began in November 2023, has incorporated children in care and care leavers into a range of internal roles, enhancing their own work experience** and providing valued scrutiny and developmental support to relevant council initiatives.*

Croydon: [Report](#)

*Personal advisers encourage young people to use the support services available to them, and they make appropriate referrals, including to **Work Redbridge and the Department for Work and Pensions, who are co-located with the care leavers team for part of the week**. Eight young people are currently supported by local businesses in apprenticeships.*

Redbridge: [Report](#)

***The Greenwich mentoring programme** provides one-to-one support to care leavers and a dedicated 18+ virtual school officer provides support to advisers and care leavers to help access and maintain education and training.*

Greenwich: [Report](#)

*...The virtual school is successful in looking for creative ways with key partners and local industries to open up and maximise work experience, apprenticeship and employment skills and other opportunities for young people. For example, **young people who worked with the tradespeople on the creation of 'The Hub' have gone on to gaining apprenticeships**.*

Hammersmith and Fulham: [Report](#)

***The leaving care panel brings together a broad range of professional advice, guidance and support** to enable care leavers to gain and sustain meaningful progress in education, employment and training. Care leavers are supported to attend their panel meetings to ensure that their voice is heard and their aspirations are taken fully into account. **Leaders demonstrate their commitment through providing employment, paid work experience and apprenticeship opportunities** for care leavers in the local authority.*

Bromley: [Report](#)

Contact: Matthew Brazier (specialist adviser, looked after children)
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11 January 2025

London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

Call for evidence: Care Leavers not in Employment, Education or Training

Submission from The Care Leavers Association

What are the key factors contributing to the greater likelihood of care-experienced young people becoming NEET, compared to the overall population?

Trauma

We know that the vast majority of young people who enter into the care system do so because they have experienced some form of trauma. This trauma can have a long-lasting and challenging effect on a young person's ability to understand and interact with the wider world. As a result, the effects of the trauma can spill over into areas of adulthood such as employment, education, health, relationships, wellbeing and social interactions.

Our 2017 research report "Caring For better Health" showed that care leavers still had to deal with mental health and wellbeing issues long after they left care. For example:

- I experienced low self-esteem – 87% in care, 83% after care
- I experienced anxiety – 80% in care, 79% after care
- I experienced depression – 78% in care, 75% after care

54% of care leavers in our research felt that their time in the care system contributed to their mental and physical health challenges.

Other research such as Nuffield Foundation report "The Life-long Health and Wellbeing of Care Leavers" clearly show that trauma and mental health challenges continue to have effects on an individual long after they leave care. If we do not provide support to improve mental health and wellbeing then services supporting housing, education, employment etc become less effective.

In-Care placement breakdown, instability and school disruption

Many children move repeatedly in and out of care, or between placements. Placement breakdowns can have a detrimental impact on a child's emotional wellbeing and mental health. They can also result in the child having to miss school. We know that children in care tend to have higher rates of school disruption than their non-care peers.

We are currently working in collaboration with Cambridge University to research the experiences of using CAMHS for children with a social work involvement in the SLAM (South London and Maudsley) area. Of the 80 randomised case notes we are analysing, 80% of the young people have experience disruptive schooling.

Clearly if a young person has disruptive schooling, they are going to find it more challenging to enter into education and the jobs market. This is not only related to having lower qualifications but also a knock-on effect of negative experiences in relation to education. We often find that older care leavers can take considerable time to see education as a positive experience because of their school experience.

Day-to-day living stress

We expect care leavers to be living independently from 18 years of age. This means that despite a traumatic upbringing and often a lack of extended family and support networks, they are

expected to be able to successfully manage the day-to-day stresses of living. Research shows that the average age for a young person in the general population to leave the family home is 25/26. We are placing unreasonable burdens on care leavers in expecting them to manage at such a young age. In our experience the main day-to-day stressors (aside from health) are financial (not having enough money to live) and poor-quality housing. It is no wonder that a care leaver will not be able to focus on education or employment if they are concerned and anxious about money and housing.

From 2014-18 we delivered a program of independent living skills to care leavers which included learning modules on employment and education. Throughout the delivery of the program, we had a higher-than-expected number of care leavers drop out due to anxieties caused by everyday living issues. As a result of this we discontinued the program and developed an emotional wellbeing program, to build emotional intelligence and improve self-esteem and confidence. We did have some small wins in relation to supporting care leavers to engage with training and employability schemes.

Dependence, independence and interdependence

Care leavers tell us that they can often find it challenging to transition into the more independent and interdependent world of adulthood. Many aspects of the care system are set up in a way that makes the young person dependent on other people such as social workers, residential workers and even foster carers. A seemingly simple task such as getting up on time every day to go to work can be challenging if someone else has managed this for you and you are suddenly left to do it on your own with limited support.

No second chance?

Many of the requests for support we receive from care leavers in relation to education stem from the fact that they have been supported by the leaving care team (PA support and educational entitlements) to access education, but something has gone wrong and they have had to drop out of education. On wanting to return to education they are no longer entitled to support; in particular, financial support. Care leavers get one chance and no second chance. This is unreasonable and unrealistic. No good parent would give their child only one chance to progress in life. As well as better mental health and wellbeing support within education to reduce the chances of drop out, we need to be giving care leavers an opportunity to try again.

Our 2010 research “Speaking Out” surveyed 425 care leavers on a variety of issues. One highlight that stood out was the high number of care leavers who went on in later life to achieve masters and higher degrees. This shows the huge potential that is lost through lack of support at an earlier age. There needs to be support for older care leavers, including those over 25, to help them fulfil their educational ambitions.

Poor Pathway Planning

The quality of Pathway Planning varies between local authorities. If we want care leavers to have good job and employment opportunities, then we need to start planning and supporting them at an early stage. Education and employment options should be a key part of the Pathway Plan. But they must be undertaken with the young person in control, listening and responding to their hopes and aspirations.

Are there any interventions which have proven particularly successful in helping care leavers access employment, education or training?

In relation to London we would always refer care leavers to the services of Drive Forward. They have an excellent package of support and a good understanding of the needs of care leavers.

In 2023 we undertook research in collaboration with Warwick University and partners to explore innovations in leaving care services (the EXIT project). As part of a distinct piece of work, we interviewed 14 organisations who had established new interventions to improve mental health support for care leavers. Although not specifically aimed at EET services, 2 different models appeared to be effective. Firstly, establishing a mental health professional within the leaving care team to not only provide support to care leavers but to support PA's to be able to respond more effectively to care leavers. Secondly, some local authorities had established mental health support for care leavers within generic services such as housing. Here the aim was to support care leavers to have improved wellbeing and thus make it more likely that they could manage and retain housing tenancies. We believe this model would work for EET services.

We are currently working with an Oxford University college to increase the number of applications from care leavers. Whilst this project is in its early stages, we have identified that there is a need for early support in terms of raising aspirations and for institutions to offer pre application opportunities such as open days and Aim Higher programs to demystify the whole university process and experience. As part of this, the use of care leaver mentors and ambassadors are key.

In the past 5 years we have worked with several educational establishments to help improve their support to care leavers. Key actions have been:

- The delivery of a wrap-around package of wellbeing support to care leavers
- A single point of contact in each department for care leavers
- A page on the establishment website outlining all the support available to care leavers

What could the Mayor, local and central government do to prevent care leavers in London from becoming NEET and help those who are NEET to progress into employment, education or training?

Work with local NHS providers to offer trauma-informed mental health support for care leavers.

Work with local CAMHS services to improve the access of children in care. Research shows that children in care are having to wait exceptionally long periods of time before getting CAMHS support.

Encourage national government to work with NHS England to review the type of interventions offered by CAMHS to children in care. Recent data showed that 50% of young people who had support from CAMHS did not feel it had been helpful. We need more evidence of what works.

Work with Virtual School Heads to ensure that all children in care have access to mental health support and support to limit school disruption.

Encourage all London leaving care teams to employ a mental health specialist within the team.

Lobby the government to extend financial support available to care leavers accessing education to ensure it's not just a one-time opportunity.

Lobby the government to introduce financial support for care leavers over 25 who are ready to go back to education.

Increase Apprenticeship and Job Placement Opportunities. More apprenticeship spots, work placements, and partnerships with employers could reduce NEET rates.

Encourage leaving care teams to provide more comprehensive support. Greater access to stable housing, mental health resources, and financial assistance is essential to help care leavers focus on education and training.

Establish more Integrated Services. Collaborate with employers, health services, and local authorities to provide holistic support for care leavers entering the workforce.

Work with local education providers to develop a comprehensive support offer for care leavers accessing college and university within the London area.

Encourage leaving care teams and children's social services in general to offer Strength Based activities that can build on the positive skills of children in care and care leavers. This should also involve creative and fun activities. This especially needs to happen as a child is growing up in the care system, to foster and nurture their aspirations.

London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee Call for Evidence: Care Leavers not in Employment, Education or Training

December 2024

About Youth Futures Foundation

Youth Futures Foundation is the national What Works Centre for youth employment, with a specific focus on marginalised young people. We want to see an equitable future society where all young people have the opportunity to be in good work. Our work has two overarching objectives to bring about system change for marginalised young people:

1. **To find and generate high-quality evidence** to better understand England's youth unemployment and inactivity challenge, and most importantly to learn what solutions work to address this. We do this through bringing together the best evidence already in existence and build on this by conducting original research and testing and evaluating promising interventions to produce much needed new evidence where there are gaps.
2. **To put evidence into action with policy makers and employers** who have the means to make direct impactful change for young people. We do this through translating the evidence practically for stakeholders to use and understand, and through partnerships and engagement to influence, inform and support them as decision makers to back evidence-based interventions that work.

Throughout our work, we proudly involve the voices, perspectives and participation of young people experiencing marginalisation, through our Future Voices Group, our young Board members and beyond.

1. What are the key factors contributing to the greater likelihood of care-experienced young people becoming NEET, compared to the overall population?

The latest [Office for National Statistics](#) figures show NEET (not in education, employment or training) rates in the UK remain high at 13.2%, with 946,000 16 to 24-year-olds now out of education, training or employment. This is nearly a quarter of a million more young people (302,000) than three years ago when NEET rates were at their lowest at 9.5% and is now equivalent to 1 in 8 young people.

A specific group of young people that experience additional barriers and are more likely to be NEET include young people with care experience. There are currently 84,000 children in care in England and many face a care cliff edge of support at 18 or younger, experiencing significant challenges in making a successful transition to adulthood and employment. Despite promising initiatives focused on care experience young people, more effort and funding is required to ensure that every care leaver can find a good quality job as soon as possible to help them start their journey towards financial security and independence.



- **Young care leavers are much more likely to be NEET than their peers.** 41% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 in England were NEET in 2021, compared to around 9% of the age group as a whole. ([Association for Young People's Health, 2022](#)) (AYPH 2022)
- When entering the labour market, **care-experienced young people often encounter precarious employment conditions in marginal or insecure jobs** with zero-hour or temporary contracts. They are also significantly more likely to be economically inactive ([Harrison et al, 2023](#)).
- **Only 20% of care leavers attain five GCSE A* to C grades (including English and maths)** compared to 62% among the general population, and **10% of care leavers do not sit any GCSEs at all.** In addition, **26% of care leavers were found to be 'persistent absentees' at secondary school**, compared to 9.3% for all pupils. These gaps impede their opportunities for accessing work or post-16 education ([Ibid](#)).
- The two main drivers of poor EET outcomes are:
 - **Disrupted educational experience and poor KS4 attainment.** Only 20% of care leavers attain five GCSE A* - C grades including English & Maths and this acts to filter care leavers out from EET pathways. ([Harrison et al, 2023](#), [Crowley et al 2023](#)).
 - **The prevalence of SEN, Mental Health and Disability.** 62% of care leavers were identified as having a high level of need. This is connected to trauma before, during and after care and learning difficulties that might be diagnosed late due to conflation with other difficulties at school. ([Harrison et al, 2023](#), [Crowley et al 2023](#)).

4. Are there any interventions which have proven particularly successful in helping care leavers access employment, education or training?

1. **Intensive, consistent, ongoing support, including expertise in access to EET, support for the practical things that care leavers face** such as accommodation & finance, and support for the mental health, trauma, relationship-building and emotional wellbeing aspects of care leavers' lives. Some groups will also need specialist support (young parents, those with substance abuse or offending behaviour), and small-scale targeted pre-employment offers may be of benefit for them. ([DfE 2014, Newton et al, 2020](#)).
2. **Evidence shows an increased focus on education pathways and career planning while a young person is still in care** can improve their chances in the labour market, as this allows an early assessment of their strengths and aspirations and helps them address any gaps in skills, abilities and motivation. Groups at higher risk such as care leavers with emotional, mental or behavioural problems may require more intensive and structured support to facilitate their post-16 participation, with some young people potentially benefiting from a delayed or gradual move into employment ([Dixon 2007, Harrison et al, 2023](#)).
3. **Support in accessing Further Education.** Harrison et al (2023) reported 67.9% engaging at some point up in the period they studied (up to 20 years and 7 months.) This is an important route for those whose education was disrupted during KS4.

Our [Youth Employment toolkit](#) has found vocational training interventions (on-the-job training, off-the-job training, and apprenticeships) are likely to have the greatest impact on employment outcomes for care leavers. Evidence also shows that a strong system of 'wraparound' support for care leavers, can help them make the most of learning



opportunities and tackle potential barriers to work and learning (such as mental health issues, problems with housing, access to transport, etc).

To test certain interventions we are currently undertaking two Randomised Control Trials focused on care experienced young people.

Reboot West (RW3)

Reboot West 3 is a programme run by 1625 Independent People (1625ip), that works with care experienced young people aged 16-25 across Bristol and the South West, who are NEET or at high risk of becoming NEET and helping them to access and sustain learning, training and work as well as helping them to achieve stability and wellbeing in their lives.

The 1625ip coaches form trusting relationships with young people and together they explore what matters most to the young person and what they are good at, helping them to gain the confidence, skills, motivation and qualifications to progress to meaningful work, including job coaching and practical help. Reboot Coaches also work holistically to ensure the young person is in a safe and secure physical and mental state to begin EET work through Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a psychological approach that helps young people to build commitment and make positive choices.

Youth Futures has commissioned BIT to undertake a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) of RW3 – the first ever in the UK looking at the impact of a therapeutic approach for care experienced young people – to generate robust evidence on how the programme supports young people into positive education, employment and training opportunities. The RCT will finish in July 2026 and alongside 1625ip, Youth Futures plans to use the findings to influence a step change in how care experienced young people, some of the most marginalised young people, are empowered to access good education and training opportunities and find high quality work.

Drive Forward

The 'Supporting Care Leavers into Employment' (SCLiE) programme, delivered by Drive Forward Foundation (DFF), aims to address the barriers that care experienced young people face in relation to finding high quality employment in London. Care experienced young people receive a package of individualised support designed to help them develop the skills and networks they need to find fulfilling employment, while also supporting them with the other barriers in their life.

Care experienced young people are offered a mix of tailored one-to-one support, intensive employability skills training, in-work mentoring support and opportunities provided through working in partnership with corporate partners, prospective employers and local authorities.

Youth Futures is now commissioning a Randomised Controlled Trial to build robust evidence to understand whether the programme increases the likelihood that care experienced young people enter education, employment or training vs. the 'business-as-usual' local authority support, working with local authorities to support with the referral of care experienced young people to the programme.



5. What could the Mayor, local and central government do to prevent care leavers in London from becoming NEET and help those who are NEET to progress into employment, education or training?

We would be delighted to meet with the Mayor to discuss these recommendations further and how best to support young people with care experience.

Launch a 'care leavers employer support package' increasing access both to apprenticeships and to the Kickstart scheme for care leavers

From September 2020 until March 2022, the 'Kickstart' scheme funded new 6-month job placements for 16- to 24-year-olds on Universal Credit who were at risk of long-term unemployment. The DWP recognised Kickstart should be targeted at people who would otherwise face significant disadvantage in the labour market, but the lack of formal eligibility criteria or targets for participation by particular groups such as care leavers meant that many care leavers – both those claiming Universal Credit and those outside of the benefit system – missed out on the job placements provided by Kickstart. The government should therefore revive the Kickstart scheme but specifically target the job placements at care leavers and include a dedicated and structured training element alongside additional support to overcome barriers to employment.

More proactive outreach and practical support which is needed to encourage both apprenticeship and kickstart take up by care leavers. We recommend that employers and training providers who recruit a care leaver onto an apprenticeship or a kickstart programme should receive £3,000 each. With this new set of £3,000 bursaries in place for care leavers, employers and providers, the government should aim to treble the number of care leavers starting an apprenticeship each year to 900.

Give greater financial assistance to those leaving care at age 16

The 16-19 Bursary Fund provides targeted funding to help young people aged 16 to 19 with the costs of staying on in education and training. Care leavers are entitled to bursaries of up to £1,200 a year, yet [current DfE guidance](#) states that "students should be awarded the amount of support they need to participate based on an assessment of the types of costs they have and must not be automatically awarded £1,200." A recent FOI request to the Department for Education found that vulnerable groups such as care leavers only receive an average bursary of £969, meaning that they are missing out on over £200 of financial assistance at this crucial time in their lives. If the goal is to provide care leavers with the best possible chance of making a successful transition from education to employment, the DfE guidance should be amended so that care leavers automatically receive the full bursary from government during their studies. As well as scrapping the discriminatory age bands for the minimum wage, also reviewing the age banding for apprenticeships, which act as a barrier to young people such as care leavers who are not able to live at home with their family.

In addition to the above:



- Considering whether additional bursaries might be offered to care leavers undertaking apprenticeships to recognise the extra costs that they face as they are not able to live at home with their family.
- As part of the strategy for post-16 education, considering the support available for care experienced young people, reflecting the fact that children in care often have disrupted education and complete their Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications later than other young people.
- In transforming Further Education Colleges into specialist Technical Colleges, recognising that this provision offers a lifeline to young people, such as those with care experience, who have had a disrupted education. A recent study indicated that 67% of care leavers accessed further education provision – often to re-sit functional skills, L2 or L3 qualifications. These opportunities for a “second chance” at qualifications should not be put at risk by the changes planned.

