

Care Leavers Connected

Volume 1 | Issue 2

Autumn Edition: October 2024



‘All of us, We are One’

National Care Leaver Week, 28 October - 3 November 2024

About Us



The CLA held a strategy weekend in September and discussed how to develop the Care Leavers Connected Project

Welcome

Dear readers,

Welcome to the second edition of Care Leavers Connected

This magazine is part of The Care Leavers' Association National Lottery funded project 'Care Leavers Connected' launched in 2024 specifically for care leavers aged 25 and over. The project aims to recognise the challenges many care leavers experience as adults and provide a space to connect with others to share their unique experiences.

Care Leavers Connected Magazine is produced by care leavers for care leavers. It is a safe space to share our stories, ambitions, and tips to support and celebrate everyone in our community. Please take the time to read through the magazine and give us any feedback. We want this to be a place that reflects our community, where people have a voice and can also find resources and connections.

If you would like to give any [feedback](mailto:connected@careleavers.com) or want to write for our future editions, please email connected@careleavers.com.

Thank you for your support,

Editorial Team



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If you simply don't have the time to get actively involved in the CLA, but you still want to support our work, you could think about [making a donation](#). All donations will go towards helping the CLA run projects and campaigns for care leavers



@careleaversassociation



@careleavers

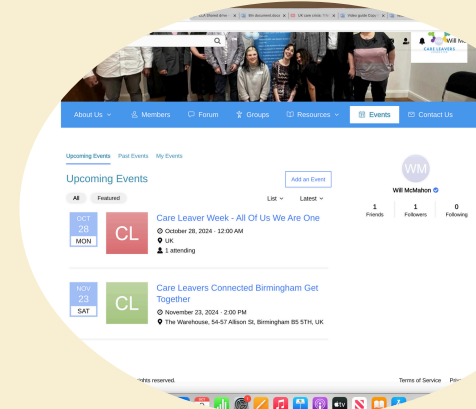


@careleaversassociation

Latest News

New Care Leavers' Connected Website will launch in November

Care Leavers Connected website is the place where care leavers of all ages are encouraged to come and connect with others. While we are all very different people, being in care has given us many common experiences. Care Leavers Connected gives us a way of connecting with others who were in care, to chat about our life experiences, and help each other with any issues that are important to us. Keep your eyes on our social media platforms!



Care Leavers Connect Meet-up in Birmingham on 23 November 2024

Care Leavers Connected is organising a meet-up for everyone who can make their way to Birmingham. It will take place on Saturday 23 November from 2pm to 4pm. All care leavers are welcome. If you want to come then please let us know by registering [here](#). **Check the inside back page for our face to face meetings in 2025.**



New Care Leavers Access to Records Guide launched

Our new Access to Records video guide created by care leavers, for care leavers is now available. It aims to help care-experienced individuals navigate the process of accessing their social care records. Drawing on real-life experiences, the video gives practical advice, step-by-step instructions, and emotional support, to help care leavers accessing their files feel confident and informed as they explore their past. You will find the video here: [Access To Records – The Care Leavers Association](#)



We understand that some of the articles in this magazine are about sensitive issues. If you need any support please contact us on 0161 826 0214 and leave a voicemail. We will return your call. You can also contact us by email connected@careleavers.com or on social media.

If you need urgent support please contact the Samaritans on 116123.

All of us, We are One

National Care Leaver Week, 28 October - 3

November 2024

Whether sharing their life circumstances, reflecting on the past, or passing on some helpful advice, each of the voices we hear in this issue show what a diverse bunch we care leavers are. They also demonstrate what we share in common. Being adult care leavers means there is a connection between all of us. As the theme of the National Care Leaver Week 2024 expresses it, 'All of us, We are one'.

Care leavers, like everyone else, come in all shapes and sizes and with a kaleidoscope of lives lived. There are many overlapping and shared experiences, of living in children's homes, or in foster or kinship care. For some there has been a mix of all three and more.

Life can be a roller-coaster

The Care Leavers Connected team are very conscious that for many adult care leavers life can be a roller coaster, whether we are 26 or 76. Being a care leaver does not stop at 25. We know because as care leavers we have that shared experience as well.

The care experience can just sit in the background and occasionally tap us on the shoulder. Events can remind us of a past life not thought about much. In October, the Connected team received a call from a care leaver who only found out in their 50s, after a parental death, they had been in care.

For some care leavers, being able to get out of bed in the morning and get through the day is a success, life having been made difficult by care or the reason they went into care.

For others, success is holding down a job or bringing up children, or both. Some find being in care has given them the resources to thrive. We are all different.

If you don't see a reflection of your experience then please tell us about it.

We hope you see yourself reflected in this issue. If not, then please let us know about your experience of being a care leaver. Put fingers to keyboard or pen to paper and let us have your account. Or send us an email letting us know that you want to write something for the magazine and to talk about what it might cover.

If writing is not your thing, then get in touch and we can have a chat and put together an article, with you having the final say about what goes into print. You might want to send us a picture or a poem or anything creative that represents what you want to say.

Whatever your life experience, and whatever your age, if you have been in the care system as a child, for no matter how short a time, the Care Leavers Connected team want you to know that this magazine, our new website, our access to records advice and the frequent zoom and face to face care leaver gatherings we hold, are for you as an individual and for us as a community.

You can find all of our contact details on the inside back page. of this issue.

If you are not a care leaver but know a care leaver then please share this magazine or request a paper copy and we can send it to them, or you, if you would prefer to pass it on.

*This issue of Care Leavers
Connected has been published
for National Care Leaver
Week.*



Thinking of accessing your child care files?

If you want to talk about whether you should try to access your files, get started on the process, or have tried and you need some advice. The Care Leavers' Connected team are all care leavers who have accessed our files, we are here if you need help. Please visit [here](#).

Care Leaver Voices

“Born ‘illegitimate’ in 1944, I have no idea who my father was”

Born ‘illegitimate’ in 1944, I have no idea who my father was. I was not brought up by my mother but by Mr. and Mrs. Hicks. It was from them that I received my moral compass. Mr. Hicks continued to look after me after his wife died until, when I was 12, I found him dead in bed.

My mother’s contact address got lost and I was sent into a children’s home until she was found. Not the nicest experience of my life. One staff member bullied me, but that didn’t work because when I complained he was fired.

The social services eventually contacted my mother who wanted me farmed out again, so I was placed with foster parents. I stayed there until 15, but I simply didn’t fit in. I was never part of the family, having to stay in the kitchen whilst they watched television in the lounge. I would take myself off over the downs and watch airplanes at the local airport.

At 15 I became an aircraft apprentice at RAF Halton, training to be an Engine Fitter. I was posted to the Far East where I met my wife, to whom I’m still married, 58 years on. Shortly after, I retrained as an RAF Flight Engineer, later joining BOAC/BA as an Engineering Officer and flying for them until my retirement at 55.

My wife had insisted

My wife had insisted I should contact my mother who by then lived in San Francisco. Although I frequently visited her, she was not a particularly nice person. On one occasion my wife and I took our daughter to visit her, but she frequently told our daughter off, for example, for moving a curtain slightly to see out of the window.

Needless to say, I remonstrated with her. On another occasion my mother introduced me to a friend of hers as a ‘friend’ from UK. I told her that if she ever did that again that would be my last visit.

After my mother died, a tracing agency called to inform me I had a sister, born in the 1930’s who, also being illegitimate, had been adopted. I get on very well with my sister and her partner who divide their time between England and Holland. We frequently visit one another and talk over the phone most weeks. I have never tried to find my care files because I have always been comfortable with being who I am.



Gus at his Men’s Shed

I help set up my local Men’s Shed. We welcome all members. I enjoy passing on skills and helping people connect. We open three afternoons weekly, the members making things for both themselves and the local community.

Some people come just to chat and have a cup of tea or coffee with a biscuit, that’s also fine. We really don’t mind, it’s the friendship and belonging that matter. We have women as members and find that they are good at getting some of the men talking.

What I personally get out of Men’s Sheds is putting something back in for all the things that I’ve got out of life. It’s as simple as that.

When I visit a Shed and walk through the door and I hear laughter, it really doesn’t matter if the dolls houses or bird boxes are a bit wonky.



You can visit Men’s Shed [here](#)

Care Leaver Voices

“If you're considering returning to education, I urge you to go for it”

I left school in 1983 at 12 due to the disruption of being placed into care, finishing with just one O'Level and a few CSEs. My interest in education had faded, partly because I wasn't allowed to pursue my interests — while boys had more choices, I was denied the chance to play football or do woodwork simply because I was female.

My self-esteem was also low after years of racist abuse for being mixed race, so I didn't push myself to continue. Despite this, I was intelligent and soon grew bored with the jobs I tried. At 24, I became pregnant, which made me reconsider my path and the type of role model I wanted to be.

Determined to improve my job prospects, I began educating myself, completing an HNC in Interior Design in Birmingham and starting an HND in media. Spontaneously, I moved to Cornwall, where I enrolled in a media degree at the University of Plymouth.

By this time, I had three young children, including a baby, and balancing school with family life was tough. I often stayed up late after putting the kids to bed to complete my coursework, and eventually, the commute became too much, prompting us to move to Devon.

On trial for past mistakes

I graduated with a 2:1 and immediately enrolled in a PGCE to teach adults. I was excited when I landed a job at a school in Devon, but my past caught up with me. During the hiring process, my DBS check revealed non-child-related offences from my time in care, leading to an uncomfortable interrogation by the hiring committee.

One member, an ex-judge, treated me as if I were on trial for my past mistakes. Devastated and disheartened, I didn't apply for jobs for months and fell into depression.

A good friend eventually helped me secure a teaching position at a college in Plymouth, where I developed an interest in games-based learning, especially for students with autism. Eager to learn more, I began a master's degree at the University of Exeter, funding it myself while working full-time and raising my children.

My determination was increased by the setback I had faced, and I refused to give up. During this time, I attended child protection training where I was told that females in care rarely pursued education beyond GCSEs.



Heather Wren

This comment enraged me, as I had worked hard to overcome my difficult past. Fueled by this anger, I completed my master's degree with merit and immediately enrolled in a PhD program.

Over six challenging years, including a scare where I nearly lost my daughter, I finally earned my PhD this summer. All of my children attended my graduation, which was a deeply rewarding moment.

While completing my PhD, I applied for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship and, to my surprise, was accepted despite the fierce competition. My journey from a troubled past to earning a PhD has inspired my children, and I now have a job I love. I started my undergraduate journey at 30 and, at 53, completed my PhD.

If you're considering returning to education, I urge you to go for it—it can boost your self-esteem and inspire others. There's also plenty of funding available, like the support I received from the Funds for Women Graduates Foundation, which helped me complete my studies.

Good luck with your journey!

Heather Wren

Care Leaver Voices

My Epiphany: Making a Difference

I was 16 and still had 2 years of my care order left to run. No one ever came to see how I was doing, but I needed to know that I was heading in the right direction, so I would often visit the children's home to say hello, but really, I was seeking reassurance and advice. When I turned 18, there was no one there!! no care order, no looked after care support, I had to figure it out on my own, I just relied on my friends.

Having left school with no qualifications, I had a series of dead-end jobs, working in a chicken factory, in a laundry cleaner factory, out of work, being sacked, but I found a flat and managed to find a labouring job sweeping the factory floors in a boatbuilding company. But it suddenly occurred to me that I had made decisions about my life, I was learning about what responsibility meant.

I began to learn boat repair skills, which improved my financial stability, quality of life and jobs and worth, I was taking control of my life, I was committed, was loving it, and done this myself. I had often wondered how I did this, and I am still not sure, other than having the experience of having nothing, coming from nowhere, self-confidence and making the leap of faith, trusting my instinct.

But I had a series of good jobs in the boat building trade, but my soul was still searching for something. I was just a number on a clock card, that's all I really was. I looked out of the window from

the factory floor, doing the same routine day after day and I kinda shook my head and said to myself "there has to be more to life than this, I don't want to be just a number, my name is Paul and I feel I have a lot to offer to make a difference", I turned away from the window and carried on doing my job. I bumped into a



Paul Brockman BEM

couple of old members of staff from my old children's home. We had a good catch up and they just happened to mention that they were managing a children's home in Winchester, which used to be the first children's I was in, but now under a different name.

They said to me, "why don't you come and work with us, your life experience, care experience and knowledge would great for our young people to learn from, and that was it, the opportunity to make a difference, and to be treated as Paul and not on a clock card.

Write for the magazine!

Care Leavers Connected magazine is produced by Care Leavers for care leavers. We want to fill the pages of each issue with every aspect of the care leaver experience, with a focus on care leavers over 25.

You might want to write about a success that you have had or a challenge you faced, either way, we want to hear from you. The magazine will carry regular articles focused on 'Care Leaver Voices', Health and well-being, 'Access to Records', Care Leavers in the national culture and the latest policy developments among others. So, if you want to write 50 words or 750 words and connect with other care leavers then get in touch at

connected@careleavers.com



Care Leaver Voices

Hi everyone, I'm Liz, older than I ever want to admit, and I have the most incredible career, working at a large university to inspire disadvantaged young people into university, including care leavers! On top of that, I am a care leaver. Success has not come easy, and this is largely due to what most care leavers face, 'Imposter Syndrome'.

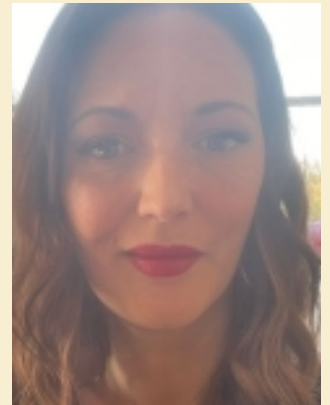
My career is my identity. I inspire our younger counterparts by encouraging them to take the scary steps into the world of lifelong learning through higher education, but some days, I am crippled with the fear I don't deserve my success, and I don't belong! This is the very definition of imposter syndrome. However, through my studies, I have learnt how to harness this into a super-power, which I want to share with you all. As a community, we can embrace our achievements and celebrate success in whichever form it takes for everyone. For me, it is my career, but for my friends it's being a good parent and providing their children with a happy childhood, free from trauma.

Step 1 – Embrace the fear factor

We naturally want to steer clear of challenges in our lives, for fear that we will fail. But embracing the fear and facing challenges re-enforces our resilience from our childhoods. Defining what success looks like to ourselves, we can embrace the fear of challenge, furthermore, learning to notice when the inner voice is becoming critical, we can ask ourselves, would we let anyone say that to our faces?

Step 2 – The learning zone

We have accepted our fear of failure, and changed our mindset. Failure is natural, and provides us with the ability to reflect and learn from mistakes. It is our ability to learn from these moments that give us opportunity to grow, meaning we uncover new skills, knowledge or coping mechanisms.



Liz

Step 3 – Advance to the growth zone

Now we feel more comfortable facing challenges, we progress towards our projected individual successes and grow from our experiences. Harness those critical inner voices with answers and rational reasoning, and use this inner voice to give a balanced opinion on the situation. Harnessing imposter syndrome isn't easy, and it will present in different ways for people.

One of the greatest things I have learnt is that some of the most successful people, such as Tom Hanks, Lady Gaga and even Albert Einstein have commented on their struggles with imposter syndrome. If we look at their achievements we are in good company, and learning to turn this into our super-power is the kindest thing we can do for ourselves.

"In care aged seventeen – looking to connect with others" -Kit

I accessed my social care records recently – I am just about middle-aged. The first page from the Council reads 'Case Note Report', 'Kit has always been a rather pale child and quite uptight'

My story is that when I was seventeen a child protection investigation was started by the social care department of my local council. I stopped living with my parents on the same day the investigation began. I never returned to live with them again and decades later we are still not in contact. I was offered some lodgings by the council. However, a schoolteacher took me in and I lived there instead. A charity gave me some money towards some clothes and the Citizens Advice Bureau helped me apply for income support and housing benefit. Although my social worker stayed in touch for a few months, she eventually left her role.

From reading my records, it seems that I was not formally accommodated under a care order. After I turned eighteen my file was closed. I went to university and I was contacted during my second term to be told that my parents had entered a guilty plea to child cruelty.

Looking back now, most of the support I received was informally provided by teachers at my school, as any Council support was minimal and I had no extended family.

Having spoken to the CLA, I understand that for the purposes of the CLA's definition I am categorised as having been in care, even if not for the purposes of the state definition. I would be interested in connecting with others in a similar situation to me, who were 'in care' in later childhood and didn't return to live with their parents again. I have a happy life now and have even managed to trace some biological extended family who I had never met as a child.

However, there is a gap in my life, as I have never been able to identify anyone with a similar experience to me, as the majority of children or young people in care I have met tend to have been in care from a younger age. It can be very difficult to explain my life story to others. I'd be really keen on connecting with anyone at all who relates to this story, to share experiences and chat. **Please feel free to reach out, the CLA staff can put you in touch with me.**

Care Leaver Voices

“I wish I’d known to be kinder to myself”

Hi, my name is Westley, I’m 41 years old and was born in Coventry and now live in New York City.

I spent most of my early childhood in different foster homes, until I was put up for adoption on the TV show “Find A Family” when I was 5 years old. Adopted at 7, I left the adopted family aged 17 and went back into the care system.

Growing up in care, I always felt different. I struggled as I navigated the systems, while trying to grow up and become an adult. I often felt alone, overwhelmed and like I didn’t fit in.

Without a family, I found life really challenging. Navigating being a teenager and becoming an adult, without the care and guidance of loving adults meant that I had to figure things out as I went. The daily fight to survive, meant that much of the trauma of my childhood was pushed deep down - and wouldn’t be dealt with for decades to come. Fortunately, I had some really supportive friends and a stubborn determination to survive. Even so, over the years I struggled with feeling lonely (especially at Christmas and other holidays); and a lack of support through the ups and downs of life. I often felt less than others and at a disadvantage and I felt a lot of anger at the injustices of the world.

I often felt less than others.

I wish I’d known to be kinder to myself! And to take the time to understand why I am the way I am. What made me different and “lacking”, also gave me resilience and strength. That is what set me apart and ultimately allowed me to thrive. I felt so much shame about who I was and where I came from. Now I feel the opposite! I’m proud of my experiences and how they have shaped me. I found that facing up to my past is what really helped me know myself and ultimately set me free from my shame.

For the last 20 years, I’ve been working in TV production (something I’m sure came from that fateful decision to put me up for adoption on TV!) Working as a TV producer has been exciting and I’ve been fortunate to work on some great shows around the world! 12 years ago I moved to America to work on The X Factor USA and have since worked on a number of shows, including Netflix’s Love Is Blind and Queer Eye - which I won an Emmy for in 2022!! I’m really proud of that - growing up in care doesn’t make



Young Westley, please meet grown up Westley ...

you less capable, in fact, I believe your true strength lies in using your life experiences to your advantage. You are capable of anything!

What truly changed my life was facing up to my past - something that has taken a lot of time and patience. Therapy has been key, but often I couldn’t afford it, so I found other things I could do for free that really helped: reading books about trauma, meditating, and gratitude journaling. (“What Happened To You” By Oprah Winfrey & Dr Bruce Perry, “The Body Keeps The Score” by Bessel van der Kolk and “Lighter” by Yung Pueblo are all books I’ve found very helpful).

I’m excited to connect with other care leavers because I feel like listening and sharing stories is how we ultimately realize we are not alone. It’s been really nice to write this and I already feel more connected to the care leavers community. Thank you so much for reading. I’d love to meet up in person soon!

Wes

Sign up for our monthly bulletin

The Care Leavers Association now has a regular monthly bulletin supported by the Care Leavers Connected team. It will keep you in touch with the latest information about the CLA. If you want to make sure that you receive it in your inbox then please sign up [here](#)

Care Leaver Voices

From foster care to foodie:

How cooking became my passion and my way of sharing love

Hello, I'm Liam, and I'm 26 years old. My journey with food began during my early years in foster care. I entered the system when I was just 3 years old and remained there until I was around 13, when my sister stepped in to become my kinship carer. Moving in with her marked a significant turning point in my life, especially when it came to discovering my love for cooking.

Growing up, food always was a passion for me. I would spend hours flipping through recipe magazines or trying to catch a glimpse of the cooking on the TV on a Saturday, absorbing as much as I could. Special occasions like Christmas are etched in my memory, filled with excitement.

By the time I moved in with my sister, I had already taught myself the basics of cooking. One of my earliest memories of cooking for her was when I decided to make lasagne. I spent the entire day preparing it at my foster carer's home, carefully layering the pasta, meat, and sauce, before packing it up in little foil containers to bring over to her. That meal was more than just food; it was my way of connecting with her, of sharing a part of myself, and showing my appreciation for the home she was creating for us.

Seasoning is the key ...

One evening, my sister announced that we were having shepherd's pie for dinner. I was convinced I wouldn't like it. After all, my past experiences with the dish hadn't been great. But when I finally gave in and took a bite, I was blown away—it tasted incredible. I couldn't understand what made her version so different. That's when she shared a secret that changed my approach to cooking forever: seasoning.

Seasoning, she explained, was the key to transforming simple, everyday dishes into something extraordinary. Our family and support network is diverse, with influences from Caribbean and Pakistani cultures, and my sister had learned how to blend these rich culinary traditions into her cooking. Being surrounded by these vibrant flavours and spices taught me the importance of seasoning in creating meals that are not only delicious but also filled with love.



Liam, aged 26

As I grew older, my passion for cooking deepened, especially when it came to cooking for others. There's something incredibly fulfilling about preparing a meal and watching the joy it brings to those who eat it. Whether it's sharing a simple dish with a friend or preparing a feast for a gathering, cooking has become my way of expressing care and love for the people in my life.

Now, as an adult, I find immense joy in discovering new recipes and experimenting in the kitchen. I often hunt for cookbooks in charity shops, selecting a few recipes and diving into the process of creating something new. Some of my favourite dishes to cook are jerk chicken, ramen, fried rice, and anything with Thai flavours. But with winter upon us, there's one dish that stands out as a perfect comfort food: Caribbean Curried Chicken.

This dish is a true winter warmer, combining the rich, warming spices of Caribbean cuisine with the comforting, hearty nature of a slow-cooked stew. It's a recipe I learned from my sister, who adapted it from our extended family's tradition. The blend of curry powder, allspice, thyme, and Scotch bonnet peppers creates a deep, flavourful sauce that envelops tender chicken pieces. Served over rice or with a side of warm roti, it's the kind of meal that wraps you in warmth, perfect for those cold winter nights.

You can find [Liam's Winter Warmer Recipe, Caribbean Curried Chicken](#) on page 17.

Care Leaver Voices

“This year's National Care Leavers' Week theme is ‘All of us. We are one.’ It got me thinking about some of the experiences I have had since stepping a little more into the care space”

For decades, I barely spoke about my experience in care. I had set my sights forwards, and I was never going back. The trauma I had experienced in those first couple of decades had created such steadfast beliefs that I should never go back. I had even established all these rules in my life, such as not walking back down a street, rewinding a movie, or rereading a chapter in a book. I was so adamant that I wouldn't relive a minute of my life, I would just keep moving forwards. But life has its way of forcing you to do the work you need to do.

I finally had a reason to confront that past. My eldest daughter, then nearing her teenage years, was becoming obsessed with my past. For years, whenever she asked about my parents or why I didn't always live at home, I would simply say, “We will talk when you are older.”

“Older” was fast approaching, and as her questioning increased, I knew I would have to find a way to be more open with her. So followed years of therapy and a newfound ability to say out loud the hundreds of things I had held in silence.

I had always felt really isolated in my life.

I had always felt really isolated in my life. I have some amazing friends, but none of them spent time in care. As they sat around the pub table reminiscing about old movies, or the time they learnt to ride a bike, I would sit in silence or simply smile and nod along. So, I started to wonder who else might be out there.

One of my first experiences was joining one of the Care Leavers Association's online monthly social calls. It was really wonderful hearing about other people's experiences, recognising parts of their stories in my own journey, and learning about the very real and challenging paths they had travelled. It made me feel a little less alone to connect with other people who could understand.

Now that I am able to talk about my past, I love the idea that doing so might help others. It is probably the reason I have written *Ten Things Every Foster Child Wishes You Knew*. The thought that just a drop of insight might make something better for a child in care is so healing. I connected with this other care-experienced person



Row

and was keen to help them grow their ideas and continue to make the world of care more visible and cared for.

Sadly, things started changing rather rapidly. I had other established connections reaching out to me, worried and upset by some of the things being said. Before I knew it, without saying a thing, I too had been blocked and dropped from every space I held a connection with the newcomer. I wasn't too bothered myself. After all, you do you. However, I was really aware of the hurt and anxiety it caused others.

Overall, stepping into the care-experienced space as an adult has been hugely positive. I have been welcomed and connected with so many amazing people: care leavers, charity leaders, professionals. I have such a huge respect for the many people who grew up in care and have continued to work in that space. The resilience and selflessness are immense. With every connection I make, I find a little bit of joy, hope, and healing.

If you would like to connect with Row you can find them on Instagram, LinkedIn or at RowanAderyn.com

You can find Row's tips from their experience in the Wellbeing section of the magazine on page 16.

Care Leaver Voices

“Our experiences as care leavers make us resilient, adaptable, and able to think outside the box”

I began my journey with the Civil Service in 2021 through the Care Leaver Internship Scheme, and it has truly been transformative. Just two days after finishing my degree in Politics and International Relations, I joined the Darlington Economic Campus, becoming one of its first 100 staff members.

This opportunity wasn't just a career stepping stone—it was a lifeline that has allowed me to grow both personally and professionally.

As a care leaver, entering the workforce can be daunting. We often face unique challenges and lack the support networks and nepotism others might take for granted. The Care Leaver Internship Scheme offers more than just job training; it provides a supportive environment that recognises our potential and unique life experiences. This initiative gave me the chance to prove myself, and I seized it.

The Care Leaver Internship Scheme was a launchpad, offering me opportunities I could only have dreamed of, allowing me to work in central government outside of London, without having to leave the community I call home.

“To my fellow care leavers: our past does not define us”

Throughout this journey, I have continuously upskilled myself and am currently pursuing a part-time Master of Science in Innovation, Leadership, and Management at the University of York.

My next permanent role, back at HMT in Business Relationship Management, promises new challenges and learning opportunities. I am excited to make a meaningful impact, bring digital and technology strategies to life, and, of course, add my own flair to the role.

To my fellow care leavers: our past does not define us, but it does shape us. The Care Leaver Internship Scheme is more than just a career opportunity; it's a chance to redefine our future. It has given me stability, purpose, and a path to success. I encourage every care leaver to take that first step—you never know where it might lead.

You can be based anywhere in the country on this scheme, as participating departments have locations all over the UK, offering a range of roles and experiences.

When applying, my advice is to be honest and open about your skills and struggles. Don't feel pressured to have all the answers.

Instead, focus on the unique perspectives and experiences you bring to the table. Our experiences as care leavers make us resilient, adaptable, and able to think outside the box—qualities that are invaluable in the Civil Service. By framing your experiences in a positive light, you can show how your background equips you to contribute meaningfully and challenge the status quo.

Remember, the Civil Service needs fresh perspectives to challenge groupthink and drive innovation. Your voice and your story matter. This internship is not just about what you can learn from the Civil Service, but what the Civil Service can learn from you. Check the Civil Service Jobs website for the next intake, I encourage you to take the opportunity, be yourself, and show them what you've got!

Best wishes, Sebastian Moore



Sebastian Moore

Thinking of accessing your child care files?

If you want to talk about whether you should try to access your files, get started on the process, or have tried and you need some advice. The Care Leavers' Connected team are all care leavers who have accessed our files, we are here if you need help. Please visit [here](#).

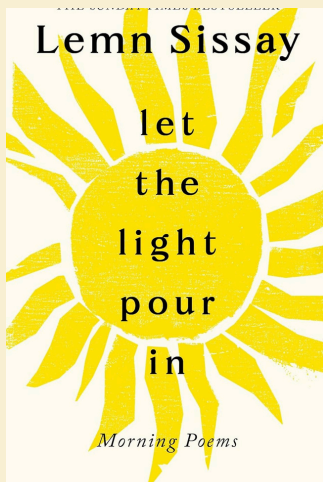
Care Leaver Culture

“Once you're grounded, nothing can shift you”

Care leaver Tashi Dhondup, who lives in Stroud, recently featured on BBC's Gardener's World. In what is a beautiful 10 minute film, Tashi explains he grew up in an orphanage in Tibet and that he has learned lessons from gardening that help him in his life and has used his life's lessons to help him with gardening. Tashi says he did not fit in at school but he did find comfort in nature. For Tashi, a lesson from gardening is that flowers in his garden “are all sown by seed. I love seeing plants grow which teaches me lots of things about patients and resilience.” You can watch the short film on the BBC iPlayer [here](#)



Tashi Dhondup



Let the light pour in, Lemn Sissay

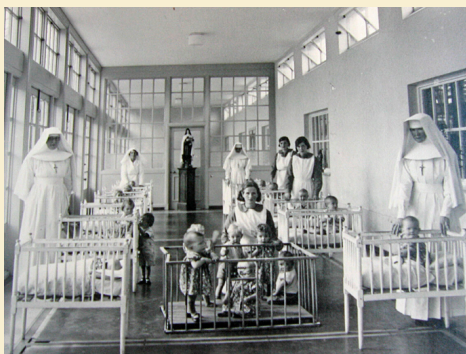
For the past decade, care leaver Lemn Sissay has composed a short poem as dawn breaks each morning.

Life-affirming, witty and full of wonder, these poems chronicle his own battle with the dark and are fuelled by resilience and defiant joy. *Let the Light Pour In* is a collection of the best of these poems, and a book celebrating this morning practice.

‘How do you do it?’ said night
‘How do you wake up and shine?’
‘I keep it simple,’ said light
‘One day at a time’

No One Special, Peter Knowles

Combining his own experiences of living in care with those of the young people he now supports, Peter Knowles portrays the harsh realities care-experienced young people face. Hard-hitting, emotional but with hope for the future, this collection of poems and written works gives insight into the thoughts and feelings of care-experienced young people and the challenges they overcome on a daily basis. You can find the book [here](#)



Stolen, Wildfire Films

Stolen (2023) is a documentary directed by Margo Harkin. It tells the story of how over 80,000 unmarried mothers came to be incarcerated in mother & baby homes in Ireland between 1922 and 1998. The homes were run by nuns.

*If you want to see more like this
check out
<https://www.careexperienceandculture.com/>*



Creative Corner

Hamish recommends model making because:

- It helps develop a creative mind
- It is a chance to re-create something and feel a sense of achievement
- It focusing the mind away from negative thoughts



I was just a child

I was just a child when the world seemed too wide,
A heart full of questions with nowhere that I could hide.
The walls that once sheltered, I just wanted to rest,
With a bag full of dreams and fear in my chest,
I walked out alone, leaving behind the nest.
The echoes of voices I used to call my home,
Now whispered goodbyes as I faced the unknown.
Every step was a battle, every day was a fight,
But I learned to find strength in the quiet of night.
The streets became friends, the sky was my guide,
And though I stumbled, I never lost my pride.
I carried the scars, each one a story,
Of battles hard-fought, of moments of glory.
There were days I felt broken, lost in despair,
But I patched up my soul, I learned how to care.
I found my own stories in faces I met,
In the kindness of strangers I'll never forget.
I built a new home from pieces of me,

A place filled with hope, where I could be free.
Now, I stand tall, a survivor of storms,
With a heart that's been shattered but somehow still
warms.
The journey was long, the nights often cold,
But I've grown into someone both strong and bold.
So here's to the past, the pain and the tears,
To the lessons I've learned over the years.
I'm not just a person in the care system, I'm so much
more.
A traveller who's found a purpose
And though the road ahead is still unknown,
I know I can face it, I've made it my own.
For I am the author of my own story.

S from the West Midlands

Have you got a creative talent you want to share? Get in touch: connected@careleavers.com

Health and Wellbeing

Journaling as a tool to reflect and replenish

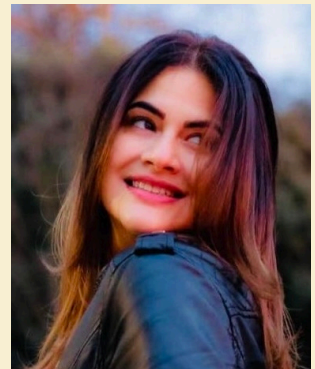
Writing can be a therapeutic and nurturing way to get our thoughts and feelings onto paper and can be a gentle way to give ourselves some quiet time and space, a meditative moment, a brain dump and perhaps a moment of reflection to alleviate the chatter in our heads.

I can't talk about writing without mentioning the solace of reading. Books have always been an escape for me and no more so than during the period of being made a ward of court and then subsequently taken into care, they were an escape into another world.

As the world I was experiencing was too painful, trying to navigate the realisation that my mum's mental health deteriorating meant that she was sectioned, coupled with the heartbreak of being separated from my two siblings

The ritual of journaling has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember, initially the thrill of the little pink diary with a padlock on at 10 years old, being sandwiched in my care years whilst in the children's home and then at various foster placements, a diary was my biggest escape. As my teens unfolded and independence I graduated to pretty notepads and then the more intuitive practice of 'Morning Pages' when I discovered 'The Artists Way' by Julia Cameron.

At every stage of my life the solace of the blank page to pour out my innermost thoughts and feelings and sometimes just to write, Why? How? or a simple humble Thank You ... the act of writing has always had a certain magical quality to it.



Yasmine Khan

I fondly share with you a ritual I love called the 'Three things that made me smile' A practice which I found helpful and also became my son's goodnight prayer in his younger years, a sweet ritual we shared that went alongside reminding ourselves that anything that made us sad, we could pop into a cloud and watch float away before drifting off to sleep.

This naturally has evolved into a nightly gratitude practice, a simple notebook by my bedside in which I note the moments that made me smile. There is a grace that arises when I recognise that the small acts of appreciation are a salve that help replenish and restore me daily. Journaling can also be used as a moment of mindfulness in our often busy lives.

Yasmine

Row's advice if you are new to the care leaver community:

If you are new to engaging in the care-experienced space, my advice would be:

- Find an established group like the Care Leavers Association.
- Go at a pace that is right for you, perhaps just reaching out to one person first.
- Be cautious. I am always mindful that we all carry a lot of baggage, and some of us handle that better than others.
- Be kind. We all have a different journey and a different set of things we bring to the table. We are all equally valid.
- Look after yourself. Even after years of therapy, sometimes it is hard to talk about and hear the journeys in our world.

Winter warmer recipe: Caribbean Curried Chicken



As the aromas fill your kitchen, you'll understand why this dish is a favourite of mine. It's a testament to how food can warm not just the body, but the soul. Cooking, for me, isn't just about making food—it's about building connections, sharing love, and creating moments of warmth and togetherness." [Liam](#)

Ingredients

- 1 whole chicken, cut into pieces
- 2 tbsp curry powder
- 1 tsp allspice
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 piece of ginger (about 1 inch), grated
- 2 Scotch bonnet peppers, whole (or chopped for extra heat)
- 2 sprigs thyme
- 1 can coconut milk
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 2 potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 1 carrot, chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Fresh coriander for garnish
- Cooked rice or roti to serve

How to make it

- 1** In a large bowl, season the chicken pieces with curry powder, allspice, salt, and pepper. Let it marinate for at least 30 minutes.
- 2** Heat some oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the chicken pieces, browning them on all sides. Remove and set aside.
- 3** In the same pot, add the chopped onion, garlic, and ginger. Sauté until fragrant and the onions are softened.
- 4** Add the thyme, Scotch bonnet peppers, and browned chicken back into the pot. Stir to combine.
- 5** Pour in the coconut milk and chicken broth, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pot.
- 6** Add the potatoes and carrots, then bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat and let it simmer for about 45 minutes to an hour, or until the chicken is tender and the sauce has thickened.
- 7** Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper to taste. Remove the Scotch bonnet peppers if left whole.
- 8** Garnish with fresh coriander and serve over steamed rice or with warm roti.

Policy and Practice

Care Leavers: A Call for policy change on the commercialisation of care

Imagine if a quarter of the prison population were Etonians. The government, having paid for their boarding and education, would certainly take swift action to address the issue. This is the reality for care leavers in the UK who find themselves in prison. As one of the fortunate ones who managed to avoid this fate, I reflect on how broken the system is and what must change.

Though I left the care system before my 18th birthday, the trauma of entering care never left me. I believed in the dream of a better life and isolated myself to survive. Unlike some of my peers, I sought an alternative path—one of education, discipline, and giving back to society.

I avoided drugs and alcohol, focused on work and study, and contributed to civil society. Despite this, the haunting memories of my early experiences stayed with me. I struggled with flashbacks, nightmares, and a deep-seated emotional pain I couldn't articulate.

I sought help, even visiting one of the best clinics money could buy, supported by my private health insurance. But no one treated the underlying cause: the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that led me into care. This is the reality for many care leavers—trapped in a cycle of trauma, often without access to proper support.

“The commercialisation of care is at the heart of the issue”

Profits of up to £900 per week are being made from vulnerable children, but little is done to address the root causes of their trauma. We, as care leavers, know what needs to be done. The evidence is there. What's needed is a trauma-informed, structured approach that addresses the mind, body, and soul before a child leaves care.

There must be policy change. No more rhetoric—only real, trauma-focused interventions that prevent children from falling through the cracks.

When a care leaver starts life in society with the perceived balancing out of all Adversities of Childhood Experiences, that's when the trauma continues to haunt them, they don't know why the symptoms are present, all the avoidance, anxieties, safety behaviours that unknowingly hinder, restrict and curtail a potentially thriving life.



Mal Mohibullah Choudhury

The future of millions depends on the mental health treatment of care leavers before they leave care. We wouldn't let a plane, train or a automobile start a journey without the engine cooling system working.

So why let care leavers start a journey without all the necessary emotional processing? If the government can get it right for care leavers, it will give Britain's future back to all its citizens. One day, we will move from care leavers to care thrivers, and the cycle will be broken. Let this be the start of that change.

**Is there a policy issue that you
want to write about?**

Please get in touch if you want to write an article of about 500 words on a policy issue that concerns the adult care leaver community.

Contact us at connect@careleavers.com

How to Get Involved?

Get in Touch

Phone: 0161 826 0214

Email: connected@careleavers.com

Address: The Care Leavers' Association
3rd Floor, Swan Buildings, 20 Swan Street,
Manchester, M4 5JW

Share With Us

If you would like to send in any stories, art work, photos, media recommendations or any resources you have found helpful, it would be warmly received. We want our magazine to be your voice!

Connected Zoom Groups

Join our Care Leavers Connected Zoom groups. Our next date is 18th November 7-9pm. These sessions are an opportunity to connect with other care leavers and discuss things that are important to you. If you would like to join this session please get in touch.

Free data for all care leavers

Are you finding it hard to keep up with the cost of living and need data? Announcing "Keeping Care Leavers Connected" in collaboration with The Digital Inclusion Network. If you need data assistance, reach out to us at connected@careleavers.com

Jim's Zoom Groups

Jim's Zoom sessions run once a month, on the first Wednesday of the month between 8-10pm. They sometimes have a topic for discussion and sometimes we just talk about any topic that those who turn up want to raise. They always try to find subjects that are of interest to all people who have been in care as children. [Sign up here](#)

Bristol Gathering

There will be a meet-up for everyone who can make their way to Bristol on Saturday 1 February 2025, 2-4pm. All care leavers are welcome. If you want to come then please let us know by registering [here](#)

Accessing your Records

We currently support many people across different generations in accessing their child care files. In the future, we be running some drop in sessions for support with accessing your files. In the meantime, if you need any support in accessing your file, please [click here](#).

Campaign With Us

At Care Leavers Connected, we are determined to ensure that care leaver issues are addressed by both national and local government. We want to make sure that care leavers have as good a life as possible. If you want to join us in this campaign, then get in touch.

Support Our Work!

If you simply don't have the time to get actively involved in the CLA, but you still want to support our work, you could think about making a donation. All donations will go towards helping the CLA to keep going and to running our projects and campaigns. Also, because the CLA is a registered charity, we can claim an extra 20% back from the government for every £1 you donate.



LOTTERY FUNDED

