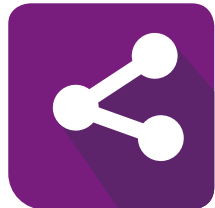
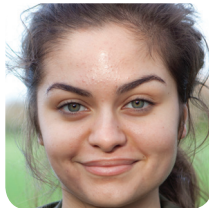


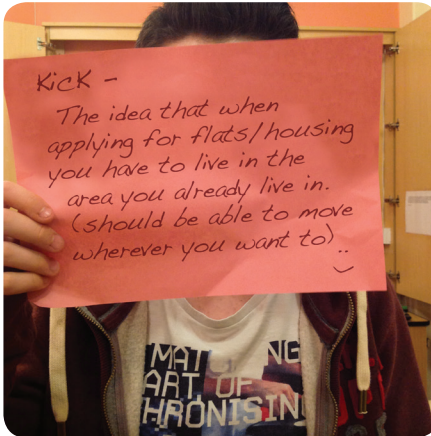
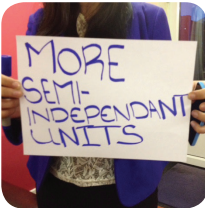
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# Access All Areas:

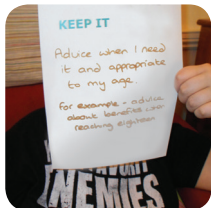
Messages from care leavers  
to a new Government

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**'Keep it:** the chance to stay with foster carers after 18.'



## Contents

### Foreword

### Education

### Employment

### Financial assistance

### Health

### Housing

### Justice system

### Access to advice and ongoing support

In 2012, The Care Leavers' Foundation, NCAS, The Prince's Trust and a National Voice brought together a coalition of third sector organisations with an interest in care leavers to form 'Access All Areas'. The purpose of the initiative was to begin a co-ordinated approach from the sector and to call on central government departments to 'care proof' a wide range of policies and practices. Successful lobbying from the group led to the implementation of the Government's Care Leaver Strategy in 2013.

# Foreword

Young people who have been in care often say that the support they get from public services doesn't meet what they need. **Access All Areas**, a group of charities that work with care leavers, published a report in 2012 which showed what the Government needed to change and do to help young people better as they left care.

In response to this, in 2013, the Government published its 'Care Leaver Strategy'<sup>1</sup>. This set out what central departments would do to improve services for care leavers. Some positive changes came about from this coordinated focus on care leavers and, in 2014, a one-year-on report from the Government summarised the key changes that had taken place.

There was, however, no commitment from Government to continue its focus on care leavers or to make sure that the public services provided by their corporate parent work well for those young people who have been in care.

Some of these young people have been through difficult and challenging times and need some extra support and encouragement as they start to make the transition to independence.

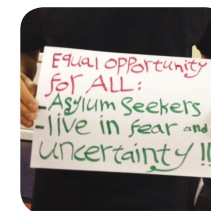
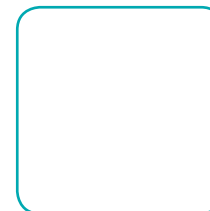
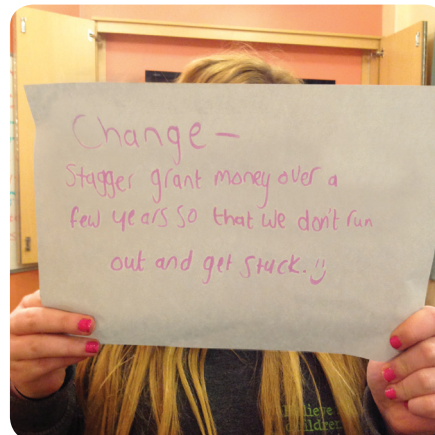
**Access All Areas** believes that central government should keep its focus on care leavers as we start a new Parliament.

To work out what needs to happen next, we asked care leavers from across England what they thought would help them. We asked questions based on the Government's Care Leaver Strategy which set out seven areas of support. We had responses from around 50 young people in 9 care leaver participation groups.

We asked young people to think about these areas of support and what about them should be **KEPT**, what should be **KICKED** and what needed to be **CHANGED**. The young people we spoke to had lots of ideas about this and their first hand experiences and knowledge should be used to inform any services that are developed to support them.

This report tells the Minister for Children and Families, in young people's words, what they need as they move on from care.

1. [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/266484/Care\\_Leaver\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266484/Care_Leaver_Strategy.pdf)



# Education

## What the Government has already done:

- Personal advisers for care leavers who want to return to education/training up to the age of 25
- Widening access to higher education through the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' National Scholarship Programme
- All local authorities required to appoint a Virtual School Head
- Pupil Premium Plus increased to £1900
- Guide to educational opportunities available to young people.

## Keep it



Care leavers told us that they welcomed being able to access bursaries for higher education and to minimise the level of debt incurred by going to university. They want to have support in school from specialist looked after children services.

- Higher Education Bursary
- Looked After Children education services in school.

## Kick it



Young people want to be able to access free training or education after the age of 19, and don't want to have their options limited because of their age or financial situation.

- Having to pay for further education or training courses after the age of 19.

## Change it



Care leavers want to have support until the age of 25 extended to all care leavers regardless of whether they are in education or not. They wanted to know where the Pupil Premium Plus was being spent, and to make sure that it is spent on young people in care and not young people in general. They want to see more support for care leavers who have emotional and behavioural issues.

- Leaving care support extended to 25 for all care leavers regardless of whether they are in education
- Ensure Pupil Premium Plus is used for Looked After Children and not children in general
- Students to be told what the Pupil Premium Plus is spent on
- Extra help for care leavers in all education establishments.

# Employment

## What the Government has already done:

- Through the Youth Contract provided access to additional adviser support, work experience, apprenticeships and wage incentives for employers
- More discretion for Jobcentre Plus staff to provide employment support for care leavers
- Jobcentre Plus accessing local flexible support funding for care leavers
- Earlier access to the Work Programme with tailored support
- New marker from Department for Work and Pensions to identify care leavers on Jobcentre systems so staff can ensure they get the support they're entitled to.

## Keep it



Young people told us that they welcomed being able to undertake apprenticeships, in order to improve their skills and employability for full time work and that more apprenticeship places should be reserved for care leavers. Additional support from non-statutory agencies was crucial in helping them look for and prepare for work.

- Apprenticeships [reserved specifically] for care leavers
- Support from employment agencies
- Specialist support from non-statutory services.

## Kick it



Whilst the young people saw the benefits of apprenticeships, they wanted to see the wage level increased. They wanted work to pay and they struggled to support themselves and their families on low rates of pay or in unpaid traineeships when there was no guarantee of a job afterwards.

- Zero hours contracts
- Low pay for apprenticeships
- Having to pay for travel when you are on a low income.

## Change it



Care leavers wanted local authorities to offer apprenticeships to all care leavers in their area, across a wide range of departments as well as more manual labour apprenticeships. They also wanted to see better access to work experience and careers advice in schools.

- More councils should offer apprenticeships to all care leavers
- More work experience in schools
- Make sure apprenticeships lead to a job offer.



# Financial assistance

## What the Government has already done:

- Arranged for all looked-after children to have a special savings account called a Junior ISA
- Revised guidance to encourage local authorities to provide at least £2,000 as a 'setting up home' allowance for care leavers
- Using dedicated advisers, ensured all Jobcentre Plus districts allow care leavers to make a claim to benefits in advance of leaving care to prevent payment delays.

## Keep it



Young people told us that they wanted to keep the various types of financial support that are available to them, such as the Higher Education bursary and the setting up home allowance.

- Higher Education bursary
- Setting up home allowance.

## Kick it



Care leavers wanted to get rid of the age restrictions on education bursaries and the bedroom tax.

- Bedroom tax
- Age restrictions on bursaries.

## Change it



Young people felt that there should be financial support if benefits were sanctioned. They were concerned that without it, young people could get into debt by going to loan sharks to support themselves. They wanted more financial independence, whether in education or employment, for example through financial support for apprentices and access to crisis support. They also wanted more advice and support, particularly personal advisers or dedicated officers at the Job Centre.

- A dedicated officer to deal with care leavers accessing benefits at every JCP benefit office
- Financial support for care leavers to 25 even if not in education and access to crisis funds
- Greater financial support when on an apprenticeship
- Housing Benefit exemptions when on an apprenticeship
- Lift restrictions on Income Support entitlements when at college and also wanting to have a part-time job.

# Access All Areas:

Messages from care leavers  
to a new Government

**'Keep it:** emotional  
health and  
well-being services  
specifically for  
care leavers'

**'Kick it:** low pay for  
apprenticeships.'

**'Change it:**  
ensure we get  
information on  
everything we  
are entitled to.'

Change:  
introduce a website  
to inform care leavers  
about specific work  
experience opportunities.



Keep It  
• Keep talking with the  
house staff  
• Keep the moving home  
allowance  
• Keep the PEP in School

Change it  
• Please support the young people  
in care  
• Better educational opportunities  
• Please pay and support with mental  
health issues and social issues  
• Yes you should

Keep it  
• Please support the young people  
in care  
• Yes you should

Kick It  
Get rid of  
LAC reviews



# Health

## What the Government has already done:

- Set up a children and young people's mental health and well-being taskforce
- Revised the health and wellbeing guidance for looked after children
- Launched interactive e-learning programmes to support children and young people's mental health.

## Keep it



Young people told us that they wanted targeted and tailored health services for care leavers. They thought that CAMHS was a good service, although support can be cut off too early. They wanted to keep easy access to sexual health services.

- Where available emotional health and wellbeing services specifically for care leavers are a good idea and work well
- CAMHS really helped with issues but support cut off when I was stable.

## Kick it



Care leavers wanted to get rid of having to pay to access some health care.

- Paid-for access to health services
- Prescription and dental charges.

## Change it



Young people told us that they wanted to change the fact that CAMHS cuts off at 18 for all young people, and that care leavers should get support for longer. They also felt that there should be integration of health services with leaving care services.

- Extension of CAMHS past age 18
- Children's health services to run in line with leaving care services.



# Housing

## What the Government has already done:

- Given young people in foster care the right to Stay Put until 21
- Encouraged local authorities to provide care leavers with at least £2,000 for their setting up home allowance
- More support for youth homelessness
- Revised social housing allocation guidance
- New guidance to limit Bed and Breakfast use for 16/17 year old care leavers.

## Keep it



Young people told us that they wanted to have help when they set up their first home, having money to buy the things that they need for their home. They also said that they often needed more personal support once they left care and so wanted more supported housing and supported lodgings available to help them transition to independence. Supported lodgings were good because young people felt they were part of the family and they had someone around to talk to when they felt down. They said Staying Put should be kept, if they had found the right foster carer, as they already had a bond with their carer.

- Keep the setting up home allowance
- More supported lodgings and supported housing
- Keep Staying Put
- More financial support for buying essentials.

## Kick it



Care leavers wanted to get rid of inappropriate or bad housing. They felt that private rented housing was often of a low standard and didn't meet their needs. They wanted more semi-independent housing so that they could gradually learn to manage on their own once they left care. Some told us that the standards of housing were really bad – dirty and unfit properties – and they should be kicked.

- Poor private housing – give us semi-independent units
- Stop inappropriate, dirty or bad housing.

## Change it



Young people told us that they wanted more support with their housing when they left care. They wanted floating support, so they had someone to turn to even when living in their own property, or a dedicated housing worker who understood what care leavers need. They also said they needed training on how to manage a tenancy and more help with budgeting their finances. Young people wanted more choice about where they were going to live, not just being told they have to stay in the same area. Others agreed that location is important and said they wanted help to find somewhere near friends and family.

- More floating support when in our own flat
- A dedicated support officer to help care leavers with housing
- Let us have a choice about where to live
- Help us find a place close to family and friends
- More help with budgeting.

# Justice system

## What the Government has already done:

- Issued guidance to staff in prisons and probation to support better identification of care leavers
- Working closely with other government departments to improve support for care leavers in the criminal justice system
- Appointed a care leavers champion.

## Keep it



Young people told us that it really helped them when they received specific support related to being a care leaver, especially from people who knew what it was about. They were able to explore other areas of their lives once they felt more confident about understanding and talking about their care experience. It was important for them to work with professionals in the criminal justice system who had an understanding of the care experience.

- Specific support made a big difference as it was the first time I spoke to someone who knew what it was about
- Peer groups really helped me talk about my experience
- Now I understand what happened to me I feel more confident about talking to my probation officer
- Talking about my time in care has helped me organise my priorities: I won't go back to prison.

## Kick it



A key message coming from young people relates to early criminalisation of young people in care and the general stigmatisation that a care experience can bring when in the criminal justice system. Professionals in the care system need to stop using the police to manage behaviour. And professionals in the criminal justice system need to stop labelling and making assumptions about young people who have been in care.

- Stop calling the police and charging me if I break a window in the children's home
- Stop assuming I am going to be difficult just because I have been in care
- Take the time to listen and to understand my history – don't just assume you know me cause I've been in care.

## Change it



Young people told us that there needs to be much more consistency in all areas of the criminal justice system. There were too many places where they didn't offer good support or have an understanding of the needs of care leavers. All professionals need to be trained in how to identify and support care leavers.

- Much more support for care leavers in prisons and in the community
- When I moved to an adult prison nobody was bothered that I was a care leaver
- They asked me if I had been in care but then nothing happened. I wanted support
- I was in care for 5 years but eventually went home but it broke down. I really needed help with resettlement as I had no family support
- Because I had been in prison, I wasn't allowed to keep my leaving care worker after 21, even though I was in training.

# Access to advice and ongoing support

## What the Government has already done:

- Funded some projects that mentor and support care leavers
- Made plans to capture more data about all care leavers, not just those who are age 19
- Extended the right to a personal adviser to care leavers aged 21 - 25 who say that they want to go back to education, not just those who are already in education.

## Keep it



Young people told us that drop-in services were really useful and they wanted this to continue. They also said that they wanted to keep the services that already existed, particularly face-to-face support and access to the internet in buildings that they go to.

- Drop-in services for care leavers are really helpful
- The amazing advice I have been given
- Face-to-face work
- Internet use at buildings we access.

## Kick it



Care leavers wanted to get rid of the inconsistency and poor continuity in support workers. They wanted one person (they suggested a social worker) to take the lead in each case as they felt that there were too many people involved in cases, and nothing got done.

- More consistency in workers between 16 and 21
- Lead Social Workers to take the lead in care leaver cases – too many people trying to do things and nothing gets done.

## Change it



Young people felt that there needed to be improved communication and advice on what services are available for care leavers. They thought that care leavers needed guidance on where to go for advice, and thought that advice and information should be given at a younger age, but also make sure that young people are getting advice when they need it, when it's appropriate to them. They also wanted out of hours support, and young person-friendly information on entitlements.

- Better communication between services on what is on offer for care leavers and what services they can access
- Have an out of hours support service in all areas
- Ensure we get information on everything we are entitled to
- Listen to what we want to talk about
- Make it easy to understand
- Provide information to school pupils for early advice.





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