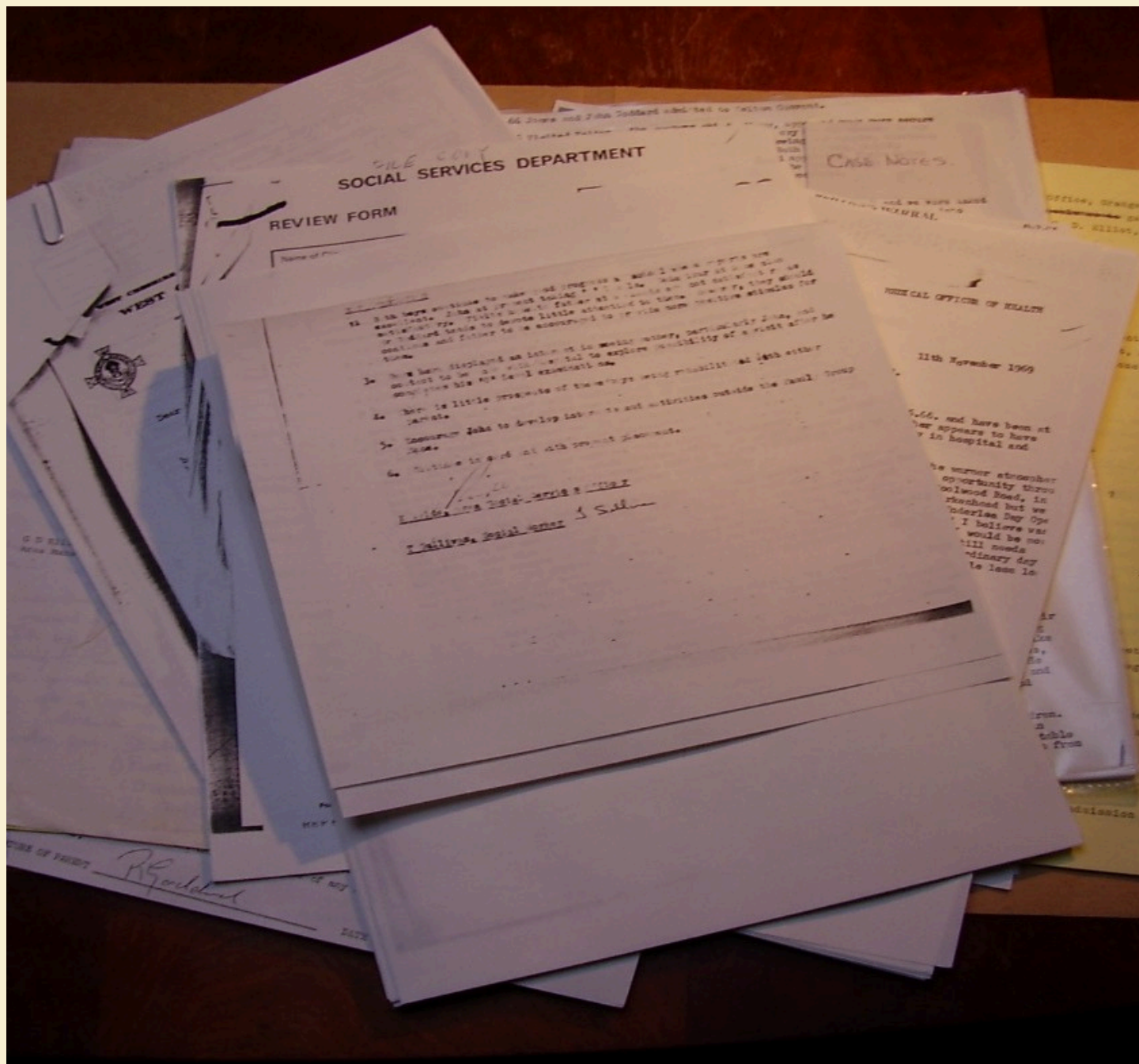


Care Leavers Connected

Volume 2 | Issue 1

Summer Edition: August 2025

‘Pieces of me’



Access To Records Project

Welcome

“We might not all take the same path, but our stories and ideas are just as valuable as anyone else's”

Dear readers,

Welcome to this edition of Care Leavers Connected. In this issue our lead story focusses on the Identity Project launched by the Care Leavers Connected Team. The project looks at how accessing your records can have an impact on your identity and how the access to records journey looks like for different people. Click on the image below to listen to the podcast.



To accompany this project launch we have two articles in our 'Me and My files' series. One from Imani whose files helped her get accountability for her poor experience in care, the other from Nina who is not sure whether to cross the bridge of accessing her files.

We also have a series of great articles from care leavers in their 20's to care leavers on their 60's, Valerie, Muhammed, Ruth and Phoenix, about how they are making their way through life.

If you are reading a hard copy of this magazine and need any of the links included, please contact connected@careleavers.com



Write for the magazine

If you want to write about your files, your life experience as a care leaver or a treasured item from when you were in care then please do. It can be 50 words or 450 words long. If you are not confident in writing then one of Care Leavers Connected team, who are all care leavers, can chat to you and take notes for an article that you can approve.

Have a look at the new Care Leavers Connected website

The new Care Leavers Connected website, was launched on May 9th. The website is a pilot which we have decided to keep as simple as possible. We encourage you to register on it, look for or add any homes or placements you were in when you were in care and let us know how the site works for you. At this pilot stage we need to know what you like about the site and what you think could be done better, **so tell us what you think at the email address below, your views are really important to us.**

We hope you enjoy this issue, if you have any suggestions about how we can improve the magazine then we are all ears at connected@careleavers.com. This magazine belongs to the care leaver community, so your views matter to the Editorial Team, who are:

Akiyinde, Jim, Mal, Stephen, Terri, Toya, Will and Yasmine

Inside this Issue



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Ways to get involved in the CLA

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

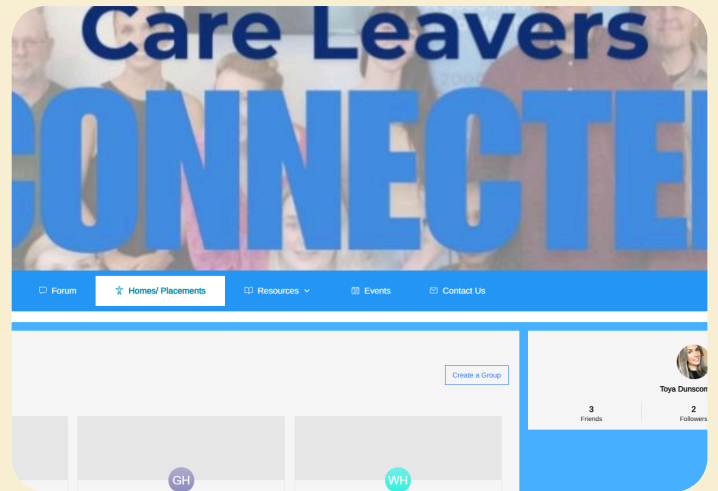


Latest News

Join the new website

The new Care Leavers Connected website was launched in May. It celebrates the diversity and strength of those who have navigated life in and after care.

This website is a pilot which we have decided to keep as simple as possible. We encourage you to register on it and look for or add any homes or placements you were in when you were in care.



Older, Wiser, Brighter Project

We are introducing an arts programme for older care leavers aged 25+. Designed to encourage creativity, connection, and self-expression in a supportive environment. Starting in September, sessions will be weekly in person in Manchester. These sessions offer care leavers an opportunity to share experiences and explore their personal journeys in a fun and creative way. If you would like to get involved email us at connected@careleavers.com

Report of Annual Gathering 2025

Care leavers of all ages came to our 2025 Annual Gathering and Annual General Meeting in Manchester on the 31st of May. As mentioned above, the day focused on the Care Leavers Connect project and how it will develop over the year ahead. We tested out some of our ideas for our Older Wiser Brighter project that will be launched later this year and shared accounts of being in care.



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.

‘Pieces of Me’

Connected Identity Project - Access To Records

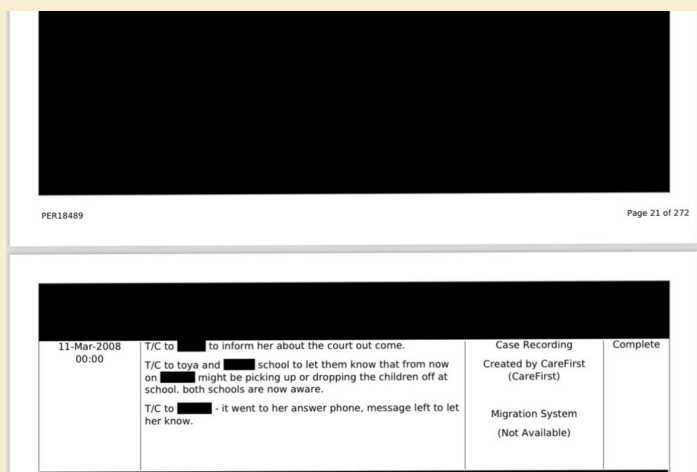
The Connected Team have been working with care leavers to create a new Identity Project focused on how accessing their files impacted on their identities, and what the access to records journey looks like for different people.

For many care-experienced people, accessing childhood records is a deeply personal journey. These records can hold the missing pieces of identity, lost memories, or truths never fully explained.

These files—written by others, about us—can hold long-forgotten memories, unanswered questions, or the truth behind decisions made in our early lives. For some, reading their records brings clarity and a sense of self. For others, it raises even more questions.

“I had questions about a number of things that were never quite clear over the years”- Sarah

We spoke with five people who accessed their care records—and each story reveals how powerful and how complex this process can be. These conversations have been recorded as a series of podcasts and as an online guide to support others along their journey.



PER18489		Page 21 of 272	
11-Mar-2008 00:00	T/C to [redacted] to inform her about the court out come. T/C to toya and [redacted] school to let them know that from now on [redacted] might be picking up or dropping the children off at school. both schools are now aware. T/C to [redacted] - it went to her answer phone, message left to let her know.	Case Recording Created by CareFirst (CareFirst)	Complete
		Migration System (Not Available)	

Heavily redacted care files



A whole life in one box: care files from birth to 25

Their stories show that accessing care records isn't just about looking back—it's about reclaiming identity, healing wounds, and sometimes, rewriting the stories we were told about ourselves. While the process can be emotional and even painful, it can also be transformative.

“it brought up a lot of trauma for me, I think people need to be prepared for that” - Mel

Accessing care records is different for everyone. It can be empowering, confusing, heart breaking—or all three at once. Not everyone finds closure, but many find strength in simply knowing more, or in finally being able to tell their own story.

“It gave me my identity” Anonymous

Whatever your experience, you deserve support on this journey. Your story matters—and so do you. If you would like support or to share your experience please email connected@careleavers.com.

Care Leavers Connected Magazine is produced by care leavers for care leavers. Please read through the magazine and give us feedback.

Me and my files

I was able to use my files and my voice to seek accountability after being failed by social services

My name is Imani, I went into care at the age of 11 years old and became a care leaver at 25. I am now 27 years old.

I requested my files from children's services in 2024 at age 27. Receiving my files was like opening a time capsule full of pain, confusion, and long unanswered questions. Page after page confirmed what I had always felt but never had proof of, I was failed by the people who were meant to protect me.

Reading those records was hard. There were missed warnings, overlooked risks, and times where I was passed between professionals who didn't seem to listen or take responsibility. It wasn't just disappointing, it was devastating.

I used my own voice and the evidence in the file

I am now a young adult, and I realised I didn't have to stay silent anymore, I have a voice and I decided to use it. I submitted a formal complaint to the local authorities. I put together a detailed letter explaining what had happened to me and how their negligence had affected me.

You are not a burden for speaking up. You are brave.

I used my own voice and the evidence in the file to show the long-term harm caused by their incompetence. It took strength, courage, and a lot of emotional energy. But I kept going, because I knew I deserved to be heard.



Imani

Eventually, the local authority responded. They admitted to their failings as the evidence I submitted was undeniable, I was issued a formal apology, and awarded me £4,500 in compensation. That money doesn't erase the past, but it was a small recognition of the harm I endured.

More importantly, the process gave me something even more valuable, closure. I now feel lighter, more in control, and more at peace with my story. Speaking out helped me stop carrying shame for things that weren't my fault. I've taken a painful chapter of my life and used it as fuel to fight for myself. I was failed by the system but I've found strength in holding them accountable. And I feel a lot better now.

To any care leaver reading this, you have every right to ask questions, to demand answers, and to seek justice. You are not a burden for speaking up. You are brave.

Imani Amelia Webb

Do you want to share your account of you and your files? You can remain anonymous if you want to.

Email connected@careleavers.com with your article. It can be anonymous if you want. Not sure about writing? Then we can chat to you and make notes of what you want to say for you to check over before publication

Me and my files

“I am most scared of... reading what I have forgotten.”

My first memory of hearing about ‘my files’ is my social worker telling me that I had to the right to collect my files after I turned 18.

I didn’t have the confidence to ask what that meant. It was just another thing swirling around with all the other words and terms being used at the time to me, Leaving Care, Sheltered Accommodation, Review, Supported Lodgings etc.

My imagination has created a picture of myself at the Civic Centre and I am holding boxes of tattered files and bits of papers. This photograph I have conjured up of myself is limited, much in the same way as a still image is, there is little movement to it. It is fixed and static and only shows the physical place of where I would get them from but not much further than that. Today, 20 years on, I understand the rights and importance of us who have been in care of accessing our files. Listening to people share their experiences, I know there’s a huge spectrum from life changing to unhelpful or even traumatising.



Nina

I can understand from a human rights perspective of being able to access and receiving files and intellectualise it but on a personal level there’s little movement towards it. I have not yet accessed my files. I don’t know what stops me. Essentially, I know in my lifetime I will but I haven’t been able to yet. I am scared. I am fearful of what I could read and how it has been written down. I have worked really hard to come to terms with difficult and disturbing memories and I think what I am most scared of is reading what I have forgotten.

Nina McLoon

Were you in Maumbury House Children’s Home in Dorchester in the late 1960s and early 1970s?

Care Leavers Connected has been contacted by Shirley Drewitt who was a care worker in the Maumbury Home at 89 South Court Avenue in Dorchester.

Shirley has uncovered quite a few pictures of children and staff who were at the Maumbury Home at that time. Some of the names of children at the home that Shirley remembers from the pictures are: Lillian, Brain, Pik, Sean. Marilyn, Rosemary, Maureen, Denis, Anita and Wendy. Some staff names are: Sarah, Carol and, of course, Shirley Drewitt herself, who is happy to be contacted if you would like to get in touch. The home was closed in 2018, the story of the closure

being featured on the regional BBC News website. There was also a petition launched to keep the home open that has comments on it from people who lived at the home.



Maumbury Children’s Home

We know how difficult it can be for some to see a picture of themselves from decades ago if you are not expecting it, so will share photos with you if you were in the home at that time. Get in touch at connected@careleavers.com

Treasured item from care

For Valerie Akala it was the giraffe that brought so much comfort

Hello there,

I was in the care of social services at 9 and my time as a Care Leaver ended in this past year at 25. There have been many memories but my 'Moment in Care' that encapsulates the beginning and end of my care journey will forever be my giraffe.

When my sibling and I were taken into the care of social services, I was taken from my primary school to their office while they looked for emergency foster carers. I vaguely remember the noises, and I vividly remember my confusion and fear.

Memories started to return

There was information overload so I do not remember much. But one thing that I so explicitly remember is there being a giant giraffe teddy. I was not much of a teddy fan, but that giraffe brought me so much comfort in such a scary time.



In the past year, the memories that I subconsciously buried slowly, but surely, started to return with the help of therapy. So when I was prepping for my final meet up with my Personal Advisor, I bought us matching small giraffe teddies.



The giraffe symbolises the beginning and the end of my care journey, but it is also a reminder that I still made it through one of the most difficult, life-changing days of my life and here I am today.



I have accomplished so much for myself with the support of those around me. My giraffe teddy resides in my bed and serves as a connection to my inner child and a reminder that I am resilient. I can overcome anything.

Kind regards,

Valerie

We invite you to share a treasured item from your childhood. These items often carry memories that words cannot express. Please send your stories to connected@careleavers.com

Care Leaver Voices

“Her story isn’t finished yet and neither is mine, or yours.”

I’m that person on the back row in the 1970s who made teachers question their career choices. If I wasn’t truanting, I tapped my pen continually in Maths, talked over Beethoven in Music and graffitied the desks in French. I spent days languishing in corridors and knew the walls of the detention room like old friends.

But I’m also the person who studied for a degree at 40 then trained as an English teacher. I soon experienced disruptive behaviour from the other side (cue my old schoolteachers’ revengeful laughter). I even wrote a book about my teaching career, an autobiography called ‘Miss, What Does Incomprehensible Mean?’, published in 2020.

I raged when they protected me

I’m that foster child who, far from being grateful to my foster parents, resisted their attempts to establish routine and normality for me after a chaotic early life. I raged when they protected me from unsuitable boyfriends, drove me to school to see me through the doors, and hauled me out of the local pub before I’d finished my Jack Daniels.

But I’m also the person who became a novelist, writing ‘Cuckoo in the Nest’ about a teenager in foster care, published in 2023. I was interviewed on Radio 4’s ‘Woman’s Hour’ and runner-up for a prestigious literary prize.

Sometimes I feel like two different people: the traumatised child for whom education was just a sideshow and the adult who became teacher and author. But, no, I’m one cohesive person. The way I taught my English lessons, plus the things I care about and write about, have solid origins in that unhappy, dysregulated and hypervigilant child.



Fran Hill

Because I knew about alcoholic parents and domestic violence, I could empathise with pupils experiencing the same. Because I understood how it felt not to have headspace for education, despite being bright, I recognised that in others. Remembering the feelings of displacement and disorientation in foster care, I could write about my fictional teenage character, Jackie Chadwick, unimpressed by her new sunflower yellow room in a strange house, and lying awake on that first night wondering where her loyalties now fell.

Those in care need their voices heard.

Children in dysfunctional homes and those in care need their voices heard. Being a teacher was one way, for me, to listen and try to help. Now, I’m representing them – and myself – in my fiction and sometimes in poetry or memoir. Writing is the art form I’ve chosen or perhaps it chose me because, trust me, the world doesn’t need my dancing, painting or acting.

What happens to Jackie Chadwick when she leaves her foster home? Well, the second book ‘Home Bird’ is now out and I’m currently writing a third.

Her story isn’t finished yet and neither is mine, or yours.

Fran

Care Leaver Voices

“We might not all take the same path, but our stories and ideas are just as valuable as anyone else's.”

Hello, my name is Mohammed,

I am a care leaver in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. I have recently finished a project with the Citizen Science Academy at University College London where I gained experience in how to carry out community research, became a ‘citizen social scientist’, and gained a certificate at the end of the project.

Citizen social science is when people from different backgrounds are encouraged and supported to get involved in real research. It’s about using your real-life experience, curiosity, and knowledge of your local area, to explore issues that matter to you and your community.

I chose to take part because I wanted to prove to myself that I could do something academic, and most importantly help others in the care leaver community to get our voices heard. I’ve often felt that care leavers are left out of conversations that affect us. This was a chance to change that.

You’ve got more to give than you think.

Earlier on this year I had the urge to pursue my new goal of becoming a personal advisor or youth worker, due to my past experience, and wanting to help young people who had been through things like me. I therefore chose to focus my research on interviewing the work of social workers, about how they help young people, and what services they provide regarding care leavers’ emotional well-being.

I chose this topic because I not only wanted to find out how social services help young people but also understand the points of view of social workers and



Mohammed receiving an award

how their job affects their own well-being. At the end of my research, I created two audio pieces and a small magazine with the help of tutors from UCL. You can listen to my audio about why I chose to work on this project [here](#), and my other piece interviewing the social workers [here](#).

Our voices can have power.

Doing this project reminded me that our voices can have power. We might not all take the same path, but our stories and ideas are just as valuable as anyone else's. If you're a care leaver thinking about doing something like this, I'd say go for it. You've got more to give than you think.

You can read Mohammed's magazine and those created by the other care leavers on the course by clicking [here](#).

University College London Citizen Science Academy, supported by the Public Health team and Supporting Families division at Tower Hamlets Council, developed a three month training programme covering research ethics, methods and project planning, and supporting six local care-leavers to carry out qualitative research connected to health and wellbeing issues they felt were of importance.

Care Leaver Voices

“I am an outlier and sometimes feel a form of ‘survivor’s guilt’”

My name is Phoenix, I am a 28-year-old care experienced transmasculine person, who spent the ages of 11-19 in care. Unlike many other care experienced people, I was able to use this to access the resources that supported my path to higher education, in turn this then enabled me to pursue my current career in teaching.

The time where this support had the most impact is my GCSE’s, particularly English, where I had, to everyone’s surprise, fallen behind, predicted a D. During this time, many teachers looked at me through the same lens that they did many other children in care and labelled me as ‘troubled’. Not wrong, but not right either.

I was able to learn

However, toward the end of year 10 this struggle was taken seriously. I was offered 1-to-1 support during English, this 1-to-1 support eased the anxiety I was experiencing in class. I was able to learn. I was able to learn that my education had value.

This dedicated support bolstered my academic opportunity, allowing me to meet the entry criteria for A-Level courses, and not be written off like so many having failed a core GCSE. I believe this should be the standard for all children, but particularly those the system has agreed to ‘look after’.

Higher education was a path that my PA pushed me towards, due to my achievement at GCSE. I underachieved at A-Level but was able to secure a place on a foundation degree where I was diagnosed with dyslexia. This is where I started to resent the system, as my mum suggested dyslexia in PEP meetings throughout my GCSEs, but shockingly, she wasn’t listened to.



Phoenix

I feel that the system failed in this case, given how much I struggled at GCSE. How an otherwise ‘model’ student would become so anxious in just one subject, makes me question how they could miss it.

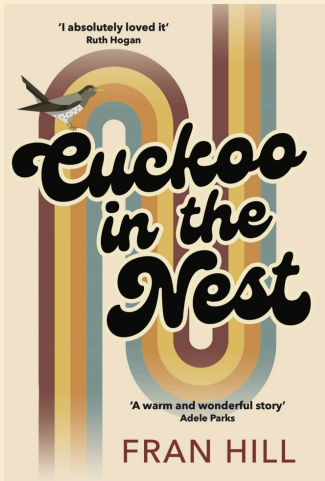
Upon graduating I began to notice how much this support stops. This is where the resentment compounded, as I still needed a lot of support, but they didn’t seem interested anymore. I applied for a teaching course and was told that my anxiety would impact me too much to be in a classroom, and to come back when I was ready. I started to feel written off by the system.

Amazing support

I was lucky enough to have an amazing support network that empowered me to advocate for my healthcare. I started to build a future, one I personally worked really hard for, but I can appreciate hard work alone would not have been enough without the dedicated support given as a result of being in care.

I am very much aware that I am an outlier and sometimes feel a form of ‘survivor’s guilt’ almost for this, but I feel as though I am living proof that, if you don’t write us off when we start to fall behind, we can go on to do amazing things. I should be the rule, not a ‘success story’.

Care Leaver Culture

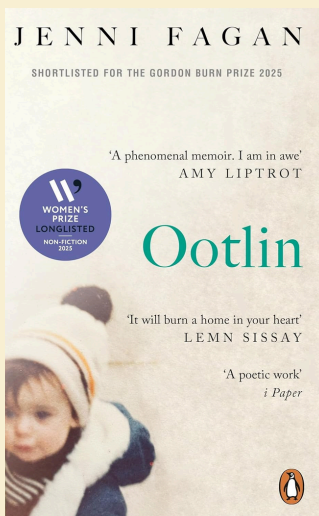


Cuckoo in the Nest and Home Bird- Books by Fran Hill

Fran Hill is care experienced, a writer and (semi) retired English teacher living in Warwickshire, England. Bittersweet and funny, *Cuckoo in the Nest* and *Home Bird* draws on Fran Hill's own experiences as a teenager in foster care. Reviewers write "Fran writes with such humour and humanity, it was an absolute tonic" and "This made my soul sing! Witty, poignant and full of heart!" [Buy the books here](#)

Sirens - Netflix Series

The series "Sirens" on Netflix explores the complex dynamics between sisters and their relationships with foster care, particularly focusing on the character of Devon, who, after her mother's death, is placed in foster care. The show delves into the impact of foster care on Devon's life, her struggles with addiction, and her eventual decision to leave foster care to care for their father. The narrative highlights the challenges of navigating the foster care system and the emotional toll it takes on the children involved. Watch *Sirens* [here](#).



Ootlin - Jenni Fagan's 'visceral' memoir of care

By the age of seven, Fagan had lived in 14 different homes and had her name changed multiple times. "There are a lot of kids out there being told they are less than everyone else. They are made unsafe by that story alone," writes Fagan in the book.

'Extraordinary and uplifting' OBSERVER

A triumphant tale of survival' FINANCIAL TIMES

'An extraordinary book' LITERARY REVIEW

You can buy Jenni's book [here](#)

Creative Corner

Testing our Older, Wiser, Brighter project at our Annual Gathering



Here we were creating vision boards, looking at our past, present and future selves. We used magazines, newspapers, stickers and other materials to create these collages.

'it feels so nice to be a big kid again and get creative'

We are introducing an arts programme for older care leavers aged 25+. Designed to encourage creativity, connection, and self-expression in a supportive environment.

These sessions offer care leavers an opportunity to share experiences and explore their personal journeys in a fun and creative way.



The project will be running throughout September from 11am–2pm on Saturdays – 6th, 13th & 20th September

The sessions will be held at our Manchester Office – 3rd Floor, Swan Street, Manchester, M4 5JW

It will be a relaxed, creative space for care leavers aged 25 and over – a chance to connect, reflect, and explore your journey through art. The sessions are family friendly, led by a care-experienced team, and include free brunch.

Each session will gently build on the one before, so if you're able to attend all three, that would be fantastic – but don't worry if you need to miss one.

We will be focusing on a new skill each week, with a chance to reflect on your past and also look towards to your future.



If you would like to get involved or have any questions. Please get in touch with us at connected@careleavers.com

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

Policy and Practice

Listening, Learning and Driving Change: Our Visit to the Liverpool Passport Office

Earlier this month, Terri-Anne and Toya from the Connected team were invited to the HM Passport Office in Liverpool to meet directly with the policy and guidance team.

Our aim? To share the lived experiences of care-experienced people who face persistent and often invisible barriers when applying for a passport — a basic yet essential form of ID that too many struggle to access.

We raised real-life examples from our work — situations where people didn't have access to parental details, where forms were returned due to missing birth certificates, or where services filled in paperwork incorrectly, causing delays that meant re-applying from scratch.

Care-experienced people are left in limbo

Some young people have been wrongly told they need to apply for UK citizenship, despite being born here. Others have been asked to repay fees when delays weren't their fault. One man even lost his job after a service used the wrong name on his documents, causing his passport application to be invalid. These stories may seem like one-off mishaps, but they reflect a systemic issue where care-experienced people are left in limbo — without valid ID, without recourse, and without support.

What stood out most about the visit was the genuine willingness of HMPO staff to listen, learn, and change. We spoke about making systems more trauma-informed, training frontline staff, and adjusting algorithms that automatically reject applications based on “inconsistencies” that are often a direct result of growing up in care.



Meeting the policy and guidance team at the Passport Office

As part of the visit, we were even taken behind the scenes to see how passports are printed — a process that was surprisingly quick and efficient. The machine used was enormous, and we couldn't help but laugh at how fast it produced a passport, especially compared to the months of delays some applicants face just to reach that stage. The irony wasn't lost on us.

We're hopeful this is the start of real progress. HMPO wants to do better — and they've asked for more feedback directly from care-experienced people and professionals who support them.

Your voices count

Your voices can inform better policy and practice moving forward. In line with the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Care Leaver Covenant, public services have a duty to ensure equitable access to ID. Identity is a right — and together, we're working to make that a reality.

To share your passport experience, get in touch or write an article for Care Leavers Connected.

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

Access to Records Call

You will now be able to book a 15 minute slot for a phone call with one of the team every Monday between 9am-1pm using the following [link](#) . You can also watch our Access to Records video guide [here](#).

Connected Zoom Groups

Join our next Care Leavers Connected Parenting meet-up on 11th August to connect with other care leaver parents. This sessions start at 7.30pm. [Sign up here](#)

Free data for all care leavers

Are you finding it hard to keep up with the cost of calls and need data? The CLA's "Keeping Care Leavers Connected", in collaboration with The Digital Inclusion Network. Get in touch.

Jim's Zoom Groups

Jim's sessions are on every first Wednesday of the month between 8-10pm. They sometimes have a topic for discussion and sometimes we just talk about any topic that care leavers who turn up want to raise. [Sign up here](#)

Research Group

Would you like to be part of our Research Group? You will be sent any details of people conducting research, able to join groups and discuss any research you find with us. Email toya.dunscombe@careleavers.com to join

Older, Wiser, Brighter Project

A three-week programmes for care leavers 25+ focused on cooking, art, and photography. Designed to encourage creativity and connection, in a supportive environment. and aim to explore personal journeys. Get in touch.

Campaign With Us

We are determined to ensure that care leaver issues are addressed by government. We want to make sure that care leavers have as good a life as possible. If you want to join us in campaigning, then get in touch.

A massive thank you....

To Zoe Baker

*Zoe Baker is running the
Yorkshire Marathon in October to
raise money for the CLA and
Settle. If you would like to donate
please [visit here](#).*



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

