

# Views from the frontline:

What do young people need to move on from care successfully?

October 2017





## Introduction

**“As a care leaver, it is good to know there are people supporting me and are there to help me when I may be struggling” – young person.**

On 17 July 2017, Centrepointhosted a parliamentary event to launch new research – From care to where? - on care leavers’ access to accommodation. The event was attended by over 60 people including care leavers, local authorities, parliamentarians and charities. Attendees were asked to share their solutions, both policy and practice, to a range of problems faced by care leavers which were highlighted in the report.

The solutions identified by attendees spanned a wide range of themes. These are presented as recommendations for both local and national government alongside examples of good practice.

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## Ensuring care leavers are able to manage a tenancy

### 1. Care leavers need the practical skills necessary to manage a tenancy

**Not having the necessary practical skills to manage a tenancy and personal finances remains one of the biggest barriers standing between care leavers and independence.**

All care leavers need:

- **Financial responsibility.** Young people should be given some financial responsibility while in their care placement. Foster carers or accommodation providers should ensure young people learn to manage an allowance and are included in discussions about household bills and financial management.
- **Money management sessions.** Local authorities have a duty to ensure that care leavers are financially capable and aware of the financial responsibilities required when living independently. This should include a session on how to claim Universal Credit and, for those requiring benefits upon their 18th birthday, an Advance Claim should be made.
- **Support to understand their tenancy.** Local authorities must ensure that care leavers understand the rights and responsibilities of a tenant and should go through the young person’s tenancy agreement with them. They should understand their housing options in the longer term and what to do if things go wrong with their tenancy.

**“Utility companies should train customer advisers to deal with care leavers’ unique needs”**

### Good practice example: Money House Programme, Greenwich

In the Royal Borough of Greenwich all care leavers are encouraged to access the Money House Programme which aims to practically prevent youth homelessness. The Money House is a ground-breaking financial capability programme, run by the charity MyBnk, built to give young people the skills to survive and prevent homelessness.

For five days, 16-25 year olds gather in a real flat while experts help them tackle rent, bills and living costs to make informed choices about their future and confront their attitudes and behaviours towards things like debt. The Money House outcomes include:

- Attendees are three times less likely to have rent arrears than their peers.
- No one who has completed it has ever been evicted.
- Landlords have reduced costs and secure more rent with fewer arrears.

In Greenwich attendance has been linked to care leavers being able to submit a bid for their own tenancy and is key to helping ensure young people are ready to transition to their own home. The course is interactive and creative. Greenwich personal advisors and foster carers have also accessed aspects of the training which further ensures young people receive more consistent advice and support. Our young people really enjoy the programme, the high quality trainers and the 'nice lunches'!

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## 2. Care leavers need sufficient money to pay rent and a deposit

**When a care leaver turns 18 the local authority is no longer responsible for financing their accommodation and many begin claiming benefits if they are not in education or employment. They are also unlikely to have savings, making it difficult to access the private rented sector.**

All care leavers need:

- **Access to a rent deposit scheme.** This should be a national government led offer, to ensure all care leavers are able to access a rent deposit, similar to the national ISA scheme for children in care.
- **Help with their first month's rent.** Care leavers are unlikely to have savings and face a wait of at least five weeks for their first Universal Credit payment upon turning 18. Local authorities must ensure that care leavers have sufficient money to cover their first month's rent.
- **Their local authority to act as a guarantor.** Young people are often required to have a guarantor when they rent their first property, but care leavers may not have a family member who can do so. Local authorities should act as a guarantor, establishing a clear contract which sets out the maximum guarantee they are willing to provide plus deposit terms and conditions.

### Good practice example: Centrepoin's rent deposit bond scheme

Centrepoin has been running a highly successful rent deposit bond scheme in the North East for the past 13 years, for homeless young people including care leavers. Rather than Centrepoin providing a cash deposit, a certificate is given to the landlord which guarantees that Centrepoin will cover any costs normally covered by a deposit, such as damage to the property.

Centrepoin provides around 50 bonds per year in the North East and has recently expanded to Bradford. The scheme has a failure rate of only six per cent and a contingency budget of around £3,000 per year to cover costs. As many young have been living independently for some time when costs are incurred, they are often in employment and therefore in a position to repay Centrepoin.

The scheme has enabled hundreds of young people to access the private rented sector who could not otherwise have done so because they did not have savings for a deposit. Landlords have reacted very positively to the scheme and are satisfied with the guarantee provided by Centrepoin.

- **To be exempt from council tax payments.** As some local authorities have already brought this in, care leavers are subject to a postcode lottery. Legislation is needed to ensure all local authorities exempt care leavers until their 22nd birthday.
- **The one bed Local Housing Allowance rate.** Care leavers should not face the cliff edge of a decrease in their housing support entitlement on their 22nd birthday. The exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate should be extended to 25.

### 3. Care leavers need a range of housing options

**Care leavers need a variety of housing options, which will also be shaped by the local housing market. The private rented sector is increasingly important given the shortage of other types of accommodation.**

All care leavers need:

- **A housing panel which assesses their needs and whether they are ready to leave care.** This should be convened by the local authority and include representatives from children's services, housing, accommodation providers/ landlords, health and education professionals (where applicable) and the young person themselves.
- **Specialised support if they are going to live with their family.** Many care leavers return to their families after care, despite issues and problems often being unresolved. Some families may require mediation, counselling or family therapy. Local authorities should use family group conferencing to establish support networks with both practical and emotional support into the future.
- **Access to 'clearing house' style accommodation.** Flats reserved for care leavers which come with floating support, designed for up to two years to prepare for the private rented sector.
- **Information about housing services in the local area.** This must also include where to access information, advice and guidance if they experience housing problems. The Centrepoin Helpline gives young people information about their housing rights and entitlements and signposts to local support: 0808 800 0661
- **Support to access and utilise their Leaving Care Grant.** Local authorities should help care leavers to think about and purchase the items they will need in their new home.

**"Local authorities should buy houses for shared accommodation for care leavers"**

**"Have a helpline if they need extra support"**

- **Access to suitable private rented tenancies.** Local authorities should keep a register of suitable private landlords and negotiate rent on behalf of care leavers.

Care leavers living in shared housing need:

- **Individual tenancies within their shared house.** A lot of young people want to live in shared accommodation but need an individual tenancy agreement so they can concentrate on just taking responsibility for their own actions.
- **Suitable housemates.** Care must be taken when placing care leavers in shared housing to ensure that the placement is a good fit for all residents within the house. Local authorities may want to consider placing care leavers with older care leavers who have already learnt to live independently and can act as role models.

“Landlords need information and support to understand the benefit system and how to support tenants who are claimants!”

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#### 4. Care leavers need ongoing housing support

Learning the skills necessary to live independently is an ongoing process and care leavers need a safety net of support to fall back on when they need it.

All care leavers need:

- **Floating support, if they need it, up to the age of 25.** This enables care leavers to live independently with a lower level of support so they are not alone. To ensure quality of service, floating support must be properly resourced and prioritised by both central and local government. If a young person’s case is closed there should also be an open door policy.
- **Regular meetings between the multiple agencies supporting them.** In order to ensure care leavers’ support needs are met and don’t fall between multiple agencies, regular meeting should be established, e.g. between local authorities, floating support and social landlords. This will provide an opportunity to make all agencies aware of issues and to give wrap around support where appropriate.

“Government funding for staying put and staying close, currently not enough!”

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#### 5. Care leavers need effective Personal Advisor support

All care leavers are entitled to a Personal Advisor, but as caseloads increase and resources decrease, the quality of service is undermined.

All care leavers need:

- **A Personal Advisor they know and trust.** There must be a smoother transition from Social Worker support to Personal Advisor support. Personal Advisors should begin working with young people at least three months before they turn 18 so that a relationship is established before independence. They should also provide increased levels of support over the first three months of independence.
- **Personal Advisors who have an understanding of the benefit system and basic financial management.** Care leavers reported that this is what they need help with as soon as they leave care and Personal Advisors are well placed to provide this.
- **Personal Advisors who have sufficient time to support them effectively.** While some care leavers may not need high levels of support, many will. Personal Advisors should be easily contactable by telephone and available to meet care leavers when they need it. This can only happen if Personal Advisors have lower caseloads.

“Care leavers need a consistent person who they can turn to”

## 6. No care leaver should be left without the mental health support they need

**Due to trauma and difficulties experienced in their childhood, care leavers often struggle with poor mental health. Their mental health needs must be addressed if they are to live independently.**

All care leavers need:

- **Access to CAMHS support until they are 25 years old.** Within this, care leavers should have access to therapeutic support which is specifically tailored for care leavers, given their unique experiences and needs. Until emotional and mental health needs are met, care leavers struggle to focus on developing the practical skills needed to manage their tenancy.
- **Personal Advisors who are trained in recognising when a care leaver is struggling with their mental health.** They must be on hand to ensure young people are signposted to appropriate treatment and support. This also requires a positive professional relationship between care leavers and their PA to ensure this is effective.

## 7. Care leavers should be in employment, education or training

**Young people often leave care at a critical time in their education, which can greatly affect their ability to continue learning or to access employment.**

All care leavers need:

- **A clear plan regarding their employment, education or training,** as part of their Pathway Plan. Local authorities need to ensure they have access to information and advice to inform these plans.
- **Information about local learning and training opportunities.** Particularly for young people who may need extra support or an alternative to traditional academic routes.
- **Encouragement to aim high.** While their peers will have the emotional and moral support of their family, care leavers need this support from the professionals supporting them.
- **Work taster days.** Practitioners attending the event suggested that the local authority would be a good place to have work taster days, enabling care leavers to experience a work place which is also a supported environment.

### Good practice example: Kent County Council's Care Leaver Progression Partnership

The Care Leaver Progression Partnership (CLPP) sees universities, colleges and local authorities commit to equipping care leavers with skills needed for when they transition between different stages and on to independence. It is a collective endeavour to better understand and remove the barriers to post-16 education and training for local children in care and care leavers.

All members work to agreed Terms of Reference and objectives that are reviewed annually, and sign an agreement which runs for three years at a time. They are governed by a steering group comprising of a representative from each member institution.

Each year CLPP commissions a data report which looks at the profile and educational outcomes of the local care leaver population and makes comparisons with national data sets. This report is used to inform their collaborative work.

Find out more: [www.careleaverpp.org](http://www.careleaverpp.org)

## 8. The potential of peer to peer models should be harnessed

**Only care leavers understand what it feels like to leave care and so systems should be in place to create a supportive network, within which young people can support each other and learn from each other.**

All care leavers need:

- **Buddying schemes.** Where younger care leavers or those preparing to leave care are partnered with their older peers who can offer advice and support to the younger person as they leave care.
  - **A Care Leaver Council.** Many local authorities have a children in care council, but this often ends when the young person leaves care. Local authorities should also establish care leaver councils to inform the support they provide to this group as well as acting as an alumni group where care leavers can support each other.
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## 9. Care leavers need to feel part of their wider community

**Some care leavers don't have family so the community needs to create more opportunities so young people have a secondary family.**

All care leavers need:

- **To live in an area where they feel comfortable and are able to call home.** This is especially important where a young person has been placed away from their home local authority. If they have settled somewhere else they should not be forced to return to an area where they have no connection in order to access housing.
- **Access to mentors or Independent Visitors from their local community.** Having a trusted adult who knows the local area who can provide orientation and support to establish their independence. This will be especially crucial for young people who do need to move to a new area.
- **Access to a care leaver's hub within the community.** Many practitioners and young people argued that having access to support in one central location would ensure care leavers know where to get help.
- **To know what services and amenities are available in their local area.** Personal Advisors need to ensure that all care leavers have an overview of local services, ranging from health to leisure facilities.

**Find out more about  
Centrepoin't's work with care leavers:  
[www.centrepoin't.org.uk/careleavers](http://www.centrepoin't.org.uk/careleavers)**

**If you would like to discuss our  
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