

FINDING THEIR FEET

Equipping care leavers to reach their potential

January 2015



THE CENTRE FOR
SOCIAL
JUSTICE

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Finding their Feet: Equipping care leavers to reach their potential

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About the Centre for Social Justice

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) aims to put social justice at the heart of British politics. Our policy development is rooted in the wisdom of those working to tackle Britain's deepest social problems and the experience of those whose lives have been affected by poverty. Our Working Groups are non-partisan, comprising prominent academics, practitioners and policy makers who have expertise in the relevant fields. We consult nationally and internationally, especially with charities and social enterprises, who are the champions of the welfare society.

In addition to policy development, the CSJ has built an alliance of poverty fighting organisations that reverse social breakdown and transform communities. We believe that the surest way the Government can reverse social breakdown and poverty is to enable such individuals, communities and voluntary groups to help themselves.

The CSJ was founded by Iain Duncan Smith in 2004, as the fulfilment of a promise made to Janice Dobbie, whose son had recently died from a drug overdose just after he was released from prison.

Director: Christian Guy

Director's preface

This report is about giving the most vulnerable children in society a second chance. Too often those who start life experiencing deeply dysfunctional relationships end up treading the same path their parents did before them. With 10,000 children leaving care every year and with at least one in 10 care leavers who are parents having their own child taken into care in the past year alone, it is vital this cycle of disadvantage is broken.

The unavoidable truth is that the system is failing too many of the most vulnerable children in the country. Most shockingly the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) found that 22 per cent of female care leavers become teenage parents, and 60 per cent of suspected child victims of trafficking go missing from care, many within 48 hours.

These children require safe, stable and supportive relationships. Instead, it is hard not to conclude that in many cases the state is failing in its role as corporate parent. The evidence already makes clear the shocking effects the lack of functional relationships can have on children in care. Despite representing only one per cent of young people, care leavers make 11 per cent of homeless young people. Moreover, 24 per cent of the adult prison population and 70 per cent of sex workers have been in care. Whilst this can stem from lasting impacts of pre-care experiences, it cannot be avoided that more can be done to support these children. As the CSJ's previous report *Survival of the Fittest?* shows care leavers who are most likely to experience poor outcomes are given the least help.

The report finds that siblings in care are separated at shocking levels. 95 per cent of those in residential children's homes are separated from a sibling in care and 71 per cent of looked after children. Nor is there enough emphasis on developing functional relationships with children in care and reliable extended family members. It is important the next Government takes note of hugely successful practices such as the Family Finding and Engagement model in the United States. Among the successes, the Orange County Family Finding project saw 97 per cent of young people involved increase contact with family members and 89 per cent make life-long connections.

Our report also finds that too many individuals leaving the care system are unprepared for independence. The transition to adulthood is often a difficult time for most young people but without a suitable system of support the ability to gain a good education, sustainable employment and financial stability is much more of a challenge.

For the past decade the number of care leavers not in education, employment or training has remained at more than double the national average. Previous action by Governments over the past decade has led to more care leavers in higher education but the next administration must focus on apprenticeships to ensure children are not left behind.

Contained in this report are realistic and comprehensive recommendations that will enable the next Government to help care leavers.

I would like to thank the author of the report, Mark Winterburn, for his dedication and hard work, and to the wider CSJ team including our Policy Director Alex Burghart and Associate Director for Families and Mental Health Dr Samantha Callan, both of whom provided crucial editorial input and project leadership.

Our hope is that those planning for office this year pay attention to our findings and ideas. There is much good that could be achieved through them, if implemented with dedication and political will.

Christian Guy

Director, Centre for Social Justice

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- The numerous local authority staff, jobcentre advisers, foster carers, residential care workers, and semi-independent accommodation staff who we interviewed or consulted;
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- Caitlin Devereux, whose interim report, *Survival of the Fittest?*, was foundational to this research.

Special thanks go to Ryan Robson and John Hemming MP for their generous support for this project.

Executive summary

Introduction

For the last decade, the CSJ's work has shown that safe, stable and nurturing relationships, particularly within families, are vital for children and young people's wellbeing. The secure base these relationships provide is indispensable for young people making key transitions to adulthood.

When families are unable to provide this base, such that children are at risk of harm and unable to thrive, it is right that the state intervenes. The care system provides a second chance for every child to benefit from stable and loving relationships. As such, it does not just protect children from abuse and neglect: it should equip children in care to become young adults who flourish in life, and contribute to society.

The state, as 'corporate parent', therefore takes on a responsibility towards children in care that does not end on their 18th birthday. Young people often need practical and emotional support from their parents to thrive, well into early adulthood. The 9,000 young people who leave care every year in England also need this from their corporate parent.^{1,2}

Yet, too often, this is simply not happening, with tragic consequences. The CSJ has spent the past year taking evidence from care leavers, and those who care for them. We found that, from a background of family breakdown, many care leavers go on to experience educational failure, debt, worklessness and mental health problems. The leaving care population represents about one per cent of young people, yet it is estimated that:³

- 24 per cent of the adult prison population have been in care;⁴
- 11 per cent of homeless young people are care leavers;⁵
- 70 per cent of sex workers have been in care.⁶

1 Social services and policy relating to children in care and care leavers are devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This report focuses primarily on leaving care in England, however many of the points made apply to other parts of the United Kingdom, especially Wales where leaving care is most similar to England.

2 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1

3 Ibid; Office for National Statistics, *Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Mid-2013*, Office for National Statistics, 2014

4 Ministry of Justice, *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds Results from surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*, London: Ministry of Justice, 2014, p8

5 Homeless Link, *Young and Homeless 2014*, London: Homeless Link, 2014, p11

6 Home Office, *Paying the Price: A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy*, London: Home Office, 2004

To some degree this can be explained by the lasting impact of pre-care experiences: 62 per cent of children are taken into care because of abuse or neglect.⁷ Early intervention to help birth parents provide the loving environment their children need has to be a priority.

Where it is necessary to take young people into care, central and local government must make every effort to ensure that they have the chance to experience stable and loving relationships in a 'substitute family'. For younger children this may mean adoption, but, as things stand, for the majority of older children taken into care the best option will be a secure and successful foster care placement, for as long as they need.

Earlier this year, the Government introduced Staying Put arrangements: local authorities now have a duty to enable care leavers to remain with their foster carers until the age of 21.⁸ The CSJ called for this reform in our parliamentary briefing paper *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, and it is an important step towards our long-term ambition that care leavers should be supported until they are 25.⁹

However, more needs to be done:

- These arrangements only affect care leavers in a good foster placement. A foster care placement (or adoption) is not appropriate for some children, and others will reject that kind of support into adulthood. These young people tend to be the most vulnerable;
- Failures in the care system sometimes prevent young people from building up the skills, the resilience and the support networks needed for a successful transition to independence;
- A lack of involvement, care and support from their birth families can make it harder than usual for young people to discern 'who they are' and what they want to do with their lives;
- Early adulthood poses unique challenges. Most notably, young people have to make the difficult transition to the world of work, whether straight from school or after accessing higher education.

Most significantly, it is often the care leavers who are most likely to experience poor outcomes who are given the least support.¹⁰ The reforms we propose in this report aim to ensure that every young person leaving the care system makes a successful transition to independence, and reaches their potential in adulthood.

Putting relationships at the heart of leaving care

When young people are close to leaving care, local authorities are required to appoint a 'personal adviser' until the age of 21 so that care leavers will always have at least one mentoring relationship in place, and a link with the local authority.¹¹

7 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table A1

8 Department for Education, *Children to stay with foster families until 21*, London: Department for Education, 2013

9 CSJ, *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, London: CSJ, 2013; CSJ, *Couldn't Care Less*, London: CSJ, 2013

10 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014

11 Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014

This system is failing. Many care leavers have either not been appointed a personal adviser or have not seen them in years: by the age of 21 about a quarter of care leavers are no longer being supported by their personal adviser.¹² The average case load of a personal adviser is 23 young people, undermining the chance they have to build a supportive relationship.¹³

Instead of introducing another professional at this point, local authorities need to build networks of support around young people before they leave the care system.

Sibling relationships

The first way they can do this is by valuing sibling relationships. Where the relationship is strong, siblings can be extremely important in providing mutual support in the process of leaving care and older siblings can take on a 'quasi-parental' role.¹⁴

However, care leavers told us about their anguish when relationships with their siblings were lost through separation in care. Last year 71 per cent of looked after children with a sibling in care were separated from a brother or sister.¹⁵ For those in residential children's homes, this was 95 per cent.¹⁶

While recognising that it may sometimes be better for siblings to be separated or split up, we heard from experts and practitioners that sibling separation is too often the result of a lack of resources or deficits in social worker training.

We therefore recommend that the Government collect data on the number of sibling separations in each local authority and the stated reason for sibling separation. This will shine a light on good and poor practice.

We also recommend that where siblings are separated, the presumption must be that meaningful sibling contact is included in care plans.

Engaging family and significant adults

The care leavers we spoke to during our research had almost always developed supportive and nurturing relationships with adults (such as teachers, youth workers, or parents of friends) during their time in care, even if they were no longer in touch. Moreover, each looked after child also has blood connections with their extended family.

In the USA, practitioners have developed methods to draw on this resource, in order to build a network of support around older young people in care. Family Finding and Engagement seeks out at least 40 adults who have a connection with the young person, including non-family members,

¹² Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1

¹³ CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p9

¹⁴ See especially Wade J, 'The ties that bind: support from birth families and substitute families for young people leaving care', *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(1), 2008, pp39–54

¹⁵ Morgan R, *Children's care monitor 2013/14: Children on the state of social care in England*, London: Ofsted, 2014, p59

¹⁶ Ibid

and family members with whom the young person may have had little or no prior contact.¹⁷ Out of these 40 there are almost always one or more adults who are reliable, genuinely concerned and able to engage with the young person: even those from the most dysfunctional of families.

Of those young people involved in the Orange County Family Finding project, 97 per cent increased family contact, and 89 per cent made life-long connections.¹⁸

We recommend similar principles are applied in England. Leaving care service staff should intensively search for adults with whom a young person has a connection; subsequent engagement could take place in the context of a Family Group Conference and commitments, such as regular contact, should be integrated into pathway plans.

Reforming leaving care services and the role of the personal adviser

We also propose significant reform to leaving care services. The role of the personal adviser, wherever possible, should be assigned to someone with whom the young person already has an established relationship. Local authority staff should work to support these individuals, and provide specialist expertise.

In Northern Ireland some young people are appointed a 'person-specific personal adviser'. Their experience has shown that the model can work well, but also that strong national leadership is needed for local inertia to be overcome.

We recommend that the Department for Education (DfE) issue new statutory guidance to prompt a change in practices; issue easy-to-use model contracts on how to hire personal advisers who are not local authority staff; and provide transitional funding to equip local authority staff for their change in role.

Extending the Staying Put principle

Staying Put was introduced so that 'those young people who remain in foster care ... experience the stability and security of family life enjoyed by their peers'.¹⁹ This is important for a cultural shift towards a presumption that care leavers will spend time in a single, stable Staying Put arrangement until they are at least 21.

However, current arrangements are not appropriate for all care leavers:

- Some care leavers have a 'survivor' mentality and want independence as soon as possible but are often highly unprepared for this new level of freedom;²⁰

17 Allen T et al, *Piecing Together The Puzzle: Tips And Techniques For Effective Discovery In Family Finding*, USA: Child Trends Research, 2011 [accessed via: www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Child_Trends-2011_12_01_RB_FamilyFindingTips.pdf (10/12/14)]

18 Children's Defense Fund, *Promising Approaches in Child Welfare: Helping Connect Children and Youth in Foster Care to Permanent Family and Relationships through Family Finding and Engagement*, USA: Children's Defense Fund, 2010

19 Department for Education, *Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2014–15*, London: House of Commons Education Committee, 2014, p1

20 Stein M, *Resilience and young people leaving care: Overcoming the odds*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005, p21

- Older children in care may reject the parenting role of their foster carer. Alternatively, their foster parent may 'opt out' of Staying Put;
- A quarter of looked after children have their final placement in residential care.²¹ These tend to be the most vulnerable: 62 per cent have 'clinically significant' mental health difficulties.²²

Encouragingly, DfE has provided funding through the Innovation Programme for a pilot to develop a model of Staying Put in residential care, but more action is required.

We recommend that local authorities work with 'good' and 'outstanding' residential children's homes and other local partners to develop their own versions of Staying Put.

Our research showed that for many care leavers, the best option is good quality semi-independent accommodation, in which they have their own room but also staff on-site to provide practical and emotional support as they transition to independent living. Yet only 12 per cent of care leavers are in semi-independent accommodation at the age of 19, a proportion which falls to six per cent for 21-year-olds.²³

We recommend that all local authorities are required to provide supported, semi-independent accommodation as an option for those over 18, as well as those aged 16–17. Statutory guidance must state that a young person should only be moved on when they feel ready.

Education, employment and training

The Government has taken important steps to improve educational outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. But there has been notably less focus on securing employment.

This is deeply concerning in the context of high unemployment for care leavers. Not only are 36 per cent of care leavers aged 19 not in education employment and training (NEET), but this figure has been persistently double the national average for the last decade.²⁴

Mentoring and early intervention

Our work has previously shown that early intervention in the form of intensive mentoring from early adolescence can significantly improve the employment prospects of disadvantaged young people.²⁵ We cited the work of ThinkForward in East London where 95 per cent of young people at risk of becoming unemployed successfully moved into post-16 education, employment and training.²⁶ Moreover, coaches provide consistency, support and high

21 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2013, Table D3

22 Berridge et al, *Living in Children's residential homes*, London: Department for Education, 2012, Table 4.15

23 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1

24 Ibid; Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2013, Table F1; Department for Education, *Children looked after by local authorities in England: year ending 31 March 2010*, London: Department for Education, 2010; Department for Education, *NEET statistics quarterly brief: January to March 2014*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1

25 CSJ, *The Journey to Work: Welfare reform in the next Parliament*, London: CSJ, 2014, Chapter 1

26 Ibid, p25

aspirations throughout the instability faced by many children in the care system, including school placement moves.

We recommend that the Government roll out a national programme of high-quality coaching to young people most at risk of being unemployed, including all children in care.

We recommend that this kind of support is enhanced through the use of psychometric tools which can identify personal strengths and weaknesses and learning styles, and help young people understand themselves better so they can make good choices about their future.

Apprenticeships: a path to work

Every local authority provides a bursary of at least £2,000 for care leavers going to university, but 64 per cent of local authorities are providing no specific, additional financial support to care leavers who take an apprenticeship.²⁷

The minimum wage for an apprenticeship is £2.73.²⁸ Low wages mean that young people leaving care are being put off from taking them up, dropping out, or suffering severe financial hardship. This is unacceptable.

We recommend local authorities properly support apprenticeships as a form of education, providing a personal adviser until the care leaver is 25, a bursary comparable to that which is provided for care leavers in university, and assistance with travel costs. DfE should show their commitment to apprenticeships by funding the first £2,000 of a bursary for care leavers, as they do for higher education.

Making the most of Higher Education

Today six or seven per cent of young care leavers go to university, compared to about one per cent a decade ago, but far below the national average of 49 per cent.^{29, 30} Greater access can partly be achieved by ensuring young people in care are inspired about university options early in secondary school, well before GCSEs.

Care leavers appear to drop out of university at an alarming rate but the vast majority of institutions do not collect data on care leaver retention, suggesting few treat it as a priority focus for action. Moreover a lack of forward-planning, combined with a 'cliff-edge' of local authority support, means that care leavers struggle when they leave university. Buttle UK's Quality Mark, held by 112 institutions, has driven the provision of better support for care leavers in higher education but this organisation can no longer continue their highly effective work in this area.

27 Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 28/04/13]. 117 local authorities responded

28 HM Government, *National Minimum Wage rates* [accessed via: www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates (07/12/14)]

29 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1; Social Exclusion Unit, *A better education for children in care*, London: Social Exclusion, 2003, p3

30 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *Participation Rates In Higher Education: Academic years 2006/2007 – 2012/2013 (Provisional)*, London: Office for National Statistics, 2014

We recommend that Action on Access be funded to continue the work spearheaded by Buttle UK's Quality Mark, in part through a grant from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), and in part through fees from participating institutions.

The role of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus (JCP)

DWP has shown significant commitment to care leavers in recent years:

- A Care Leavers Marker has been introduced to the DWP's Labour Market System;³¹
- A care leavers awareness document has been distributed to JCP advisers;³²
- Care leavers are now able access the Work Programme from 'day one' of their benefit claim;³³
- Jobcentres have been introducing procedures to allow care leavers to enrol for benefits in advance of leaving care.³⁴

However, care leavers told us they were not getting the specialist support they felt they needed, and JCP advisers told us their colleagues often lacked an adequate understanding of the vulnerability of these young people.

Worryingly, there appears to be a divide between the work of leaving care services and the work of JCP. Only six per cent of local authorities have joint working agreements with JCP regarding care leavers.³⁵ Many leaving care managers feel obliged to provide financial support to care leavers when they are sanctioned because they have no family to turn to.

We therefore recommend the rollout of a care leavers' hub model following the example of Barnet, where a JCP adviser has specialised their workload to become a care leavers coach, is based in the leaving care team rather than the jobcentre, and works alongside a specialist employment charity for care leavers.

We also recommend that the next Government ensure, wherever possible, that specialist employment charities with a proven record of helping the most vulnerable care leavers into employment are able to deliver the Work Programme (or equivalent).

Overcoming other severe challenges

It is often at points of crisis when young people most need to be able to rely on their parents. The state must therefore be no less responsive in these moments to the needs of looked after children and care leavers.

31 HM Government, *Care leaver strategy: One year on progress update*, London: HM Government, 2014, p21

32 Department for Work and Pensions, *Care Leaver Awareness* [accessed via: <http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/0e8547452436fa818115f391c9fdcd91.pdf> (07/12/14)]

33 HM Government, *Care leaver strategy: One year on progress update*, London: HM Government, 2014, p21

34 HM Government, *Care Leavers Strategy*, London: HM Government, 2013, p10

35 Catch 22, *Extended corporate parenting: Are local services good parents to care leavers?*, London: Catch 22, 2014, p11

Early parenthood

Our Freedom of Information (FOI) requests reveal that 22 per cent of female care leavers become teenage parents, about three times the national average.^{36,37} Furthermore at least one in 10 care leavers aged 16–21 who are parents have had a child taken into care in the past year.³⁸

These alarming figures strengthen the case for our other reforms, particularly those which aim to build a network of positive relationships around young people. They also highlight that a substantial minority of care leavers need their local authority to ensure they receive help to be the good parents they aspire to be.

However, local authorities appear to be failing in this duty. Only 20 per cent of local authorities have a policy specifically detailing the support they provide to care leavers who are parents.³⁹

We recommend that robust data be collected on early parenthood and children of care leavers being taken into care, and that Ofsted inspect whether local authorities have any meaningful policies to tackle these issues.

We also recommend that local authorities create formal links with voluntary sector organisations able to provide a ‘family’ environment away from the statutory services young people may be wary of, and make greater use of family fostering.⁴⁰

NHS England should make Family Nurse Partnerships the default provision for all looked after children and care leavers under the age of 21.

Vulnerable unaccompanied asylum-seeking and trafficked young people

There are currently 1,970 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are looked after in the care system.⁴¹ Many come from situations of civil instability, wars and conflicts in which they may have suffered violence first hand, or witnessed the death of family members.⁴² Studies have estimated that half of unaccompanied young people suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴³

Most vulnerable of all are young people who have been victims of modern slavery. 60 per cent of suspected child victims of trafficking go missing from care, many within 48 hours.⁴⁴ Rather

36 Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 11/11/14]. 103 local authorities responded, 93 were able to give data

37 Office for National Statistics, *Childbearing for women born in different years, England and Wales, 2013*, London: Office for National Statistics, 2014, Table 2 (note: our FOI Requests were to English local authorities)

38 Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 22/08/14]. 119 local authorities responded. 108 were able to give data

39 Ibid

40 See CSJ, *The Next Generation*, London: CSJ, 2008, especially Section 5.3

41 British Association of Adoption and Fostering, *Statistics: England* [accessed via: www.baaf.org.uk/res/statengland#uas (08/12/14)]

42 Wade J, 'Preparation and transition planning for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee young people: A review of evidence in England', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 2011, p2425

43 Ibid, p2427

44 The All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, *Report From The Joint Inquiry Into Children Who Go Missing From Care*, London: The All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, 2012, p13

than being given specialist support in such circumstances, many are put into inappropriate accommodation such as bed and breakfast, hostels and supported lodgings.⁴⁵

We recommend local authorities develop or commission specific provision for trafficked and vulnerable unaccompanied minors. This should include residential accommodation which creates a 'familial' environment for the young people, and incorporate intensive English language training and planning for the future.

Mental health problems

Half of looked after children have some level of emotional or behavioural difficulty.⁴⁶ These challenges often continue into early adulthood. Despite the difficulties of disclosing conditions that are still considered to be highly stigmatising, 37 per cent of care leavers in our survey admitted that coping with mental health problems was 'very difficult' when leaving care, and a further 22 per cent found it 'quite difficult'.⁴⁷

If vulnerable or 'hard-to-reach' young people are to access mental health services, these services need to be taken to them, rather than expecting them to come to a clinic.

We therefore recommend that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) staff should be embedded in both children's services and leaving care services.

We also recommend that CAMHS staff time be made available for short consultations, either face-to-face or on the phone, for carers and other frontline professionals who are concerned about the mental health of young people in their care.

Helping local authorities to step up to their responsibilities

Local authorities have the primary responsibility to ensure looked after children and care leavers flourish, but councillors often have little understanding of the issues these vulnerable young people face. They should have the same high expectations and aspirations for these young people as they would for their own children.

If this were happening now, then councillors would have the same level of alarm as if outcomes for looked after children and care leavers were those for their own children. For example: our FOI requests show that there were at least 4,452 cases of children missing from care for more than a day, 707 for more than a week, and 252 for more than a month last year.⁴⁸

45 Ibid, p18

46 Department for Education, *Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table 8b

47 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p8

48 This refers to children up to the age of 18 who have run away from their foster placement, have been abducted, or whose whereabouts is unknown. 'Missing' does include child abduction where a child has been abducted or forcibly removed from their place of residence. 'Missing' does not include unauthorised absence where a looked-after child's whereabouts is known or thought to be known but unconfirmed. Note that the figures are likely to be an underestimate because only 102 local authorities, representing 68 per cent of the care population, responded with data. Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 11/11/14]. 107 local authorities responded, 102 were able to give data

In fact, some local authorities are failing to make the most basic provision for children leaving care. Half of care leavers report they do not even have a pathway plan – the basic document which is necessary for young people to receive personal and financial support.⁴⁹

Our research has found that good practice in local authorities is always a product of personal commitment from local authority leaders.

To raise the profile of corporate parenting and increase understanding of the challenges care leavers face, we recommend that council members should be introduced to their role and responsibilities as corporate parents through shadowing or ‘hands-on activities’ with care leavers.

We also recommend that DfE introduce corporate parenting scorecards for every local authority that would allow councillors to identify whether they are meeting targets on a number of criteria (supplementing national performance indicators on care leavers’ education and employment participation, and accommodation). Where local authority performance is particularly weak, scorecards should drive central government intervention.

Conclusion

Family breakdown is always a tragedy, and it is unfortunate that any child must be taken into the care of the state. When this does occur, however, it is a second chance for some of our most vulnerable young people to build secure and stable relationships, and develop the skills they need to live happy and successful lives.

Today, this chance is all too often wasted because there is inadequate support to help young people make the transition from care to independence. We urge both central and local government to implement our recommendations to ensure that young people taken into care do not just survive, but go on to thrive in adulthood, and contribute to society.

⁴⁹ The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, *The Entitlements Inquiry Report with recommendations*, London: The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, 2013, p11. This is largely consistent with previous surveys, such as Morgan R, *Children’s care monitor 2011*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2011, p64

Introduction

The work of the CSJ has consistently emphasised the contribution strong families make to children's life chances and, conversely, how family breakdown is a potent driver of poverty and disadvantage.⁵⁰ In cases of severe family dysfunction, where the state has to step in, the care system must provide a vital second chance for some of the most vulnerable children in our society to experience safe, stable and nurturing relationships that are vital for their wellbeing. As they make the transition to adulthood, however, too few of these young people are escaping the cycle of disadvantage which their parents were often caught up in.

Every year nearly 10,000 children leave care in England.^{51, 52} The CSJ has spent the past year taking evidence from care leavers, and those who care for them, about the challenges they face. Far too often the narrative of their lives is one of broken relationships, unfulfilled potential and financial hardship.

- One of the most striking corollaries of family breakdown and ongoing disruption of relationships is early parenthood: our FOI requests reveal that 22 per cent of female care leavers become teenage parents.⁵³ This is about three times the national average;⁵⁴
- Educational failure leads to many children in care markedly underperforming. Only 14 per cent achieve five good A*–C GCSEs including English and Maths, in comparison to the

50 See CSJ, *Fully Committed? How a Government could reverse family breakdown*, London: CSJ, 2014

51 Social services and policy relating to children in care and care leavers are devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This report focuses primarily on leaving care in England, however many of the points made apply to other parts of the United Kingdom, especially Wales where leaving care is most similar to England.

52 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]

53 Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 11/11/14]. 103 local authorities responded, 93 were able to give data.

54 It should be noted that the national figure (eight per cent) is for England and Wales, whereas our Freedom of Information Requests were to English local authorities. Teenage conceptions in Wales have been consistently higher than in England in the last 10 years, which means it is not unlikely that the proportion of young women who become parents before their 20th birthday in England is in fact lower than eight per cent. Office for National Statistics, *Childbearing for women born in different years, England and Wales, 2013*, London: Office for National Statistics, 2014, Table 2 [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/fertility-analysis/childbearing-for-women-born-in-different-years/2013/rft-cohort-fertility-2013.xls (14/12/14)]; Office for National Statistics, *Area Based Analysis, Conceptions Deprivation Analysis Toolkit, 2009–11*, Office for National Statistics, 2014 [accessed via: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-353723 (18/12/14)]

national average of 52 per cent.⁵⁵ Only seven per cent of care leavers aged 19–21 are in higher education, in comparison to more than two fifths of young people;⁵⁶

- Too many care leavers then go on to lives of unemployment. At least 38 per cent of care leavers aged 19–21 are NEET;⁵⁷
- Poor mental health plagues care leavers. A CSJ survey suggested that 37 per cent of all care leavers found coping with mental health problems was 'very difficult' when leaving care, and a further 22 per cent found it 'quite difficult';⁵⁸
- Many young people leave care for unsettled or unsuitable accommodation, which they may not have the skills to maintain. The leaving care population represents about one per cent of young people, but 11 per cent of homeless young people are care leavers;^{59, 60}
- A disproportionate number of care leavers also end up in the criminal justice system. A quarter of the adult prison population have been in care;⁶¹
- Financial hardship can result from the difficulties of coping on a low income (with no one to help informally in the way many families do) or money mismanagement, leading to a spiral of debt. A CSJ survey found that 57 per cent of young people find managing their money and avoiding debt is difficult when leaving care.⁶²

To some degree this can be explained, though not excused, by the family environment in which these young people were living before they came into care. Looked after children tend not only to come from a background of disadvantage, but also bear the scars of past parental failings. The most common reasons for coming into care are abuse and neglect.⁶³ Half of looked after children have some level of emotional or behavioural difficulty.⁶⁴

55 Department for Education, *Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table 3 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/384783/SFR49_2014_NationalTables.xlsx (14/12/14)]; Department for Education, *Provisional GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2013 to 2014*, London: Department for Education, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/385915/SFR41_2014_NationalTables.xlsx (14/12/14)]

56 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *Participation Rates In Higher Education: Academic years 2006/2007 – 2012/2013 (Provisional)*, London: Office for National Statistics, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/347864/HEIPR_PUBLICATION_2012-13.pdf (19/12/14)]

57 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]

58 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p8

59 Proportion of young people who are care leavers based on a calculation of 19–21 year olds. Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]; Office for National Statistics, *Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Mid-2013*, Office for National Statistics, 2014 [accessed via: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-322718 (18/12/14)]

60 Homeless Link, *Young and Homeless 2014*, London: Homeless Link, 2014, p11 [accessed via: www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/201411%20-%20Young%20and%20Homeless%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf (16/12/14)]

61 Ministry of Justice, *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds Results from surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*, London: Ministry of Justice, 2014, p8 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278837/prisoners-childhood-family-backgrounds.pdf (08/12/14)]

62 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p5

63 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table E1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]

64 Department for Education, *Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table 8b [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/299801/SFR50_2013_TablesA.xlsx (03/12/14)]

However, as we argued in our interim report, *Survival of the Fittest*, the state is not doing enough to help children in care overcome these problems, and make a successful transition to adulthood.⁶⁵ The most vulnerable, in particular, are often failed by the system. This report sets out how government can fulfil its duty towards those taken into care and enable them to reach their potential as they move from care to independence.

The family, the state, and young people leaving care

Of course, the most effective way to make sure young people in our society avoid the struggles we have described is to ensure they get the love and support they need from their birth families, without the need to enter the care system in the first place. Current trends are therefore worrying: today there are 68,840 children in the care system, compared to 60,900 just five years ago.⁶⁶

We should not accept that family breakdown is an inevitable part of modern life.⁶⁷ Intensive interventions for families of children who are on the edge of care can help parents overcome personal difficulties such as addiction or domestic abuse.⁶⁸ The state therefore has an important role in enabling parents who struggle the most to provide the loving and stable environment their children need to flourish.

Where this is not possible the state itself must sometimes take on the parental role, with the direct responsibility for a child's welfare. The state become the young person's 'corporate parent'.

Government must therefore work to ensure that children in care flourish and go on to outcomes which any parent would want for their child. The primary way this is achieved is by placing young people with 'substitute families' where they can experience the stability, nurture and long-term support most receive from their birth parents and close relatives.

Where appropriate, this can be best achieved through adoption, providing not just a substitute family for childhood, but a new one that will be there throughout life. This Government has reformed the adoption process to ensure that this is the case for as many children as possible.⁶⁹ Between 2007 and 2012 the number of adoptions ranged from 3100 to 3470 a year; last year 5050 children were adopted.⁷⁰

65 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014

66 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table A1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]; Department for Education, *Children looked after by local authorities in England: year ending 31 March 2010*, London: Department for Education, 2010, Table A1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/218975/sfr27-2010v2.xls (03/12/14)]

67 CSJ, *Fully Committed? How a Government could reverse family breakdown*, London: CSJ, 2014

68 *Ibid*, Chapter 7

69 Department for Education, *Improving the adoption system and services for looked-after children*, London: Department for Education, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/policies/improving-the-adoption-system-and-services-for-looked-after-children (03/12/14)]

70 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table E1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]; Department for Education, *Children looked after by local authorities in England: year ending 31 March 2010*, London: Department for Education, 2010, Table E1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/218975/sfr27-2010v2.xls (03/12/14)]

However, at current rates, adoption is not going to be the solution for the majority of older children in care. Last year, more than half of children in the care system (39,600) were aged over 10 years old.⁷¹ A mere 0.2 per cent of this group, 70 young people, were adopted, in comparison to 17 per cent of younger looked after children.⁷²

For most of this older age group, a loving family environment will be best provided by a stable foster placement. In 2014 the Government introduced Staying Put arrangements so that, with £40 million funding from DfE, local authorities now have a duty to enable care leavers to remain with their foster carers until the age of 21 if they so choose.⁷³ This reform, which the CSJ recommended in our report *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, is an important step towards our long-term ambition that young people should be supported by the care system until the age of 25.^{74, 75}

Nevertheless, this report argues that for the state to fulfil its duty towards all young people taken into care and ensure they go on to contribute to society and lead fulfilling lives, significant additional support is needed.

There are several reasons why this is the case.

First, it is an unfortunate truth that failings in the care system sometimes prevent young people from building up the skills, the resilience and the support networks needed for a successful transition to independence. Two of the most pernicious problems, which we explored in *Survival of the Fittest*, are frequent placement moves and out of area placements.⁷⁶ Both have the potential to rip children from their social networks, destabilise their schooling and create a sense of isolation and alienation. In this report, we only discuss in-care reforms when these are particularly pertinent to leaving care provision, but it also has to be recognised that the need for some of our proposals would be lessened if the care system was improved.

Second, a 'substitute family' placement is not appropriate for some young people in the care system, and others will not want that kind of support into adulthood. Therefore, the needs of some children are best met by a residential care placement. Others, particularly older children in care, may reject the parenting role of their foster carer as they may view the relationship as 'disloyal' to their birth families. Still others simply crave the independence they associate with moving on from care, without fully realising the challenges that this will bring.⁷⁷

71 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table E1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]

72 Ibid

73 Department for Education, *Children to stay with foster families until 21*, London: Department for Education, 2013 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/news/children-to-stay-with-foster-families-until-21 (03/12/14)]

74 CSJ, *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, London: CSJ, 2013, Section 2.2

75 CSJ, *Couldn't care less*, London: CSJ, 2008, Chapter 6

76 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving outcomes for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, Section 4.3.1

77 See Section 2.2

For these young people, Staying Put in foster care is simply not feasible. Yet they are likely to be the most vulnerable. Those children placed in residential children's homes rather than foster care tend to have the greatest needs of all – 62 per cent have 'clinically significant' mental health difficulties.⁷⁸ Other solutions are needed for these young people to ensure they have strong relationships in place to help them make their way in the world, and to make sure they are only moved to full independence when they are ready.

Third, early adulthood itself poses its own challenges. For many young people, the transition to adulthood is a fraught and difficult process. Along with practical challenges, such as finding a job and managing bills, there are significant emotional challenges, and the need to develop an adult sense of identity.⁷⁹

Parents play a crucial role in helping young people make this transition. This means that specific government interventions will be necessary if care leavers are to have the quality of support which most young people can expect from their birth parents. This is acknowledged by ministers:

*'Our ambition is to give care leavers the same level of care and support that other young people receive from their parents.'*⁸⁰

Edward Timpson MP, Children's Minister

In our conversations with care leavers, one of the most consistent messages was that they wanted help from their corporate parent to find a job. Young people realise the importance of work in the transition to independence; it brings stability, financial security, and a sense of dignity. However care leavers typically face greater hurdles than most young people to find employment, and lack the resources which many parents provide for their children to help them get started.

Improving outcomes for care leavers

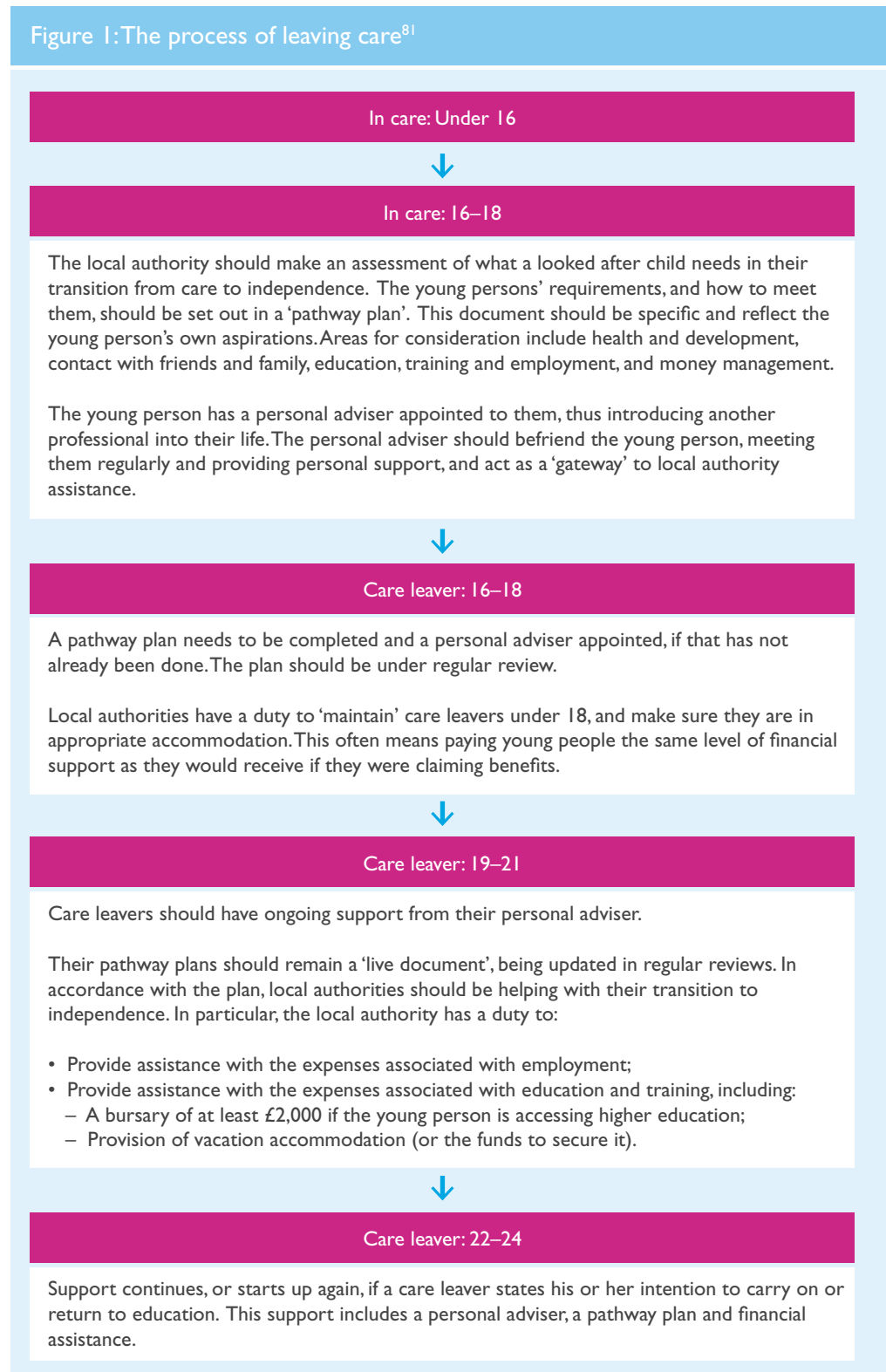
Currently, young people leaving care between the ages of 16 and 25 should go through different stages of planning and preparation for independence, and should receive financial and personal support after leaving care.

78 Berridge et al, *Living in Children's residential homes*, London: Department for Education, 2012, Table 4.15 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184079/DFE-RR201.pdf (10/12/14)]

79 Apter T, *The Myth of Maturity*, New York: WW Norton and Co, 2002

80 HM Government, *Care leaver strategy: One year on progress update*, London: HM Government, 2014, p3 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/368235/Care_Leavers_Strategy_update.pdf (03/12/14)]

Figure 1: The process of leaving care⁸¹



81 Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361534/CA1989_The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_V3_0610.pdf (03/12/14)]

In the chapters that follow, we argue that this system of support is often ineffective or insufficient, and major reforms are needed if central and local government are to be effective in meeting the needs of young people in their transition to independence.

At the moment the system fails to prioritise relational quality and stability in care leavers' lives. Rather than introducing a new professional into a young person's life just before they leave care, the priority should be to build networks of support around looked after children, and ensure that they continue into early adulthood.

Moreover, young people are not being provided with the stability of accommodation that many benefit from by living with their parents as they make the transition to independent living. The Staying Put principle may currently work well for some of those in foster care, but, as we have argued elsewhere, it must be expanded to ensure all young people have the chance to live in supported accommodation until they are at least 21.⁸² As stated earlier, it is our view that the long term ambition must be to support care leavers until they are 25.⁸³

Although the aim to encourage young people to access higher education is admirable, it is vital that this is closely connected to what must be the long-term goal for young people: to ensure they achieve fulfilling employment. We make recommendations to both central and local government on how the barriers to employment for care leavers can be broken down, helping these young people embark upon and build the careers to which their talents are best suited.

Furthermore, care leavers may face specific challenges which require specialist interventions. It is at a point of crisis, such as early and unplanned pregnancy, that young people most rely on their parents – the corporate parent must be no less responsive in these moments. We recommend some effective ways in which government can so act.

Finally, we emphasise the importance of local authority leadership in taking on the role of corporate parents. We outline ways in which greater commitment and transparency about outcomes would do much to improve the lives of care leavers.

This programme of reform has the potential to help give some of the most vulnerable young people in our country a better, more stable start to adult life. With the numbers of those in care continuing to rise, the need for action is urgent.

82 CSJ, *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, London: CSJ, 2013

83 CSJ, *Couldn't care less*, London: CSJ, 2008, Chapter 6

chapter one

Putting relationships at the heart of leaving care

Strong relationships are of fundamental importance for any young person in their transition to adulthood. Without having someone who will provide unconditional love and acceptance, the challenges that the world present can seem insurmountable. Parental figures, in particular, provide security in the context of great uncertainty and shifting identities.⁸⁴

Furthermore, as a young person makes their way in the adult world, they will often encounter problems of which they have no prior experience. Young people need someone to turn to, for example, if they have trouble understanding bills. This is particularly important for care leavers who may not have developed some of the basic skills many pick up in the family home – such as cooking and cleaning.⁸⁵

To date, the Government has taken two different approaches to ensure relationships are in place for care leavers. The first is to appoint a 'personal adviser', introducing another professional into the young person's life. The second is to make the most of the quasi-familial relationships young people have already formed with their foster carers. This is achieved through the Staying Put arrangements, which enable relationship continuity in a family environment.

As we set out below, the first approach is failing. However, there is considerable potential in the second. If local authorities value, extend and support the relationship networks young people have, they can maximise the benefit of pre-existing connections of trust and affection – with teachers, aunts, or youth workers for example – to ensure all care leavers have the personal support they need.

84 See Apter T, *The Myth of Maturity*, New York: WW Norton and Co, 2002

85 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving outcomes for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p24

1.1 Leaving care services and the role of the Personal Adviser

Since the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 local authorities have been required to assign a personal adviser to those making the transition from care.⁸⁶ They are supposed to 'act as the focal point to ensure that care leavers are provided with the right kind of personal support'.⁸⁷ They should be a mentor, advocate and friend. They also act as a link between the care leaver and the local authority, ensuring that the young person gets appropriate practical support from their corporate parent.

It is important to emphasise that the personal adviser is the *only* individual local authorities have a duty to provide to support care leavers (who are not necessarily assigned a social worker). It is therefore crucial that the role is effective.

Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010⁸⁸

A personal adviser has the following functions in relation to the relevant child or former relevant child for whom they are appointed:⁸⁹

- (a) to provide advice (including practical advice) and support;
- (b) where applicable, to participate in the assessment and the preparation of the pathway plan;
- (c) to participate in reviews of the pathway plan;
- (d) to liaise with the responsible authority in the implementation of the pathway plan;
- (e) to co-ordinate the provision of services, and to take reasonable steps to ensure that the child makes use of such services and that they are appropriate to the child's need;
- (f) to remain informed about the relevant child's or former relevant child's progress and wellbeing; and
- (g) to keep a written record of contacts with, and of services provided to, the relevant or former relevant child.

Most local authorities have implemented the Act by setting up leaving care services, separate from mainstream children's services, and hiring staff specifically to carry out this personal adviser role. Typically, at some point before leaving care, a looked after child will be introduced to a new member of staff (their personal adviser), with the intention that they will become a constant individual in that young person's life until the age of 21 (or beyond).

86 Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361534/CA1989_The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_V3_0610.pdf (03/12/14)]

87 *Ibid*, p26

88 *Ibid*, p116

89 'Relevant children' are care leavers age 16–17; 'former relevant children' are those aged over 18

Whatever the good intentions, however, there are deep flaws in the system as it stands. Our FOI requests have revealed that:

- The average caseload of a personal adviser is 23 young people, going as high as 49 in some local authorities;⁹⁰
- 46 per cent of local authorities are appointing a personal adviser (such as a social worker) for the ages 16–17, and then appointing a new one when the young person turns 18 (or shortly beforehand).⁹¹ We heard that this is often done for financial reasons, and it undermines any chance of the personal adviser building a long-term relationship before young people leave care;
- Some local authorities have extreme problems with staff retention:⁹²
 - In Northamptonshire, 13 out of 14 personal advisers left in the course of a year;
 - In Ealing, nine out of nine personal advisers left within a year;
 - In Hull, 11 left their job, six because of redundancy, meaning that the number of personal advisers was reduced from 18 to just seven. About 200 young people leave care in Hull every year.⁹³

We heard from care leavers about how these problems can turn the role designed to be a relationship into a faceless function:

'I've started calling them all Sally, I've had so many. Sally was the only one I liked.'

'What do I care about what you [personal adviser] think of me if I see you every six weeks for an hour and [you] just tick boxes.'

*'I don't have a relationship with mine which is hard as I only have contact with her when I need financial help.'*⁹⁴

Others told us about how their personal advisers simply failed to stay in touch at all.

'I didn't have contact with my personal adviser for three years – one day I bumped into her at social services. She didn't even recognise me.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

Some of these problems are perhaps unsurprising considering the status of leaving care services, and the staff that work in them, in many local authorities. The CSJ heard that leaving care services have become silo-ed teams, often with poor progression, and little respect from children's services. The problem is accentuated by the fact that personal advisers are often unqualified.

90 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving outcomes for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p57

91 Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 11/02/14]. 104 local authorities responded

92 Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 28/04/13]. 117 local authorities responded

93 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2013, Table LAF1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/264464/SFR36_2013_LATables.xlsx (03/12/14)]

94 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving outcomes for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, pp56–57

'There are real problems with the personal adviser role as it stands. There is simply no training or professional development built in. The status of leaving care services in the wider local authority suffers as a result.'

Leaving care service manager, in evidence to the CSJ

All these problems aside, there is a more fundamental flaw in the current design of leaving care support: those most vulnerable are often the most alienated from social services, and distrustful of the local authority.

'A minority of care leavers will have had such poor experiences of care that they are unlikely to engage positively with local authority staff. For this group, the conventional support being provided by leaving care professionals is unlikely to be appropriate. But it is important that there is somebody who is able to support them.'

Professor Mike Stein, Social Policy Research Unit, York University, in evidence to the CSJ

As many as 11 per cent of care leavers aged 19, and 24 per cent of those aged 21, are not in meaningful contact with their local authority or are no longer receiving services - by which we can deduce they are not in touch with their personal adviser.⁹⁵ This is unlikely to represent success: those 'doing well' should still be in touch with the local authority for education, training and employment purposes. Rather, it suggests that many personal advisers are failing to build successful long-term relationships with young people leaving care.

1.2 The failure to value the family

This is all the more problematic because social workers and leaving care professionals are not recognising the role of family members, with whom care leavers will often have a lifelong bond.

Many children in care do have positive relationships with extended family members and, even where relationships have been strained or lost in the past, the process of leaving care can provide the opportunity for reassessment.⁹⁶ We heard from young people about how useful these people can be as someone to turn to for advice and support.

*'My gran is good to me. I can go to her house when I need to eat something or talk to someone.'*⁹⁷

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

Even where they may not be able to provide much practical help, young people still value birth family members, and see them as central to their identity. As one care leaver told us:

95 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]

96 Wade J, 'The ties that bind: support from birth families and substitute families for young people leaving care', *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(1), 2008, pp39-54; Marsh P and Peel M, *Leaving Care In Partnership: Family Involvement with Care Leavers*, London: The Stationary Office, 1999, p56

97 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p50

'The thing about being in care is it doesn't matter even if you have the greatest [foster] family in the world, if you don't know where you're from, who you are, you always have that sense of loneliness and being on your own ... you need to be able to feel that you belong and that people are there for you.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

Statutory guidance recognises the importance of family networks for those making the transition to independence. Regulations require pathway planning to consider 'the support to be provided to enable the child or young person to develop and sustain appropriate family and social relationships'.⁹⁸ Moreover guidance states that 'relevant members of [care leavers'] wider family network' must be involved in the pathway planning process.⁹⁹

The CSJ heard that this was not being done adequately.

'How am I meant to stay in contact with my sister? We've got different social workers [in different areas of the country] ... how are we going to be able to afford to travel ... there's nothing about that in the pathway plan.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

As one expert explained to the CSJ, the issue is not prioritised.

'Far too little is being done to involve extended families in pathway planning. Often these relationships are seen to be of secondary importance, with issues like financial and educational support the priority. But in fact this is counterproductive because extended family members can themselves provide practical support, such as accommodation, as well as the constant relationships needed to make a successful transition from care.'

Professor Mike Stein, Social Policy Research Unit, York University, in evidence to the CSJ

In one in-depth study of nine local authorities, scrutiny of care records revealed that over two thirds of pathway plans failed to record any information on 'needs in relation to identity; support from birth family cares or the responsible authority; and family and environmental factors'.¹⁰⁰ Less than a third of young people reported that family members were involved in discussions about their pathway plans.¹⁰¹ In fact, another study found that more than three fifths of social workers and personal advisers could not even correctly identify the key kin of young people leaving care.¹⁰²

98 Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014, p118 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/342289/CA1989_Transitions_guidance_FINAL_08-08-2014.pdf (30/11/14)]

99 Ibid, p21

100 In fact, seven of these nine were 'Right2BeCared4' pilot authorities, explicitly designed to improve practice and empower young people in the leaving care process. Munro E R et al, *Evaluation of the Right2BeCared4 Pilots: Final report*, London: Department for Education, 2011, p14 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182483/DFE-RR106.pdf (30/11/14)]

101 Munro E R et al, *Evaluation of the Right2BeCared4 Pilots: Final report*, London: Department for Education, 2011, p63 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182483/DFE-RR106.pdf (30/11/14)]

102 Wade J, 'The ties that bind: support from birth families and substitute families for young people leaving care', *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(1), 2008, p43; see also Action for Children, *Too much, too young*, London: Action for Children, 2014 [accessed via: www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/9663598/too-much-too-young-web.pdf (07/12/14)]

Clearly, the importance of family relationships for looked after children and care leavers is severely under-appreciated.

1.3 Sibling relationships

One of our greatest concerns is that the bonds between siblings in care, which can lead to greatly valued lifelong relationships, are being broken.

Coming into care marks a cut-off point with a person's past life, and has the potential to cause a major disruption to social networks. A third of looked after children have no contact with any of the friends they had before coming into care.¹⁰³ Co-placement can therefore allow continuity of identity and greater security in a new, initially alien, environment.¹⁰⁴ As one person faced with separation from his sister told us:

'We didn't want to lose the little bit of family we had.'

Where sibling bonds are maintained, this role can continue into adulthood. Siblings are therefore a major source of support at the point of leaving care. One study found that a quarter of young people leaving care identified their sibling as their closest adult family member.¹⁰⁵ Where these older siblings were living independently or had their own families, they might take on a 'quasi-parental role', providing advice, guidance and practical support.¹⁰⁶

'My brother was, and still is, so important to me. We went through everything together – moving to the UK, the abuse, the care system. He has always been the one constant.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

'I see my sister every weekend... she explains what I can do to make [life] better for myself.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

Government guidance recognises the benefits of co-placement.

*'Being able to live with brothers and sisters where they are also looked after is an important protective factor for many looked after children. Positive sibling relationships provide support both in childhood and adulthood and can be particularly valuable during changes in a young person's life, such as leaving care.'*¹⁰⁷

103 Morgan R, *Keeping in Touch: A report of children's experience by the Children's Rights Director for England*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2009, p20 [accessed via: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/keeping-touch (29/11/14)]

104 Parker E S, *The meaning and significance of sibling and peer relationships for young people looked after on behalf of local authorities*, unpublished doctoral thesis, 2010 [accessed via: http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/3920/1/WRAP_THESIS_Parker_2010.pdf (29/11/14)]

105 Wade J, 'The ties that bind: support from birth families and substitute families for young people leaving care', *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(1), p45

106 Ibid

107 Department for Education, *Looked-after children: contact with siblings, Update to 'The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 2: care planning, placement and case review'*, London: Department for Education, 2014, p43 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/279693/Looked_after_children_contact_with_siblings.pdf (29/11/14)]



Indeed, it should be noted that, far from being detrimental to in-care experience, research suggests that co-placement is often associated with better outcomes around mental health, socialisation, academic performance and placement stability.¹⁰⁸

Yet, in practice, there are very high levels of sibling separation. According to a survey, last year 71 per cent of looked after children with a sibling in care were separated from a brother or sister.¹⁰⁹ For those in children's homes, this was 95 per cent.¹¹⁰

The reasons for this are complex:¹¹¹

- Sometimes separation is in the children's best interests, for example where the sibling relationship is abusive;
- The pressure of timescales can mean that there is a lack of time for social workers to make a proper assessment;
- The shortfall of foster carers able or willing to take on large sibling groups, or children's homes big enough to accommodate them, means that co-placement of large sibling groups is often not possible;
- Reluctance on the part of social workers to place siblings together is sometimes due to insufficient knowledge and confidence.

108 Washington K, 'Research Review: Sibling placement in foster care: a review of the evidence', *Child and Family Social Work*, 12, 2007, pp426–433; Hegar R L and Rosenthal J A, 'Foster children placed with or separated from siblings: Outcomes based on a national sample', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 2011, pp1245–1253; Rock S et al, 'Understanding Foster Placement Instability for Looked After Children: A Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence', *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(4), 2013, pp1–27

109 Morgan R, *Children's care monitor 2013/14: Children on the state of social care in England*, London: Ofsted, 2014, p59 [accessed via: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/force_download.php?fp=%2Fclient_assets%2Fcp%2Fpublication%2F803%2FChildrens_care_monitor_201314.pdf (29/11/14)]

110 Ibid

111 Roundtable of legal, social care and mental health service professionals hosted by John Hemming MP, Siblings Together and the CSJ, 17 March 2014

'Social workers find themselves between a rock and a hard place. They want to work to keep siblings together where appropriate, but they face numerous challenges due to time scales, limited resources to work therapeutically, and the often limited availability of placements for sibling groups. Some feel unprepared by their training to confidently make such trying recommendations. Facing such challenges, separation can seem to be the only option.'

Berni Stringer, Consultant, British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), in evidence to the CSJ

One solution is to equip social workers better to make the correct decisions. In response to this need, BAAF are developing an MSc Advancing Professional Practice (Social Work Family Placements) with Sheffield Hallam University which will include sibling assessments in the Assessment, Judgement and Decision Making module.

'It's an important step forward. If social workers are not trained to make these difficult assessments, how can they be expected to make the right recommendations?'

Kanu Patel, Training Services Development Manager, BAAF, in evidence to the CSJ

In situations where siblings are assessed to have a positive relationship, but no appropriate accommodation is available, more could be done to enable foster carers to provide for them. In our 2008 report, *Couldn't Care Less*, the CSJ suggested that capacity in the care system could be increased by providing grants to trusted foster carers to make home improvements (such as a loft conversion).¹¹² This would be particularly beneficial in a context where sibling groups are being split up simply because local foster carers do not have enough bedrooms to accommodate them.

One or both of these approaches may be appropriate in different areas: there will be different reasons for sibling separation in different local authorities, which will require tailored solutions. Of course, it may also be that some local authorities are separating relatively few children and only where it is genuinely in their best interests.

What is required is clarity on the issue. We need proper data to highlight good and poor practice, and allow local authorities to identify where problems lie.

We recommend that the Government collect data on sibling separation. Both the number of separations and the stated reason for sibling separation should be published for each local authority.

To reiterate: to ensure that positive relationships are maintained during care, and therefore become a source of support during the transition from care, we should be aiming to place siblings together in care as far as possible. In light of the substantial challenges involved in reversing current trends, however, it is also important to look at the quality of contact between siblings when they are separated in care.

Currently, when siblings are placed apart there is no explicit legal duty to maintain contact between them (unlike contact with parents).¹¹³ As a result, half of children in care with siblings

¹¹² CSJ, *Couldn't Care Less*, London: CSJ, 2008, p84

¹¹³ Children Act 1989, Schedule 2, Paragraph 15 [accessed via: [\(30/11/14\)](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/schedule/2)]

have contact with them less than once a month, and 12 per cent have no contact with them at all.¹¹⁴

It is a problem that continues after one sibling has left care, preventing care leavers from being able to provide advice and support to their younger brothers and sisters.

'It's so frustrating: my little sister is getting into trouble and she needs someone who's been through it, social services can't do that ... But they won't let me see her.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

Where contact between siblings does take place, it is often of poor quality. It can take up to an hour for children to 'settle' into a situation, by which point half the session time has expired. Contact can be in the presence of a parent, meaning siblings fight for parental attention. And most contact takes place in McDonald's or designated contact centres.¹¹⁵

'Young people report that contact centres are unnatural settings in which they find it hard to spend meaningful time together. It is important to listen to young people's views about what they are experiencing and explore what would be meaningful to them to ensure that the bonds between siblings are not only maintained but strengthened.'

Dr Mariya Ali, Research and Development, Shaftesbury Young People

Local authorities need to be thinking about alternative ways to ensure that there is a more natural form of contact between separated siblings. Good practice in the charitable sector shows how this can be done.

Good practice: Siblings Together

Siblings Together is a charity which runs activity camps of one week's duration for children who have been separated in foster care. As well as simply allowing relationships to be built up in a less artificial environment than a contact centre, the aim is to create memorable and meaningful experiences which reinforce the solidarity and shared identity of sibling groups.

Last year's camp saw participation from 18 different local authorities. This in itself is significant: sometimes children separated in care are not able to have contact because they are placed in different local authorities, making travel and coordination extremely difficult.

The work of Siblings Together is currently undergoing a rigorous evaluation by the REES (Research in Fostering and Education) Centre at the University of Oxford. In the meantime, the testimony of children bear witness to the impact on their lives:

'We got to know each other again, and better.'

'I felt at home with my sisters and friends.'

'Being at this camp has changed my life a lot.'

¹¹⁴ Morgan R, *Keeping in Touch: A report of children's experience by the Children's Rights Director for England*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2009, p16 [accessed via: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/keeping-touch (29/11/14)]

¹¹⁵ Evidence submitted by Shaftesbury Young People

Whether or not co-placement takes place, it is clear that meaningful contact is needed if siblings are to have the strength and depth of relationship which can help them to support one another in the challenging transition from care.

We recommend that there be a presumption not only that contact for separated siblings is included in care plans, but also that it should take place for extended periods of time and in an environment that resembles family life as closely as possible.

1.4 Finding and engaging significant adults

The personal adviser model we described above implicitly works upon the assumption that there are no adults who could fulfil the role of reliable mentor in care leaver's lives; hence a new professional has to be introduced.

This is simply not true. Almost without exception, the care leavers we spoke to for this review had made their own connections of trust and affection with adults during their time in care, even if they were no longer in touch. Connections might be with someone like a teacher; a former carer; the parent of a friend, or a youth worker. Studies have shown that such connections can be so strong that children leaving care actually regard these adults as family.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, even when the immediate family of a looked after child appears dysfunctional, there may be some in the extended family network who are able provide the consistent support which adolescents need.

These two points have been recognised in the USA, where a radically different model has been developed to ensure lifelong relational support is in place for older looked after children as they leave the care system.

Family Finding and Engagement in the USA

The Family Finding and Engagement model was originally designed to challenge the myth that prevails in England: that older children in care lack connections with reliable adults, so professionals are best placed to provide a supportive role.

In essence, the model provides techniques for professionals to find at least 40 family members and other adults who care about a looked after child, particularly older children in care. Family members include those with whom the young person may have lost contact, and even those whom they have never met. Other adults may include friends, neighbours, mentors, school teachers, coaches, religious leaders, or youth group leaders.

The 'family finder' then tries to engage those individuals they consider reliable and authentic to create a supportive network for the looked after child and to establish 'emotional permanency' for the

¹¹⁶ Wade J, 'The ties that bind: support from birth families and substitute families for young people leaving care', *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(1), 2008, pp39-54; Marsh P and Peel M, *Leaving Care In Partnership: Family Involvement with Care Leavers*, London: The Stationary Office, 1999

young person: long-term unconditional love and commitment. A secondary goal is sometimes 'legal permanency' (adoption, guardianship and reunification).¹¹⁷

Genuine and meaningful participation from social services is necessary if the model is to be successful. The programme is not a 'magic bullet', but it has had extraordinary success in providing the resources to build a network of support around a young person, where before there may not have been any.

Indeed, some of the results have been highly impressive:¹¹⁸

- The Children's Home Society of North Carolina was only able to find an average of nine family members known for each child before implementation of Family Finding and Engagement; after implementation, staff were able to find an average of 53 family members for each child. At the conclusion of family finding services, each child typically had eight family members committed to maintaining ongoing relationships;
- The California Permanency Youth Project worked with 750 young people over seven years and found permanent connections for over 70 percent of the young people in the project;
- Of the young people involved in the Orange County Family Finding project, 97 per cent increased family contact, and 89 per cent made life-long connections.

As a result of the success of the model, in 2008 President Bush made the diligent searching and notification of relatives component of Family Finding a nationwide requirement. This requirement was expanded by the Obama administration.¹¹⁹

There is also increasing international interest in this approach. Family Finding and Engagement has now been implemented in a number of Canadian provinces and will be introduced in Australia in July 2015.¹²⁰

Fundamentally, the model turns the usual approach of social services and leaving care teams on its head. As already stated, non-professional networks of support are currently so undervalued that they are frequently not even considered in pathway planning. In Family Finding, it is recognised (and proven) that even young people from the most dysfunctional families are likely to have someone in the network of 40 significant adults identified who will be able to support them into the future.

We believe that establishing a model in England along similar lines has the potential to dramatically improve the lives of many of our most vulnerable care leavers.

¹¹⁷ Recent studies have cast some doubt on how useful the model is for legal permanency in its current form. See Malm K et al, *Family Finding for Children and Families New to Out-of-Home Care: A Rigorous Evaluation of Family Finding in San Francisco, USA*: Child Trends, 2013 [accessed via: http://cssrberkeley.edu/cwscmsreports/LatinoPracticeAdvisory/PRACTICE_EB_Child_Welfare_Practice_Models/Family%20Finding/Malm%202013.pdf (07/12/14)]. Arguably this is due to a failure in practice. The founder of the Family Finding Model, Kevin Campbell, recently made some revisions to methodological guidance to overcome these and other shortcomings. However, the record of the model to establish or renew connections between older children in care with significant adults, potentially creating lifelong connections, is well proven; moreover the doubts over legal permanency are of little relevance to this review of leaving care.

¹¹⁸ Children's Defense Fund, *Promising Approaches in Child Welfare: Helping Connect Children and Youth in Foster Care to Permanent Family and Relationships through Family Finding and Engagement*, USA: Children's Defense Fund, 2010 [accessed via: www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/promising-approaches.pdf (07/12/14)]

¹¹⁹ Evidence submitted to the CSJ by Kevin Campbell

¹²⁰ Ibid



Leaving care service staff (in their new role which we set out in section 1.5) should become 'family finders' and, where necessary, should intensively search for at least 40 significant individuals in the lives of older children in care. Once reliable and trustworthy individuals have been found, they should be brought together with the young person to build a network of support and plan for the future. This could be done in the context of an adapted Family Group Conference where this practice is already embedded in local authorities.

Family group conferencing in England and Wales

Family group conferences are a proven and effective way of identifying and enabling family members to come forward as potential carers. They are family-led decision making meetings involving all those who are significant in the child's life; the child is supported to be involved in the meeting, with an advocate provided for them where appropriate.

Parents, relatives and friends develop a plan for the child's care, following significant earlier preparation by an independent co-coordinator who explores the issues with each person attending the meeting. The family plan addresses child welfare concerns. The family plan is approved by the local authority providing it satisfactorily addresses the welfare and protection concerns.

Three quarters of local authorities in England and Wales currently run or commission family group conferences for children in their area or are planning to do so.¹²¹

Leaving care staff would then partner with the network of support (one of whom may become the young person's personal adviser, as set out in section 1.5 below). Commitments and arrangements, and the enabling support the local authority would provide, should become an integral part of the pathway plan.

¹²¹ Family Rights Group, *Family Group Conferences* [accessed via: www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-group-conferences (30/11/14)]

'The CSJ has rightly highlighted the central importance of focussing on past and current key relationships in the young person's life and their potential to create a framework to enable the transition into adult life. Experience in the USA has established the very real potential for such an approach and the enormous benefits that this can bring to the security and welfare of this vulnerable group. The recommendation deserves our urgent attention and indeed the resources and focus to implement such an approach.'

British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)

We recommend that local authorities intensively seek out, and engage, family members and significant adults in the lives of older children in care, using a similar model to Family Finding and Engagement. This could be piloted with support from DfE's Innovation Fund.

1.5 Reforming leaving care services and the role of the personal adviser

To reiterate, the purpose of the personal adviser is twofold: to provide personal support, and to be a 'gateway' to leaving care service provision from the local authority.

There is no reason why at least part of this function cannot be delegated to any appropriate individual. Indeed, statutory guidance recognises that there are 'circumstances where a professional's relationship with an individual young person may mean they will be best placed to act as their personal adviser, even though they may not possess the usual skill-set', such as a foster carer.¹²²

Edward Timpson MP, Minister for Children and Families, recently stated that the personal adviser needs to be a flexible role:

*'I have given quite some thought to how we can use the role of the personal adviser in the child's life to be able to fulfil it to the best of their ability. It may not be a personal adviser who works for the local authority, but someone who works in the children's home, or it may be their foster carer.'*¹²³

Responding to this and other evidence, the House of Commons Education Select Committee has recommended that DfE clarify and strengthen statutory guidance to the effect that local authorities must consider, as a first option, appointing an existing carer or other professional with whom a young person has an established relationship as a personal adviser, and involve the young person in this decision.¹²⁴

¹²² Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014, p90 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361534/CA1989_The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_V3_0610.pdf (03/12/14)]

¹²³ House of Commons Education Committee, *Oral evidence: 16+ Care Options, HC 1033 Wednesday 14 May 2014*, London: House of Commons Education Committee, 2014, p4 [accessed via: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/education-committee/16-plus-care-options/oral/9572.pdf> (07/12/14)]

¹²⁴ House of Commons Education Committee, *Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options*, London: House of Commons Education Committee, 2014, p17 [accessed via: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/259/259.pdf (07/12/14)]

We agree with this principle. Appointing someone who already has a strong relationship with a young person as their personal adviser would enable greater continuity in the transition from care.

On the other hand, it must be recognised that the problems care leavers face can be more complex than many appropriate adults would be able to handle on their own. Aside from providing the role of the personal adviser, the value of leaving care teams is that they are a reservoir of experience, and can also provide specialist support.

Good practice: Tower Hamlets

Tower Hamlets employs a number of specialist personal advisers who are able to help care leavers with particular challenges they might face.

Two workers deal with education, training and employment issues, working alongside other personal advisers, as well as having a caseload of 16 young people who are attending university and also with those who are in danger of becoming NEET. They work to develop links with employers and further and higher education providers, widening opportunities and working to instil ambition.

A housing worker ensures that care leavers have the appropriate accommodation they need. They work through the options available to young people as they approach their eighteenth birthday, and have close links with the local authority housing department.

A UASC (unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) personal adviser helps young people making their asylum claims, and supports them to plan for the future in the context of uncertainty.

A wellbeing personal adviser has a caseload specially picked from those identified as most at risk from poor mental health, many of whom refuse formal therapy or counselling. The adviser seeks to promote positive mental health through informal means, such as horticultural work with the young people. They are also on hand to give other personal advisers support as and when issues arise with their care leavers.

All of these personal advisers have stayed in their posts for a number of years.

Clearly, these advantages would be lost by abolishing the separate function of leaving care teams. There therefore needs to be a core group of professionals based in leaving care services to help personal advisers (and other networks of support, if the model in section 1.4 is implemented). Moreover, there is no reason why they have to be silo-ed in leaving care services: a leaving care service worker might spend half of their time working in children's services or housing services, for example.

1.5.1 Ensuring reform happens

The DfE have stated that they do not need to act to reform the role of the personal adviser because statutory guidance already allows flexibility in the role.¹²⁵ Lessons learned from the opportunities and challenges that accompanied the adoption of a more flexible personal adviser role in Northern Ireland challenge this assertion.

Northern Ireland and person-specific personal advisers (PSPAs)

Northern Ireland has a separate system of children's services from England, Wales and Scotland. This includes a different legislative framework, and responsibility for provision lies with Health and Social Care Trusts rather than local authorities.

Although legislation and guidance in Northern Ireland tends to follow that of England and Wales, regulations place a stronger emphasis on young people being able to choose their own personal adviser:

*'It may also be the case that a young person asks that a person who is already providing him or her with support ... These requests should always be considered seriously and the young person's wishes accommodated, where practicable.'*¹²⁶

This has led to the introduction of detailed guidance on how to employ 'person-specific personal advisers' (PSPAs), alongside mainstream personal advisers. We heard about a huge range of individuals being employed as PSPAs, including residential workers, siblings, independent advocates, classroom assistants and youth workers.

However, we also heard about significant challenges to implementation. There has been considerable resistance from Human Resources in the Trusts, who are hesitant about creating tailored contracts for each PSPA. The PSPA requires management from coordinators, and some Trusts have lost that role. As a result only two Trusts currently utilise the PSPA function.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust, however, successfully implemented protocols and practices for the hiring of PSPAs. This included early identification of those care leavers who they thought would most benefit, and encouraging them to nominate an appropriate individual. Once nominated, the potential PSPA would undergo an informal panel assessment – very rarely has anyone been turned down. If cleared, they receive training, including in Health and Safety.

Paulene Burns, from the Western Trust, emphasised the importance of flexibility.

'It's crucial to work with whoever is most appropriate for the young person. Sometimes, they are a professional who is able to do a lot, including the writing of the pathway plan. Other times that sort of thing has to be taken on by the leaving care team.'

Paulene Burns, Senior Practitioner, Therapeutic Needs, Western Health and Social Care Trust

While retaining specialist staff, with the expertise and experience, this Trust was also able to provide a service built around the needs of care leavers.

¹²⁵ Department for Education, *Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2014–15*, London: House of Commons Education Committee, 2014, p3 [accessed via: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/meduc/738/738.pdf (07/12/14)]

¹²⁶ Department of Health, Public Services and Social Safety, *Personal Advisers*, p58 [accessed via: www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/leaving-after-care-ch6.pdf (08/12/14)]

As a whole, the Trusts are looking at expanding the role of the PSPA for the future. However, it is now recognised that, if the role is to become more universal, there will need to be a stronger centralised lead to prompt practice to change at the local level.

'By adopting an approach which is timely and gives consideration to the possibility of identifying and appointing a young person-specific personal adviser through discussions with the young person and their existing support network rather than automatically allocating a Trust-employed personal adviser there is potential to develop PSPAs. Early indications, based on a working model in one of the Trusts, evidence that young person specific arrangements can work extremely well and afford young people much needed continuity and consistency. There is potential to develop this approach across the region and to complement existing Trust employed personal adviser arrangements.'

Deirdre Coyle, Health and Social Care Board Commissioner, Northern Ireland

Case study: 'Shaun'¹²⁷

Shaun has a mild learning disability and received the support of a classroom assistant from 11–16 years old. When Shaun turned 16 he became eligible for a personal adviser and moved from mainstream school to the local technical college.

Shaun did not want access to leaving care services and, in terms of pathway planning, his transition to college was a key area of concern. Appointing his classroom assistant as his PSPA therefore made sense in terms of meeting his immediate needs with the 'perfect' person who best understood Shaun.

The classroom assistant was subsequently assessed and recruited by the Trust as the PSPA and supervised by the personal adviser manager. This brought immediate support to Shaun in terms of his educational pathway and engaged him in a more meaningful and supportive way with leaving care services.

From the experience of Northern Ireland, it is clear that delegating the personal adviser role to those with whom the care leaver already has a relationship has been shown to be successful. On the other hand, it is also clear that there are significant barriers to reform and that change will not come about unless there is strong national leadership (from DfE in the case of England).

Local authorities should be moving towards a system where:

- Leaving care teams are the professional backbone. It may be appropriate for them to take on the personal adviser role directly in some cases, but they will spend most of their time working in tandem with personal advisers, and providing expertise;
- When the young person reaches the age of 15, a member of the leaving care team works to identify potential networks of support for them, including professionals, family members and other significant adults in the young person's life. This could use the method we describe in section 1.4, which incorporates the principles of Family Finding and Engagement;
- The personal adviser role is then delegated to one of these individuals to the extent that is appropriate in each case. Young people must be involved in the decision.

¹²⁷ Case study provided by Western Health and Social Care Trust

Such a system would provide an opportunity for the voluntary sector and faith communities to become more involved in supporting young people leaving care. In Northern Ireland, PSPAs have included church leaders and charities like VOYPIC (Voice of Young People in Care).

The example of PSPAs in Northern Ireland shows that in order for the required reform to happen:

- Statutory guidance must be changed to prompt local authorities to alter their practices;
- DfE must issue detailed guidance, including easy-to-use model contracts on how to hire personal advisers who are not members of the leaving care team;
- Leaving care service staff must be given the training to ensure they have the skills to partner with those who are to fulfil the personal adviser role, and provide more specialist support. This will require transitional funding from DfE;
- There must be a review of the situation in a year's time to identify strengths and weaknesses of the reformed system.

We recommend a significant reform of leaving care services, so that it becomes a core team of professionals who oversee a flexible system in which the personal adviser role enables an ongoing, nurturing relationship to continue.

DfE must change statutory guidance; issue easy-to-use model contracts for the personal adviser role; and provide transitional funding for local authorities to up-skill leaving care staff for their new role.

chapter two

‘Somewhere to call home’: extending the Staying Put principle

Far too many care leavers are making an abrupt move from care, without the opportunity to develop the necessary skills for independent living, or the stability to gain a foothold on adult life. Half of care leavers struggle to find and hold onto somewhere safe and stable to live.¹²⁸ This can lead to extremely poor outcomes: 11 per cent of young homeless people are care leavers.¹²⁹

The new Staying Put arrangements tackle this problem for some care leavers: they allow ‘those young people who remain in foster care to experience the stability and security of family life enjoyed by their peers’.¹³⁰ Yet this opportunity for stability is denied to those young people who tend to be more vulnerable, such as those whose foster placements break down, or those who live in residential care.

The CSJ has previously argued that our long-term ambition must be for the system to support care leavers until their 25th birthday.¹³¹ In the meantime, we must ensure that young people have the opportunity to stay in a single, stable, supported placement until they are ready to leave.

In the rest of this chapter we set out how to extend the principles of Staying Put to all care leavers.

¹²⁸ CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p22

¹²⁹ Homeless Link, *Young and Homeless 2014*, London: Homeless Link, 2014, p 11 [accessed via: www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/201411%20-%20Young%20and%20Homeless%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf (16/12/14)]

¹³⁰ Department for Education, *Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2014–15*, London: House of Commons Education Committee, 2014, p1 [accessed via: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/meduc/738/738.pdf (07/12/14)]

¹³¹ CSJ, *Couldn't Care Less*, London: CSJ, 2008, Chapter 6

2.1 Staying Put in residential care

'I have children of my own, and I wouldn't kick them out at 18, I wouldn't kick them out at 17. So, children of the state who are looked after, why are we kicking them out at 18?'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

In May 2014 it became a legal duty for local authorities to support young people to 'stay put' with their foster carers until they are 21.¹³² This was something the CSJ had argued for in *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, and it will undoubtedly improve outcomes for many care leavers.¹³³

We also argued for Staying Put arrangements to be extended to those in residential care, a recommendation which has since been supported by the Education Select Committee, Barnardo's and Action for Children.¹³⁴

In response to the Education Select Committee's recommendation, DfE stated that:

*'Whilst there is a principled argument that young people in successful residential care placements should similarly be able to 'stay put', extending this option to these placements raises a number of issues not just for the young people in question, but also others who may be living in the home.'*¹³⁵

DfE also stated that that they 'are working with the sector, and have provided funding from the Innovation Programme (to a partnership involving NCB [National Children's Bureau], Who Cares? Trust, Barnardo's, Action for Children and the Together Trust) to develop models on how Staying Put or Staying Close could work in children's homes'.¹³⁶

The CSJ applauds this move as we highlighted the potential of the Innovation Programme to fund work in this area in our interim report, *Survival of the Fittest?*¹³⁷

However, we believe that there is a strong case for moving more quickly on this issue. Young people in residential children's homes tend to be the most vulnerable, and their need for stability particularly urgent.¹³⁸ By establishing the Staying Put principle for those in foster care, it becomes indefensible to delay the extension of similar arrangements to as many young people in residential care any longer than necessary.

¹³² Department for Education, Press Release, *Landmark Children and Families Act 2014 gains royal assent*, 13 March 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-children-and-families-act-2014-gains-royal-assent (07/12/14)]

¹³³ CSJ, *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, London: CSJ, 2013

¹³⁴ House of Commons Education Committee, *Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options*, London: House of Commons Education Committee, Chapter 6 [accessed via: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/259/259.pdf (07/12/14)]; Barnardo's, *Someone to Care: Experiences of leaving care*, London: Barnardo's, 2014 [accessed via: www.barnardos.org.uk/someone_to_care_final_feb2014.pdf (07/12/14)]; Action for Children, *Too much, too young*, London: Action for Children, 2014 [accessed via: www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/9663598/too-much-too-young-web.pdf (07/12/14)]

¹³⁵ Department for Education, *Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2014–15*, London: House of Commons Education Committee, 2014, p7 [accessed via: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/738/738.pdf (07/12/14)]

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p21

¹³⁸ CSJ, *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, London: CSJ, 2013, Section 2.3

Children's homes which have an excellent track record, and want to develop their own models of Staying Put for their young people, should be enabled to do so. We must trust providers of 'good' and 'outstanding' homes to find practical ways to accommodate both children and older young people. This represents an important opportunity for innovative local authorities to work in partnership with the voluntary and private sectors, which has the potential to attract social finance, through a commitment to commission places once a capital investment has been made.

'Having seen the benefits for young people in foster care we would love to provide Staying Put arrangements for those in residential care homes. This would require investment to develop the right sort of facilities and support for young people, as well as having sufficient and appropriate support staff teams in order to ensure a value for money service. That investment would need to be backed by commitment from local authorities to commission such services.'

Dr Natalie-Jane Macdonald, CEO, Acorn Care and Education, in evidence to the CSJ

We recommend that local authorities work with 'good' and 'outstanding' residential children's homes and other local partners to develop their own versions of Staying Put.

2.2 Early moves to independence: other causes and consequences

Even if Staying Put was extended to every foster carer and children's home in the country, however, it would not be a solution for all care leavers. Currently a third of children leave care when they are 16 or 17.¹³⁹

We have heard from care leavers who felt pushed out of care, even before they turned 18.

'I was forced to move out when I was 16 – to be honest I had no job, I couldn't fund my expenses ... it's very hard to move out at that age ... you're still only a baby ... I felt like I was pushed out to leave home so they could get another person in.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

Meanwhile, some young people in care, particularly older children, may reject the idea of a 'substitute' family placement. Sometimes this is because they feel it is 'disloyal' to their own families.¹⁴⁰ Others may have to move out because their foster placement breaks down, which may be no fault of their own, or because their foster carer simply does not want to opt into the Staying Put arrangements.

'My foster carer and I never got on ... When I turned 18 I walked out the door, and that was it.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

¹³⁹ CSJ, *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, London: CSJ, 2013, p11

¹⁴⁰ Evidence submitted to the CSJ by Howard Smith MBE, team manager, leaving care, North Yorkshire County Council

For many others, leaving care is much less of a forced choice. A significant minority of care leavers have a 'survivor' mentality.¹⁴¹ Their poor attachments can lead to them seeing themselves as 'tough' and independent, and craving to leave the care system. In reality, however, positive outcomes for this group typically rely on ongoing personal and professional support.¹⁴²

'I know lots of people who come from care, and they say to me 'I can't wait, I can't wait', I've only got six more weeks to my birthday and I'm out, I'm free... but then they leave, and find that nothing is there for them.'

Young ex-offender, in evidence to the CSJ

Whatever the cause, at the moment, 44 per cent of care leavers say upon reflection that they left care too early.¹⁴³ This can negatively affect their futures in a whole range of ways. For example, 57 per cent of care leavers say managing their money and avoiding debt was difficult when leaving care.¹⁴⁴ Severe personal debt can then lead to the loss of tenancy, and potentially, homelessness.¹⁴⁵

'Everything just started piling on [with the bills], and there was a point when I just went out and spent my money on trainers and stuff, and I didn't leave myself enough money for food to last me which I know as a stupid mistake at the time... I know it was really stupid... but no one helped me.'

Care leaver, in evidence to CSJ

2.3 Transitional accommodation

There needs to be a fundamental culture change around the transition from care. It should be recognised that it is inappropriate for young people to move straight from care to full independence, where one mistake can lead to a lost tenancy and homelessness. Staying Put should not simply be a practice that is available to certain groups of care leavers, whether they are in residential care, foster care, or any other kind of placement. All care leavers should be able to stay in a stable placement that is not fully independent for as long as they need.

However, as the Education Select Committee recently highlighted, transitional accommodation for care leavers (and older children in care) is often unstable, inadequate or simply unavailable.¹⁴⁶ This was reflected in the stories we heard from young people.

141 Stein M, *Young People Leaving Care*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012, p171; Stein M, *Resilience and young people leaving care: Overcoming the odds*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, p21 [accessed via: www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/185935369x.pdf (08/12/14)]

142 Ibid

143 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p20

144 Ibid, p5

145 See CSJ, *Maxed out: Serious personal debt in Britain*, London: CSJ, 2013

146 House of Commons Education Committee, *Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options*, London: House of Commons Education Committee, 2014 [accessed via: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/259/259.pdf (07/12/14)]; see also Action for Children, *Too much, too young*, London: Action for Children, 2014 [accessed via: www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/9663598/too-much-too-young-web.pdf (07/12/14)]



'I was in foster care for six months and then I started going through the hostel system. I am now in a temporary placement. I think I've been through about five or six hostels now. I think I've had about 11 social workers, which is quite a lot... it's too much really.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

'Why should we have to keep moving, and keep moving? I've been to 13 or 14 placements since I've been in care, I don't want to keep moving around. Keep me in a place that I can stay in until I'm old enough to find my own place ... It's not fair to keep moving people because you get settled, then you get unsettled, settled, then unsettled.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

'I got kicked out at 16, and I was moved to [a hostel]. They put me in an emergency bed, which was meant to be for two nights, and said to me my next placement was going to be semi-independent. I ended up living there for eight months, with everything in one room, with rats and mice coming in ... it was terrible.'

'It was an emergency place, but they mixed me in with a lot of strange people. It was really weird to live there at [the age of] 16 with 19 or 20 people, very troubled people [such as rough sleepers and drug addicts] ... it wasn't nice ... I was so exposed. When I moved in I already had four people knocking on the door that night, asking if I can find crack, if I have a cigarette, if I can sign their friend in.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

The CSJ has heard that to provide the stability young people need, much better use will need to be made of supported lodgings and semi-independent accommodation.

- Supported lodgings are a room in a family home provided by a host (possibly even a member of their extended family) who offers help and support to the young person. Operating somewhere between foster care and ordinary lodgings in terms of both cost

and support levels, supported lodgings are a good option for care leavers who want more independence but also want to remain in a family environment;

- Semi-independent accommodation is often 'university style' with care leavers having their own room but shared kitchen facilities and on-site support staff. Good practice typically involves support staff building relationships with the young people on-site and providing help in the transition to independent living.

The advantage of good quality semi-independent accommodation, in particular, is that it provides young people with a high level of independence, but without the risk of renting privately, or socially. In this context, care leavers have the space to make mistakes, and to learn the key skills needed for adult life from staff.

Good practice: Launchpad at the New Choices for Youth (NYC) Trust

Launchpad is a semi-independent accommodation run by the NCY Trust. Were it not for the accommodation many would go straight to independent living.

The first thing Launchpad does is ensure safety and security for the young people. A member of staff is always onsite and there is CCTV to ensure the young people are safe.

As well as having their own flats, to which they have the key, the young people also have access to a communal area.

In this context, workers are able to encourage young people to engage in an OCN accredited course on developing independence skills. Elements include (but are not limited to):

- Healthy Living;
- Hygiene at home;
- Personal budgeting and money management;
- Independent shopping for household items;
- Preparation for work (including CVs, interview skills, looking for work);
- Developing interpersonal skills;
- Understanding relationships and sex;
- Time management skills.

The young people we spoke to told us they thought every care leaver should have an opportunity to stay in a place like Launchpad.

'Because it's independent you gain a lot more independence skills, like going out and having to do your own food shopping, having to budget, looking for jobs ... I have to clean my flat as well ... but you've got that help there [with these things] when you need it.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

'Before I was messing around, getting drunk ... It makes you think about the future when you're here, you're not having things done for you.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

Part of what is preventing good use of semi-independent accommodation is that instability is often built into the system. Many local authorities move young people on after a short spell. The 'cut off' point is often the age of 18.¹⁴⁷

As one manager explained to us, this is both unhelpful and arbitrary:

'Two years is barely enough time to help young people build up the skills they need for independent living. When they arrive at 17 it becomes almost impossible.'

Semi-independent accommodation manager, in evidence to the CSJ

As a result, only 12 per cent of care leavers are in semi-independent accommodation at the age of 19, a proportion which falls to six per cent for 21 year olds.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, 61 per cent of all semi-independent placements for care leavers at 19 are provided by just 22 per cent of local authorities.¹⁴⁹

The result is that care leavers can feel they have been moved on too soon.

*'I still need support and I am still struggling with things. I live in a semi-independent place and I am worried that I will soon have to live independently.'*¹⁵⁰

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

This does not have to be the case. Last year in Hackney (before the implementation of Staying Put), 30 out of 35 care leavers aged 19 were in semi-independent accommodation.¹⁵¹ The manager of Hackney leaving care services explained to the CSJ that, even when salaries for support staff are taken into account, it is often not more expensive for the young person to stay in their semi-independent accommodation than privately renting. It therefore makes sense for young people to stay where they feel safe and have onsite workers to help and befriend them.

Indeed, staff in residential care and semi-independent accommodation need not stop providing support when care leavers move out. We have heard about good practice in both of these kinds of accommodation, where care leavers are able to drop by casually for advice or just a chat, or where former residents are welcome for Christmas dinner.

Furthermore, it should be emphasised that the issues discussed in this chapter are interwoven with those of the last: workers in semi-independent accommodation can form permanent relationships, which can perhaps be formalised through the personal adviser role; and a valid form of Staying Put could entail finding security through lodging with a member of the extended family.

¹⁴⁷ CSJ, *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, London: CSJ, 2013, Section 2.4

¹⁴⁸ Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]

¹⁴⁹ CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p5

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p18

¹⁵¹ Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table LAF2 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/264464/SFR36_2013_LATables.xlsx (07/12/14)]

There needs to be a culture shift in attitudes towards the move to independence, with the presumption being that care leavers will spend time in a single Staying Put arrangement, whether that be in foster care, residential care, supported, semi-independent, or kinship care arrangement. Our long-term goal must be for all young people to be supported until they are 25.

We recommend that, as a first move towards this, local authorities should be expected to provide supported, semi-independent accommodation as an option for those over 18, as well as those aged 16–17. Statutory guidance must state that a young person should only be moved on when they feel ready.

chapter three

Education, employment and training

Too often, work is viewed as an issue of secondary importance for young people in their complex transition from care to independence, whereas the opposite is the case. A job can provide the financial security that claiming benefits alone does not. Just as importantly, it gives a sense of purpose and direction to young people in their lives, and the essential day-to-day structure which may otherwise be lacking.

In many families, parents have a vital role to play in ensuring that young people successfully secure stable employment. Good parenting means instilling aspirations in children from an early age; supporting them through education and training; and providing an emotional safety net when set-backs are encountered. A corporate parent should do no less.

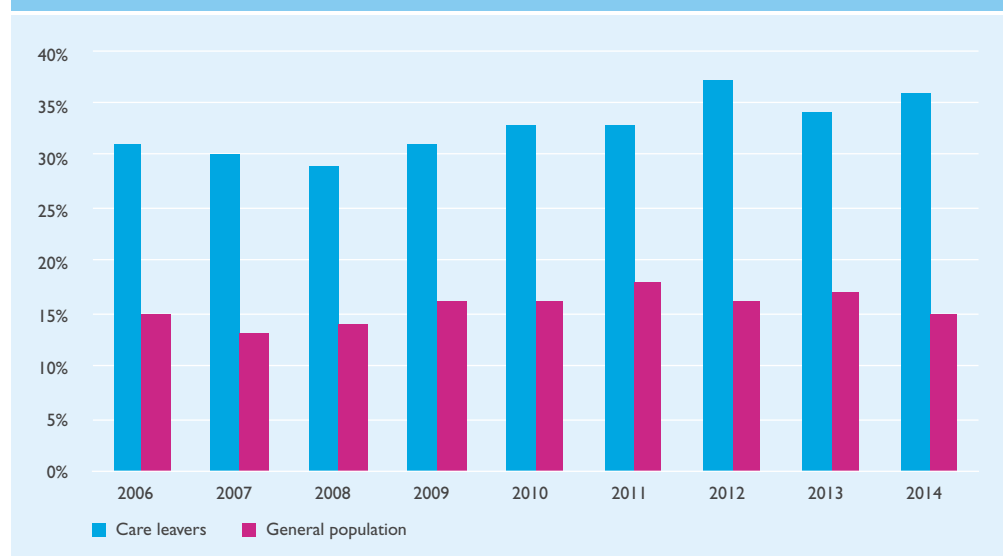
And yet, far too many young people are leaving care for a life of worklessness. National statistics show that for each annual cohort, at age 19, 20 and 21, between 36 per cent and 40 per cent of care leavers are NEET.¹⁵² As the graph below shows, the proportion of care leavers who are NEET has remained persistently more than double the national average.

This represents wasted human potential and an unhealthy relationship between care leavers and their corporate parent, which carries enormous financial penalties for the state. One study found that the lifetime cost to the public purse of 16–18 year olds being NEET is £56,301 per child, but that for care leavers this could be at least four times as high.¹⁵³ If only viewed from a fiscal point of view, the argument for action is compelling.

¹⁵² Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]

¹⁵³ Coles B et al, *Estimating the life-time cost of NEET: 16–18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training*, York: University of York, 2010 [accessed via: www.york.ac.uk/media/spsw/documents/research-and-publications/NEET_Final_Report_July_2010_York.pdf (07/12/14)]

Figure 2: Proportion of 19 year olds who are NEET¹⁵⁴



This chapter looks at how more can be done to help care leavers transition into work and independence.

3.1 Education and employment

The Government continues to take important steps to improve educational outcomes for looked after children and care leavers:¹⁵⁵

- The Children and Families Act 2014 made the virtual school head a statutory role, ensuring there is a champion for the education of looked after children in every local authority;¹⁵⁶
- In the financial year 2014–2015, schools will receive a pupil premium of £1,900 per looked after child. This compares to £1,300 for primary-aged pupils on free school meals, and £935 for secondary-aged pupils;¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Data for the general population is taken from the first quarter to be as closely comparable as possible. The care leavers figure is likely to be an underestimate as it does not include those who have lost touch with the local authority. We use data on 19 year olds because that is the only age group on which outcomes for care leavers has been measured before 2014. Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]; Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2013, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/264456/SFR36_2013_NationalTables.xlsx (14/12/14)]; Department for Education, *Children looked after by local authorities in England: year ending 31 March 2010*, London: Department for Education, 2010 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/218975/sfr27-2010v2.xls (14/12/14)]; Department for Education, *NEET Quarterly Brief – April to June 2014*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/neet-statistics-quarterly-brief-january-to-march-2014 (08/12/14)]

¹⁵⁵ For full details of support available to care leavers in education, see Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361534/CA1989_The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_v3_0610.pdf (03/12/14)]

¹⁵⁶ Department for Education, Press Release, *Landmark Children and Families Act 2014 gains royal assent*, 13 March 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-children-and-families-act-2014-gains-royal-assent (07/12/14)]

¹⁵⁷ Department for Education, *Pupil premium: funding for schools and alternative provision*, London: Department for Education, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings (07/12/14)]

- Statutory guidance has been updated so that:
 - Particular emphasis is put on the unacceptability of young people being moved from their accommodation in the academic year after their 18th birthday (for many, their 'A level' year);¹⁵⁸
 - Care leavers aged 21–25 can receive support from their local authority as soon as they announce their intention to return to education or training.¹⁵⁹

This action is welcome. The CSJ has consistently argued that educational failure is a pathway to poverty, affecting career prospects and potentially leading to low pay or worklessness.¹⁶⁰ While the proportion of care leavers achieving five GCSEs at A*–C (including English and Maths) has increased by 50 per cent since 2008, the attainment gap between them and their non-looked after peers has actually widened by six percentage points.¹⁶¹ It is essential that measures are taken to help close the divide.

On the other hand, the recent focus on education has become disconnected from what must be the long-term goal for young people in care: securing employment. Consequently, the latter has been undervalued in policy and practice.

As we argued in *Survival of the Fittest*, it is often those care leavers most at risk of unemployment who are given the least support.¹⁶² What is more, in the context of low expectations, early entry into the benefits system may be encouraging a culture of benefits dependency.¹⁶³ Jobcentres now enrol young people before they leave care, alleviating some short-term financial hardship, but at the cost of promoting an expectation that young people will be on unemployment benefits.¹⁶⁴

A good parent would be much more ambitious for their children and the remainder of this chapter sets out how these trends can be reversed.

3.2 Intensive mentoring and early intervention

As the CSJ has previously shown, intensive mentoring can be extraordinarily successful for those young people statistically most likely to end up unemployed.¹⁶⁵ Where mentoring is of good quality, with highly-trained coaches, young people can overcome the specific issues which increase their likelihood of becoming unemployed. That may mean help with GCSE choices, careers advice, and providing contacts with local services and businesses, but also emotional support and help with personal issues.

¹⁵⁸ Department for Education, *Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2014–15*, London: House of Commons Education Committee, 2014, p7 [accessed via: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/738/738.pdf (07/12/14)]

¹⁵⁹ Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014, pp31–32 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361534/CA1989_The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_V3_0610.pdf (03/12/14)]

¹⁶⁰ CSJ, *Requires Improvement: The Causes of Educational Failure*, London: CSJ, 2013

¹⁶¹ CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p6

¹⁶² *Ibid*, Chapter 2

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, Section 2.3.3

¹⁶⁴ HM Government, *Care Leavers Strategy*, London: HM Government, 2013, p10 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266484/Care_Leaver_Strategy.pdf (08/12/14)]

¹⁶⁵ CSJ, *The Journey to Work: Welfare reform in the next Parliament*, London: CSJ, 2014, Chapter 1

One of the most successful examples of this kind of early intervention is ThinkForward, an initiative running in Tower Hamlets, Islington and Hackney, supported by the DWP Innovation Fund.¹⁶⁶ In 2013, 95 per cent of young people who were supported by ThinkForward coaches (all identified as being at high-risk of becoming unemployed) made a successful transition into post-16 education, employment or training.¹⁶⁷

We are convinced that this kind of early intervention is crucially important for children in care. Expectations for this group are often far too low.

'Lots of professionals say you're not going to get employment – whether it's because of mental health, being in rehab, getting pregnant or just being unemployed. They think you're going to waste opportunities, but when you've got nothing you're going to grab it with both hands.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

Case study: 'Rachel', ThinkForward participant

Now 16, Rachel went into care when she was 12 years old. She experienced a great deal of instability while in care, with five different placement moves. In one of her placements she suffered emotional abuse from a foster carer:

She was introduced to her coach 'Joshua' by ThinkForward when she was 13. He has been one of the few constants in Rachel's life, meeting her every week and keeping up his high expectations of what she could achieve. Joshua was the first to see in Rachel the enormous potential she has for being an advocate for others, and encouraged her to think about what she could achieve with her talents. That included arranging for her work experience at a barrister's chambers.

Rachel told the CSJ that building the relationship with her coach early was crucial:

'I strongly believe that if coach came in now [when aged 16] I would say, "go away – if you wanted to help you would have helped earlier". I would think "I've done all this myself, what do I need you for?"'

Yet, because of the relationship formed, and the trust they have built up, her coach is still able to support her and challenge her to stretch herself:

'I used to turn up to things half a day late... I remember the day it changed – coach called and said I wouldn't get any more opportunities unless things improved. You want to change because of the relationship. There is a big difference between telling you off and looking down at you.'

Rachel is now applying for apprenticeships as a next step, but has not given up on her dream of becoming a family law barrister so she can use her abilities and experience to help others.

'I get setbacks, but you have to pick yourself up. I talk to coach and say "what's the next opportunity".'

We believe there is something unique in the intensive, informal relationship which coaches like those provided by ThinkForward can build with their young people. The result is that young people are not only encouraged to think about their future, but they become resilient:

¹⁶⁶ For more detail on ThinkForward, see CSJ, *The Journey to Work: Welfare reform in the next Parliament*, London: CSJ, 2014, pp46–49

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p25

better able to overcome the challenges they may experience on the way to achieving their goals.

We recommend that the Government roll out a national programme of high-quality coaching to young people most at risk of becoming unemployed, including all children in care.

The instability that looked after children often experience before they go into care (and sometimes in care) can undermine their chance to develop self-awareness, and an understanding of 'who they are'.¹⁶⁸ The result is that, when considering their future, many care leavers may have very little idea about what kind of path in life will be suitable for them.

'A lot of young people in care haven't had the opportunity to develop a strong sense of the roles they might be suited to, or the courses that they will enjoy.'

Patrick Finegan, Virtual School Headteacher, Dudley, in evidence to the CSJ

In the context of the kind of mentoring relationship we described, we believe that many care leavers would benefit from something that can systematically, objectively and accurately identify their strengths and weaknesses. That includes what motivates them, and their stress behaviours.

Many companies now use psychometric tools to test whether people are suitable for the roles they are applying for, so the company and the applicant are less likely to make the wrong decision. It therefore makes sense to deploy such tools for other significant decisions in the lives of young people.

Hoozyu: a Birkman Method tool designed for young people

The Birkman Method, which is currently used by global household names such as Walmart, Boeing and Discovery Channel, provides one of the most effective ways to get 'below the surface' and find out what kind of roles are really suited to a person. The results of the test detail:

- Your interests and the kinds of activities you usually prefer;
- Your 'usual style' – how you behave in normal conditions, your most effective learning style;
- Your needs – the support or motivation you need from others or from your environment to be effective; and
- How you react under stress – how your usual style changes when your needs are not met.

Hoozyu is an online app that used the Birkman method to provide young people with the opportunity to learn about themselves in lighter, easier-to use, and cheaper format than a traditional Birkman test.

It gives young people the opportunity to answer three big questions:

- What will motivate and energise you?
- What will keep you 'in the zone' and 'off the ceiling'?
- What career options could you think about?

¹⁶⁸ See Stein M, *Young People Leaving Care*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012, especially Chapter 12

It sets out the answers to each of these in a very clear way, with online videos which explain the meaning of the results. Young people also have a personal call, or conversation with someone like a teacher, to discuss the results.

By giving looked after children and care leavers a sense of 'what makes them tick', we believe that many of these young people will go onto better outcomes. It would also help mentors to provide better careers advice for young people. This would be particularly useful when the mentoring relationship starts late, and the mentor has had less of a chance to get to know the young person.

We recommend the piloting of Hoozyu or a similar psychometric tool for older (teenaged) children in care, alongside a mentoring relationship. This could be done using funding from the Innovation Programme.

Social sector organisations in the CSJ Alliance have already expressed interest in testing this model.

3.3 Pathways to work: traineeships, apprenticeships and work experience

As we detail below, it is good that there has been a concerted effort to increase the number of care leavers reaching higher education. However, university is never going to be the best option for many care leavers, just as it is not right for many other young people.

Whether it is an apprenticeship or a more informal route to work, parents have a key role to play in providing financial support, and often open up opportunities through personal contacts. As statutory guidance outlines it is therefore important that local authorities provide equivalent support for care leavers:

*'Authorities should work with their partners to address the employment, education and training needs of care leavers in their areas. Pathway plans should outline how the local authority will improve the employability of their care leavers. They should ensure that care leavers are aware of, and get access to work experience, apprenticeship [sic] and other training and employment opportunities.'*¹⁶⁹

As we outline below, there are some local authorities fulfilling this duty admirably. The Care2Work scheme, managed by Catch-22 and funded by the DfE, has created over 700 employment opportunities, including 175 jobs and apprenticeships.¹⁷⁰

Nevertheless, it is clear that far more could be done by local authorities to open up employment opportunities to care leavers. A CSJ survey showed that, while 70 per cent of

¹⁶⁹ Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014, pp46–47 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361534/CA1989_The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_V3_0610.pdf (03/12/14)]

¹⁷⁰ Catch 22, *From Care2Work* [accessed via: www.catch-22.org.uk/programmes-services/care2work/ (07/12/14)]

care leavers received help with claiming benefits from their local authority when leaving care, only 36 per cent received help finding a job.¹⁷¹ This is consistent with previous research, which suggested that only 30 per cent of young people in care thought that local authorities were doing well or very well at helping them prepare to get good jobs in the future.¹⁷²

Too often, it appears, local authorities are reluctant to provide the kind of flexible financial support which most young people can expect from their parents. A good parent would know whether a young person is making a reasonable request for help and grant it on that basis, rather than a bureaucratic process.

'The young people we work with often have real trouble getting even the most basic financial assistance from the local authority to increase their chances of employment. The processes for small sums are long and bureaucratic. As a result, getting £2,000 for a higher education bursary can be easy, but getting £40 for new work shoes be very tricky, and by the time the money comes through it may be too late to be of any use.'

New Choices for Youth (NCY), in evidence to the CSJ

As one care leaver told us:

'It feels like I am begging.'

Most concerning of all is the situation regarding apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships are of enormous value to those who decide not to take a higher education degree. Not only are those who complete an apprenticeship less likely to later be unemployed, with two thirds remaining with the same employer after finishing, but there are clear lifetime benefits of undertaking an apprenticeship.¹⁷³ Those who take an Intermediate Apprenticeship are likely to see extra lifetime earnings of between £48,000 and £74,000, and an Advanced Apprenticeship between £77,000 and £117,000.¹⁷⁴

The Prime Minister recently called for a major culture change, for government, employers and educators to recognise the value of apprenticeships.

*'I want it to be the new norm for young people to either go to university or into an apprenticeship.'*¹⁷⁵

Rt Hon David Cameron MP

171 CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p36

172 Morgan R, *Children's messages to the Minister*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2009, p11 [accessed via: www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/c/Children%27s%20messages%20to%20the%20Minister.pdf (07/12/14)]

173 The Telegraph, *The low-down on apprenticeships*, 16 January 2014 [accessed via: www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/student-life/10583513/The-low-down-on-apprenticeships.html (07/12/14)]

174 Ibid

175 Prime Minister's Office, Press Release, *Prime Minister: apprenticeships are central to rebuilding economy*, 11 March 2013 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-apprenticeships-are-central-to-rebuilding-economy (07/12/14)]



DfE and local authorities should be ensuring they meet this challenge by enabling as many care leavers to access apprenticeships as possible, and giving them equal status to higher education degrees.

Yet, our FOI requests reveal that 64 per cent of local authorities are not providing specific, additional financial support to care leavers who take an apprenticeship.¹⁷⁶

Although many will earn more, the minimum wage for an apprenticeship is £2.73.^{177, 178} Research suggests that low wages deter some care leavers from participating in work related activities, and that they may take unsuitable educational courses as a result.¹⁷⁹

This is not surprising. Travel costs alone can be prohibitive. Local authorities have a duty to ensure young people can travel to further education, but this duty does not currently apply to apprenticeships.¹⁸⁰ Monthly travel cards for popular commuter routes, such as Morpeth to Newcastle, Macclesfield to Manchester, or St Albans to London, often cost somewhere between £100 and £300 per month.¹⁸¹ Working 30 hours a week for £3 an hour will mean earning only £360 a month.

¹⁷⁶ Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 28/04/13]. 117 local authorities responded

¹⁷⁷ The last time wages of apprenticeships were surveyed, for those under 19 the median wage was £3 per hour and the mean was £3.77 per hour. For those aged 19–24 the median wage was £5.37 and the mean was £5.45. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *Apprenticeship pay survey 2012: Research findings*, London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013, Table 2.1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/246419/bis-13-p137-apprenticeship-pay-survey-2012-research-findings.DOC (16/12/14)]

¹⁷⁸ HM Government, *National Minimum Wage rates* [accessed via: www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates (07/12/14)]

¹⁷⁹ Dixon J, 'Obstacles to participation in education, employment and training for young people leaving care', *Social Work and Social Sciences Review*, 13(2), 2007, pp18–34

¹⁸⁰ Department for Education, *Post-16 transport to education and training: Statutory guidance for local authorities*, London: Department for Education, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277016/Post-16_Transport_Guidance.pdf (08/12/14)]

¹⁸¹ Calculated using Northern Rail, *Monthly Season Ticket Calculator* [accessed via: www.northernrail.org/travel/season-ticket-calculator (10/12/14)]; Transport for London, *Adult rate Tube, DLR and London Overground fares* [accessed via: (10/12/14)]

'After the rent, the council tax and oyster, there's nothing left... I want to do [the apprenticeship] because of the opportunity, but it means home life's not good.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

'Often young people are better off on benefits than they are working in an apprenticeship. Apprentices that are paid less than £150 a week can live whilst in the care of their parents, but those who have been through the care system do not have this luxury. Care leavers end up going into arrears in their housing, just because they can't make ends meet with bills and day to day living.'

JCP adviser, in evidence to the CSJ

What is particularly striking is the disparity of support in comparison with those going on to higher education who are entitled to a personal adviser until the age of 25, and given a bursary of at least £2,000.¹⁸² Our FOI requests reveal that some of those local authorities providing no financial support for those on apprenticeships are providing extremely generous higher education bursaries. For example, if a care leaver were to take a three year university course, they would receive £19,695 from Sunderland City Council; if they decided to enroll on an apprenticeship they might receive nothing.¹⁸³

The Government has made clear that apprenticeships are a form of education and have an equal status with higher education.

As such, apprenticeships must be properly supported. Local authorities must provide access to a personal adviser until the age of 25, a bursary comparable to that which is provided for care leavers in higher education, and assistance with travel costs.

DfE should show their commitment to enabling care leavers to access apprenticeships. They should therefore fund the first £2,000 of any apprenticeship bursary, as they do for the higher education bursary.

There are other barriers to care leaver participation in employment. Often these include a deficit in 'soft skill', such as confidence 'self-management', timekeeping and confidence.¹⁸⁴

*'I have difficulty seeing things through to the end, like with courses and staying in jobs. It's just hard to keep everything together sometimes.'*¹⁸⁵

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

The best way to tackle this problem is through early intervention, such as our proposal for intensive mentoring for children in care. However, local authorities can, and should, be providing 'wrap-around' support to help care leavers overcome barriers to apprenticeships and other work opportunities.

¹⁸² Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361534/CA1989_The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_V3_0610.pdf (03/12/14)]

¹⁸³ Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 28/04/13]. 117 local authorities responded

¹⁸⁴ CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, Section 2.3.2

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p35

Good practice: Hampshire's Traineeship Plus¹⁸⁶

Since 2011 Hampshire County Council has been supporting young people leaving the care of the local authority to move successfully into the world of work, through an 'Internship Plus' programme. Often these young people have severe barriers to employment, including few formal qualifications, poor confidence, a lack of timekeeping skills and unrealistic expectations of the world of work. The scheme provides training, support and a work placement within the local authority. It is now run as a government funded Traineeship scheme and forms part of Hampshire's Youth Investment Programme, which is a commitment to provide 1,000 employment opportunities for young people by 2018 (150 of these are Traineeships).

Before embarking on the Traineeship, the young people participate in an induction with Winchester University. The aim of this course is to build confidence and to instil realistic expectations of working life. This also equips care leavers with more general skills to help them find a job, such as CV-writing and interview techniques.

Upon completing the Traineeship, care leavers will be supported to progress into further learning or work, or into a Hampshire County Council Apprenticeship.

Crucial to the success of the scheme is intensive support mentoring from a peer within the local authority. Significant effort is made to ensure issues are overcome. For example, one care leaver was so lacking in confidence that they were afraid to make their way from the station to the council building. The mentor therefore met them at the station until they were able to do it on their own.

Also important is the system by which the care leavers are paid for their work. The young people are given a standard payment of £100 per week, but there are additional bonuses for attendance, and a £500 bonus for completion. This provides an extra incentive to 'stick it out'.

Last year, 32 care leavers completed what was then the 'Internship Plus', with 16 of these progressing directly to apprenticeships, employment or further learning. Considering that these were identified by the local authority as the most vulnerable group of care leavers, likely to be NEET after leaving school, it is a very positive outcome.

This example shows what can be achieved by local authorities when they make a sufficient commitment, and think creatively about the kind of support care leavers will need.

We also believe that similar wrap-around support could be provided in partnership with the private sector. As the CSJ recently highlighted, the Social Value Act is opening up new opportunities for commissioners to formally take into account social effects when they commission or procure external services.¹⁸⁷ This can entail the provision of traineeship and apprenticeship opportunities, and a handful of local authorities are already taking into consideration employment opportunities for care leavers.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ See also Section 5.2

¹⁸⁷ CSJ, *Social Solutions: Enabling grass-roots charities to tackle poverty*, London: CSJ, 2014, Section 2.4.2

¹⁸⁸ West Sussex County Council, *Arrangements for embedding social value in commissioning and sourcing* [accessed via: <http://www2.westsussex.gov.uk/ds/mis/271113fin10a.pdf> (07/12/14)]; Walsall Council, *Social Value Policy*, 2014 [accessed via: <http://www2.walsall.gov.uk/CMISWebPublic/Binary.ashx?Document=13914> (07/12/14)]

Where possible, we recommend that local authorities use the Social Value Act so that their contracts with the private sector entail traineeship and employment opportunities for care leavers.

Local authorities should provide inductions, mentoring and other forms of support to ensure the most is made of these opportunities.

3.4 Making the most of higher education

Policy makers have shown considerable commitment to increasing access to higher education for care leavers. Most notably, care leavers are entitled to a £2,000 bursary and a personal adviser while at university until the age of 25.¹⁸⁹

Certainly things have improved: today six or seven per cent of young care leavers go to university, compared to about one per cent a decade ago.¹⁹⁰ On the other hand, it is not clear to what extent this is a result of government measures. For example, over one third of care leavers in higher education report that they no longer have contact with anyone from their local authority.¹⁹¹ Those in the sector largely attribute progress made to the work of Buttle UK.

The Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers

Buttle UK work with both higher and further education institutions to increase support for looked after children and care leavers. For institutions to be awarded their Quality Mark for Care Leavers, they must show that they have met a number of criteria, such as having accessible outreach events, a designated member of staff to act as a key point of contact and advice, accommodation during holidays, and financial support.

The results have been outstanding. In 2004, before the start of the Quality Mark, only one university in the UK had a comprehensive policy regarding care leavers.¹⁹² Today 112 higher education institutions have achieved the Quality Mark.¹⁹³ One third of care leavers say that they would not be able to continue university without the support they received.¹⁹⁴

The Quality Mark has stimulated innovation and enthusiasm about enabling young care leavers to access university: Teesside University, for example, works across six local authorities to raise aspirations. They hold 'Every Child's Got Talent' events on campus for looked after children in Years 8 and 9 with a view to raising their aspirations and awareness of the broad range of career possibilities that education can open up, before they disengage from learning.

189 Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361534/CA1989_The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_V3_0610.pdf (03/12/14)]

190 Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table F1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]; Social Exclusion Unit, *A better education for children in care*, London: Social Exclusion, 2003, p3 [accessed via: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/SEU-Report.pdf> (07/12/14)]

191 Starks L, *Assessing the impact of the Buttle UK Quality Mark in Higher Education*, London: Buttle UK, 2013, p17 [accessed via: www.buttleuk.org/data/__resources/595/Buttle-QM-report-PDF-final.pdf (07/12/14)]

192 Jackson S et al, *Going to University from Care*, London: Institute of Education, 2004, p56 [accessed via: www.buttleuk.org/data/files/Research_Documents/Buttle_UK_-_By_Degrees_Report.pdf (07/12/14)]

193 Buttle UK, *The Buttle UK Quality Mark For Care Leavers* [accessed via: www.buttleuk.org/pages/quality-mark-for-care-leavers.html (07/12/14)]

194 Starks L, *Assessing the impact of the Buttle UK Quality Mark in Higher Education*, London: Buttle UK, 2013, p5 [accessed via: www.buttleuk.org/data/__resources/595/Buttle-QM-report-PDF-final.pdf (07/12/14)]

According to Abbie English, Student Recruitment Officer at Teesside University:

'We will lose these young people from the education system if we wait until they are in post 16 education. Some of them won't make it that far if we don't inspire them earlier about the diverse career opportunities university can open up to them. Our events give them something to aim for and encouragement from our student ambassadors shows them that anyone can succeed regardless of their background.'

In 2012 Buttle UK opened up the Quality Mark to Further Education, and since then 81 Further Education Institutions have also achieved the Quality Mark.¹⁹⁵

Despite being a voluntary sector organisation with a much broader remit than educational access for care leavers, both the Government and the education sector have come to rely heavily on Buttle UK's work to further this agenda. For instance, one of the 10 key recommendations of the *Education Matters in Care* enquiry, led by Edward Timpson MP, was greater rollout of the Quality Mark.¹⁹⁶

Earlier this year Buttle UK announced that the Quality Mark would be phased out.¹⁹⁷ While this has the potential to encourage the higher education sector to take a greater lead on this issue, it is imperative that action is taken so that progress is not lost. Even before the announcement of the withdrawal of the Quality Mark, there were signs that progress had gone into reverse, with fewer universities offering care leavers 365-day accommodation or a named contact for care leavers.¹⁹⁸

Moreover, we are concerned that, often, too little attention has been paid to outcomes for care leavers once they have gained a further or higher education place. Getting into university in particular, we heard, is often treated as 'an end in itself' with too little thought given to what is the most appropriate course, or what support is needed to sustain attendance.

The extent of the problem is obscured by a lack of data. A call for evidence by Buttle UK on behalf of the CSJ indicated that the vast majority of universities do not collect data on care leaver retention. As only 10 institutions appeared to collect this data it is impossible to draw any accurate comparison with the national average dropout rate of seven per cent in the first year.¹⁹⁹

Those access officers and care leaver liaison staff we talked to in higher education institutions were also concerned that a lack of forward-planning, and a 'cliff edge' of local authority support, combined to create significant problems for care leavers who had recently completed their

195 Buttle UK, *The Buttle UK Quality Mark For Care Leavers* [accessed via: www.buttleuk.org/pages/quality-mark-for-care-leavers.html (07/12/14)]

196 The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked after Children and Care Leavers, *Education Matters in Care*, London: The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked after Children and Care Leavers, 2012 [accessed via: www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/Education_Matters_in_Care_September_2012.pdf (07/12/14)]

197 Buttle UK, *The Buttle UK Quality Mark For Care Leavers* [accessed via: www.buttleuk.org/pages/quality-mark-for-care-leavers.html (07/12/14)]

198 Children and Young People Now, *University support for care leavers in decline*, 31 January 2014 [accessed via: www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1141895/university-support-care-leavers-decline (07/12/14)]

199 The Guardian, *Undergraduate drop-out rate falls to 7.4%*, 22 March 2013 [accessed via: www.theguardian.com/education/2013/mar/22/undergraduate-dropout-rate-falls (07/12/14)]

course. Problems range from not having a deposit or guarantor for a rent agreement, to not having any work experience.

'It appears that too often young people don't think about these things until they are close to leaving university. They then spend their time after university preoccupied with basics – such as securing a place to live – and take low-paid or casual work to get by, and often get stuck in these roles. Of course, most young people would have the safety-net of being able to return to the family home for a time, and often have the networks to support them to get themselves started.'

Access Officer, in evidence to the CSJ

Yet, awareness of these issues appears to be universally low among most professionals and policy makers. We spoke to leaving care service managers and virtual school heads to whom it had not even occurred to think about post-university outcomes.

'Our members tell us the level of drop out of care leavers in further and higher education is a real concern. Often, it appears, universities and colleges do not have a sufficient understanding of the challenges care leavers face, including a lack of support networks to fall back on. We are also concerned that there often seems to be too little focused preparation for independence and the world of work. As a result, we are anxious that the legacy of Buttle UK is built upon, rather than lost.'

National Union of Students (NUS), in evidence to the CSJ

In both these areas – retention and employability – there are currently examples of good practice, showing that such support is possible.

Good practice: York St John University

York St John University recognise that, if care leavers are to successfully complete their courses, personal support is at least as important as financial assistance. They therefore employ a care leaver contact who spends approximately 18–20 hours a week solely devoted to befriending, supporting and advocating for care leavers. This can begin before the young people apply to university, and can continue on an informal basis after they leave. The care leaver contact also signposts the young people to additional services.

One care leaver commented that:

'My experience so far at university has been really quite difficult, I haven't fit in easy at all and I've struggled so much, but with the help that I have received from my meetings with [X from care leaver support] has really helped me to try to integrate with people. When I have felt that I should just give up I haven't because I had been given reasons to stay through the help of the care leavers' support.'

A key part of this support is, increasingly, helping the young people prepare for independent living. This includes basic support to access employment opportunities (such as practice interviews). It also includes working through with the young person where they will live after leaving university. What is more, they offer to hold a bursary until the end of their course so that they can afford initial expenses of setting up living independently, such as a deposit or rent.

Encouragingly, a change in guidance now means that universities are shifting some of their access spending to focus on the 'student lifecycle', including support during courses and preparation for employment.²⁰⁰ However, it is essential that there is a body to provide advice, and to further the agenda.

We understand that Action on Access is prepared to take on some of the role of Buttle UK, depending on their receipt of relatively modest funding (enough to employ one full time member of staff).

We recommend that Action on Access be funded to continue to promote good practice in higher education, in part through a grant from Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), in part through fees from participating institutions. Their work should have a specific focus on curtailing dropout and promoting positive career outcomes for care leavers.

3.5 DWP, JCP and intensive help to find work

DWP has an important role to play in helping those care leavers who are not in employment, training or further/higher education, and are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, progress to positive job outcomes.

In the past year, jobcentres have been introducing procedures to allow care leavers to enrol for benefits in advance of leaving care.²⁰¹ No doubt this will reduce potential short-term financial hardship, but there is also a danger that it will further entrench a culture of benefit dependency among care leavers.²⁰²

Welfare reform would go a long way to reduce this problem. The CSJ has proposed a co-ordinated Youth Offer to replace the existing out-of-work benefit system for the majority of 18–24 year-olds who leave the education system and are looking for work.²⁰³ This would improve the transition from education to work and offer tailored support to those who need help overcoming specific barriers to work.

The CSJ welcomes the recent announcement by the Conservative Party that they are planning to introduce a similar scheme in the next Parliament.²⁰⁴ We urge whoever forms the next Government to implement the scheme along the lines we have set out.²⁰⁵ Additionally, we recommend that it be implemented with an 'enhanced' offer for care leavers. Care leavers

200 Ebdon L, *2015/16 Access Agreements by Les Ebdon, the Director of Fair Access*, Higher Education Policy Unit, 2014 [accessed via: www.hepi.ac.uk/2014/07/24/1837/ (07/12/14)]

201 HM Government, *Care Leavers Strategy*, London: HM Government, 2013, p10 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266484/Care_Leaver_Strategy.pdf (08/12/14)]

202 See CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, Chapter 2

203 CSJ, *The Journey to Work: Welfare reform in the next Parliament*, London: CSJ, 2014, Chapter 2

204 Speech by Prime Minister, Rt Hon David Cameron MP, to the Conservative Party Conference, 1 October 2014 [accessed via: <http://press.conservatives.com/post/98882674910/david-cameron-speech-to-conservative-party> (07/12/14)]; see also The Guardian, *David Cameron unveils welfare changes in drive to end youth unemployment*, 28 September 2014 [accessed via: www.theguardian.com/society/2014/sep/28/david-cameron-welfare-youth-unemployment (07/12/14)]

205 CSJ, *The Journey to Work: Welfare reform in the next Parliament*, London: CSJ, 2014, Chapter 2

often face numerous barriers to work, and as we detail below, without a family to fall back on some struggle to successfully engage with mainstream back-to-work support.²⁰⁶

In an enhanced Youth Offer for care leavers:

- A centralised application system for education, training and work opportunities for young people at school leaving age (which we have envisioned as a 'UCAS-style portal') would not only smooth the transition to the world of work.²⁰⁷ It would also provide an opportunity to centralise and standardise some of the relevant financial support for care leavers, such as the apprenticeship bursary we propose in section 3.3;
- Where unsuccessful in their applications, the young people should meet with their JCP adviser to discuss their options. This adviser should be a 'care leavers coach' and be based in leaving care services, on the model set out in section 3.5.2;
- Where care leavers are assessed by their care leavers coach as needing intensive support before being ready for the job market, they would be expected to engage with a new Community Wage scheme. This scheme would place a young person with an organisation that would work with them full-time for 35-hours a week. We propose that, where possible, this would be delivered by a provider with a proven track record of engaging with care leavers, who would work in close cooperation with leaving care services (see section 3.5.3).

The reforms outlined below are not dependent on the implementation of an enhanced Youth Offer for care leavers. However, they would work best under such a system.

3.5.1 The role of JCP

DWP recognises that it is important to ensure jobcentre staff are aware of their responsibilities towards care leavers:

- A Care Leavers Marker has been introduced to DWP's Labour Market System;²⁰⁸
- A care leavers awareness document has been distributed to advisers.²⁰⁹

However, the CSJ heard that often care leavers distrust JCP, which makes engagement with the young people difficult.

'I always suffered with anxiety going to the jobcentre ... [As a result] I would often miss appointments or arrive late due to not being able to leave the house.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

206 Dixon J, 'Obstacles to participation in education, employment and training for young people leaving care', *Social Work and Social Sciences Review*, 13(2), 2007, pp18–34

207 CSJ, *The Journey to Work: Welfare reform in the next Parliament*, London: CSJ, 2014, Chapter 2

208 HM Government, *Care leaver strategy: One year on progress update*, London: HM Government, 2014, p21 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/368235/Care_Leavers_Strategy_update.pdf (03/12/14)]

209 Department for Work and Pensions, *Care Leaver Awareness* [accessed via: <http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/0e8547452436fa818115f391c9fdcd91.pdf> (07/12/14)]

We also heard that jobcentre staff still do not always have an adequate appreciation of the challenges facing care leavers.

'Many of my colleagues have little or no understanding of the impact their decisions will make on these young people, or the challenges that they face.'

JCP Adviser, in evidence to the CSJ

A recent survey of leaving care service managers found that 66 per cent considered JCP to be a 'poor' or 'very poor' corporate parent.²¹⁰

In fact, there is often little coordination between JCP and leaving care services. Only six per cent of Local Authorities have joint working agreements with JCP, and it seems that the two are at odds with one another.²¹¹ We were repeatedly told that, when young people are sanctioned, leaving care services are faced with the choice of providing funding, thus undermining the point of the sanction, or allowing the young person to end up in dire straits.

'I often have care leavers coming to me, saying they have been sanctioned, and saying that we must help them out as their corporate parents. In these situations even though I can see why they have been sanctioned what can I do but provide them with enough money to get by for the next few weeks?'

Steve Moutray, Team Leader, Liverpool Leaving Care Service, in evidence to the CSJ

3.5.2 More personalised support

If DWP is to be most the most effective it can be in helping young care leavers into work, a more personalised form of support is needed. There is also the need for much greater cooperation between JCP and local authorities, to ensure the two are working in tandem rather than in tension.

The Barnet Care Leaver Hub

A new initiative in Barnet provides a promising model of JCP support for care leavers.

A JCP adviser has taken on a specialised workload to become a 'care leavers coach'.

Rather than having appointments with the young people in the jobcentre, they are based in the leaving care team. This provides a more familiar space for the young people. It also ensures the coach is able to coordinate with the leaving care services, and they are able to share information about the young people.

More broadly, the arrangement has allowed the adviser to get to know the issues affecting care leavers – both generally and those of individual young people – and better support them in their journey to employment.

210 Catch 22, *Extended corporate parenting: Are local services good parents to care leavers?*, London: Catch 22, 2014, p3
[accessed via: <http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/adb24fc509529733023a3c20d1e43e.pdf> (07/12/14)]

211 Ibid, p11

The coach is allowed greater flexibility about what they can encourage the young people to get involved in, such as work experience, further education, or apprenticeships, as well as a job. They also ensure that they are available for longer appointments than the standard 20 minutes, and often have contact with the young people between appointments.

In this context, the coach is able to build up a relationship with care leavers. They become sufficiently trusted for young people to confide in them, enabling them to be 'pushy' in encouraging them to succeed.

The care leavers coach is aided in their task by the involvement of the Drive Forward Foundation, an employability charity for care leavers. A worker helps motivate the young people through coaching and motivation sessions, including informal sessions such as football. They also broker with local businesses to open up employment opportunities.

What is more, the model has reduced the necessity for sanctions. In the rare cases when care leavers are sanctioned, the leaving care team have confidence in the coach's decision, which means they do not feel obliged to provide their own financial support.

Barnet JCP carried out a survey of the care leavers, engaging in the initiative – 100 per cent said they were satisfied.

In evidence to the CSJ, care leavers commented that:

'Going to [leaving care services rather than JCP] is good for me not only because of my anxiety but also because it's the centre for looked after children so you're not treated as a delinquent or any less of a person.'

'I can talk to [the care leavers coach] on a different level to what I used to talk to with my adviser from the job centre as she understands where I come from.'

'I think this new system thing is working for young people to be allocated to a specific person ... This way more work is been completed and the young people and the workers can get on with what is required for the system to work.'

Out of 66 care leavers, between April and September, 21 progressed to employment. The CSJ was told that this well exceeded expectations.

In light of the success of the initiative, North London Working (who manage Barnet JCP) are planning to implement the model across their region. The rollout should go further: this should be considered for national implementation.

We recommend the rollout of the 'care leavers coach' model across the country.

3.5.3 Unleashing the potential of the voluntary sector

Part of the success of Barnet initiative is down to the involvement of the Drive Forward Foundation, a charity which provides specialist support to help care leavers reach their potential in employment.

The charity is currently working with a number of other jobcentres and local authorities in 12 boroughs to support young people into employment.

Good practice: Drive Forward Foundation

Drive Forward is a London-based charity which works with care leavers who are NEET to help them find new ways into work.

Part of what makes Drive Forward stand out is that it encourages care leavers to think about opportunities they would not have even considered before. Corporate partners include Clifford Chance, Lloyds Bank, and Norton Rose Fulbright, and PHA Media. These partnerships provide care leavers with access to mentoring, work experience and sessions which showcase careers.

Last year they worked with 155 care leavers, of which 80 per cent progressed to some form of work or training:

- 46 per cent found work;
- 12 per cent went into further education;
- Six per cent went into accredited training;
- 12 per cent went onto work placements;
- Three per cent went into an apprenticeship.

DWP have shown their commitment to care leavers by enabling them to access the Work Programme from 'day one' of their benefit claim.²¹²

There are currently no statistics to show whether the Work Programme is effective for care leavers – although we understand that could now change since the Care Leaver's Marker has been introduced to DWP's Labour Market System.

Nevertheless, we would suggest it is likely that the significant financial commitment represented by offering the Work Programme from 'day one' would be most effective if specialist employability charities like Drive Forward were delivering the Work Programme.²¹³

We recommend that the next Government ensure that, wherever possible, the delivery of the Work Programme (or equivalent) is accessible for specialist employment charities that have a proven record of helping the most vulnerable care leavers into employment.

212 HM Government, *Care leaver strategy: One year on progress update*, London: HM Government, 2014, p21 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/368235/Care_Leavers_Strategy_update.pdf (03/12/14)]

213 See also CSJ, *Journey to Work: Welfare reform in the next Parliament*, London: CSJ, 2014; CSJ, *Something's Got To Give: The state of Britain's voluntary and community sector*, London: CSJ, 2013, Section 2.4.7

chapter four

Overcoming other severe challenges

Some young people will always face challenges for which they require extra help. For looked after children and care leavers these may include:²¹⁴

- A criminal conviction;
- Homelessness;
- Disability;
- Early parenthood;
- Drug and alcohol misuse;
- Significant mental health problems;
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking status and trafficking.

We believe that the reforms proposed in this report will help prevent some of these circumstances from arising, and ameliorate the difficulties associated with others. For example, if more care leavers are in employment they are likely to be more financially resilient, reducing the chance of homelessness, and if they have strong relationships they will have someone to turn to for help.

Three challenges the CSJ has repeatedly come across in researching this report are: early parenthood; being an unaccompanied or trafficked minor; and mental health difficulties.

²¹⁴ CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, Chapter 4; Stein M, *Young People Leaving Care*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012, Chapter 10

4.1 Early parenthood

It has long been acknowledged that care-experienced young people are more likely to become young parents. Our FOI requests reveal that 22 per cent of female care leavers become teenage parents.²¹⁵ This is about three times the national average.²¹⁶

The reasons are complex. Risk factors include high levels of family disruption, low parental supervision, poor school attendance, and an associated lack of aspiration.²¹⁷ Loneliness and the need to be loved are particularly important. Sadly, the impact of rejection and poor quality relationships with carers can mean 'distinguishing between a loving relationship and a sexual relationship can be difficult' and some young people want to become pregnant because they believe a child will give them unconditional love.²¹⁸

'Young people from a care background are particularly vulnerable to early pregnancy because they can have an idealised view of what a "happy family" is. Their loneliness can mean they desire unconditional love from a baby, but they may not realise how demanding parenthood is.'

Isobel Neale, Support Department Manager, TwentyTwenty

Case study: 'Jennie'²¹⁹

Jennie is 19 years old. She was taken into care after a very abusive childhood, and left care early at the age of 15.

After leaving care she moved in with her friend's family. This family had complex needs, including various members of the family with learning difficulties and disabilities, and a history of abuse and domestic violence.

Pretty soon she began a relationship with her friend's stepdad, who was 46. Jennie then moved in with this man, and had two babies in quick succession. She then left him, and started a relationship with another man, with whom she had another baby.

The first two children live with their dad (the older man), and the third baby has been taken into care. Jennie is now pregnant again.

The CSJ recently argued that a relationship education module, focussed on helping children and adolescents to build respectful and non-abusive relationships, should be added to the

215 Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 11/11/14]. 103 local authorities responded, 93 were able to give data.

216 It should be noted that the national figure (eight per cent) is for England and Wales, whereas our Freedom of Information Requests were to English local authorities. Teenage conceptions in Wales have been consistently higher than in England in the last 10 years, which means it is not unlikely that the proportion of young women who become parents before their 20th birthday in England is in fact lower than eight per cent. Office for National Statistics, *Childbearing for women born in different years, England and Wales, 2013*, London: Office for National Statistics, 2014, Table 2 [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/fertility-analysis/childbearing-for-women-born-in-different-years/2013/rft-cohort-fertility-2013.xls (14/12/14)]; Office for National Statistics, *Area Based Analysis, Conceptions Deprivation Analysis Toolkit, 2009-11*, Office for National Statistics, 2014 [accessed via: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcn%3A77-353723 (18/12/14)]

217 Barn R and Mantovani N, 'Young Mothers and the Care System: Contextualizing Risk and Vulnerability', *British Journal of Social Work*, 37, 2007, pp225-243

218 Ibid, p238

219 Case study provided by WILD (see box on this organisation p73)



national curriculum.²²⁰ This would be of benefit to those, like children in care, whose parents may not have provided a positive role model in this respect.

However, education can only achieve so much, and it is clear that the level of early pregnancy among care leavers will not be reduced easily. Tackling the problem will mean reforming in-care and leaving-care support so that more young people feel loved and valued.

The reforms that we have already outlined in this paper would be a positive step forward. In particular, our reforms to leaving care services and the personal adviser role would encourage 'emotional permanency' for young women who lack secure attachments. Although we believe that the model would benefit most care leavers, it should be a particular priority for this group.

Whether or not the necessary action to reduce early pregnancy is taken, it is important that we support care leavers to be the best parents they can be: becoming a mother or father represents a moment at which the lack of support from birth parents can be felt most keenly. As one care leaver told us:

'Having a baby was very difficult for me and I would have liked more support with knowing what to do – people forget that care leavers don't usually have a good parenting model to follow – so how can they expect to succeed?'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

As corporate parents, this is when it is more important than ever for local authorities to step in. Not only do they have a responsibility towards helping the care leaver; but to supporting mother, father and child as a family unit, just as any grandparent would.

220 CSJ, *Fully Committed? How a Government could reverse family breakdown*, London: CSJ, 2014, Chapter 1

Yet the CSJ has heard that often the care system is not supporting care leavers who are parents – despite the considerable challenges they face – with the result that a worrying number of care leavers' children are being taken into care themselves.

Our FOI requests have found that at least one in 10 young care leavers aged 16–21 who are parents have had a child taken into care in the last year.²²¹

As one leaving care service manager told us:

'Significant numbers of care leavers become parents much earlier when compared to their non-care peers, and it is particularly sad to see care leavers who are the third generation that has been taken into care. Systems to support care leavers pre-dispose those who are parents to the safeguarding spotlight. Before care leavers become parents and once they are parents local authorities should be investing time and resources in preparing and supporting them with this responsibility.'

'Care leavers who are parents should be treated with the same priority and emphasis for support that is given to those care leavers who, for example, wish to go into higher education. This way we might break the cycle for some of them.'

Howard Smith MBE, team manager, leaving care, North Yorkshire County Council, in evidence to the CSJ

This agrees with research which suggests that social workers do not become more involved during early parenthood unless they have concerns over child protection, and that care leavers do not ask for help because of fear of having their children taken into care.²²²

The tragedy is that, with a little more help, many of these young people could become successful parents, avoiding the heartbreak and enormous cost of taking another generation into the care system.

'They [social services] want me to get therapy. But when I approach them with sessions they say "we're not paying for it". I can't afford to pay £200 a session, and they want me to do two sessions a week. I haven't got the money to pay for that. If I don't get the therapy that I need, if I have any kids in the future they will take them. If I try to get therapy there's no one there to help me.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

On the other hand, the success of some voluntary sector organisations shows that intensive, personal support to young parents with children 'in need' can enable them to become the parents they aspire to be.

221 Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 22/08/14]. 119 local authorities responded. 108 were able to give data.

222 Wade J, 'The ties that bind: support from birth families and substitute families for young people leaving care', *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(1), 2008, p51; Voice, Press Release, *Care Leavers who are expectant parents feel they are discriminated against*, 23 October 2009 [accessed via: http://centrallobby.politicshome.com/fileadmin/epoliticx/stakeholders/Positive_about_young_parents.pdf (08/12/14)]

Case study: WILD Young Parents Project

WILD is a specialist service for young mothers and their children. The charity works in a deprived area of Cornwall, and many of those they work with are care-experienced. The average age of mums is 19, and the average age of dads is 21.

The charity has recently set up formal links with Cornwall leaving care services so that, when a young care leaver becomes pregnant, they are referred directly to their charity.

Along with more formal sessions, WILD run informal, friendly activities to build up an atmosphere of peer-to-peer support. Service users describe their group as a 'sisterhood'. In this context, staff are able to take on a 'mothering' role, which includes parenting advice, as well as help with building skills and encouraging aspirations around life and work.

So far this year, of 196 mums:

- 86 per cent of those identified as having problems with attachment have improved;
- 68 per cent of children identified as having development needs have improved;
- 48 per cent have been supported with current or recent domestic abuse;
- 64 per cent have been supported through mental ill health;
- 36 per cent entered education, training or employment.

They have reached dads in 46 per cent of families. Of these, 40 per cent have improved their relationship with their children (including increased contact).

Part of the success of organisations like WILD lies in the fact that they are not statutory: it allows them the space to build a community of support, in which context more significant interventions can take place.

For those parents who need more intensive support (including where there are legitimate concerns over child protection) taking the whole family into care ('family fostering') can be very helpful. Studies have shown that this specialist support, where both a mother and child (or both parents if they are together) live with a foster parent or in a residential context with 24 hour on-site support, can not only improve parenting skills but also reduce the likelihood of children being removed from the parents.²²³ As we argued in our review of early years provision, *The Next Generation*, greater use of these placements would help more young mothers become the parents they aspire to be, keep more families together, and avoid the trauma of separation.²²⁴

Where appropriate, older looked after children who are pregnant or young parents should be appointed a personal adviser who is able to provide parenting help and advice, ensuring such young people always know there is someone they can call on. This might be an aunt

223 Luke N and Sebba J, *Effective parent-and-child fostering: an international literature review*, Oxford: University of Oxford, 2014 [accessed via: http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/ReesCentreReview_EffectiveParentAndChildFostering.pdf (09/12/14)]; CSJ, *Fully Committed? How a Government could reduce family breakdown*, London: CSJ, 2014 (Chapter 6 spotlights the work of Save the Family which provides residential support to help families stay together and develop better family functioning and Chapter 7 describes the pioneering Safe Families for Children initiative which wraps a supportive community around vulnerable parents and their children)

224 CSJ, *The Next Generation*, London: CSJ, 2008, especially Section 5.3

who has a proven track record of raising her own children successfully, or a local authority specialist with relevant training.

Whatever happens, it is essential that early parenting among care leavers comes to be seen as a priority, not least because local authorities have a clear financial interest: the estimated annual cost of taking a child into care is £36,524.²²⁵ Yet, our FOI requests reveal that only 20 per cent of local authorities have a policy specifically detailing the support they will provide to care leavers who are parents.²²⁶ Moreover, there is only one fleeting reference to the issue in the Ofsted inspection framework, and no universal performance indicators to measure the problem.²²⁷

Preventing the cycle of children of care leavers taken into the care system must become a priority for local authorities.

First, there needs to be a higher profile. Data collection must be carried out as part of the model we describe in section 5.3. Ofsted must inspect whether local authorities have any meaningful policies to tackle the problem.

Second, local authorities should work preventatively to reduce the level of early pregnancy, particularly by ensuring that support networks are in place through the engagement model we set out in section 1.4.

Third, local authorities should support looked after children and care leavers to be the best parents they can be. In particular, we recommend creating formal links with voluntary sector organisations which provide a 'family' environment away from the statutory services young people may be wary of; and greater use of family fostering.

On a strategic, national level more could be done by building on the successes of the Family Nurse Partnership model, a targeted intervention for young mothers expecting their first child which we recommended for adoption in 2007.^{228, 229} The nurse visits weekly or fortnightly until the child's second birthday and provides advice on the health and development of both the child and their mother. They also help the mother think more broadly about their goals for the future, and their relationships. Importantly, parents on the programme are helped to access other resources and services within the community.

Mothers have been shown to benefit from this service: in terms of fewer subsequent births in late teens and early 20s; better quality and durability of relationships with partners; fewer arrests and convictions; and fewer days on welfare benefits. Their children are less likely to be abused or neglected; they have less depression and anxiety; lower rates of cigarette and alcohol use; and they are less likely to be arrested or convicted of a crime.²³⁰

225 House of Commons Library, *Children in Care in England: Statistics*, London: House of Commons Library 2014, Table 4 [accessed via: www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn04470.pdf (08/12/14)]

226 Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 22/08/14]. 119 local authorities responded

227 Ofsted, *Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers*, London: Ofsted, 2014 [accessed via: <http://tinyurl.com/pnfrnvl> (08/12/14)]

228 Department for Education, *Family Nurse Partnership (FNP)* [accessed via: www.education.gov.uk/commissioning-toolkit/Content/PDF/Family%20Nurse%20Partnership%20FNP.pdf (09/12/14)]

229 CSJ, *Breakthrough Britain: Family Breakdown*, London: CSJ, 2007

230 Barnes J et al, *Nurse-Family Partnership Programme: First Year Pilot Sites Implementation in England*, London: Department for Education, 2008, p 11 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/222323/DCSF-RW051_20v2.pdf (09/12/14)]

Although there are no studies directly on the effect of Family Nurse Partnerships on outcomes for care leavers and their children, data collected on the successful England pilot found that 13 per cent of clients were care experienced.²³¹ Despite mothers' very complex and difficult situations, the study found they regarded the nurses highly because they were seen as non-judgemental, and non-threatening.²³²

NHS England is committed to increasing the capacity of Family Nurse Partnerships to 13,000 by April 2015. However geographical coverage is still limited and barriers to access remain for children in care and care leavers including restrictions to accessing services. Restricting criteria include the need for it to be a first-time pregnancy, and an upper age limit of 19 at the age of conception.^{233, 234, 235}

We recommend that funding should be ongoing so that NHS England can continue to rollout Family Nurse Partnerships across the country. NHS England should also consider making them available to all looked after children and care leavers under the age of 21.

4.2 Vulnerable unaccompanied asylum-seeking and trafficked young people

Another group with very specific challenges are the 1,970 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are looked after in the care system.²³⁶ Many come from situations of civic instability, wars and conflicts in which they may well have suffered violence first hand, or witnessed the death of family members.²³⁷

Part of what makes this group of young people distinct is that, if problems can be surmounted, and they are granted permanent residency in the UK, many go on to experience positive outcomes. The hardship they have overcome means that they can become extremely resilient.²³⁸ Those who do well tend to excel. They are, for instance, more likely to go onto higher education than other young people in care.²³⁹

On the other hand, these young people face many specific challenges that are not adequately dealt with in mainstream looked after/leaving care provision. One is English language skills. Another is mental health challenges: studies have found that perhaps half of unaccompanied young people suffer from post-traumatic stress.²⁴⁰ Young people also have to deal with the anxiety of not knowing what is going to happen with their asylum application.

231 Ibid, p48

232 Ibid

233 Family Nurse Partnership, *Where is FNP offered?* [accessed via: www.fnp.nhs.uk/about/where-is-fnp-offered (09/12/14)]

234 HM Government, *Social Justice: Transforming Lives, One Year On*, London: HM Government, 2013, p16 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/203041/CM_8606_Social_Justice_tagged-mw.pdf (09/12/14)]

235 Department of Health, *The Family Nurse Partnership Programme: Information Leaflet*, London: Department of Health, 2012 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/216864/The-Family-Nurse-Partnership-Programme-Information-leaflet.pdf (08/12/14)]

236 British Association of Adoption and Fostering, *Statistics: England* [accessed via: www.baaf.org.uk/res/statengland#uas (08/12/14)]

237 Wade J, 'Preparation and transition planning for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee young people: A review of evidence in England', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 2011, p2425

238 Ibid, p2427

239 Ibid, p2526

240 Ibid, p2427

'It's one of the most stressful things ever – going to bed, not knowing if there is a letter going to come in the morning saying you need to leave the country. It's always at the back of your mind.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

Most vulnerable of all are trafficked young people, whose plight the CSJ has previously highlighted.²⁴¹ 60 per cent of suspected child victims of trafficking go missing from care, many within 48 hours.²⁴² Rather than being given specialist support in such circumstances, many are put in inappropriate accommodation such as bed and breakfast, hostels and supported lodgings.²⁴³

One scheme is showing how, by providing love, security and specialist support, unaccompanied minors can go onto successful in-care and post-care outcomes.

Good practice: Baca

Baca is a charity which provides comprehensive support for trafficked and vulnerable unaccompanied minors, from the point of identification in the UK, to support through leaving care, and after their eighteenth birthday.

They provide specialist accommodation to ensure young people feel safe and secure. 100 per cent of Baca's referrals last year were kept within the care system, compared with the 60 per cent of children who go missing. In part, Baca attribute this success to the supporting 'family environment', with 'live in' support workers.

When they are ready, young people then move into semi-independent accommodation, with 'floating support' for those who move to independence after their eighteenth birthday.

To ensure that young people are not only safe now, but are prepared for leaving care and integration into wider society, Baca run a 'Futures' Development Programme, which focuses on preparation for work and independence. A fundamental part is Baca's daily in-house English teaching provision. It allows young people to develop, grow in confidence, express emotion and understand some of the processes that they find themselves in.

As a result of this work, 100 per cent of Baca's young people are enrolled into mainstream education within eight months of having passed their Pre Entry Level ESOL (English language) course; over 80 per cent of these did not know English when they arrived.

241 CSJ, *It Happens Here: Equipping the United Kingdom to fight modern slavery*, London: CSJ, 2013

242 The All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, *Report From The Joint Inquiry Into Children Who Go Missing From Care*, London: The All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, 2012, p13 [accessed via: www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/joint_appg_inquiry_report.pdf (08/12/14)]

243 Ibid, p18

244 Case study provided by Baca

Case study: 'Trai'²⁴⁴

Trai never knew his mother, and, one day, he was abandoned by his father. A man, claiming to be his father's friend, promised to look after him but ended up taking away his freedom. Trai was then passed to another man, who trafficked him in a lorry through China to the UK. There, he was made to work in domestic servitude for two European men who would beat him every day.

Eventually Trai managed to escape. He was arrested by the police, but things changed when he was referred to Baca.

He is now glad to finally be somewhere 'safe'. Through Baca's 'Futures' programme he has learnt English and has high aspirations for the future.

'Now I am living in a safe home with very helpful people. I am very keen to learn and get a good education. I feel like I can leave my past behind and try really hard to have a better future. One day I would like to become a doctor or maybe even a chef, I don't know!'

The success of Baca's approach shows, first, that if trafficked and vulnerable unaccompanied minors are to stay in the care system (and not run away), and begin to heal from their experiences, intensive efforts need to be made to create a 'familial' environment.

Second, to ensure that these young people can fulfil their potential, specialist support is needed to overcome the cultural and language barriers which prevent them from engaging with education, employment and training, and broader social integration.

We recommend that local authorities develop or commission specific provision for trafficked and vulnerable unaccompanied minors. This should include residential accommodation which creates a 'familial' environment for the young people, and incorporate intensive English language training and planning for the future.

4.3 Mental health problems

Experiences leading to children being taken into care, and sometimes the experience of care itself, mean that many looked after young people struggle with their mental health.²⁴⁵ Half of children in care have some level of emotional and behavioural difficulty.²⁴⁶ These difficulties often continue into early adulthood. A CSJ survey suggested that 37 per cent of care leavers found coping with mental health problems 'very difficult' when leaving care, and a further 22 per cent found it 'quite difficult'.²⁴⁷

There are challenges for young people in accessing youth mental health support across the board in the UK. In 2012/13 the maximum waiting times for specialist CAMHS Tier 3 averaged

²⁴⁵ Stein M, *Young People Leaving Care*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012, p115

²⁴⁶ Department for Education, *Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table 8b [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/299801/SFR50_2013_TablesA.xlsx (03/12/14)]

²⁴⁷ CSJ, *Survival of the Fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers*, London: CSJ, 2014, p8



15 weeks across providers.²⁴⁸ Since then, local authorities and NHS clinical commissioning groups have continued to make substantial cuts to services.²⁴⁹

There are other barriers to looked after children and care leavers accessing formal mental health service provision, including trust issues. One major study found that looked after children and care leavers had very mixed views about CAMHS.²⁵⁰ Alongside some positive views were numerous comments like:

'Why would I want to talk to a stranger?'

'I struggle to trust CAMHS.'

'I don't like being in that position.'

'It's too time consuming for young people.'

The CSJ has previously argued that in order to provide access to mental health services to more vulnerable or 'hard to reach' young people, services need to be taken to them, rather than expecting them to come to a clinic.²⁵¹

During our research we came across a number of examples of good practice, where mental health services are taken to young people in the care system.

248 NHS England, *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Tier 4 Report*, London: NHS England, 2014, p16 [accessed via: www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/camhs-tier-4-rep.pdf (08/12/14)]

249 BBC News, *Mental health services cuts 'affecting children'*, 20 June 2014 [accessed via: www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-27942416 (08/12/14)]; Pulse Today, *GPs face growing pressure on child mental health referrals as CCGs impose further cuts*, 24 April 2014 [accessed via: www.pulsetoday.co.uk/clinical/therapy-areas/mental-health/gps-face-growing-pressure-on-child-mental-health-referrals-as-ccgs-impose-further-cuts/20006496.article#.VG8LjSsWzY (08/12/14)]

250 Young Minds, *Improving the mental health of Looked After Young People: An exploration of mental health stigma*, London: Young Minds, 2012, p11 [accessed via: www.youngminds.org.uk/assets/0000/1440/6544_ART_FINAL_SPREADS.pdf (08/12/14)]

251 CSJ, *Completing the revolution: Transforming mental health and tackling poverty*, London: CSJ, 2011, pp126–129

Good practice: Life Coach at Olive House Children's Home²⁵²

Olive House Children's Home in Kensington and Chelsea has found an innovative way to bridge the gap between young people's complex needs and successful engagement with statutory mental health service provision.

Once a week a CAMHS child clinical psychologist visits the home. To residents of the home, they are known as a 'life coach'. The life coach carries out 'life skills' sessions with the young people – covering areas such as planning for setbacks, dealing with loss, rediscovering motivation and identifying triggers for anger.

One young person commented that:

'It sort of made me realise that I need to learn more about myself and just work on things and work on being a better me... There's no pressure, I come because I want to and talk about what I want to talk about.'

The service is aimed at the residential support workers as well as the young people. Alongside more formal training, the staff work through the same kind of issues with the life coach as the young people do. The staff find that this helps them understand the issues the young people are going through.

'Staff can consult with the life coach and get support and guidance when doing direct work with young people, this enhances the skills of the residential staff and allows them to take on areas that may have previously felt too complex or difficult.'

'The life coach also helps to support the team to manage the emotional impact of the work and this increases resilience and helps staff to cope and keep going when helping to "bear the unbearable."'

Lee Kirwin, manager of Olive House Children's Home, in evidence to the CSJ

The significance of this practice is twofold: first, it shows the advantages of bringing mental health services to young people, rather than expecting them to present at CAMHS. Second, by equipping frontline carers, it ensures lower level problems can be dealt with immediately, and that warning signs can be identified.

In our mental health review, *Completing the Revolution*, the CSJ argued that CAMHS staff work best when integrated with other agencies as part of an interdisciplinary team.²⁵³ The same principle applies here.

We recommend CAMHS staff should be embedded in both children's services and leaving care services.

Whether or not this occurs, some of the advantages of this approach can be replicated by equipping carers across the county with better resources to help young people with their mental health challenges. We were told by carers and other professionals, such as leaving care service staff, that often they do not feel they have the expertise to deal with difficult situations.

²⁵² Case study based on evidence submitted by Lee Kirwin, manager of Olive House Children's Home; and Mullick Y et al, *Life Skills Coaching Project*, London, 2008 [accessed via: www.ncb.org.uk/media/517923/lifeskillsreport.pdf (07/12/14)]

²⁵³ CSJ, *Completing the revolution: Transforming mental health and tackling poverty*, London: CSJ, 2011, Chapter 4

'What you need is to be able to pick up the phone and speak to someone who knows their stuff, just to talk things through and get expert advice on how to handle things; otherwise you are on your own, or you are waiting for a CAMHS appointment in six months time which might be too late!'

Foster carer, in evidence to the CSJ

A basic level of support would be to simply provide easy access to expert advice to carers and other professionals, so that they know what is going on, and what to do, when they are worried about the mental health of a young person.

'As well as helping to "up-skill" those on the frontline to deal with these issues, giving carers the opportunity to consult with experts on a casual basis might actually free up CAMHS staff time. It would ensure that referrals were in cases of genuine need, helping to speed things up for young people who really need access to CAMHS.'

Sarah Brennan, Chief Executive of Young Minds, in evidence to the CSJ

Alongside current frontline staff and carers, we believe that this would be useful to help equip the coaches that we propose for all children in care in section 3.2.

We recommend that CAMHS staff time be made available for short consultations, either face-to-face or on the phone, for carers and other frontline professionals who are concerned about the mental health of young people in their care.

chapter five

Helping local authorities step up to their responsibilities

*'You have no greater responsibility than when you are acting as corporate parents.'*²⁵⁴

Edward Timpson MP, Children's Minister

As corporate parents, local authorities have the primary responsibility to ensure looked after children and care leavers flourish. This entails an enormous responsibility for councillors, who may be elected to local government with little or no prior understanding of the specific challenges that these vulnerable young people face.

The recommendations we have set out in this report will have a limited impact unless councillors are equipped to become the 'pushy parents' looked after children and care leavers need: people who take an active interest in their lives, and have the power to do something about it. This means providing a demanding level of scrutiny for officers, opening up opportunities for young people through financial commitment, and thinking creatively about how to improve the lives of young people in their care. That requires councillors to have a clear understanding of the challenges looked after children and care leavers face, and the tools to ascertain whether they are managing to overcome those challenges.

In this chapter we set out how councillors can be equipped to live up to the demands of this role.

5.1 Systemic failures

This report has shown that local authorities are not always fulfilling their duties towards care leavers to the best of their ability. Shortcomings include: insufficient support for young people

²⁵⁴ Hart D and Williams A, *Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice*, London: National Children's Bureau, 2013, v

who wish to pursue a more vocational route into employment, and the provision of poor quality transitional accommodation.

To these shortcomings it is worth adding the failures around pathway planning – the very foundation of the leaving care process. According to regulations, this crucial document should set out the support a looked after child will need when they leave care, covering issues such as their education and employment, health and development, contact with family and friends, and strategies to develop their financial capabilities.²⁵⁵ The participation of young people is 'fundamental' for the plans to be effective.²⁵⁶ There should be regular reviews of the plan as young people's needs and circumstances change.²⁵⁷ Without a clear plan with well-defined expectations, it is difficult to ensure adequate support for a young person, since personal advisers on their own do not have the authority to make financial decisions.²⁵⁸

In reality:

- 50 per cent of care leavers say they do not have a pathway plan;²⁵⁹
- Of these, 24 per cent say they know that they should have a pathway plan, but do not have one;²⁶⁰
- Many care leavers report that their pathway plans are out of date – implying that regular reviews are not happening;²⁶¹
- Pathway plans may not record important issues like their social networks and family support.²⁶²

'I was meant to get a pathway plan, but because I had mental health issues at the time, I never got one. I didn't get a personal adviser either. I asked for one – it's what I'm entitled to.'

Care leaver, in evidence to the CSJ

One approach to tackling a problem like this would be to enable young people themselves to enforce their rights and access their entitlements.

It is important that there are proper means of redress for negligence, injustice or worse on the part of local authorities. In *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, the CSJ argued that Section 8 of the Children Act 1989 should be opened up to looked after children.²⁶³ Section 8 Orders

255 Department for Education, *The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers*, London: Department for Education, 2014, pp19–21 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361534/CA1989_The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_V3_0610.pdf (03/12/14)]

256 Ibid

257 Ibid, p28

258 Family Law Week, *The Importance of Pathway Plans and Local Authorities' Duties to Care Leavers*, 2010 [accessed via: www.familylawweek.co.uk/site.aspx?i=ed68903 (08/12/14)]

259 The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, *The Entitlements Inquiry Report with recommendations*, London: The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, 2013, p11 [accessed via: www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/Entitlements_Inquiry_Full_Report.pdf (08/12/14)]. This is largely consistent with previous surveys, such as Morgan R, *Children's care monitor 2011*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2011, p64 [accessed via: www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/c/Children's%20care%20monitor%202011.pdf (08/12/14)]

260 Ibid, p11

261 Ibid, p27

262 Munro E, *Evaluation of the Right2BCared4 Pilots: Final report*, London: Department for Education, 2011, p14 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182483/DFE-RR106.pdf (08/12/14)]

263 CSJ, *I Never Left Care, Care Left Me*, London: CSJ, 2013, Chapter 3

give power to courts to stop parents from taking actions against the wishes and welfare of their children.²⁶⁴ Removing the prohibition on using Section 8 Orders with respect to the corporate parent would give children in care an equal right to contact orders, prohibited steps orders, and specific issue orders.

However, we do not believe that enforcing entitlements alone will bring about the widespread and much needed improvement of support for care leavers. As we set out in this chapter, the principles of corporate parenting are about personal commitment and an ongoing interest: these are the best safeguards against such gross injustices occurring in the first place.

5.2 Good corporate parenting: taking the lead

One of the most positive developments in recent years has been the establishment of Children in Care Councils in every local authority.²⁶⁵ These provide an opportunity for looked after children and care leavers to raise issues and concerns directly with leaders, but their effectiveness is variable.²⁶⁶ We have heard positive examples where issues raised, such as contact with families, fed directly into the corporate parenting strategy. However some councils currently fail to involve a representative group of children in care and care leavers, and children in care councils can even have trouble arranging to see councillors.²⁶⁷

We have found that, where there is a corporate parenting 'mindset' among local authority leadership, improvements across the board follow.

Case study: Hampshire County Council

The CSJ heard how personal commitment from the very highest levels of Hampshire County Council has led to exceptional support for children in care and care leavers. This achievement is reflected in part by the fact that they are now taking over the running of the Isle of Wight's failing children's services.²⁶⁸

According to Ofsted:

*'Lead members and senior officers describe children in the local authority's care as part of the "Hampshire family" and this area of work is supported by significant investment, which has underpinned the development of the Intern Plus scheme, new residential service provision, and the Staying Put initiative. These schemes have had a discernible impact on young people's confidence, personal development and life chances.'*²⁶⁹

264 Ibid

265 A National Voice, *ANV CICC National Mapping Report 2012 to 2013*, A National Voice, 2013 [accessed via: www.anationalvoice.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&task=download&id=11_5e3bf1d6109733591678d303f50f58ef&Itemid=140 (08/12/14)]

266 Hart D and Williams A, *Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice*, Hampshire: National Children's Bureau, 2013, p37

267 A National Voice, *ANV CICC National Mapping Report 2012 to 2013*, A National Voice, 2013, pp19–23 [accessed via: www.anationalvoice.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&task=download&id=11_5e3bf1d6109733591678d303f50f58ef&Itemid=140 (08/12/14)]; Ofsted, *Slough Borough Council: Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and Care Leavers*, London: Ofsted, 2014 [accessed via: www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/slough/051_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf (08/12/14)]

268 BBC News, *Hampshire to run Isle of Wight children's services*, 14 June 2013 [accessed via: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-22892070 (08/12/14)]

269 Ofsted, *Hampshire County Council: Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and Care Leavers*, London: Ofsted, 2014, p27 [accessed via: www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/hampshire/051_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf (08/12/14)]

The Internship Plus is a case in point. As we described in detail in section 3.3, the scheme provides intensive support to help young people access apprenticeships within the local authority.

This was an initiative of the council leadership, under whose direction the local authority made a substantial financial commitment to provide intensive support for care leavers to access employment.

Ken Thornber CBE, who was council leader at the time, explained to the CSJ his motivations:

'As corporate parents we must always take our responsibilities very seriously. As Leader of the Council I became aware of groups of our children in care, who year after year left our care at the age of sixteen without the support of foster parents and who were badly damaged by their early childhoods and who may have had three or more foster parent placements only to find that they could not adapt to life with these worthy people. At the age of sixteen they faced the world alone despite our efforts to maintain contact with some of them. They were on the fringes of, or within, the world of criminality and life offered them little hope.'

'We all know that the world of work offers pride and dignity, and I concluded these young people would not secure work and experience the independence that employment brings. I set up Hampshire's "Internship Plus" programme for them.'

'That was it – there was no financial incentive in it for the County Council, and no votes to be won by doing it. The reward has been to see inarticulate and semi-literate young people blossom, securing real employment and enjoying real self esteem for the first time in their lives.'

Councillor Ken Thornber CBE, former leader of Hampshire County Council, in evidence to the CSJ

From leadership based on personal commitment to the corporate parenting role, improvements in the local authority followed.

We were told by managers that, as a result of having young people working in various departments, there had been a real increase in awareness about the responsibility the entire local authority has towards care leavers. Knowledge of what it means to be a good 'corporate parent' has spread beyond children's services to other departments.

The scheme not only helps young people in a practical way, but also encourages them to expect that the local authority will look out for their welfare. As one care leaver commented to us, they wanted to sign up for the Internship 'because the council is my corporate parent'.

The case of Hampshire clearly demonstrates what it means for a local authority to be a good corporate parent. The local authority leadership identified that some of their care leavers were experiencing a problems, including unemployment, and did what many 'pushy' parents would do – gave them a start in the 'family business'.

If leadership on the issue is strong enough, the corporate parenting 'mindset' can then spread to other local authority personnel. However, that requires councillors to both have an understanding of the challenges care leavers face, and a commitment to helping resolve their problems.

We came across various examples of training and practices to help council leaders get to grips with what it means to be a corporate parent. One of the most revealing was that of Staffordshire City Council.

Good practice: Staffordshire County Council

According to Ofsted:

*'Staffordshire County Council is an ambitious corporate parent, and senior officers and members demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the needs of looked after children and care leavers.'*²⁷⁰

Those we spoke to from the local authority attributed this result, in part, to two innovative training events to raise awareness of the corporate parenting role.

These brought together, first, senior officers from across the Staffordshire County Council and, second, County and District Councillors. Participants followed the story of a (fictitious) child, 'Millie', as she became looked after and moved through care into young adulthood. A range of practitioners and professionals (alongside an actor playing the child) interacted with the audience to explore the challenges that Millie faced, and think about what they could do to support and assist children and young people in Millie's situation.

The key objectives of the event were to give participants insight into the lives of looked after children, and to prompt leaders to consider how they could take direct action to better fulfil their role as corporate parents.

'For many officers and members, this was a real eye opener. They told us that the event brought to life the complexities and challenges faced by children and young people growing up in care and allowed them to reflect on what they could do within their own roles to support them.'

Scott Crawford, County Manager, Adoption and Fostering, Staffordshire County Council, in evidence to the CSJ

At the end of the event, participants made pledges, not just to show general commitment to looked after children and care leavers, but also on what their own departments could do to provide practical support, such as taking on apprentices, offering work experience placements, and providing mentoring opportunities.

'Since these events we have facilitated a Corporate Parenting Champions Group and galvanised the support of a number of senior officers and County Councillors in order to drive forward improvements for our looked after children. We also used the feedback and learning to inform our Corporate Parenting Strategy.'

Scott Crawford, County Manager, Adoption and Fostering, Staffordshire County Council, in evidence to the CSJ

This kind of training makes the issues affecting care leavers *tangible* for officers and members, and afterwards expects a *commitment* from them.

We suggest councillors go one step further. In October last year members of the Social Justice Cabinet Committee shadowed or visited care leavers to gain a first-hand experience of the kind of issues they face.²⁷¹ This included the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Rt Hon Ian Duncan Smith MP, Minister for Children and Families Edward Timpson MP, Prisons Minister Andrew Selous MP, and Health Minister Norman Lamb MP. The commitment that

²⁷⁰ Ofsted, *Staffordshire County Council: Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers*, London: Ofsted, 2014 [accessed via: www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/staffordshire/053_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf (08/12/14)]

²⁷¹ Department for Education, Press Release, *Government ministers shadow young people at work*, 30 October 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/news/government-ministers-shadow-young-people-at-work (08/12/14)]

arose from their experiences is clearly evident in the most recent update to the Social Justice Strategy.²⁷²

If cabinet ministers can find time to spend a day with care leavers, council members should be able to find time to do this too.

We recommend council members be introduced to their role and responsibilities as corporate parents through shadowing or 'hands-on' activities with care leavers.

5.3 Facilitating good corporate parenting

Central government should also have a role in enabling councillors to be the 'pushy parents' which they should be, and many aspire to be.

As we have already stated, good corporate parenting is about leaders wanting the same outcomes for their looked after children as they would want for their own children. That includes an ongoing interest in care leavers who have recently 'left the nest' and a desire to help them in the transition to adulthood.

Such an aspiration will only be meaningful if leaders actually know what the outcomes for care leavers are. Even the most committed and conscientious councillors may be surprised to learn that over half of their female care leavers are becoming teenage parents, as our FOI data shows is the case in some local authorities.²⁷³

To resolve this problem, a handful of local authorities have collected data into 'scorecards', which clearly set out outcomes for children in care and care leavers, and how they compare to internal targets. Southwark have organised national indicators for looked after children and care leavers around the 'every child matters' outcomes.²⁷⁴ Brent is beginning to collect data on measures outside the national indicators, such as the number of care leavers who are parents.²⁷⁵ Meanwhile, Merton does not have a 'scorecard' as such, but a detailed report which ranks the local authority against its statistical neighbours on a number of measures.²⁷⁶

By setting out outcomes in a clear, transparent way, councillors in these local authorities are able to build up an accurate picture about whether provision is making a difference to young people's lives.

272 HM Government, *Social Justice: transforming lives: Progress report*, London: HM Government, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/375964/cm8959-social-justice-progress-report.pdf (08/12/14)]

273 For example, in Bolton of the 25 female care leavers who were aged 19 last year, 22 had a child that year or in a previous year. Freedom of Information Requests by Centre for Social Justice [sent 11/11/14]. 103 local authorities responded, 93 were able to give data

274 Southwark Council, *Corporate Parenting Performance Indicators – For Southwark Children's Services* [accessed via: <http://modern.gov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s12494/Appendix%201%20Performance%20Monitoring%20Scorecard.pdf> (04/12/14)]

275 Brent Council, *Corporate Parenting Scorecard 2014 – 15* [accessed via: <http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s25269/a-2-Corporate%20Parenting%20Scorecard%20Apr-%20Jun%202014.pdf> (04/12/14)]

276 Merton Council, *Merton Annual Corporate Parenting Report: Financial Year 2013–2014*, London: Merton, 2014 [accessed via: <http://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s5850/Appendix%201.pdf> (04/12/14)]

A great deal more could be achieved by universalising corporate parenting scorecards across the country, standardising them, expanding the number of indicators measured, and directly comparing local authority performance.

Case study: adoption scorecards²⁷⁷

In response to delays in the adoption process, and a desire to see more children adopted, the Government has introduced 'adoption scorecards' for every local authority.

These detail indicators including the average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adopted family, and the percentage of ethnic minority children leaving care who are adopted. The Government also ranks the performance of each local authority, in each of these measures, in comparison to other local authorities.

This gives local authority leadership a much more genuine sense of 'how they are doing' in comparison to similar local authorities, potentially providing a spur to action.

Where local authorities perform particularly poorly, urgent, detailed discussions are held with DfE to analyse what the underlying problems are.

In part as a result of the scorecard system, over this Parliament the number of children adopted rose from 3,200 to 5,050 per year.²⁷⁸

We believe that similar principles could be applied to help promote good corporate parenting. Corporate parenting scorecards for every local authority would shine a light on performance, and help council leadership identify areas of strength and weakness. As long as there is a proper understanding that local contexts can have an impact, and that there is some good practice which can negatively impact on the scores (such as high adoption rates), local authorities could be ranked on the measures.

Currently, national performance indicators are collected on education and employment participation, and appropriateness of accommodation. Encouragingly, the Government has expanded the age range for data collection from care leavers who are 19 years old, to 19–21, and there are plans to expand further to 16–21.²⁷⁹

These indicators could be included in scorecards incorporating new data regarding those aged 16–21 such as:

- Prevalence of early parenthood and repeat parenthood;
- Prevalence of children of looked after children and care leavers taken into care;
- Number able to 'Stay Put';
- Number going on to apprenticeships (as well as higher education);

²⁷⁷ See Department for Education, *Improving the adoption system and services for looked-after children*, London: Department for Education, 2014 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/policies/improving-the-adoption-system-and-services-for-looked-after-children (09/12/14)]

²⁷⁸ Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, London: Department for Education, 2014, Table A1 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359081/SFR36_2014_National_tables.xlsx (03/12/14)]

²⁷⁹ HM Government, *Care leaver strategy: One year on progress update*, London: HM Government, 2014, p3 [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/368235/Care_Leavers_Strategy_update.pdf (03/12/14)]

- Numbers who experience long-term unemployment (six months or more);
- Incidence of criminal convictions, and repeat convictions;
- Proportion who lose touch with the local authority (as a measure in itself);
- Number losing touch with their personal adviser;
- A range of qualitative measures, including the number reporting outcomes such as loneliness, addiction, and poor mental health;
- Stability of accommodation, social workers and schooling (for both looked after children and care leavers i.e. 0–21 years old).

Such an approach would enable local authorities to think strategically about what success looks like for children in their care and for councillors to have clear and transparent indicators to drive improvement where necessary. Where councils are doing particularly poorly, scorecards could provide a focus for government intervention.

We recommend that DfE create corporate parenting scorecards to measure outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

Conclusion

The number of children taken into care continues to rise: this presents a significant challenge which the Government must meet.

First, the Government must actively work to enable more parents to provide a safe and loving environment for their children to flourish. This would reduce the need for state care.

Second, there must be a concerted effort to ensure as many looked after children as possible are able to thrive in stable and loving 'substitute family' placements, whether that be foster care or adoption.

Third, much more must be done to ensure young people leaving care make a successful transition to adulthood. Much progress has been made by this Government but, as we have argued in this report, the system still lets down the most vulnerable.

Our reforms would ensure that every young person leaving care has a better chance of:

- Having strong, stable and nurturing relationships in place, with adults who are able to provide guidance and emotional support;
- Being able to stay in a single, stable supported placement until they are ready to move on;
- Being prepared for the world of work, and receiving support to succeed in whatever career is most suited to their talents and aspirations;
- Receiving specialised support if they become a parent early, are an unaccompanied minor, or suffer from mental health difficulties;
- Having a supportive and committed corporate parent, actively looking out for their interests.

We urge both central and local government to implement our recommendations so that young people taken into care do not just survive, but go on to thrive in adulthood.

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