

Would you accept this for your own child?

A set of practical policy recommendations produced by Drive Forward Foundation's Care-Experienced Policy Forum

Find the full document here



FROM CARE TO CAREER

Foreword

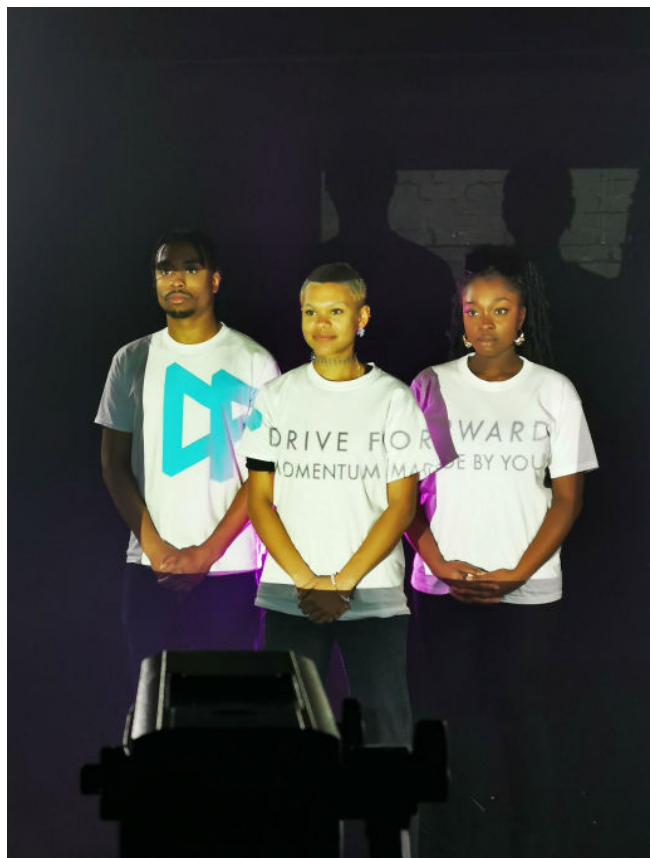
Care-experienced young people experience disproportionately worse outcomes than their non-care-experienced peers¹. Nearly half of the children in care have a mental health disorder² and it is estimated nearly 25% of homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives³. It's a stark reality: care-experienced individuals have significantly lower life expectancies than their peers, and this status quo is unacceptable⁴. We must ask ourselves:

- *Are we effectively meeting the needs of children in care?*
- *Are we adequately preparing them for successful futures during their transition to adulthood?*

Despite the urgent recommendations from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care two years ago, meaningful reforms have yet to be implemented. This manifesto aims to ensure that these critical issues receive the attention and action they desperately need from policymakers. **Our goal is to improve the life outcomes for care-experienced young people.**

As care-experienced individuals, we understand firsthand the challenges of transitioning from care to adulthood. We propose solutions that would have positively impacted our lives then and could continue to do so now. Far too often, young people in care feel abandoned when they turn 18, with essential services coming to an abrupt end when they are needed the most⁵.

Following the recent UK general election, we are calling on the newly elected government, public officials, and policymakers to consider the policy recommendations featured in this manifesto. These recommendations, developed in collaboration with care-experienced policy forum members, offer practical solutions to longstanding issues.



¹ [statistics-briefing-children-in-care.pdf \(nspcc.org.uk\)](#)

² [A-healthy-state-of-mind-final.pdf \(allcatsrgrey.org.uk\)](#)

³ [Care-leavers-transition-to-adulthood.pdf \(nao.org.uk\)](#)

⁴ [The-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-Final-report.pdf \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵ 'Ready or not': care leavers' views of preparing to leave care - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](#))

Together, they seek to replicate the role of a ***supportive family network*** and lay the foundations for care-experienced adults to flourish as they transition into adulthood.

Our recommendations reflect the systematic inequalities and discrimination faced by care-experienced individuals⁶ and will have a direct impact on the quality of life for care-experienced people now and in the future. We pose a simple question to policymakers and society at large:

***Would you accept this for
your own child?***

⁶ WWCSC_-Systematic_Review_YP_Leaving_OOH_Care_July2021_FINAL.pdf
(whatworks-csc.org.uk)

Introduction

Drive Forward Foundation's Policy Forum

Drive Forward Foundation is a pioneering organisation committed to empowering care-experienced young people to thrive in education, employment, and beyond. At the heart of our mission is our youth-led policy forum. We provide a platform where care-experienced individuals come together to drive positive change in policies affecting their lives.

Our Care Experienced Policy Forum was established in 2016 as a response to the consistent oversight of care-experienced young people in policy development and implementation. Since our inception, we have been fervently advocating on issues about housing, health & social care, and criminal justice. Composed of passionate individuals driven by a common purpose, we strive to effect transformative policy changes benefiting all care-experienced young people across the UK.

Over the years our forum has built valuable relationships with public officials and organisations around the country; leveraging our connections to shape policy agendas and steer legislators to address the unique needs and challenges faced by care-experienced individuals.

In this manifesto, we use the term "care-experienced" to encompass both children in care and care leavers. However, where necessary to delineate the legal category of Care Leavers (defined as individuals who have been under the care of a Local Authority for 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday), we will specifically refer to them as such.



At a glance



Care-Experience as a Protected Characteristic:

Advocate for the inclusion of care-experience as a protected characteristic in legislation, ensuring legal recognition and protection for care-experienced individuals.



Local Authority Rental Guarantor and Deposit Scheme:

Introduce a scheme whereby Local Authorities act as rental guarantors and provide deposit assistance for care-experienced young people seeking accommodation in the private sector.



Dedicated Mental Health Provision for Care Leavers:

Establish dedicated mental health services for Care Leavers, ideally integrated within Local Authority Leaving Care Teams, to ensure tailored and accessible support.



Place a statutory duty on local authorities to create and embed Local Protocols for reducing the criminalisation of Care-Experienced young people:

A statutory duty to implement Local Protocols would commit appropriate interventions and ringfence funding for services which prioritise diversion from formal youth justice involvement.



Universal Credit Entitlement for Care Leavers:

Extend the top rate of universal credit entitlement to all Care Leavers upon reaching the age of 18, providing essential financial support during the transition to independent living.



Expansion of Care Leaver Internship Schemes:

Extend care leaver internship schemes to a wider range of public sector organisations, as part of an expanded Corporate Parenting responsibility, to facilitate greater access to employment opportunities and professional development for care-experienced individuals.

Creating the Conditions for Care-experienced Young People to Thrive

"While most 18-year-olds are able to live with their family whilst they figure out their next steps, most care leavers do not have this luxury and do not have adequate time, space and resources to make these decisions in an ideal way" Ester, Policy Forum member.

Care-experienced young people come into contact with a broad range of public services from a young age, and amidst the cost-of-living crisis⁷ and the financial strain on local councils, they are disproportionately impacted by services that are struggling to deliver their core responsibilities. Unlike many young people who can depend on family support and often go back and forth from their parents' homes until they are in their 20's⁸, a luxury care leavers do not have, they face the full brunt of these economic pressures alone. Already navigating a complex transition to independence, they are particularly vulnerable to the effects of economic instability⁹. The interplay between increased exposure to public services and the current economic instability intensifies the urgent need for targeted interventions required to mitigate the adverse impacts on care-experienced young people¹⁰.

The average age a young person stops living with their parents has steadily increased and is now between 23 and 25¹¹. **The new Labour government must take a proactive stance, sticking to their *mission-driven* pledge, recognising their parental responsibility and providing public bodies¹² with the skills and resources necessary to match the level of support most families are providing for their own children.**

Furthermore, the strain on support services such as food banks and homeless shelters exacerbates the challenges faced by care-experienced individuals. As these services struggle to meet the demands of all those in need, resources are stretched thin, leaving care-experienced young people at risk of falling through the cracks¹³. This highlights the critical importance of addressing the systemic issues contributing to the reduction of living standards across the country¹⁴.

⁷ CBP-9428.pdf (parliament.uk)

⁸ docs (financialfairness.org.uk)

⁹ report-cost-living-crisis-care-experienced-young-people-bank-mum-dad-.pdf

¹⁰ Written Statement: Basic Income Pilot for Care Leavers in Wales (16 February 2022) | GOV.WALES

¹¹ More adults living with their parents - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

¹² APPG-Corporate-Parenting-Inquiry-Final-Report.pdf

¹³ CSJ_Care_Report_28.01.14_web.pdf (centreforsocialjustice.org.uk)

¹⁴ R265-Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK-2023-1.pdf (ifs.org.uk)

Our Top Six Policy Recommendations

1. Legislative

Policy Ask - Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic to be made into legislation

"The term 'Care-leaver' often has negative connotations attached to it. Care leavers can be viewed and categorised by society as individuals who are either criminals, troubled, living an unstable life, or unable to obtain a qualification or a career. Though this isn't the case for most care-leavers, this is the stereotype we must battle.

*Care-leavers already face many barriers in their lives when it comes to employment and educational opportunities, which can be exacerbated by the 'care-leaver' status. Not having care-leaver status as a protected characteristic leaves us open to discrimination without any legal protection from the government. The government has asked for our trust in handing them the title of Corporate Parents, yet a parent would never leave their child open to discrimination from the world. A parent would actively seek a way to end this discrimination. It's time for the government to step up for its corporate children". **Noura - Policy Forum member***

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, published in May 2022, included recommendations that the 'government should make care experience a protected characteristic'. It also notes that making care experience a protected characteristic would provide greater authority to employers, businesses, public services, and policymakers to put in place policies and programmes that promote better outcomes for care-experienced people. It would also make the UK the first country in the world to recognise care-experienced people in this way.

Despite their resilience, care-experienced people are confronted with significant barriers that impact them throughout their lives¹⁵. They face discrimination and stigma across housing, health, education, employment, and the criminal justice system, which often results in significantly worse outcomes compared to their non-care-experienced peers¹⁶. This stigma and discrimination can be explicit, often accompanied by assumptions about the likely characteristics of children and adults who have care experience. They can also be implicit and are evidenced in the way care experience is discussed in schools, workplaces, and the media¹⁷. At its worst, this can lead to care-experienced people being refused employment, failing to succeed in education, or facing unfair judgements about their ability to parent when they have children and families of their own.

¹⁵ Final_14_06_23_Protected_Characteristics_Report.pdf

¹⁶ WCS_and_EHRC_2018_Care_Experience_and_Protected_Characteristics.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/care-experience-as-protected-characteristic/>

Equalities legislation brings statutory duties to organisations, and this could increase the visibility of care experiences in more sectors of society. Furthermore, there would be greater knowledge of care-experienced people in organisations, and it would impress upon organisations a requirement to explicitly consider the needs of care-experienced people. Our forum spoke with Josh MacAlister about this topic when he was writing the Care Review, and since then, over 90 councils have passed motions recognising care experience as a protected characteristic¹⁸. We see a tipping point coming, and the government should reconsider their position.



¹⁸ Systemic disadvantage and unrecognised resilience: Why experience of the care system should be a protected characteristic - Revolving Doors (revolving-doors.org.uk)

2. Housing

Policy Ask - Local Authority to act as a rental guarantor and provide a deposit scheme for care-experienced young people between 18-30.

"Having grown up in the care system, I know firsthand the struggle of finding stable housing once you turn 18. Care-experienced young people are five times more likely to face homelessness than their peers, often because we lack the financial security and guarantors that landlords demand. It's imperative that local authorities step in as rent guarantors for those of us who are employed or receiving Universal Credit. This simple act would offer us a safety net and a fair chance to build our lives.

*To encourage private landlords to accept local authorities as guarantors, we need policies that provide incentives such as tax breaks or insurance schemes covering potential rental losses. Additionally, establishing a streamlined process for local authorities to act as guarantors can build trust and ease the administrative burden on landlords. These steps would significantly reduce the risk of homelessness for care leavers, giving us the stability we need to thrive." **Fatima - Policy Forum member***

The need for a national rent guarantor and deposit scheme for care leavers aged 18-30 in England is underscored by the significant challenges these young individuals face when transitioning out of the care system into independent living¹⁹. The number of care leavers aged 18 – 20 facing homelessness has increased by at least 33% since 2018²⁰. The care system often leaves young individuals without the safety net and stability that a family structure provides²¹. In the absence of this support, care leavers in England often struggle to find good quality accommodation and are at increased risk of homelessness – one in four homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives²².

The private rental sector has become increasingly important for care leavers in recent years due to the shortage of social housing and long waiting lists. Most landlords require rent upfront alongside a deposit, which can be very difficult for care leavers to provide due to their low income. For example, an apprentice in London can expect a salary of £22,000 a year, or a young person over 21 on minimum wage working full-time will receive £23,700 a year. Landlords often require someone who can act as a guarantor in the event of non-payment of rent. For care-experienced young people, this is a real challenge as they do not have family members who can fulfil this role. These barriers make it difficult for care leavers to access properties in the private rental sector, and in

¹⁹ Rent guarantor - FINAL.pdf (barnardos.org.uk)

²⁰ Press release: 33% increase in homelessness among care leavers - Become (becomecharity.org.uk)

²¹ No-Place-Like-Home-Report-IKEA.pdf (barnardos.org.uk)

²² appg_for_ending_homelessness_report_2017_pdf.pdf (crisis.org.uk)

one survey, 40% of care leavers stated that not having enough savings for a deposit has been a barrier to accessing secure accommodation²³.

Secure housing is essential for everybody, not just care-experienced young people. Stable housing serves as the cornerstone for mental well-being, employment stability, and access to essential support networks, playing a foundational role in establishing yourself as a young adult²⁴. **Implementing a dedicated scheme that offers a rent guarantor and assistance with rental deposits is a simple solution to increasing the number of care leavers who can access secure tenancies.** As part of their corporate parenting responsibilities, local authorities are perfectly placed to provide this assistance, and in some cases, they are already doing this. **Kent County Council already acts as a guarantor and provides a deposit for care leavers looking to rent in the private sector**²⁵. Initial evidence shows that in the early days of the rental guarantor scheme – which launched in 2018 – it had a 0% default rate on guaranteed tenancies. Barnardo's has calculated that to set up the deposit scheme it would cost an initial outlay of £23 million and an ongoing cost of £380,000 thousand a year. And it would cost the government £6 million a year to provide the rental guarantor scheme. Such interventions would not only alleviate the immediate financial burden on care leavers but also emulate the supportive familial environment that people without care experience often take for granted.

²³ from-care-to-where-centrepoint-report.pdf

²⁴ Improving health and care through the home – UK Health Security Agency (blog.gov.uk)

²⁵ Ongoing housing support (lea.kent.sch.uk)

3. Mental Health and Wellbeing

Policy Ask - Dedicated mental health provision for Care Leavers, ideally sat within Local Authority Leaving Care Teams.

"Whilst there is a commitment from professionals in health and local authorities to support care leavers, the reality is that many are still not having their mental health needs met. Care leavers do not receive annual health checks in the same way as children in care. It is crucial that NHS mental health services establish good relationships with their local authority Leaving Care services, including any dedicated mental health services within their local authority. This will ensure that the young person receives the level of support that they deserve in a timely manner, and promote their well-being, which will inevitably give them the opportunity to make the most of the opportunities given to them and have the same quality of life and life experiences as others their age. This is invaluable, especially as care-experienced individuals are likely to have felt different from their peers in some way whilst they were in the system," Nicole, Policy Forum member

50% of care leavers identify as having mental health needs, and many of these needs go unaddressed due to targeted services coming to an end when care-experienced young people turn 18²⁶. Ensuring that mental health services are readily available to care leavers upon reaching adulthood is crucial. **Many young people in the forum have said that they were not able to or ready to access mental health services when they were a child and that the need for mental health services only increased when they turned 18 due to transitioning out of care and many other services becoming unavailable for the first time²⁷.**

Research has shown that the transition out of care leaves young people financially vulnerable, with a significant number living at or near the poverty line²⁸. This problem has taken on a new dimension with the cost-of-living crisis, which has resulted in an increased strain on young people and their mental well-being. With a transition out of care, generally at 18, young people find much of their support system changes, and they are no longer eligible for young persons' mental health services²⁹. Despite eligibility for services decreasing following the young people leaving care, their mental health needs are known to increase, exacerbating known disparities in the mental health and well-being of care-experienced young people compared to their non-care-experienced peers³⁰.

²⁶ neglected-minds.pdf (barnardos.org.uk)

²⁷ phillips-et-al-2023-a-scoping-review-of-factors-associated-with-the-mental-health-of-young-people-who-have-aged-out-of.pdf

²⁸ Reviews-on-mental-health-services-for-care-experienced-young-people-final (1).pdf

²⁹

<https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/An-exploratory-study-of-the-emotional-wellbeing-needs-and-experiences-of-care-leavers-in-england.pdf>

³⁰ Care-leavers-experiences-of-emotional-wellbeing-support-while-leaving-care.pdf

In the government's response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the Department for Education committed to working with health partners to reduce the disparities in long-term mental and physical health outcomes and improve the well-being of care-experienced young people³¹. **We are calling on the new government to create a mental health-specific Care Leaver offer. We believe it should be embedded into Leaving Care teams through the local authority's social care services³².** This service could be in partnership with the regional NHS teams³³ in a similar way that CAMHS works with children's social care³⁴.



³¹ Children_s_social_care_stable_homes_consultation_February_2023.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)

³² Meeting-the-mental-health-needs-of-care-leavers_guidance.pdf

³³ <https://open.spotify.com/episode/5R5tSOjJgVJiKS3I9CDQ2z?si=7235485de4d44379>

³⁴

https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20230308122535mp_/https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-Final-report.pdf

4. Criminal Justice

Policy Ask - Place a statutory duty on local authorities to create and embed Local Protocols for reducing the criminalisation of children in care and care leavers.

"Many children in care are exposed to things in childhood which many adults may never see in their lifetime, from attempted suicides to drug use, gangs and the inside of a cell, homelessness, abuse and more. These experiences could happen alongside personal issues the child is experiencing, such as dealing with the lack of a family and being placed in an alien environment, being expelled from school and suffering from poor mental health. These experiences stay with you into adult life, they never go away, compounded by the realities of supporting yourself as an adult. These are the same children we label as criminals, sometimes for minor offences, when what they really need is support, stability and the chance to leave the care system and forge their own way forward." Shimron - Policy Forum member

The number of children entering the youth justice system in England and Wales has reduced significantly in the last decade. This was largely due to an increase in diversionary schemes and cost-reduction measures. Unfortunately, the reduction in youth justice involvement has not been experienced equally, and the decline has resulted in intensifying existing inequalities within the system³⁵. Care-experienced children and Black and minoritised children have not experienced the same level of decline as other children³⁶. Official data suggests that children in care are disproportionately likely to receive a caution or conviction and that children living in residential care are particularly at risk of formal youth justice contact. **The over-criminalisation of young people is an intersectional issue, and young people who are care-experienced and of a minority ethnic background are significantly more likely to receive a custodial sentence than their white care-experienced peers³⁷.**

There is no one-size-fits-all policy that will end the unnecessary criminalisation of care-experienced young people³⁸. It is a systemic issue and requires a multi-agency approach alongside local expertise and decision-making power³⁹. Ending the unnecessary criminalisation of care-experienced young people has been one of the policy forum's longest-standing campaigns⁴⁰, and we have been a part of and witnessed real progress on this issue. The National Protocol on Reducing the Unnecessary

³⁵ Katie Hunter - Policy Briefing - Final Sept 2023.pdf

³⁶ Double Discrimination - Black care-experienced young adults navigating the criminal justice system report.pdf

³⁷ BoystomenthecostofadulthoodDavisandMarsh2020.pdf

³⁸ nuffield-literature-review-final.pdf

³⁹ YA-youth-led-report-09-FINAL.pdf

⁴⁰ YJLC-Guide-DARE2CARE-14-D.pdf

Criminalisation of Looked-After Children and Care Leavers⁴¹ provides the framework for best practice for those working with looked-after children, in all types of placement, and care leavers up to age 25. It was developed across the key governmental departments responsible for working with care-experienced young people and is guided by the principle of multi-agency working across education, health & social care, and criminal justice. **Despite the protocol representing national recognition of the issue and its call for action for local authorities to implement their own agreements⁴², the protocol was not given statutory status, which immediately raised questions about its potential impact⁴³.** As recently as 2023, data shows that 59% of children and young people in custody in England are care experienced (HM Inspectorate of Prisons). This indicates the protocol is struggling to have the intended impact on care-experienced young people.



The national protocol was designed with the intention that local protocols would be created with targeted interventions, local knowledge⁴⁴ and expertise embedded within the agreements. We want the government to place a statutory duty on local authorities to create, implement and

embed Local Protocols to reduce the criminalisation of children in care and care leavers. **A statutory duty to implement Local Protocols would obligate appropriate provisions and interventions and ringfence funding for services which prioritise behaviour management and diversion from formal youth justice involvement wherever possible.** The protocols must also take account of the specific needs of different groups of children⁴⁵, including, girls, neurodivergent young people and those from racially minoritised backgrounds. Ongoing training and resources should be provided for staff to ensure protocols are embedded in practice. Finally, there must be transparent monitoring and evaluation to ensure protocols are being applied effectively and consistently. A statutory duty on local authorities will ensure the protocol's values are put into practice and ultimately lead to fewer care-experienced young people entering the criminal justice system.

⁴¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c13de84ed915d0b9211b98c/The_national_protocol_on_reducing_unnecessary_criminalisation_of_looked-after_children_and_care.pdf

⁴² [reducing_criminalisation_of_looked_after_children_and_care_leavers-_a_protocol_for_london.pdf](#)

⁴³ [hunter-et-al-2023-a-difficult-balance-challenges-and-possibilities-for-local-protocols-to-reduce-unnecessary.pdf](#)

⁴⁴ [all-wales-protocol-reducing-the-criminalisation-of-care-experienced-children-and-young-adult.pdf](#)

⁴⁵ [Disrupting the routes between care and custody for girls and women - Final-Care-Custody-Report-May-2022.pdf](#)

5. Welfare

Policy Ask - Top rate of universal credit given to all Care Leavers when they turn 18.

"I cannot turn to my family for financial assistance. Nor my peers. Or the Bank. Costs are rising, and rates of help are not. This is why I think a blanket raise to the over-25 rate should be introduced. That extra money is important not just for survival but to make a smile, and remove stress." Ester - Policy Forum member

Care leavers are expected to live independently at an earlier age than their non-care-experienced peers while receiving less financial support than those over 25⁴⁶. Currently, under-25s receive £81.77 less each month than those over 25. This disparity does not account for the fact that the cost of essentials such as food, energy, and transport are not cheaper for younger individuals. Unlike their peers, care leavers often lack family support to help them meet rising living costs. The lower rate of Universal Credit for under-25s is based on the knowledge that *most* young adults continue to be supported by their families until they achieve full independence in their mid-20s. However, this assumption is not valid for care leavers.

Research by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum⁴⁷, which included feedback from 106 care leavers who received the Universal Credit uplift during the Covid-19 pandemic, overwhelmingly supports the need for care leavers to receive the top rate of Universal Credit starting at age 18. The extra money made a significant difference, allowing care leavers to buy enough food to avoid hunger, afford phone contracts to stay connected to their support networks, and cover essential expenses for young parents, such as nappies.

The lower rate of Universal Credit for under-25s inadvertently discriminates against some of the most vulnerable young people in England⁴⁸. By providing care leavers with the same financial support as those over 25, we can acknowledge that their transition to independence occurs much sooner than that of their non-care-experienced peers, who may be able to access alternative support through robust family networks. Labour has committed in its 2024 manifesto to remove minimum wage age discrepancies and we are advocating for the same policy to apply to Universal Credit as well⁴⁹. This policy change would offer crucial support, allowing care leavers to build more stable and secure lives as they navigate early adulthood.

⁴⁶ Care Leavers Attending University are Being Made Homeless by Their Local Authorities – Byline Times

⁴⁷ <https://d1mdc3nx9zxju4.cloudfront.net/prod/uploads/2023/03/National-Leaving-Care-Benchmarking-Forum-Impact-of-Universal-Credit-uplift-2021.pdf>

⁴⁸ National-Leaving-Care-Benchmarking-Forum-Impact-of-Universal-Credit-uplift-2021.pdf (d1mdc3nx9zxju4.cloudfront.net)

⁴⁹ My plan for change – The Labour Party

6. Employment

Policy Ask - Expand Care Leaver internship and apprenticeship schemes to a wider range of public sector organisations as part of extending Corporate Parenting responsibilities

*"I believe that supporting care leavers with employment can reduce the dependency on benefits, prevent people from engaging in unhealthy activities, foster independent living and create success stories who can be a positive example." **Shimron, Policy Forum member***



Care leavers face significant barriers to employment⁵⁰. Many recommendations in this manifesto aim to alleviate those barriers by improving mental health, reducing unnecessary criminalisation, and ensuring a stable home. Employers can also take the initiative by implementing schemes to increase sustainable employment for care leavers. By earmarking specific positions or programmes for care leavers, organisations not only recognise the unique challenges these individuals have overcome but also provide them with a pathway to gain valuable work experience, develop essential skills, and build professional networks. **These internship and apprenticeship schemes offer care leavers a supportive environment where they can receive tailored guidance and mentorship, helping to bridge the gap between education or training and sustainable**

employment.

Moreover, such initiatives signal a commitment from employers and society at large to address the disparities faced by care leavers in the job market, promoting inclusivity and diversity while unlocking the potential of a talented and resilient workforce⁵¹.

As Corporate Parenting responsibilities are extended, there is an opportunity to expand the already successful Civil Service Care Leaver Internship scheme⁵². By providing

⁵⁰ CareLeaversLabourMarket.pdf (hubble-live-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com)

⁵¹ About the CLC - Care Leaver Covenant (mycovenant.org.uk)

⁵² Civil Service Care Leavers Internship Scheme | Civil Service Careers (civil-service-careers.gov.uk)

ring-fenced opportunities in the workplace, the civil service is levelling the playing field for young people who often face significant barriers to employment. Since its introduction, the Civil Service Care Leaver Internship scheme has recruited over 700 care leavers. If the NHS were to offer a similar scheme to 3,500 care leavers, it would make up 0.3% of its workforce.



Towards a Preventative State using Cross-Party Agreements

Care-experienced children and young people recognise the issues facing our public services better than most people. Our councils are facing bankruptcy and are barely managing to carry out their statutory responsibilities. **Care-experienced children and young people come into contact with a broad range of public services, including education, health, social care, transport, criminal justice, and immigration systems. When these services struggle to fulfil their duties, it is care-experienced people who experience disproportionate negative outcomes.**

As care-experienced individuals, we have had enough of being let down by the institutions that are meant to support us when we are removed from our families. The number of care-experienced young people and adults who are NEET, homeless, suffering from mental health conditions, or involved in the criminal justice system has remained largely the same for a generation⁵³. We are using this manifesto to ask you to consider working with your cross-party peers to create aspirational targets for care-experienced young people. **We believe that setting policy targets related to care leaver outcomes, such as raising our life expectancy to be in line with the UK average by 2040, would result in notable improvements for care-experienced people.**

Cross-party collaboration and agreements are essential for reaching these targets, ensuring sustained commitment across political cycles⁵⁴, and preventing policy reversals that could derail progress. Using a model similar to the Paris Agreement and COP, our political parties should come together to establish a set of aspirations for care-experienced people and then outline how they plan to achieve these ambitions. Care-experienced people should be involved in creating these aspirations, forming the solutions, and holding public officials to account.

By adopting a preventative approach⁵⁵, we can create a more supportive and effective society that addresses the root causes of the issues faced by the care-experienced community. This collaborative effort would demonstrate a genuine commitment to improving the lives of some of the most vulnerable members of our society, ensuring that they receive the support and opportunities they deserve.

⁵³ APPG-for-Looked-After-Children-and-Care-Leavers-Spotlight-Inquiry.pdf

⁵⁴ Welsh Parliament - Radical Reform for care experienced children and young people.pdf

⁵⁵ Our welfare state should prevent problems, not just solve them | Joseph Rowntree Foundation (jrf.org.uk)

Time for Action

It has been two years since the *Independent Review of Children's Social Care* was published. The review called for urgent reform and an investment of £2.6 billion over four years to address the spiralling crisis in children's social care. As part of that investment, great attention was given to the needs of care leavers. The government published its response, *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, in February 2023, announcing a commitment of £200 million over the next two years to trial a new approach in 12 local authorities. **Delaying the national reform process for children's social care will cost the taxpayer billions⁵⁶ over the long run and, more importantly, will lead to more children coming into care unnecessarily, while already under-resourced services for care-experienced young people will continue to struggle to meet their needs⁵⁷.**

The solutions set out in this manifesto have been formed by the views and experiences of care-experienced young people. It will require a joint effort to address the inequalities faced by care leavers. We all have a responsibility to address the disparities we experience, and we want to work with the government of the day to provide our expertise and experiences. This joint effort must span all sectors, including our community, national and local government, and the business and voluntary sectors.

Let's stop passing the buck! The time for action is now, and the cost of delay cannot be risked any further. By working together, we can ensure that the needs of care leavers are met and that they are given the opportunities they deserve to lead successful, fulfilling and independent lives.

⁵⁶ Cost_of_Delay_Briefing_Final_hGzUKSr.pdf

⁵⁷ Download.ashx (probonoeconomics.com)

Find out more

We're keen to speak to all parties, Civil Servants, and likeminded people ahead of the upcoming elections.

We can offer further insight and explanation on the points in this manifesto. We can also advise on how to make sure care-experienced children and young people are represented in your policies and manifestos.

Email Drive forward Foundation's Policy team with any questions, or to arrange a call or a meeting:

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