

# CELCIS Transcript

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## We're talking about people, not systems

David Graham is the UK National Director of the Care Leavers' Association. Here he explains the association's work, the differences he finds north and south of the Border, and how his group reflects issues back to corporate parents.

### David Graham

The Care Leavers' Association was set up about 18-19 years ago by a group of care leavers who were getting support as young people. There was a national organisation in England a bit like Who Cares? Scotland, that we're supporting care leavers up to 25. And then everything stopped. Care leavers weren't getting any support in adulthood. So this group of care leavers set up the Care Leavers' Association with a view to using that lived experience to support care leavers of all ages. We now have a range of projects where we work with young people leaving care and all those independent living issues. We work with adults, particularly in the criminal justice system trying to improve their lives, trying to improve the systems within the criminal justice system. We look at the health of care leavers - so working with the NHS and other providers, really looking at care leavers lives from a holistic point of view and either trying to support care leavers directly, or supporting those wider organisations to improve that the way the way they work - so ultimately improving the lives of those care leavers. The majority of the staff team and all the trustees and all the volunteers are care leavers, so all the time, we're bringing in that lived experience. The key issue though with that, is that when we're working with care leavers, in the room will be two three care leavers working with each other. So we immediately we can make that connection, we can make that engagement, we can get people talking to us who may not talk to other professionals. And we can draw out those really important issues, we can draw out their feelings, we can help create and promote their voice. Scotland and England are very different in size, in that in England, we've got 157 different local authorities, and the government there is very keen for each one to do things in their own way that can be good in terms of innovation, if we get something good coming out that has good impact for care leavers. But what we don't see, then is a lot of good practice, we find sometimes local authorities can be very precious, they want to do their own thing, they want to take the credit. And they're not very good at rolling out things that work. So looking to Scotland, where there's very clear identity coming from the government about this being a priority to improve the lives of care leavers and where

they can take the opportunity to roll things out throughout all local authorities. It's really exciting. And I think Scotland from that point of view is coming up with some really good ideas, really good ways of working, where they listen to the voices of young people. A campaign a couple of years ago by Who Cares? Scotland, about taking those young people, sitting them in front of politicians and getting them to tell their story. It really does make a difference when policymakers hear how their policies affect the real day to day lives of young people. When we're talking to corporate parents, we're really reminding them that in the first instance, they're dealing with human beings, we're not talking about systems, we're talking about people and their everyday lives and their loves and the practicalities of how they get on and live. And you really have to bring that humanity to the policy work. And we take the user experience, we take the good things and the bad things. And we sit down with policy makers and we show them how their policies affect those lives and where we can make change the small practical changes that can be made easily but make a huge difference to somebody's day to day living.

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