



CELGIS's response to the Scottish Government's consultation on 'Moving On' from Care into Adulthood

October 2024

CELGIS, the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, based at the University of Strathclyde, is a leading improvement and innovation centre. We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long-lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care.

We welcome the opportunity to submit our views in response to [the Scottish Government's consultation](#) on what is needed to improve support for children and young people as they grow into adulthood and move towards leaving care and living more independently.

Our response is underpinned by research evidence, practice experience, and extensive insight and intelligence from lived experience and professional practice gathered through our long-standing, cross-organisational and interest-specific networks, as well as our group of consultants with lived experience of care. These networks include people across the workforce, including leaders working across the spectrum of children's services and other public services working in support of children, young people and their families, adults with care experience, amongst others.

In our responses to questions and requests for examples, we have also drawn on the learning from recent research, including the Children's Services Reform Research study published in 2023 which clearly outlined the components for underpinning effective improvements in and integration of services and highlighted the challenges Scotland is experiencing as it works to improve outcomes for children, young people, support their families and carers, and meet the aspirations of The Promise. The challenges that remain unchanged in access to and the provision of services, workforce recruitment and retention and stable funding will limit the potential to make the improvements this consultation is focused on for young care leavers.

Scotland already has in place many of the policy levers and drivers to support real changes in practice. It is attention to investing in and resourcing legislative duties, including the implementation of Continuing Care, applying improvement and implementation approaches consistently across Scotland, that will go a long way in achieving the support young people leaving care need, deserve and have a right to.

Question 1

How can we ensure that young people, and those who support them, are given enough time, advice and resources to effectively prepare them for moving on from care?

"They say care is lifelong but the support is not lifelong." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

"There is something about the system catching up with society... people are staying at home a lot longer..." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

We have answered this question throughout under each thematic heading.

'Moving on from care'

It is important to be clear that 'moving on from care' should never be a singular point in a young person's life. Rather, it should be a process of moving into independence and interdependence. For many care experienced young people in Scotland, this is not the case. The most recent available year data for Scotland from 2015 shows the average age care experienced young people leave care at 17 years old, while their non care experienced peers leave their parental home at 26 years old on average. Comparable more recent data for England gives similar ages, with the average age of care experienced young people moving out of where they are being cared for between the ages of 16 and 18, compared to 24 for their non-care experienced peers leaving home. With challenges to the number of young people benefiting from this intended support, and availability of suitable aftercare support, all too often emotional, financial and practical support for care leavers are stopped very suddenly, meaning care experienced young people must suddenly cope with the complexities of independent living, while their non-care experienced peers are supported to move to independence over much longer periods of time.

The use of 'moving on' and 'leaving care' language may be viewed as being at odds with the spirit of the 'Staying Put' policy and Continuing Care and Aftercare duties in Scotland. Whilst it may be understood to denote the end of the experience or status of being formally 'looked after' under legislation, the language around 'moving on' and 'leaving care' may inadvertently suggest that there are no longer any duties on local authorities and corporate parents in Scotland to support young people with experience of care and this is not the case. Scotland has significant policies and particular entitlements in place to support young people leaving care and these must be seen as essential to ensuring they are able to thrive well into adulthood. We know that transitions to adulthood are never straightforward, thus the importance of recognising relationships and interdependence when developing policy is essential.

Ongoing support

Delaying the age at which young people move on to independent living, alongside a gradual and supported transition, has a profoundly positive impact on the lifelong wellbeing of people with care experience. Scottish legislation and policy aims to positively delay the age and way young people have historically

transitioned from care into adulthood to more accurately reflect child development, emerging adulthood and what all children and young people need and navigate as they grow up.

Early planning for children going into adulthood

Early planning for children going into adulthood is vital. This is true for all children, but this must be intentional for children in need of care and protection. As soon as a decision has been made that a child is in the care of the local authority, then that local authority should be planning to support that child's aspirations into their adult life.

This should be done on a multi-agency basis via 'Looked After Child Reviews,' where appropriate, and through the GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) approach, up until the child is aged 18. The Scottish Government states that "through GIRFEC, everyone in Scotland can work together to build the scaffold of support children and young people need to grow up loved, safe and respected. GIRFEC provides Scotland with a consistent framework and shared language for promoting, supporting, and safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young people. It is locally embedded and positively embraced by organisations, services and practitioners across Children's Services Planning Partnerships, with a focus on changing culture, systems and practice for the benefit of babies, infants, children, young people and their families."

Corporate parenting duties are vital here to ensure that all relevant public bodies, and the services within them, take responsibility for supporting children and young people. These duties last until the age of 26; although could be expanded to all young people with experience of care and not only 'care leavers'. Any expansion of corporate parenting duties will require the need to "do policy" in order, understand what has worked, what is effectively in place, then take the next step, thus intentional sequencing is essential to any expansion. Alongside, adequate resource, a skilled and supported workforce, and infrastructure. The Scottish Government describes corporate parenting duties as "an organisation's performance of actions necessary to uphold the rights and secure the wellbeing of a looked after child or care leaver, and through which their physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development is promoted, from infancy though to adulthood. In other words, corporate parenting is about certain organisations listening to the needs, fears and wishes of children and young people, and being proactive and determined in their collective efforts to meet them." These responsibilities apply to a wide range of organisations and individuals, including local authorities, Scottish Ministers, health boards, and the Scottish Housing Regulator.

For all young people with experience of care

All young people need support as they enter adulthood. However, currently many of the entitlements regarding children who needed care and protection are only available if they are also 'care leavers'. We would recommend that this support is extended to all young people with experience of care. Any expansion of these entitlements will also require sequencing, adequate resource, a skilled and supported workforce, and infrastructure.

A 'care leaver' in Scotland is defined in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 as someone who is 'looked after' on their 16th birthday. Many children may have extensive experience of care but, by the time they are 16, will no longer be 'looked after'. For example, a child may have needed care and protection when they were 2 years old and cared for by the local authority as 'looked after' but when they were 14 went to live with a family member or friend under a kinship care order, and their legal status of being 'looked after' child with local authority duties to them ending. This child will have had 12 years' experience of the care system and yet will not be entitled to any 'aftercare' support as they transition into adulthood. However, a child who needed care and protection from the local authority from the age of 14 and who was still 'looked after' on their 16th birthday will be entitled to Continuing Care, Aftercare, and the new proposed Care Leaver Payment.

If the aspiration for entitlements such as Aftercare is to support young people with experience of care as they move into adulthood, then this inequity means this aspiration is not being met for a significant number of young people due to eligibility for such entitlements being based a narrow legal definition of what it means to be a 'care leaver'.

The entitlement to Aftercare should include all young people who have experience of care, including those who were 'looked after' at home with their parent/s or in kinship care - and not only to young people who are 'care leavers.'

We would recommend that this support is extended to all young people with experience of care.

Fundamentally, planning for transitions into adulthood should be seen as part of permanence planning for children in need of care and protection, and not as a function that only begins when a child reaches the age of, for example, 14.

Collective leadership and collaborative working

Making these duties real for young people requires a multi-agency approach and should not be seen as being the responsibility of only one specific service. This requires intentional collaborative working between children's and adult's social work services. Practitioners have told us that this is currently a critical area for improvement and point where young people could potentially 'fall through the cracks'.

Collective leadership is required to ensure that all services and agencies that support young people at this crucial stage are involved. This includes housing, education, finance, health, third sector colleagues, and any other partners who supports young people at this crucial stage.

Trusted relationships

Planning for a child's transition into adulthood involves discussions around their aspirations for their future; their next steps in education, training, or employment; who is in their support network; where might they like to live in the future; and so much more. Consequently, these are individual, personal and often sensitive conversations that should take place between the child or young

person and trusted adults in their life. It should not be a 'one off' conversation because a 'review' is due; rather, this should be an ongoing dialogue to allow the child or young person the opportunity to reflect on these conversations and fully understand the entitlements and support available to them so they can make informed choices about their future. Materials such as those co-produced and designed by young people and CELCIS and on [Continuing Care and Rights](#), for example, can support these conversations.

Transitioning into adulthood as a developmental stage

It's important to acknowledge that young people will make mistakes – as everyone does at that stage in life, and making choices and mistakes is crucial to learning and development. The issue is that the stakes are often much higher for young people with care experience as they often have less support around them. The need to manage finances so young can lead to homelessness, and debt. It is essential to view adolescence as a developmental stage, and that part of this is making mistakes and having the room to change course and recover from these. There must be suitable 'safety nets' in place, including trusting relationships, having sufficient financial support, and having a secure home.

Minimum Income Guarantee

We are keen to learn more about the potential benefits that a Minimum Income Guarantee may bring for care leavers and what the next steps might be in the Scottish Government's work on a Minimum Income Guarantee. Much could be learned from the evaluation of similar initiatives in Wales and London and wider Universal Basic Income approaches elsewhere.

Sources:

- CELCIS (2015) Housing Options and Care Leavers: Improving Outcomes into Adulthood Glasgow: CELCIS
- Fortune, R., Smith, N. (2021) No Place Like Home. A look at young people's experiences of leaving the care system, Ilford: Barnardo's; Office for National Statistics (2023) More adults living with their parents, Newport: Office for National Statistics
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- Baker, C. (2017) Care leavers' views on their transition to adulthood: A rapid review of the evidence. London: Coram Voice; Mann-Feder, V. and Goyette, M. (eds) (2019), Leaving Care and The Transition to Adulthood, Oxford University Press, Stein, M (2005) Resilience and Young People Leaving Care: Overcoming the odds, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York. and Stein, M. (2012) Young People Leaving Care, London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Lough Dennell, B L., McGhee, K. and Porter, R. (2022) Continuing Care: An exploration of implementation. Glasgow: CELCIS
- The Looked After Child (Scotland) Regulations 2009

- Scottish Government (2022), Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) - <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Part 9
- CELCIS (2022) 'Your right to continuing care' Continuing Care and Rights information and resources. CELCIS: Glasgow
- Welsh Government (2023) Basic income pilot for care leavers: overview of the scheme Cardiff: Welsh Government Camden Council (2024) Procurement Strategy for Care-Experienced Basic Income Pilot Scoping
- Scottish Government (2015). Statutory guidance on Part 9 (Corporate Parenting) of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Scottish Government: Edinburgh.
- Scottish Parliament (2014) Part 9, Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Scottish Parliament: Edinburgh
- Scottish Parliament (2014) Schedule 4, Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Scottish Parliament: Edinburgh

Question 2

Are there any barriers to starting the process of planning and preparing for young people leaving care at an early stage?

Early planning for young people entering adulthood is vital. This is true for all children, but this must be particularly intentional for children in need of care and protection. As soon as a decision has been made that a child is in the care of the local authority, then all partners in the Children's Services Planning Partnership should be planning to support that child's aspirations into their adult life. It is important to acknowledge, however, that there are barriers and challenges to doing this effectively in the current context.

Inconsistent implementation across Scotland of legislation and policy for young people entering adulthood

Research carried out by CELCIS in 2022 identified several bureaucratic barriers and cultural and practice factors that have had an impact on the successful implementation of legislation and policy for the benefit of young people entering into adulthood and these continue. The research found that there was inconsistency in approach in providing Continuing Care to young people not only between different local authority areas in Scotland, but also within those local authority teams. Young people should be offered equity in terms of support and experience. This requires collaborative working across all services and agencies, including children's and adult social work services, housing, education, health, third sector and all organisations who have a corporate parenting responsibility to plan ahead for the futures of children in need of care and protection.

Lack of sufficient resources

Across Scotland there is a lack of sufficient resources to successfully support children and young people entering into adulthood.

Housing was raised by both CELCIS consultants with lived experience and practitioners who support children and young people in need of care and protection as being a continual issue. Twelve local authority areas in Scotland have declared a housing emergency, with the Scottish Government announcing a national housing emergency in May 2024. This lack of affordable housing in general, plus a lack of local authority housing, means that many young people with experience of care simply cannot access suitable accommodation at this key point in their lives. On average, young people with experience of care leave home aged 17 in Scotland – whereas their non-care experienced peers leave home, on average, aged 26. A lack of suitable housing has considerable implications for early planning for young people entering into adulthood and for the kind of transitions young people are experiencing into independent living.

Another substantial barrier to early planning for children and young people is the workforce challenges that all partners in children's services are facing. Recent research (Scotland's Local Government Workforce Report 2024) found that almost all local authorities in Scotland have critical workforce gaps for social care roles (97%) and social workers (91%). The research also showed that for the vast majority of local authorities, workforce planning or workforce gaps appeared on their risk registers (94%) as an area of significant concern.

Ongoing trusted relationships between young people and the people who work with them is vital to support children and young people in their aspirations for adulthood. The current workforce challenges impact on the ability of practitioners to support young people in the way they would wish and the way that is needed.

There are limited financial resources across the children and families sector at present. This, in addition to managing competing demands, is having an impact on leaders and practitioners being able to prioritise current legislative and policy commitments for young people entering into adulthood. There is a need for improvements to be made to national resource planning to guarantee capacity at a local level to provide support and entitlements for young people with experience of care.

The 'Follow the Money' report from the Independent Care Review estimated that the operational costs of the current care system (as at 2020) across Scotland was £942million. However, financial modelling across Scotland in relation to the system and structures around young people growing into adulthood would be beneficial to fully understand what resource is needed to support the current legislative duties for young people, and for this resource to be ringfenced. Without this, practitioners at all levels in the system are being placed in an ethical dilemma. This is a substantial barrier to early planning as they wish to support young people to realise their ambition and potential, whilst knowing that there will not be the requisite resource to support them in this.

Lack of an enabling context

Early planning will only have the desired positive outcome for young people as they enter adulthood if the surrounding scaffolding is available to allow this to take place. Implementation Science states that, without an enabling context,

successful implementation of any policy or legislation will not be able to take place. Consequently then, for practitioners to be able to support young people at this crucial stage in their lives, the context they are working in must be conducive to support this. The current context is far from enabling – in fact, the multiple resource constraints are barrier to implementing the current legislation and policy that Scotland already has in place to support children and young people in need of care and protection, not least Continuing Care. Recruitment challenges, the housing crisis, and the lack of sufficient and sustained financial resources have to be addressed to provide the required enabling context to support children and young people.

Sources:

- Lough Dennell, B L., McGhee, K. and Porter, R. (2022) Continuing Care: An exploration of implementation. Glasgow: CELCIS
- CELCIS. (2015) Housing Options and Care Leavers: Improving Outcomes into Adulthood: Glasgow: CELCIS
- Society of Personnel and Development Scotland, SOLACE Scotland, Improvement Service (2024): Scotland’s Local Government Workforce Report [Scotland's Local Government Workforce Report 2024 \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](https://improvementservice.org.uk)
- Independent Care Review (2020) Follow the Money. Independent Care Review: Edinburgh.
- Fixsen, D. L., Blasé, K. A., & Van Dyke, M. K. (2019). Implementation Practice and Science.

Question 3

How can we ensure young people receive the right support and guidance to build the life skills they need for adulthood before they move on from care?

"Transitioning to adulthood feels like most vulnerable time of life, like a cliff." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Ensuring young people, and those who support them, are given enough time, advice and resources to effectively prepare them for moving on from care is a vital precursor to build life skills and cannot be separate from this. Our response to the first question in this consultation which asks about preparation should be read and understood together with this question about building life skills.

All young people must be able to experience a gradual transition into adult life. Ensuring this is the case for young people with experience of care will require full implementation of Parts 10 and 11 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which outlines Aftercare and Continuing Care duties. This should include clearly articulating the rights of all young people with care experience to remain in their home or a suitable home until 21, and to receive high quality, ongoing and individualised aftercare support until 26 (or older if necessary).

Support

Evidence from research shows that while the needs of young people are diverse, there are some clear, consistent and vital needs to address to get support right for young people with experience of care who are growing into adulthood. These include:

- The need for consistent support, across Scotland, with a national approach applied locally, to avoid any 'postcode lottery' of support
- The importance of continuity of relationships and support continuing once a child or young person is no longer formally 'looked after'
- The importance of beginning planning and discussions about future plans and needs as early as possible

Sources:

- The Independent Care Review (2020) *The Promise*. Glasgow: Independent Care Review.
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) *UK Poverty 2024*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) *Poverty in Scotland 2023*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2022) *Going without: deepening poverty in the UK* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) *Guarantee our Essentials: reforming Universal Credit to ensure we can all afford the essentials in hard times* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Stein, M (2005) *Resilience and Young People Leaving Care: Overcoming the odds*. Research Report. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Mann-Feder, V. and Goyette, M. (eds) (2019), *Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood*, Oxford University Press and Stein, M. (2012) *Young People Leaving Care*, London: Jessica Kingsley
- National Union of Students (2022) *Cost of Living Students and Apprentices* Cheshire: NUS
- Baker, C. (2017) *Care leavers' views on their transition to adulthood: a rapid review of the evidence*. London: Coram Voice.

Question 4

What services and support should be considered and provided to a care leaver who returns home to live with their birth family?

"Navigating relationships with family would have been helpful throughout my life." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Care leavers who return home to their birth families will continue to need support and for this to be sustained to help them and their families.

Action for Children research that looked at children returning to the care of their parents found that instability in relationships increased with older children/young people and that a number of other factors mean that support is necessary to ensure that a transition back home is successful. Family stability and poverty, previous care experience, the number of care placements, and whether care was on a voluntary or statutory basis, can all interact to increase risk of instability and breakdown.

This report also offers a number of suggestions that could be considered within a Scottish context:

- The establishment of 'national reunification guidance' for all local authorities
- Support to local authorities to embed 'reunification best practice' on the back of developed guidance
- Build on research knowledge and practice experience of the known risks that can create instability to young people who return home to their family and focus on what works to support young people and prevent breakdown in relationships.

In line with both The Promise and GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) principles, resources and strategy should be focussed on both prevention approaches and scaffolding to families to prevent breakdown and need for a child to be cared for by their local authority. Early planning is key. A range of support to assist the family to address underlying risk to the young person's safety and needs and support to the young person themselves will be required. These should include services to support parental mental health, substance use or concerns regarding domestic abuse and a range of other needs.

Sustained support to help address what a family needs to be together will also be necessary. It is unlikely that short term support will create what is needed.

The current context of squeezed resource, recruitment and retention crisis in the workforces creates a challenge for creating the conditions to the type of intensive long-term support that many families need. Without adequately addressing the system-level resourcing and capacity issues, the ability to improve support will be limited.

Sources:

- Action for Children/NSPCC (2024). Home Again: Understanding Reunification Practice in the children's social care system in England. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2024/home-again-reunification-practice-in-england>. NSPCC: London.

Question 5

Can you provide examples of good practice where services have worked together in a holistic way to support birth families and young people moving on from care when the young person returns to live with their birth family?

CELCIS does not directly deliver services to children and their families.

From our research, good practice in working with children, young people and their families and carers, this would include services that are able to be developed and provided in line with:

- Early and sustained transition-planning based on robust assessment of need; early preparation produces better outcomes

- Holistic and coordinated support, including wrap-around support if required
- Services delivered in partnership to meet wide ranging and complex needs
- Designated keyworkers / lead as a co-ordinating point of contact
- Person-centred support, preparation and planning - relationship based and trauma-informed support
- Family involvement in planning and decision-making and intensive support to families who support the young person / young adult
- The provision of clear and accessible information and access to advocacy to help the young person and their family navigate the system
- Adequate services, resources and staffing - services are often lacking or inconsistent across Scotland.

Question 6

How do we ensure that young people with care experience, and those who provide them with care, can easily access information about entitlements and support? Please provide any examples of good practice you are aware of in the open text box.

"I would never have known unless I had reached out."- CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Young people and their carers are often unclear or unaware about what entitlements or supports they may be able to access and often hear about these from other young people rather than those who have a formal role in supporting them.

Entitlements reflect young people's rights to services and support. It is crucial that the information about these is accessible and available in different formats and languages.

What is needed:

- A national approach would provide consistency and reduce the postcode lottery of service provision and support that we have seen repeatedly in research and responses to consultations
- A 'one door approach' to being able to access information online 24/7/365
- A well-informed workforce who can help young people and carers navigate complexities and answer questions that will arise
- Independent advocates who can support young people to navigate this information and know and exercise their rights
- Designated keyworkers / lead as a co-ordinating point of contact and source of information
- Attention to person-centred support, preparation and planning
- Provision of relationship-based and trauma-informed support that recognises that transitions are a stressful and emotional time for young people, their carers and families
- The involvement of carers and families in planning and decision-making, with clear information to help inform decision-making.

Taking a co-design approach with young people will help to make the information more accessible and engaging. A good practice example we can offer here is the co-produced 'Your Right to Continuing [Care](#)' information materials. The content and format of these materials was led by a group of young people with experience of care, who worked with CELCIS, Clan Childlaw and the Care Inspectorate to develop these resources as a tool for having conversations about entitlement to Continuing Care. These resources are available in multiple formats including video, text, paper and augmented reality, and all hosted and freely available online.

Question 7

Are there any changes you would like to see as part of the eligibility criteria for Continuing Care?

'Continuing Care' is a legal term established by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 that refers to a local authority's duty to ensure young people who were last cared for in foster, formal kinship, or residential care can remain in their 'care placement' until they are 21. Implementation of this legislation has been challenging, with the number of young people benefiting from this intended support remaining low. There are a range of reasons for this, as outlined by [our 2022 research](#) exploring the Implementation of Continuing Care, as well as our more recent research with practitioners in our Children's Services Reform Research. This study found that the current complex policy and legislative landscape was not supportive of children and young people accessing Continuing Care, with resources, workforce crises, and availability of carers and accommodation having an impact on this. Attention is urgently required to address these resource and workforce constraints and to increase the availability of carers and accommodation.

The complexity of the policy and legislative landscape can be resolved by instituting a simplified definition of Continuing Care, that the default for all care experienced children and young people is to be able to remain in their care setting (or appropriate alternative if a child has been in secure care), with appropriate support, and with a right to return to this care, until they are 21.

Children and young people leaving care from secure care centres

Part 11 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 does not enable young people living in secure care to access Continuing Care. Whilst children should not be deprived of their liberty any longer than is set out by a secure care order and subject to stringent criteria, it is imperative that where children live after leaving secure care is stable and their home environment is able to offer caring and developmentally appropriate support. This should be through moving into residential care, to living with foster carers, or access to financial, emotional and practical support if returning to kinship or biological families.

The [Secure Care Pathway and Standards](#) set out children and young people's rights in their transitions from secure care. A 2023 review of these standards by the Care Inspectorate, found many positive practices around transitions, such as collaborative approach involving young people, families, community-based staff and secure care staff working together to plan and make decisions around

children and young people's transitions. However, challenges were highlighted, including abrupt decision-making about children's living arrangements, and difficulty securing appropriate accommodation, which left children and young people facing a significant risk of homelessness.

We recognise that there is a substantial degree of complexity that must be considered to remedy this. The Promise recommended investment in intermediate settings, for example. We also note that the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 has made changes that will mean children in conflict with the law are placed in secure care instead of being remanded or sentenced to Young Offenders Institutions, and that their local authority must regard them as 'looked after' if they are not already, in terms of their rights and entitlements. A proportionate approach should be taken around entitlements to Continuing Care when a child or young person has been 'remanded' in secure care for a short amount of time. However, it is likely that any child placed in secure care for more than a very short amount of time would benefit from an entitlement to Continuing Care provision.

Children and young people who are 'looked after' at home

Evidence has consistently identified that children and young people being cared for under Compulsory Supervision Orders (CSO) while living with their parents while the family is supported by the local authority as needing extra support. Their needs and circumstances can be complex and as pressing as the needs of children 'looked after' away from home. They may require additional support around multiple and concurrent challenges such as parental substance misuse, mental health issues and poverty, and are more likely to have poorer outcomes than their care experienced peers, for example in education, when these support needs are not met.

Children who are 'looked after at home' are not entitled to Continuing Care provisions. Whilst these children may not require alternative accommodation if they are living with their birth families, their support needs into adult life do not diminish when a child turns 16 or 18. Continuing Care provisions should be made available support a child or young person and their family, including financial support, until a young person is 21, albeit on a voluntary rather than compulsory basis after a child reaches 18.

The right for children and young people to return home

Part 11 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 includes provision that "the duty to provide Continuing Care ceases if the person leaves the accommodation of the person's own volition". Current legislation is not aligned with the intention that Continuing Care should be the default care scenario for 'looked after' children and young people until they are 21, nor does this consider evidence about children and young people's development and their capacity to make decisions, to make mistakes or change their mind. Children and young people who have experienced significant adversity and disruption to relationships in their young lives need the same 'safety-nets' as their non care experienced peers who are often able to return to live with their family in adulthood if they want or need to.

Furthermore, in accordance with the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) Article 20, children and young people should always have a

right to return to their care setting up to the age of 18. To uphold The Promise and enact the intention of Continuing Care as the default care scenario for children and young people until they are 21, Section 67(7)(a) should be removed from the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, ensuring that children have a right to 'change their mind' and return home to their care placement until the age of 21. Scotland has of course also recently incorporated the UNCRC into Scots Law.

[Our 2022 research](#) gathered evidence from practitioners who support children and young people to access Continuing Care shows that children and young people may not always be informed of their eligibility for Continuing Care by professionals or carers, nor may they have support they need from a person they trust when they are making decisions around Continuing Care.

This evidence has also shown that children and young people moving into term-time accommodation when attending higher education have been informed that they are now no longer eligible for Continuing Care as this is interpreted as having ended their care placement. Whilst there have been limited changes to practice since our research was published, such as short periods for care experienced learners to decide whether they wish to stay on their university course or return home at the beginning of their first term, this 'choice' is not in line with the principles of Continuing Care and presents as potentially unfair to their education. Their non-care experienced peers are likely to be able to return home during the academic holidays and after they graduate.

Informal kinship care

Children and young people in informal kinship care are not entitled to access Continuing Care provisions. Whilst these care arrangements are facilitated, and often supported financially, by the local authority, the children and young people are not formally 'looked after,' and thus there is no legal duty on the local authority to provide Continuing Care.

Evidence with practitioners who support children and young people to access Continuing Care highlights that these young people can experience the same challenges and difficulties as their formally 'looked after' peers and yet cannot access the ongoing support of Continuing Care as they develop into adulthood. This suggests a moral, if not legal, failing on the part of Continuing Care and one that should be addressed through the inclusion of informal kinship care within Continuing Care entitlements.

Sources:

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Question 8

What additional support do you think is required for families, professionals and practitioners who are responsible for providing Continuing Care arrangements?

Continuing Care is about providing a young person with consistency, predictability, stability and appropriate support as they develop and grow into adulthood. It means not moving a young person from their home, not expecting carers to reduce the support they provide and not rupturing established, trusted, and loving relationships between young people and the people caring for them. Doing this requires changes in culture, leadership, guidance and practice. There are persistent challenges to the implementation of Continuing Care, with the number of young people benefiting from this intended support remaining low: these challenges are likely to be exacerbated by current resource constraints. Many of the challenges identified by CELCIS research with practitioners in 2022 require complex change to take place in a wide range of organisations, and the evidence highlighted a number of legislative, cultural and practice barriers to implementation too:

Culture and Leadership

All agencies, stakeholders, individual staff members, and carers, must work to articulate and prioritise Continuing Care as the default provision for all young people. This will fulfil the ambition outlined in the Continuing Care guidance to "*reinforce the legal and ethical responsibilities of local authorities to looked after young people and care leavers.*"

There must be improvements to national finance and resource planning to guarantee care setting capacity to meet Continuing Care entitlements for all eligible young people. This must include consideration of infrastructure, staffing, and support across foster, residential, and kinship care settings. Local authorities must plan their finances to guarantee every eligible child and young person's Continuing Care entitlement from the point of entry to care. This should take account of current and projected costs associated with their current care setting to ensure stability and continuity of care, especially in externally commissioned care settings. Considering the current budgetary constraints on local authorities, there should be feedback and discussion between local and national government about budgetary requirements to ensure Continuing Care is delivered.

Clear, practice-focused information materials for staff, carers and young people, clearly explaining Continuing Care as the legal duty for the support of all eligible young people must be available. This should clarify both practice and procedural issues to ensuring Continuing Care is the default provision for young people, and challenge perceptions around the expected age of leaving care. The role of the Scottish Government and regulatory bodies such as the Care Inspectorate in monitoring Continuing Care should be clarified, including commitments to improvement activity and thematic inspections.

Redrafting of current guidance into statutory guidance

Updated guidance which removes the possibility for a young person to forfeit their right to Continuing Care should be drafted and issued as statutory guidance. Young people up to the age of 18 should always have a right to return to where they were being cared for. Local authorities' duties to make Continuing Care the default position for all eligible young people must be emphasised, including a presumption that any young person's care arrangement continues to be suitable to them while they are supported under Continuing Care. Any assessment should only be to confirm that continuing these arrangements would not be significantly detrimental to their welfare.

Guidance should be clear that a young person does not need to cease to be 'looked after' in order become eligible for Continuing Care. Continuing Care should be understood and used as a seamless, natural progression rather than a beginning or end in a young person's experience of care. Guidance should remove any requirement for young people to request Continuing Care, and focus on the importance of early planning, stability, emotional wellbeing and continuing relationships into adulthood. It should contain clear language and messaging, removing any bureaucratic or procedural ambiguities and interpretive barriers.

Inclusion of Continuing Care throughout the care system

The provision of all care for Scotland's children in need of care and protection needs to consider and reflect the values and implementation of Continuing Care. Foster carers' recruitment, assessment, registration, induction, and ongoing support should be based on the explicit presumption of carers providing Continuing Care through to 21. Both local authority and external providers should plan for this, and providing Continuing Care should be addressed in any commissioning process with independent providers.

The expectation to provide care to the age of 21 should be explicitly addressed from the outset of any matching process. Foster care and residential child care services registration and regulations should be amended to remove any bureaucratic or procedural barriers to the implementation of Continuing Care. The provision of Continuing Care should not be contingent on foster carers moving from independent providers to local authority management at any stage of their caring for children.

A consistent theme raised in CELCIS's [2022 research](#) with practitioners was the pressures on finances and the financial support made available to carers as the

status of a young person's care changes from being formally 'looked after' in care to continuing to live with their carers under Continuing Care arrangements.

National fees and allowances for foster and formal kinship carers should be introduced which reflect the true costs of caring for young people in transition to adulthood. Currently there are arbitrary reductions in fees and/or allowances based on chronological or legislative triggers or thresholds, this must stop.

Residential child care must provide Continuing Care for all eligible young people in their care, working proactively with the Care Inspectorate to address any real or perceived obstacles to registration and practice.

Evidence from our Children's Services Reform Research study reinforced many of the findings from our earlier research with Continuing Care Practitioners, with practitioners telling us that there is insufficient clarity in transition pathways, processes, and procedures and this is creating a barrier to providing appropriate support to young people transitioning into adulthood and interdependence.

"Continuing Care could cause confusion in the transition of young people into adult services, as adult services could perceive the guidance as meaning that children and families social work teams would maintain their support to a young person up until they were 26 years of age, and that adult services support was therefore not required. Others highlighted that there could be a lack of clarity over who was responsible for allocating budgets and undertaking assessments to provide Continuing Care." Children's Services Reform Research study: Scotland's Children's Services Landscape: The Views and Experiences of the Children's Services Workforce, page 53

The production of statutory guidance and a simplified definition of Continuing Care would support greater clarity for practitioners. This would support the practice improvements required to address deficits in planning for Continuing Care, and the current lack of understanding of different roles and responsibilities between practitioners which prevent effective joint working.

Sources:

- Lough Dennell, B.L., McGhee, K. and Porter, R. (2022) Continuing Care: An exploration of implementation, CELCIS: Glasgow (pg 41)
- McTier, A., Manole, M., Scott, J., Young, E., Fowler, N., McIver, L., Anderson, C.A., Porter, R. and Ottaway, H. (2023) *Children's Services Reform Research: Scotland's children's services landscape: The views and experiences of the children's services workforce* CELCIS; Glasgow

Question 9

How do we ensure that young people, and their views, are heard during discussions on Continuing Care which impact them?

The full inclusion of children and young people in discussing, planning for and access to their entitlement to Continuing Care is a right and entitlement of care experienced children and young people, as set out by The Promise, that children and young people must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately

involved in decision-making about their care. Article 12 of the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) also sets out the right for children to be listened to and meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them, and in Scotland the UNCRC has recently been enshrined into Scots Law. The inclusion of children and young people is also aligned to the values and principles of Scotland's GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) approach, including "placing the child or young person and their family at the heart, and promoting choice, with full participation in decisions that affect them." Beyond these rights and entitlements being in place, children and young people's inclusion is an essential component if the implementation of Continuing Care is to be successful and planned effectively for each and every young person eligible for this support.

Evidence from [our research in 2022](#) with practitioners shows that Continuing Care is not implemented consistently between, or even within, local authorities in Scotland. Continuing Care is too often discussed with young people too late into their teenage years (at ages 15-18) when they may have already made tentative plans, perhaps due to a feeling of necessity or fear about what to do or what happens next. When implemented well, Continuing Care supports young people to be and feel part of their family, and to have the stability of support as they navigate adolescence and then adulthood.

Planning for Continuing Care needs to be conducted alongside or in partnership with young people. This means introducing the idea that the young person could stay in their care setting at the earliest possible time, in a manner that is appropriate to having these conversations depending on their age and stage of development. Our research raised the idea that how reviews are conducted and child-led care plans are developed, for example, should be part of this. It was also found in this research with practitioners that discussions about Continuing Care might not take place with young people unless the young person raised the topic themselves, in order to reduce worry around future transitions. While the desire to reduce worry and stress around future transitions is understandable, this runs the risk of actually stoking stresses relating to transitions for young people. Young people are likely to be aware of their legal status as 'looked after' or a 'care leaver' but may not be aware of their rights to continuing living in care under Continuing Care support. Not addressing the long-term nature and stability of a young person's care may encourage them to make plans for when the arrangement for their care is due to formally end, which they are likely to understand is at 16 or 18 years of age, in part from witnessing the care experiences of older young people in similar situations.

To support ongoing and relationship-based conversations, children and young people, as well as their carers and practitioners who support them, must have access to information about their rights and entitlements to Continuing Care. This information must be freely available in various age and needs-appropriate formats. This should clearly, and appropriately, cover Continuing Care into adulthood, focussing on relationships and emotional security. CELCIS have produced a resource '[Your Right to Continuing Care](#)' which is one example of this type of information provision.

Sources:

- Scottish Government (2022), Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) - <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>
- The Independent Care Review (2020) The Promise. Glasgow: Independent Care Review.
- Lough Dennell, B.L., McGhee, K. and Porter, R. (2022) Continuing Care: An exploration of implementation, CELCIS: Glasgow (pg 41)

Question 10

How can we make sure young people can access the range of support they need when they leave care through the provision of Aftercare?

Aftercare means the provision of 'advice, guidance and assistance' to 'care leavers' aged 21 to 25. This can include, but is not restricted to, helping a young person to secure accommodation, education and employment opportunities, and financial support.

Corporate parenting responsibilities

Aftercare should be viewed as a corporate parenting responsibility and planned for at the earliest opportunity. It requires a multi-agency approach and should not be seen as being the responsibility of only one specific service. This requires intentional collaborative working between children's and adults' social work services; as well as with housing, education, finance, health, third sector services, and any other partner who supports young people at this crucial stage in their lives. The link between children's and adults' services is vital, especially in relation to supporting a young person from moving from the support of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult mental health services.

A national approach

Experiences of accessing Aftercare vary from person to person, and from local authority area to local authority area. A national approach to Aftercare would be beneficial. Practitioners with a responsibility and duty to support children and young people in need of care and protection, and CELCIS Consultants with lived experience, have noted that there needs to be consistency in both practice and resourcing across Scotland for Aftercare provision. The variation can be difficult for young people as they often move between local authority areas at this stage in their lives to access employment, education, and training opportunities and the variation is inequitable. Further financial resourcing may be needed to ensure that adults working with children and young people can be certain that there is sufficient support to meet the needs and aspirations of the children and young people they support.

Relationships

"She was just fantastic with me and we had a fantastic relationship and I was so grateful for that because I would never have known it [Aftercare] existed if it wasn't for her..." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Our Consultants with lived experience have noted that it can be difficult at times to access Aftercare support, and that many young people may not even be

aware of their right to access this support. One consultant noted that they only became aware of their entitlement to Aftercare because they reached out to a service provider directly. Some of the consultants wondered if young people who were perceived to be 'doing well' by practitioners may find it more difficult to access Aftercare. There was also a sense from some consultants that there may be, on occasion, a practice culture that encourages distance or barriers, for example, professional boundaries, that may lead to a separation between care experienced young people and the key workers who support them after they are no longer being formally 'looked after'. This may also be compounded by the fact that practitioners have high caseloads and are operating in a context of competing priorities and limited resources. Some consultants noted that they have, in the past, been aware of such pressures and that this has, on occasion, created a sense of young people feeling guilty about reaching out for support when it was needed.

Practitioners require sufficient time, capacity, and resources to fully support young people. Professionals are doing this complex work in the context of a lack of resourcing for services, and within a recruitment and retention crisis in the social work profession. It is crucial that these systemic factors be addressed to allow practitioners to work alongside young people in the most beneficial way.

Both our Consultants with lived experience and practitioners with a responsibility and duty to support children and young people in need of care and protection have noted that positive relationships between young people and the professionals who work alongside them are vital to young people being able to fully access their entitlement to Aftercare. Many practitioners noted that they and their colleagues are extremely committed to fully knowing the young people they work alongside, and to working in a relational way. It was also agreed by practitioners and consultants that this was especially beneficial for young people when these positive relationships were sustained even when a young person moved to a new home, or on to university or college.

A Consultant with lived experience noted their very positive experience with a social work assistant who met with them frequently and provided timely and thorough support when they were planning to go to university and considering applying for social housing. The social work assistant provided in-depth information around the consultant's entitlements, including a deposit scheme, and offered support in the process of finding an appropriate flat. The consultant was even able to receive financial support upfront for furnishing their new home.

Housing

Housing is a continual and pressing issue around Aftercare. Twelve local authority areas in Scotland have declared a housing emergency, with the Scottish Government announcing a national housing emergency in May 2024. This lack of affordable housing in general, plus a lack of local authority housing, has meant that many young people with experience of care simply cannot access suitable accommodation at this key point in their lives. In Scotland, on average, young people with experience of care were leaving home at the age of 17,

whereas their non-care experienced peers were leaving home at the age of 26. This shows how particularly pertinent and crucial housing challenges are for young people with experience of care.

In addition to bricks and mortar, everything that goes into having a home comes into play too: practical skills to run a home; budgeting and paying bills; life skills; and how to maintain a tenancy. Support to do all this is vital. One example we are aware of within a local authority is a youth housing forum where social workers work with housing colleagues to discuss the needs of young people with care experience, and to address any tenancy-related issues at an early stage. Another example is Housing First for Youth's pilot project in West Lothian which was set up specifically to support care leavers. An independent evaluation of this work has found that engagement with the project directly resulted in positive changes to the lives of the young people using the service over a two-year pilot period.

Positive practice

Practitioners have also told us that there are a number of specific positive practices that have been helpful in supporting Aftercare entitlements, including:

- Having a specific team of practitioners to support Aftercare provision for different populations of young people to reflect their differing needs and aspirations - for example, for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, and for young people in residential child care.
- Developing clear transition plans, with actions, to ensure a young person's needs are met within realistic timescales for timely Aftercare support. Aligned to this, is the importance of thorough assessment planning.
- Having clear individual 'placement agreements' to ensure that everyone involved in providing support and accommodation for a young person formally agreed to a young person's individual plan. This is helpful when needing to uphold a young person's right to support.
- Providing courses for young people on 'what it means to become an adult' to support them with, for example, how to budget.

Sources:

- Barriers and enablers to care-leavers engagement with multi-agency support: A scoping review: Prendergast, L.; Davies, C.; Seddon, D.; Hartfiel, N.; Edwards, R. T. (2024)
- Housing Options and Care Leavers: Improving Outcomes into Adulthood: Glasgow: CELCIS (2015)
- Rock Trust: Housing First For Youth <https://www.rocktrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HF4Y-Evaluation-Report-July-2020-Final.pdf>

Question 11

Are there any changes you would like to see as part of the eligibility criteria for Aftercare?

Extend entitlements beyond only 'care leavers'

"What if someone has been in care their whole lives until this cut-off point of 16th birthday and they're excluded?" - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience in relation to the proposed Care Leaver Payment

Aftercare means the provision of 'advice, guidance and assistance' to 'care leavers' aged 21 to 25. This can include, but is not restricted to, helping a young person to secure accommodation, education and employment opportunities, and financial support.

Whilst the entitlement to Aftercare is welcome, it is important to note that this support is limited to only 'care leavers' and young people with experience of care who are aged 21 to 25. This means that there is a population of young people who have experience of care but are not entitled to Aftercare support.

A 'care leaver' in Scotland is defined in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 as someone who is 'looked after' on their 16th birthday. Many children may have extensive experience of care but, by the time they are 16, will no longer be 'looked after'. For example, a child may have needed care and protection when they were 2 years old and cared for by the local authority as 'looked after' but when they were 14 went to live with a family member or friend under a kinship care order, and their legal status of being 'looked after' child with local authority duties to them ending. This child will have had 12 years' experience of the care system and yet will not be entitled to any 'aftercare' support as they transition into adulthood. However, a child who needed care and protection from the local authority from the age of 14 and who was still 'looked after' on their 16th birthday will be entitled to Continuing Care, Aftercare, and the new proposed Care Leaver Payment.

If the aspiration for entitlements such as Aftercare is to support young people with experience of care as they move into adulthood, then this inequity means this aspiration is not being met for a significant number of young people due to eligibility for such entitlements being based on a narrow legal definition of what it means to be a 'care leaver'.

The entitlement to Aftercare should include all young people who have experience of care, including those who were 'looked after' at home with their parent/s or in kinship care - and not only to young people who are 'care leavers'.

Sources:

- Children (Scotland) Act 1995, sections 29 and 30
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, section 66

Question 12

What do you think the challenges would be in changing the eligibility criteria for Aftercare?

Requisite resources to meet increased need

Changing the eligibility criteria in ways that would remove current inequities and deliver improved support young people would mean the number of young people eligible for Aftercare would increase. There would therefore need to be proper sequencing, sector preparation, lead in time, corresponding financial resources, infrastructure support and skilled practitioners to support this. At present, resourcing and capacity to support the current population of eligible young people are stretched, and so financial modelling is essential here to ensure that there is appropriate resource given to support any widening of Aftercare eligibility. Assuming there is capacity in the current system would be naive and result in failed implementation.

Raising awareness of entitlements among young people

If eligibility to Aftercare were to be widened, then clear communication around this would be required. This is necessary obviously so that young people would know what they were now entitled to. Currently, we know that many young people do not understand the difference between Continuing Care and Aftercare, or indeed what Aftercare is – so clear publicity around this will be important.

Any extension in the eligibility criteria would also need to be clearly communicated to statutory bodies with responsibilities around Aftercare to ensure that they are suitably resourcing and planning for this potential increase in demand for support.

Question 13

What do you think would be the best way to provide long term support and services to adults with care experience?

"They say care is lifelong, but the support is not lifelong." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

The best version of long-term support to adults with care experience requires working to implement core principles and behaviours within the system and of workforces of practitioners as early as possible in the experiences of children.

Staying Put Scotland (2013) outlined the principles and behaviours which are required from the people within the system to ensure that care experienced people have the greatest chance of growing to become active citizens with an equal stake in society. These principles begin with having an explicit philosophy of care demonstrated through 'The Importance of Relationship-Based Practice and Extended and Graduated Transitions' outlined in Staying Put.

The importance of relationship-based practice

"The weight of evidence, from all quarters, convinces us that the relationships with people who care for and about children are the golden thread in children's lives..." and that "unless in exceptional circumstances... planning should focus on ensuring continuity of key valued relationships for the child". - 'Making not Breaking' report

In the pursuit of positive outcomes for young people leaving care, research consistently points to the importance of maintaining relationships and attachments. This applies not only to carers, but young people also. Often forged in a period of significant stress and anxiety (as they come into care, arrangements are changed, or they to a placement or prepare for a transition out of one), it is these relationships which can hold things together as the young person moves into a new and challenging period of their lives.

In line with the final recommendations of the 'Making not Breaking' report, the Staying Put Scotland approach stresses that relationships formed between the young person and their carers, be that foster carers or residential workers should wherever possible and desirable, be continued and maintained. There should - at the very least - be arrangements whereby a young person can return to their previous home for an evening meal or period of respite. Practitioners and carers who have formed a good relationship with a child should be encouraged and supported to maintain contact with them when they change their job, or the child's circumstances change such as when they leave care or go on to be cared for by another carer.

Extended and graduated transitions

Accelerated or abrupt transitions from where a child is being cared for and who by should be avoided wherever possible. Corporate parents need to ensure that the encouragement, enablement and empowerment of young people to make gradual and phased steps towards more independent living, over extended periods, becomes standard practice. Moreover, care leavers must be able to return to where they have been living or to a more supportive care setting, if and when they meet with any difficulty as they embark on this new transition in their young life. This will provide young care leavers with a vital 'safety net', at a time when their long-term health and wellbeing is at significant risk.

In the general population, most young adults will phase their departure from their family home over months or years, depending on their own circumstances and needs. Within this, many young people will return to the family home for a period, perhaps between college and employment or over holiday periods, or to get additional support at times of difficulty. Accepting that there are practical difficulties involved, the Staying Put Scotland approach depends on corporate parents attempting to address those difficulties and putting systems in place that enable care leavers to return to the support of a care setting. This should be accepted and embedded as a principle of good practice and responsible corporate parenting.

Support from health services

These principles applied to transitions from children and families to Throughcare and Aftercare, can and should equally be applied to the transition from:

- children's to adult health services with NHS Scotland and Health and Social Care Partnerships acting as a key corporate parent in this context. It is crucial to get transitions from CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) to adult mental health services right for young people.

- secondary to further and/ or higher education or employment
- financial dependency to independency.

All of these will require support from other people, in the form of well-established and trusted relationships which have been nurtured. Equipping practitioners to create long-term support for carers is also vital:

"Carers in all settings must be supported to develop caring relationships and know that those relationships must be nurtured. Young people growing up must be supported to have lifelong links with their carers." - The Promise

The Promise of the Independent Care Review places a strong emphasis on the importance of supporting the workforce in developing their approach to nurturing and sustaining relationships with young people to increase the likelihood this will be meaningfully sustained into adulthood. It says "All of the workforce should access, at a level appropriate to their role, initial and lifelong learning that is grounded in attachment theory, trauma responsive care and the clear understanding and application of children's rights. Child development should be part of essential foundation learning for anyone working with children, not merely 'added on' as part of continuous professional development. There must be clarity about the application of theory to practice so that all learning can be applied."

This places a strong emphasis on the importance of effectively supporting the workforce in developing their approach to nurturing and sustaining relationships with young people to increase the likelihood this will be meaningfully sustained into adulthood. This not just about skills. The importance of emotional readiness, resilience and ongoing relational support is fundamental.

This also highlights the problematic nature of chronological thresholds as these are at odds with everything else we know about the impact of childhood trauma, about young people's development, and about notions of emerging adulthood.

Question 14

What do you think the challenges would be in providing support and services to adults with care experience?

Definition of care experience

The definition of care experience in Scotland is a discussion happening currently within the policy landscape, among people with experience of care, and organisations and individuals working to support children and families. Scottish Government are about to launch a national consultation on this very subject. It is important to consider the importance of a clear definition when considering providing support into adulthood as well the legislative changes that might stem from any definition.

The most important consideration is whether people view themselves as care experienced. This can often depend on the setting in which a child or young person lived and who cared for them. People who grew up in kinship care or

adoption, for example, may not self-identify as “care experienced.” When a definition is used as a criteria for something, people can be less aware of the support and services they might be entitled to.

While being in care or accessing Aftercare maybe a temporary period in the lives of some young people's lives, we have consistently heard that the impact of growing up in care is often lifelong.

Stigma and discrimination faced by people with care experience can make it difficult to disclose their experience. When or if they do, they are then often faced with retelling their story to a range of practitioners in health, education and social work services, to get support, access entitlements or exercise their rights. This is a barrier for many in accessing services and supports in later life.

Transitions in life

“Often care experienced people have the least resilience during times of transitions – so support from people you know is especially important during this stage.” - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

CELCIS’s Consultants with lived experience told us that transitions throughout life can be difficult when you have experience of care and that additional support and advice during these times would be welcome.

A challenge may arise when these transitions are unplanned. For all of us, big life events happen in an unplanned way such as death of a loved one, divorce or relationship breakdown, or an unplanned pregnancy. People with care experience need lifelong support that can be adaptable to this.

One approach suggested by CELCIS’s Consultants with lived experience is “no wrong door.” The approach has been delivered in local areas in England and provides an integrated service for young people, aged 12 to 25, who have experience of care or have a social worker. The approach brings together psychologists, health professionals, police, outreach and hub workers with others to provide a dedicated team available to young people when they need it. Support offered includes housing, risk-taking and offending behaviour support, education and employment, relationships, health and wellbeing and crisis support.

Taking an integrated approach to the needs of adults with care experience and offering a consistent approach to services and support would require financial resourcing, workforce capacity and commitment at a local and national level. Furthermore, creating an upper age limit would not align with our understanding that the impact is lifelong so the support required may be lifelong.

“There is an aging population of care experienced people ‘looked after’ in the 1970s who have huge need for life skills.” - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Question 15

What improvements do you think could be made to the support given to those leaving secure accommodation?

"After secure care, some young people struggled to access the right health and wellbeing supports when they returned to the community after living in secure care settings. One example was that of a young person who was unable to access dental treatment, and another was a young person who struggled to access medication." - CELCIS consultant with lived experience

Continuing Care

Too often children in secure care experience a 'cliff edge' of support when they turn 18. Children and young people should be able to remain in secure care beyond their 18th birthday, where necessary and in their best interests, for as long as their needs require it. However, it is critical to state that children and young people should only be deprived of their liberty where it is absolutely necessary and in their best interests.

Children in secure care should have the same rights to Continuing Care as other children and young people receiving care, this approach enables care leavers to remain in care until such time as they are ready to move into independent living. It emphasises young people's entitlement to support into adulthood and offers them the option to return to care, if and when they encounter difficulties. This approach emphasises and recognises the importance of relationship-based practice and extended and graduated transitions.

Staying Put also highlights how planning decisions should be based on the needs of individual children and young people. A child's care should be based on their developmental stage and individual needs. However, we know from CELCIS's research [into the implementation of Continuing Care](#) that too often decisions are based on bureaucratic, chronological, or budgetary considerations instead. We would encourage flexibility so that decisions to remain in secure care can be made on a case-by-case basis and upon the circumstances of the needs of each individual child.

Relationship-based support

Concerted effort and investment are required to ensure all children leaving secure care have access to relationship-based support into their adulthood, with transitions that meet their individual needs at their developmental stage. Too often, care experienced children experience an abrupt ending to the support they need when they leave care, this is especially true for children leaving secure care. All care experienced children have care and protection needs and are likely to have experienced trauma and adversity in their young lives; however, emerging evidence shows that children cared for in secure settings are likely to have experienced multiple harms to their wellbeing and safety such as neglect, trauma, bereavement and abuse. It is imperative that these children do not experience an abrupt end to the care and support they require. The consequences of not meeting their needs after they leave secure care can be seen in the overrepresentation of care experienced people in the criminal justice system, reduced economic activity, as well as a lifelong need for health or other support, including welfare support, mental health or homeless services.

Planning

Scotland's Secure Care Pathway and Standards set out what all children and young people in secure care should expect across the continuum of intensive supports and services for them. Children and young people with current or previous experience of secure care have been at the heart developing this Pathway and the Standards. The Standards are aligned to The Promise and the Health and Social Care Standards and will support Scotland to uphold children's rights under the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). These should be considered in detail in any plans for improving the support for young people leaving secure care and the planning for this.

The Secure Care Pathway Review by the Care Inspectorate highlighted the need to fully implement GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) when planning for children and young people to return from their communities from a secure care setting. This includes planning alongside children and young people using the GIRFEC value of "placing the child or young person and their family at the heart, and promoting choice, with full participation in decisions that affect them", alongside all those involved in children's lives working together, to plan transitions as soon as a child or young person goes into secure care. It sets out key features that helped young people after secure care, including:

- Focussed plans for moving on from secure care implemented in partnership with young person, family, lead professional and residential care staff.
- Staff 'moving' with young person – social workers moving jobs in same local authority retain lead professional role, residential care staff working for same provider transferring.
- Ongoing access to same level of support for emotional wellbeing and mental health.
- Collaboration with housing to access appropriate accommodation.
- Commitment and tenacity of lead professional to advocate for the young person.
- Support available from a range of staff who know the young person well.

Planning which uses these principles would mean an end to young people leaving secure care into hostel or hotel accommodation; instead, being provided with stable accommodation and the wraparound relational support they need to thrive. This should include intensive community-based support, and, where needed, 'step-down' or similar residential accommodation.

In addition to these material and practical needs, like all children, care experienced children need care, love and trusting relationships in their lives. They need educational opportunities and connections within their communities that allow them to reach their full potential. Providing these supports for their emotional wellbeing is just as important as supporting material and practical needs.

Sources:

- Scottish Government (2020) Staying put Scotland, Edinburgh: Scottish Government

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- Secure Care Pathway and Standards Scotland
- Care Inspectorate (2023) Secure care pathway review 2022-23. Dundee: Care Inspectorate
- Scottish Government (2022) Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC): policy statement. Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- Walker, M., Barclay, A., Hunter, L., Kendrick, A., Malloch, M., Hill, M., & McIvor, G. (2005). Secure Accommodation in Scotland: Its Role and Relationship with 'Alternative' Services. Scottish Executive.

Question 16

How do we ensure all young people in Scotland get equal access to the support services they need during the transition from and after leaving secure accommodation?

"I was put back into a children's house after leaving secure care while waiting on my own house. And my new own house was in close proximity to the children's house I grew up in so I could still visit was amazing. I still live here, and still visit 10 years later." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Equal access to Continuing Care

Creative, aspirational approaches to planning for moves from secure care into the community should be the norm for this group of young people. Whilst the current legislation does not enable young people remaining in secure care to access Continuing Care, we believe this should change. There are general principles of Continuing Care which we believe should be equally applied to children and young people in secure care as are available to their 'looked after' peers. This would mean that:

- The local authority must make a Pathways Plan and provide accommodation that is safe and suitable for young people leaving secure care.
- All young people in secure care should have access to independent legal advice and independent advocacy support.
- A young person who moves into residential care would have the right to Continuing Care until they turn 21 or feel ready to take the next step to live independently.
- Options should be provided in care and in supported accommodation so young people do not need to live by themselves. Legal help may be needed to assess and provide these options.
- Young people living in secure care, who do not move to residential care before their 18th birthday, would be entitled to Aftercare which includes advice, guidance and assistance to eligible care leavers from the local authority.

CELCIS's information materials ['Your Right to Continuing Care'](#) provide information and support for all care experienced children and young people. One scenario – Alex's story – indicated what could be in place for a young person due to leave secure care.

Planning

"One of the key issues which I feel we experience regularly is the difficulty of child-centred planning versus real world resources. We will often highlight the type of placement and wraparound support which a young person would need to support their transition however, if a local authority can't provide this, then they have to make do with what they have. This will often result in a generic placement being provided which is not best fit for the young person.

"We have also often experienced young people finding out where they are going the day before they leave, due to a lack of available resources. This leaves them extremely anxious and unconnected to the new placement or the new staff team. All of these experiences make it extremely difficult for young people to leave the safety of secure care and move into the new placement." - Practitioner, Secure Care setting

Young people moving into adult life from secure care need to understand their rights about what next steps are available to them. Planning for moving from secure care should take place as soon as a young person arrives and the lead professional who has responsibility for the co-ordination of services should work together with the child or young person and their family to make a Pathways Plan which considers all aspects of their lives and their needs.

As outlined in the GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) values and principles, everyone should work together to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. When considering the support needed for young people leaving secure care, this could include:

- Practitioners explaining what they can do to support the young person and what their organisation can offer.
- Young people, alongside their families, and the practitioners knowing the other organisations available for support in the local area, including what requirements there are to be able to access different available offers of support.

The link between children's and adult's services

Effective support requires a multi-agency approach, it is not the responsibility of only one specific service. This requires intentional collaborative-working between children's and adult social work services; as well as with housing, education, finance, health, third sector colleagues, and any other partner who supports young people at this crucial stage in their lives. The link between children's and adult services is vital, especially in relation to supporting a young person from moving from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult mental health services.

Question 17

What improvements could be made to the support given to people with care experience at the transition point from leaving young offenders institutions or prison?

"Children in custody are some of our most vulnerable, disadvantaged, distressed and excluded in society" (CYCJ, 2020a). These young people will often have already faced multiple adverse experiences, including abuse (sexual; physical

and emotional); neglect (physical and emotional); household dysfunction (familial substance abuse; familial mental illness; domestic violence in the home; incarceration of a household member); moves of home and school; community violence; and associated trauma” - IRISS, The Child's Journey

Young people with experience of being in care and care leavers are overrepresented in custody. Research evidence shows us that depriving any child of their liberty, even for a short time, has an impact on their wellbeing. It is essential that children and young people are only detained as a matter of last resort and for the shortest possible period and that where this is the case, they are well supported in their transition and re-integration back into the community.

Furthermore, alternatives to secure and custody should be used whenever possible and appropriate. For children under 18, secure care is now the default in Scotland and this is to be welcomed. We have provided a response in answer to improving support and transition from secure care posed by questions 15 and 16.

Transition support for young people from custody (which by its nature is an adult institution) who are remanded and sentenced and over the age of 18, requires a sharp focus.

Relational and appropriate support is recognised as the foundation for achieving improved outcomes and positive futures, with throughcare support required to aid the transition for young people returning and reintegrating to their community from custody.

The transitions to and from custody are major, often traumatic, life events for children and young people and the Scottish Government have recognised that “the amount and availability of support networks that each young person has is integral to their successful exit from secure care or custody.”

Planning

Planning for a young person leaving custody and reintegrating into their community should start at the point of remand/sentence and must include them and their families in the planning and the choices and decisions being made.

Local authorities and community planning partners have a responsibility under the Whole System Approach to ensure resources are available for all children and young people returning to the community from secure care and custody to support their reintegration, promote their wellbeing, uphold their rights and improve outcomes, to address ongoing risk and reduce the risk of re-entry into the prison estate. This is regardless of whichever legal order or condition a child or young person is subject to. There is a clear need for co-ordinated, trauma informed, relationship-based support to be place for as long as required. As of 2024, meetings prior to discharge from custody happen in the weeks prior to the release date. Planning for reintegration should start at the point of remand or sentence. It is vital that these planning meetings begin at an earlier stage and can develop and co-ordinate the plan and ensure that the young person's participation, views and rights are upheld in throughout this process.

With the end of the use of Young Offender Institutions for under 18s in Scotland from September 2024, there must be a renewed focus for the throughcare support young people aged 18 and over who are in prison and Young Offender

Institutions. Currently, there are discretionary powers in place for this rather than duties and the nature of this non-statutory, voluntary support from the local authorities makes the support of 18 - 26-year-olds in custody (who are not going to be restricted by release on licence or subject to lifelong restrictions) less clear. This lack of clarity needs to be addressed, and consideration given to whether shifting the status to a statutory duty on agencies would be effective in improving the support to young people.

Support for outcomes

Ensuring that there is appropriate accommodation and holistic support for a young adult when leaving custody is essential and this is an area that needs improvement.

There should be a legal obligation and duty established for a minimum standards for what a young person should expect in a plan focused on accommodation needs, education, training and employment, health and mental health and support. Currently this is discretionary.

This support must be based on a clear assessment of need and plan that the young person/ young adult and any carers or relatives, where appropriate, are fully involved in and agreement with. A rights respecting, relational approach with care and support at the centre is key, which includes the mandatory involvement of relevant multi-agency partners will be crucial to the effective provision of this support and best outcomes for the young person.

Services and practitioners need to recognise that care experienced young people with experience of custody have legal entitlements to having their needs assessed for Aftercare support. These needs are required to be met under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

There is a need for intensive, holistic support in the weeks and months after leaving custody, when the stress of adjustment can lead to increased risk of re-offending and other negative outcomes, and longer-term risk of psychiatric disorder and suicide. Services and practitioners must be ready, prepared and co-ordinated to ensure the continuity of support that may be required can be provided, and for as long as this support is required. The short-term nature of voluntary throughcare support post release in the context of statutory priorities, will not be sufficient for all and should be supplemented by other voluntary support from third sector organisations where possible.

Sources:

- Broderick, R., & Carnie, J. (2019). People In Custody Who Have Been In Care As 'Looked After Children'
- Moodie, K., & Gough, A. (2017). Chief Social Work Officers and secure care
- Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) (2024) Children and young people in conflict with the law: policy, practice and legislation. <https://www.cycj.org.uk/resource/youthjusticeinscotland/> Nowak, M. (2019). Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty
- IRISS (2024) Young Offenders Institutions in Scotland - The child's journey: A guide to the Scottish justice system. <https://content.iriss.org.uk/youthjustice/yo-young-offenders.html>

- Scottish Government (2011c). Reintegration and Transitions - Guidance for Local Authorities, Community Planning Partnerships and Service Providers.
- Bateman, T., & Hazel, N. (2015). Custody to Community: How Young People Cope with Release

Question 18

How do we ensure all young people get access to the same support services when they are leaving young offenders' institutions or prison, regardless of where they are located in Scotland?

"Postcode lottery: depends on where you apply..." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

The issue of differential access and quality of throughcare support for young people in Scotland depending on their location is a common reality and observation among all aspects of support for young people with experience of care.

There is strong research evidence on what works for meeting the needs of children, young people, and their families and yet there remains ongoing concern about the differential support available for young people, and this includes in the context of young people who have been in conflict with the law and/or in custody. The reasons for the differential access are in part influenced by locale, local resource currently available, local prioritisation of resources, and the discretionary nature of some of the service provided.

A national agreed set of standards could go some way towards addressing this, matched by these being implemented consistently, regardless of locality, and based on the assessed need of the young people concerned not on the availability of services locally or the discretion of local-decision makers. The workforces implementing the support offered need to be clear and confident in their approach and supported to deliver the services based on the assessed need.

Underpinning these standards should be a rights-based approach, delivered by workforces who have the trauma-informed and relational skill set required for this support work. These should be aimed at meeting the broad-based needs that any young person in these circumstances would require, namely:

- Stable housing and support to help a young person maintain and thrive within their tenancy
- Support to family and carers if the young person is returning to live with relatives to prevent breakdown and promote positive re-integration.
- Access to health support and services to address physical and psychological health
- Access to services if there are concerns about substance use, that may be a driver to further conflict with the law
- Links into community support services to encourage integration and strengthening of relationships
- Access to training, education or employment support and financial support to enable the young person to achieve their potential

- Additional support to help the young person address any other factors or concerns that may be supporting continued conflict with the law.

Question 19

Can you share details of any services that are already working well to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people transitioning out of care?

There are a few examples of services in Scotland that are working well that need to be learned from and sustained in order to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people as they go on to live more independently in Scotland.

Guardianship Service

The Scottish Guardianship Service provides an effective model of support for young refugees through the provision of skilled navigators of systems and relationship-based practices. Other services that support young refugees should embed these practices into their models.

Community, outdoor pursuits and faith services

The Drawing Together Project research showed that local peer and faith-based community of origin groups are essential to the wellbeing of young refugees. The role of these groups should be promoted in policy, and their long-term funding sustained by Scottish Government, as recommended by research on implementation of the New Scots Refugee Integration strategy.

Public bodies

- Public bodies in Scotland working to uphold their duties to unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people and refugees, have developed support systems and services, working with third sector and private partners in innovative and creative ways. Just some examples of these are: Accessing funding for young people to complete financial management SQAs in groups, which also facilitate peer support spaces.
- Enabling foster carers to access fostering across borders training programmes.
- Participation of young people on Champions Boards.
- Applying for individual grants from The Princes Trust for young people to complete a food safety course.
- Development of a peer mentoring group.
- Resources to develop practitioners' understanding and support

Practitioners working to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people leaving care in Scotland will have a wealth of knowledge about the services and support available in their local areas. Here are some resources which are helpful in relation to equipping practitioners with knowledge and understanding of the needs of this group of young people:

- [Protecting Separated Children, Online course, CELCIS](#)
- [Your Voice Matters: a peer led research project to explore the experiences of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in Scotland](#)
- [Children and families across borders' \(CFAB\)](#)

Question 20

What supports and/or improvements do you think could be implemented to ensure we meet the particular needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people transitioning out of care in Scotland?

Awareness of entitlements and rights

Practitioners have spoken about a lack of awareness of the rights this group of children and young people have as 'looked after' children or 'care leavers' within the UK. Unaccompanied young people seeking asylum may not think of themselves as 'having experience of care' and may not therefore be aware of their entitlements as 'looked after' children or 'care leavers'. Some services in the public and third sector are providing information and support to them to enable them to access their rights, in particular to understand their eligibility for resources such as the Care Experienced Bursary and the Council Tax Exemption scheme, alongside a right to Continuing Care and Aftercare.

First and foremost, the care provided for young unaccompanied asylum seekers must be equivalent to that provided to any and all other children and young people in Scotland who are or have been 'looked after'. Local authorities have statutory responsibilities to all children who are formally 'looked after' under their care.

This includes making arrangements for where they will live until they are 21 years of age; arrangements which should be consistent, stable, and with appropriate support in place, including support that meets their cultural and religious needs. The child or young person should not be moved from the home environment put in place for them and carers must provide the same level of support to meet their needs throughout this time. Establishing, trusted, and loving relationships between young people and their carers is essential to their wellbeing and these relationships must not be ruptured.

Unaccompanied children who are moved in 'cross border placements'

Anecdotal evidence from practitioners highlights that difficulty accessing critical entitlements such as Continuing Care or Aftercare can be exacerbated for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people who came to Scotland having arrived elsewhere in the UK and were moved using cross border placements under UK Home Office reserved policy. These young people may be told to return to their 'home' local authority (somewhere in England, for example) to access care after they reach 16 or 18. For many of these children and young people, their carers, communities and home are now in Scotland, they may never have lived in their 'home' local authority. Under Scots Law, these children and young people are care experienced and are entitled to, and must be supported to, access their support and stay in their homes and communities if they wish to.

Communication, alongside training and support for practitioners, should occur, to enable a greater understanding for this group of children and young people of their rights at all stages of their childhoods and young adult lives. However, there must also be adequate attention to resourcing in local areas to ensure they

are able to uphold these children and young people's entitlements, including attention to addressing the barriers to children placed across UK borders accessing their entitlements to care.

Distinctive needs

"They are still just children." - Foster carer for an unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person

There is a need to provide support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children which focuses on their need, and right, to enjoy their childhoods. These young people may have experienced trauma and relationship disruption during separation from their birth families and communities, exacerbated during potentially dangerous and/or traumatising journeys to the UK, before experiencing a rapid adjustment to a different culture alongside learning a new language. Services and support need to be developed which enable an understanding of the culture within Scotland and the UK, alongside enabling these children and young people to experience the same fulfilling childhood as their non-care experienced peers.

High quality, trauma and culturally- and gender-informed translation is critical to the support of children, young people and families who require this support. Recognising that translators as part of the workforce, who benefit/are entitled to from training and supervision is integral to ensuring that any support involving translation is high quality. This is even more important when the subject matter being discussed is sensitive or covers traumatic life events, such as meetings as part of the asylum process or the care and protection systems.

We would like to raise awareness of other migrant children and young people with experience of care too. The report entitled 'Taking Care: How local authorities can best address immigration issues of children in care,' by South London Refugee Association (SLRA) outlines that 'more than 10,000 young care leavers in England have unresolved immigration or citizenship issues.'

The report outlines the following recommendations for local authorities to enable this group of young people to access the right support and be able to access everyday activities such as "applying for jobs or university, seeking scholarships, grants, or student loans, setting up a bank account, getting a driving licence or renting accommodation":

- identify all 'looked after' children and care leavers with immigration and nationality issues.
- connect 'looked after' children and care leavers with good quality legal support as soon as possible.
- take a proactive and informed role in supporting looked after children and care leavers through any immigration applications and appeals.
- enable those who are eligible to apply for permanent status and British citizenship.

The Scottish Government needs to make sure immigration issues for these young people in Scotland are identified at the earliest possible opportunity to support their transition into adult life. Local authorities or organisations such as Just Right Scotland should be able to assist to enable to correct support to be put in place.

Attending to the wellbeing of young asylum-seekers can also require an understanding of their distinctive needs.

The Drawing Together project explored how young refugees experience integration through rebuilding their everyday lives in Scotland, Finland and Norway and made the following recommendations for Scottish policy makers and practitioners to better equip them in promoting the wellbeing of young refugees:

- The Scottish Government should reverse budget cuts to affordable housing to ensure there is adequate good quality housing for all young people, including young refugees.
- The Scottish Government should continue to provide education and training opportunities for young refugees to become economically active.
- The Scottish Government must ensure there is adequate funding for regional NHS Boards to guarantee consistent access to language translation services to support access and provision of healthcare.
- Local public authorities acting as corporate parents should make good on an essential right to the digital inclusion of young refugees by providing a smart phone, adequate data and the skills to use these, integrating this right into pathway planning and support processes.
- The Scottish Guardianship Service provides an effective model of support for young refugees through the provision of skilled navigators of systems and relationship-based practices. Other services that support young refugees should embed these practices into their models.
- This research shows that local peer and faith-based community of origin groups are essential to the wellbeing of young refugees. The role of these groups should be promoted in policy, and their long-term funding sustained by Scottish Government, as recommended by research on implementation of the New Scots Refugee Integration strategy.
- Free bus travel schemes should be aligned with the age range in which young care experienced refugees are supported by their corporate parents, which extends to their 26th birthday.
- The Scottish Government should continue to provide suitable leisure and recreational resources for young refugees, as set out by Article 31 of the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). This includes the entitlement to access nature, also set out in Scotland's Environment Strategy (2020). These entitlements must be explicitly set out in policy on refugee integration
- The Scottish Government must ensure there is adequate funding for local public authorities, non-governmental organisations, and community groups to uphold young refugees' rights to culture and religion.

Sources:

- Kohli, R. K., McGregor, S. A., & MacKinnon, K. (2024). Policy briefing: Wellbeing in the lives of young refugees in Scotland. University of Bedfordshire. [Drawing Together Project policy briefing](#)
- Scottish Parliament Information Centre (2024) Affordable homes – Scottish Government budget and progress.
- Stott, H. and Kohli, R.K.S. (2021) An evaluation of the Scottish Guardianship Service: The work of Guardians within asylum determination

and National Referral Mechanism processes. Glasgow: Scottish Refugee Council.

- Scottish Government (2018) New Scots: Refugee Integration Strategy 2018–2022. Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- United Nations General Assembly (1989) Convention on the Right of the Child. Geneva: United Nations Commission on Human Rights.
- Scottish Government (2020) The Environment Strategy for Scotland: vision and outcomes. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Question 21

Can you tell us about any specific services or supports that already work well for disabled young people or people with complex health needs leaving care?

Whilst CELCIS has not been able to identify specific named services that work well, relational practice and meeting the individual needs of each disabled young person or person with complex health needs leaving care is paramount. Key to getting this right is the work done and relationships developed through early intervention and close working with children and young people and their families and carers, which really listens to their views, values, and respects individual rights, to shape and influence the planning and support that can be put in place.

Question 22

What improvements do you think could be made to ensure disabled young people leaving care have the support they need when they make the transition into adulthood?

Data

Fundamental to ensuring that support to address needs can be implemented well is that disabled children and their needs are actively recognised, identified and known to services. CELCIS's recent review of available [data and statistics](#) identified that while just under 9% of 'looked after' children and young people had a disability recorded, for over 24% (almost 1 in 4) nothing was known about whether they had a disability or not.

Improvements in recording this information is required. Such data helps to inform how and what services are developed and the resourcing required to provide support. While there is Scottish Government guidance on recording this data, it is not consistently followed by local authorities.

Areas for improvement

For all children transitioning out of or between support and services, research has identified the key areas of focus to ensure best practice:

- Early and sustained transition planning based on robust assessment of need. Early preparation produces better outcomes.
- Holistic and coordinated support, including wrap around if required

- Services delivered in partnership to meet wide ranging need.
- Designated keyworkers/ lead as a co-ordinating point of contact.
- Person-centred support, preparation and planning.
- Family involvement in planning and decision-making and support to families who support the young person.
- The provision of clear and accessible information and access to advocacy to support accessibility and help the young person navigate the system.
- Adequate services, resources and staffing - services are often lacking or inconsistent.

All of these areas could benefit from improvement nationally to ensure disabled children leaving care access the support they need in their transition from care. Without all of these areas being optimised as required, services cannot be confident that they are ensuring that the support needs for disabled children transitioning to adulthood are being met.

A recently published thematic review of social work services for disabled children found that:

- Too many disabled children in Scotland are not receiving the help they needed at the right time
- Respectful relationships were key to building a culture of listening to and respecting children and young people's views. This would help ensure they were engaged in decisions about their care and support. However:
- Too many disabled children and young people's views, feelings and wishes are not being heard, and
- The experience of transitioning into life as a young adult continues to be characterised by unpredictability and uncertainty for too many disabled young people.

However, where there were elements of good practice developed, this highlighted the importance of early planning, respectful relationships, hearing the views of children, young people and their families and a partnership approach which valued and respected the views and wishes of the children and young people and offered meaningful choices.

Thresholds and eligibility criteria-based decision making applied by adult social work services driven by resource pressures creates a tension with aspirations to develop person-centred care. Where a transition approach focusses on what individuals cannot access due to resource availability, rather than a person-centred strengths-based approach that genuinely is focussed on their needs, transitions will continue to be problematic for young disabled people as they enter adulthood. The need to tackle the variability in assessment and planning for children and the stressful workload context within which dedicated staff are attempting to provide support cannot be underestimated if we are to get things right for disabled young people.

Sources:

- McTier, A (2024). Are disabled children visible in Scotland's statistics.
- Diffley Partnership / Scottish Government (2023). Literature Review: Transitions to Adulthood for Disabled Young People.

- Care Inspectorate (2024). Disabled children and young people's experience of social work services: a thematic review.

Question 23

What improvements can you suggest in the support provided to young people with care experience as they prepare to give birth or become parents?

All people preparing to become parents for the first time need help and support. Young people with care experience may have specific concerns or need additional support.

Sexual health and relationships education

For many care experienced children, it is possible that they may have missed appropriate sexual and reproductive health education and support that is provided in formal education. A rights-based approach to sex and relationships education for care experienced children and young people is key. It is important to consider the responsibility of adults in care settings to advocate for and where needed support discussions around sexual and reproductive health for young people out with the education setting.

Attention must also be paid to the emotional reasons behind some young people's decisions to become parents, which can be linked to the pursuit of stability, and family life. Developing a package of support which is sensitive to these drivers is crucial.

Relationships

Transitions for expectant mothers can be abrupt, and may be unplanned, often requiring them to move from the secure, long-term place where they have been cared for into a new tenancy or temporary accommodation. This change in addition to preparing to give birth and become a parent can be very unsettling. The relationships, and the support and care they are used to and is part of their lives, could be severed as they move into independence with a new baby. It could also mean an adjustment in their relationship with the child's father and any other people important to the mother.

It is vital that, where possible, all the supportive relationships established to date through their care experience (carers, social workers and other support staff) transition with young people who are preparing to give birth or become parents. This needs to be done in a nurturing and practical way, giving a level of familiarity, trust and care as they embark on a daunting and exciting journey.

Parenting and Education Programmes offered to young people both individually and collectively as expectant or new parents are also highly beneficial. These require space and time for expectant parents first develop trusting relationships with staff and other parents.

Stigma

In June 2022, Who Cares? Scotland's Annual Participation Programme Report highlighted the need for parenting support spaces specifically for care experienced mothers and fathers in each local authority areas. Friendships and peer support are often a natural course for new parents creating shared experiences, advice and support for each other. Groups such as 'walk & talk,' playgroups and baby classes all create space to meet and share with other new parents and develop friendships.

However, discrimination and fear of judgement has an impact on the relationships young people develop with their peers, services and professionals. The fear of being judged, not having the same experiences, or how risk may be assessed often means young people are reluctant to reach out for help and support when needed and can also make attending local playgroups feel daunting.

Parents with care experience may have encountered difficult relationships with practitioners in the past. This can impact on their confidence to seek help when needed as parents fear their parenting will be judged and risk having their baby removed from their care. It is important to acknowledge this as a real barrier to seeking help when most needed.

Housing and practical support

Suitable housing and accommodation could be improved for new parents with experience of care and their babies. There is a lack of dedicated accommodation nationally that can offer parenting support to new parents in those early months with a new baby. In principle, new parents under 21 are entitled to stay in Continuing Care with their baby but the appropriate, suitable accommodation is not available. Continuing Care placements would support more young parents to transition well with their baby.

Managing a tenancy can be a daunting, it requires new skills on budgeting, shopping, cooking and cleaning. Doing this for the first time with a new baby and with little support can increasingly be difficult for parents with care experience.

Some young parents may also face additional challenges such as with literacy and numeracy. Again, this speaks to making sure all the support all children and young people in care need to develop their learning and skills in their young lives is in place when they need this to prepare them for adulthood, and provide extra support where this is needed.

Sources:

- Community Care (2008) Teenage pregnancies among children in care: research. Community Care: London.
- Care Journeys (2022) Care-experienced Parents Unite for Change Peer researchers' project exploring the experience of becoming a parent. Barnardo's: London

- Tyrer, P, Chase, E, Warwick, I and Aggleton, P (2005) 'Dealing With It': Experiences of Young Fathers in and Leaving Care. The British Journal of Social Work: Oxford University Press.
- Who Cares Scotland (2022) 'Believe in Us', Care Experienced Parents: Findings from our Annual Participation Programme. Who Cares? Scotland: Glasgow.

Question 24

How can the workforce be better supported to help care experienced people as they become parents?

The needs of care experienced young people as parents are the same as those of any young parent: they will require emotional and practical support, to learn about children development, and to navigate this new chapter of their lives. For new parents who have had experience of care, the experience of how they may have been parented may also lead to concerns, self-doubt or worries about their ability to parent as well as fears that others may not trust them to be able to be a 'good parent.'

Stigma and fear of judgement can cause anyone reaching out for help when they need this and this can happen for many new parents. It's imperative then that these concerns are anticipated by services so that the stability and continuity of both universal and specialist support that parents and babies critically need throughout pregnancy and early years can be put in place as early as possible and sustained.

The Family Nurse Partnership in Scotland is an example of practice that takes a holistic approach to support the health and wellbeing of young new parents and babies. It is available to parents under the age of 20 until their child's second birthday. Family nurses help build pathways into community support for them and provide resources to address social and economic factors, such as welfare, education, employment and money advice.

It starts with the assumption that everybody has potential possibilities and strengths. The role of the Family Nurse is to support new young mothers to realise that potential and the potential of their child. The role focuses on a strengths-based approach and connects with the intrinsic motivation that all parents must do the best for their children.

There have been examples of good practice and outcomes for new care experienced parents and their babies when Social Work Services and Family Nurses work in partnership to support them.

The Why Not Trust in Scotland provides another model of support for care experienced parents. This is a peer mentoring model that offers support to new and expectant parents with care experience across Scotland.

This can help to create and reproduce some of the caring, compassionate, trusting relationships that all new parents look to within their networks of family

members, friends, neighbours and others. Support for new parents needs to be 24/7, the 'office hours' of the support from professionals can only go so far.

Practitioners providing support to young people leaving care have spoken to us about doing everything they could to support a new mum transition to parenthood and independence including practical support such as washing, cleaning and food shopping together.

Sources:

- The Why Not Trust (2024) the-village-annual-report-2024_160824.pdf (whynottrust.org)
- UK Government. Family Nurse Partnership programme
- Wimbush E, Geddes R, Woodman K, Craig P, Jepson R. *Evaluability assessment of the Family Nurse Partnership in Scotland*. 2015;(March). <https://www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/26102-Family%20Nurse%20Partnership%20Evaluability%20Assessment%20Report.pdf>

Question 25

How can children's and adults' services better work together to provide whole family support for parents who are care experienced?

Young people who grow up in care are 2.5 times more likely to become pregnant in their teenage years compared to their non care experienced teenage peers.

Becoming a young parent often comes with difficulties with accessing further education, employment and physical and mental health support. As a result, the children of young parents can be more exposed to poverty and social disadvantage.

Within social work, attention is needed to the duality of responsibilities that practitioners have for parents with experience of care and their babies. It is important that we develop an understanding of what best practice looks like in this context. Creating a shared understanding of minimum expectations that support both mother and baby and consider what a holistic family approach would involve.

For young people in care and leaving care, becoming a young parent can alter or add to their perceived role of social workers, especially where they associate social work with scrutiny, assessment and with the power to place a child in care. This can lead to mistrust and anxiety for care experienced young parents. The result of this can mean that young parents may be wary of accessing support, guidance and help from social work or health services when needed. This can risk exacerbating their needs and getting early help for them and their child.

Having access to one consistent and nurturing relationship during pregnancy and early parenthood, with this key person able to liaise with the myriad of services

involved in the care and support of both parent and baby is what is needed. A relationship that is established early on and sustained for the new parents.

Much like the corporate parenting role in Scotland, consideration should be given to a corporate grandparent role. This would support organisations across children and adult services to work together to address the needs of both care experienced parent and baby with adequate housing, financial support, social isolation access to childcare and mental health support.

Transitions for young people during pregnancy can be abrupt and unplanned, often, young people are unable to remain in their existing placement alongside their baby. Existing caring, nurturing and supportive relationships with adults in foster care or residential care placement end and often are unable to transfer with the young person into parenthood. This requires the new parent to work with and establish relationships with new services and practitioners at a particularly vulnerable time in their lives.

It should be highlighted that there is limited research on the experiences of care experienced fathers. It is crucial that support is available to all young parents with experience of care and that the needs of new fathers are better understood.

Sources:

- Care Journeys (2022) Care-experienced Parents Unite for Change Peer researchers' project exploring the experience of becoming a parent. Barnardo's: London
- Community Care (2008) Teenage pregnancies among children in care: research. Community Care: London.
- Roberts, L (2021) The Children of Looked After Children, Outcomes, Experiences and Ensuring Meaningful Support to Young Parents In and Leaving Care. Policy Press: Bristol.

Question 26

In what ways would you like to see peer support used by people leaving care and/or caregivers during a young person's transition from care into adulthood?

"Focus on creating community spaces for care experienced people. These can be places where support, resources, and upskilling can take place, as well as physical places that people can be in and connect to, as well as connect to a community – other people and the community surrounding the space. A place to create belonging, connection, and lifelong links." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience.

Research tells us that young people's transition to adulthood does not happen quickly but emerges over a period between adolescence and mid to late 20s. However, for care experienced young people this process is accelerated, often, due to constraints put in place by organisations, systems and legislation. Without the safety net of family, this often makes young people more vulnerable. The

most recent available year data for Scotland from 2015 shows the average age care experienced young people leave care is 17 years old, in comparison to 26 years old for their non-care experienced peers.

Where it is necessary to distinguish between children and young people currently receiving care and adults with care experience, it is important to be clear that 'leaving' care should never be a singular point in a young person's life. Rather, it should be a process of moving into independence and interdependence, a process that requires support and help.

Research has shown that there is a correlation between relationships and resilience during the period of emerging adulthood and leaving care. During this period and into adulthood, lives are interdependent, we rely on others for support in all aspects of our lives. This includes emotional support through and for our relationships and friendships, practical support with housing, further or higher education and employment and advice with decisions that will impact our lives. Often, the networks we have developed in communities, at school or in extended family offers this support at times of transition. For young people with care experience, fractured relationships, instability and isolation can mean that this support often is not available in the same way.

Practitioners providing support to young people leaving care have told us about being able to create physical spaces in a community that was solely for young people transitioning to adulthood and the benefits of these. These create a sense of safety young people to come together with nurturing staff available on site and this allowed for relationships to develop over time supported by skilled adults.

Who Cares? Scotland is a membership organisation for people with care experience. It based on the themes of reward, connect and shape. They have over 4000 care experienced members across Scotland and provide a range of support and services. They offer peer spaces and a chance to connect with people who have similar or shared experiences creating virtual and in person spaces where care experienced people feel understood, respected and like they belong. The groups run nationally and locally and offer the opportunity for care experienced people to come together to have fun or to influence change.

Each year, on Christmas day, they host a care family Christmas dinner with gifts and festivities. This creates a space for connection and belonging for people with care experience who may not spend the day with family.

Peer support creates a mutual exchange of skills, knowledge, care and support between two or more people with similar situations. The exchange is based on an understanding of hope, trust and learning in a shared space.

Support for caregivers and providers

Peer support models are recognised nationally and internationally across many sectors including health and social care for those providing care and support. NHS-Scotland Greater Glasgow and Clyde has a peer support model for staff that is delivered through a competence framework across 3 levels:

- Level 1: Looking after yourself and others
- Level 2: Peer support (including Peer Support Mentors)
- Level 3: Peer support hubs

The approach is based on the knowledge that when people feel supported and heard, it will positively impact on their resilience and wellbeing. Creating spaces for people to make sense of difficult situations or emotions together with peer

One important way to hold the hands of those holding the hand of the child (Independent Care Review, 2020) is to support workers' reflective practice. Regular reflection at depth is critical for maintaining a steady state of relationship-based care and managing the demands of bringing the self fully to the work, both of which are linked to improved outcomes for children and young people. Safe spaces to reflect and learn are vital in supporting good relationship-based practice and managing the self at work. They are also necessary for individuals to effectively challenge themselves and their organisations.

Sources:

- Arnett, J J (2007); Afterword: Aging out of care—Toward realizing the possibilities of emerging adulthood. *New Directions for Youth Development*
- National Wellbeing Hub Peer support in the workplace: putting theory into practice
- Steckley, L, Deeley, S and Watson, G The Reflection and Action Learning Forum (RALF) Project Update. CELCIS

Question 27

Do you know of any examples where peer support networks have had a positive impact on the experience of leaving care, either for care leavers or those who supported them?

"To successfully build community spaces, there are a variety of factors to take into account, in particular how to bring together people of all ages who are at different stages of life, with different skills, different interests, and, who although may share the experience of being care experienced, all have had different journeys. All have different needs and wants. There must be an interest in being part of this community." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Peer support creates a mutual exchange of skills, knowledge, care and support between two or more people with similar situations. The exchange is based on an understanding of hope, trust and learning in a shared space.

Research has shown that there is a correlation between relationships and resilience during the period of emerging adulthood and leaving care. During this period and into adulthood, lives are interdependent, we rely on others for support in all aspects of our lives.

CELCIS Consultants with lived experience shared some of their experiences of peer support networks to contribute to our response to this consultation.

One consultant shared their experience of being involved in The University of Strathclyde Care Experienced and Estranged Student Society, a campus community for care experienced young people where they could seek support and connections with others. The society developed an online community that students could join anonymously to engage with each other, removing potential fear of exposing their identity. The community expanded to include online forums for seeking advice and share opportunities, such as jobs and funding. The society also were closely involved with the university, including via corporate parenting meetings. The society held events for Father's and Mother's Day and online socials for Christmas day, providing a close community and connection.

The Rock Trust was noted as a good example of peer support and mentoring for young people leaving care age 16-25 in Edinburgh. They recruit and train people who have experience of care or homelessness who are matched with a young person leaving care. They can offer support to:

- Move into and sustain more appropriate long-term housing.
- Greater opportunities to move into volunteering, education, training or employment.
- Greater social confidence and experience improved personal support and positive relationships.
- Explore what is available to do in your local community reducing social exclusion and increasing physical and mental health.

The Rock Trust offers a shared accommodation model known as "supportive flatmate". It is a peer support model available to young people as they transition to their first tenancy and offers a gradual transition from group living. Supportive flatmates share a tenancy with up to three young people and help them to make a success of independent living. They support young people to build positive relationships within their community while developing skills required for managing a tenancy.

The Why Not Trust takes a community approach to supporting care experienced parents. This was developed with parents with care experience for parents with care experience and offers mentoring support, a place to ask questions and reach out to others, practical support with hospital packs, support to access benefits, rights and advocacy and parenting hints and tips from others.

Their peer community is known as "the village" and it aims to build social networks for care experienced parents, offering the informal and comprehensive support that every parent deserves. Villagers' ages range from 15 to 39, with a

median age of 25. Over a third of parents are pregnant or have a child under one, and over 70% are first-time parents. Most parents in the village are mothers, but about 10% are fathers. Parents with care experienced parents have accessed financial and welfare advice, developed reliable support networks with peers and developed new skills to help them be a confident parent.

The village does not operate on a referral system from Social Work or other agencies but is a community where “parents to be” choose to join offering a more supported transition to independence. Their aim is to offer a supportive social network to all care experienced parents in need.

Sources:

- Marion et al. (2017) Relationships Matter: Understanding the Role and Impact of Social Networks at the Edge of Transition to Adulthood from Care
- The Why Not Trust (2024) the-village-annual-report-2024_160824.pdf (whynottrust.org)

Question 28

How can we better enable young people and the supportive adults in their lives to maintain healthy relationships once the young person has moved on from care?

“I was put back into a children’s house after leaving secure care while waiting on my own house. And my new own house was in close proximity to the children’s house I grew up in so I could still visit was amazing. I still live there, and still visit 10 years later” - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

For this to happen, relationships must be viewed as vital and be prioritised. An understanding of trauma and the impact of trauma on children and young people will create a trauma responsive systems and teams where the needs of children and young people are prioritised.

Organisations, systems and leaders all have a role to play in prioritising relationships amongst the challenges of placement moves, a national staffing crisis, policy and legislation. It will take a whole system approach for this to happen well and with consistency as young people transition.

Research tells us that care experienced young people are at risk of being less likely to make and maintain relationships as they progress to adulthood than their peers. This is due to factors such as fractured family relationships, instability and social isolation. There will be fewer adults who carry a thread of their childhood memories with them and can recall stories of their whole childhood.

CELCIS’s research on the implementation of [Continuing Care](#) highlighted that relationships in Continuing Care are critical to creating and celebrating key

moments in a young person's life, from birthdays to first days to 'rites of passage.' Artificially imposed thresholds and relationship disruptions inhibit the development of these secure and supportive relationships.

The Staying Put Guidance stresses that relationships formed between a young person and their carers (be that foster carers or residential workers) should wherever possible and desirable, be continued and maintained. There should - at the very least - be arrangements whereby a young person can return to their previous place of care for an evening meal or period of respite. Practitioners and carers who have formed a good relationship with a child should be encouraged and supported to maintain contact when they (the adults) change job, or the child leaves care or moves to be cared for by new carers.

Practitioners providing support to young people leaving care understand and emphasise that one important element of enduring relationships for young people is that it limits the need for them to retell their stories and express their needs to new practitioners.

CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience have shared examples of when organisations have worked together to offer the support they needed, when needed. One spoke of a transition between secure care, residential care and moving to their own property. Services worked together to support each transition. The collaborative approach to transitions meant that the young person was supported to maintain nurturing relationships with carers in their residential house while transitioning to adulthood. As an adult, they spoke of still visiting the residential house for evening meals or special occasions as their house is in close proximity.

Sources:

- Waaler et al. (2021) Striving for Happily Ever After: Supportive Interventions for Youth Leaving Residential Placement. A Systematic Review of Reviews
- Dennell et al. (2022) Continuing Care: An Exploration of Implementation

Question 29

What types of support and advice do you think should be available to care leavers as part of an out-of-hours service?

"[The] System relies on workers who go above beyond, who will do the right thing despite the system." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

"This isn't limited to social workers, corporate parenting means everyone should be working in joined up way to do this work, so the work looks like parenting if they were your own child." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

The strongest approach to providing support and advice is to ensure strong relational and developmental foundations are in place as early as possible in childhood or adolescence to reduce the likelihood that there is a continued need for formal support from services. It is also important to explore the concept of 'out-of-hours,' assuming that practitioners are thought to be mostly available

during conventional weekday 'office hours'. If we were to re-imagine what it would mean to provide meaningful support to individuals and families, then the concepts of 'in-hours' and 'out of hours' might come to mean something different. Strong, effective support through established relationships with children and families can diminish the need for services and practitioners to provide 'extra' or unplanned support.

Staying Put outlines some key principles which, if adopted effectively, speak to the need for a different way of thinking about what the needs of care experienced individuals are and how this might therefore mean 'out-of-hours' support is needed.

The reality of the kind of support and advice required is very broad and incredibly varied. Care leavers might need practical support such as what to do if they have lost their house keys, something isn't working in their home, or they have financial concerns, to emotional support and advice such as coping with the loss of a friend or family member. Young adults are most likely to seek support from those with whom they hold meaningful relationships. Where these relationships are absent, it is important for all corporate parents to understand the role they can play in providing effective ongoing support which is beyond the current 'working hours' services offer.

In the absence of relationships, the approach to any support, whether it is framed as out-of-hours or not, should be relational. CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience have emphasised that it is important that one-to-one relationships are not "transactional." Scotland has experience and evidence of offering a nimbler response to offering and giving support during the COVID-19 pandemic where we saw a new ways of supporting large numbers of vulnerable people and families needing help supported, with minimal barriers attached.

Scotland can learn from that experience and put in place more resources and financial commitment to services to be more responsive to be able to give support when people need this.

The key component behind the answers and solutions this consultation exercise seeks to explore is long-term meaningful relationships, supported by good quality early planning. Get this right and the need for formal 'out-of-hours services' for care leavers should be significantly reduced.

Question 30

What improvements do you think could be made to ensure care leavers have access to services which support their physical health, and mental health and wellbeing?

"All families need support to thrive. The impact of Scotland's 'care system' is felt throughout Scotland's communities. The underlying universal support system must support all families and identify those who need more support. Universal services (such as schools and mental health services) must recognise the role they play as adjacent parts of the wider scaffolding of care so they can support and nurture those with care experience." - The Promise

Young people leaving care and adults with experience of care need earlier and more effective support from everyone who is part of their everyday life, corporate parents and specialist and universal services including education and healthcare.

Fundamentally there's a lack of sufficient resource to meet the needs of a community who experience challenges to their health and wellbeing in a number of ways beyond that of their non care experienced peers in the general population.

Accessing any form of health service is not solely the responsibility of the individual, but rather requires a whole system response.

A piece of engagement work with a group of care experienced young men on the issue of accessing mental health supports and the barriers they faced, provided an insight into what can help or hinder this. Having initially spoken about the lack of available resource to be able to meaningfully support them at the point when they need it most the discussion moved to the importance of relationships. The key emerging theme from this conversation was that each of them reported that they would not reach out to a CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) worker (or equivalent) for support because these always felt like transactional exchanges. The alternative they universally agreed on was that they would contact their advocacy workers with whom they had well established, positive, and meaningful relationships. This highlighted that the priority for this group was the nature and quality of the relationships they held, not specifically the service or organisation they were attached to. The accessibility of these relationships was key too, and the fact that they could be sustained over a period not dictated by legislative timeframes.

This is just one example of many to illustrate the very pressing reality that young people in Scotland require more, and more urgent access to, mental health services and this includes young people with experience of care. Evidence provided by IRISS shows that in relation to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) "there is unprecedented pressure on the service and poor provision of support, with an increase in rejected referrals and few alternative services available to absorb the need."

Barnardo's has identified two main issues with CAMHS and the needs of care experienced young people:

- The types of therapy made available are not always suited to meet the needs of care experienced young people whose mental health problems are likely to be a result of trauma
- They create additional barriers for care experienced children and care leavers accessing support.

The charity has reported that despite the recognition that the majority of children who are in care will experience mental health issues and poor wellbeing, they are disproportionately affected by rejected referrals to CAMH services because of lack of stability in where they live, lack of understanding about their engagement with support, or their symptoms being deemed not being severe enough.

Sources:

- Kirman, M (2019) Care In Mind Paper 1 Rejected Referrals: Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Barnardo's
- IRISS (2020) Care experienced children and young people's mental health

Question 31

What improvements do you think could be made to ensure a smooth transition is made between children and adult physical health services, mental health services and wellbeing services?

"The workforce and in particular family carers must know that they have a particular role in supporting children to have good overall health across dental, physical, mental and sexual. That must be done through caring, nurturing relationships that model good habits and a healthy approach to life." - The Promise

Transitions for care experienced young adults is difficult when moving from the support of a children and families team to the support of a Throughcare and Aftercare service. There is then often the added difficulty of navigating the broader system when it comes to physical health, mental health and wellbeing needs. This will involve new people, having to tell your story and create new relationships, become familiar with new places and individual records about an individual's health needs will need to maintain pace with this.

The need for good quality early preparation and planning is as necessary in relation to health care provision as it is any other aspect of the lives of young people moving on from the formal structures of care. The Scottish Transitions Forum has identified the principles of good transitions and attention needs to be paid to all of these in terms of support from health services:

- Principle 1. Planning and decision-making should be carried out in a person-centred way
- Principle 2. Support should be co-ordinated across all services
- Principle 3. Planning should start early and continue up to age 25
- Principle 4. All young people should get the support that they need
- Principle 5. Young people, parents and carers must have access to the information they need
- Principle 6. Families and carers need support
- Principle 7. A continued focus on transitions across Scotland

Children's rights and partnership working are key when considering the transition of paediatric to adult health services for all young people and young people with experience of care will transitions to uphold their rights and build on the partnership working that has been in place, with new relationships created between services.

As Children's Health Scotland highlights, all children and young people should be informed of their healthcare rights and supported to understand:

- How to look after their health, both physical and mental.
- Know what to do if they are unwell.
- Know how to access health services when they are needed.

Attending to and awareness of these rights is a key way in which to ensure transitions can be smoother between services.

There can also be a lack of understanding across professional boundaries about both the responsibilities different practitioners within and across services hold, and the nature of the challenges that the people needing their help and support may face. Improving and nurturing a mutual understanding of these responsibilities and challenges aids improved partnership working.

Question 32

Please tell us about any good practice you are aware of that supports young people leaving care to find a home that meets their needs.

A home is more than bricks and mortar, and everything that goes into having a home comes into play too for young people leaving care when they start to live independently: practical skills to run a home; budgeting and paying bills; life skills; and how to maintain a tenancy. Support to do all of this is vital.

For many young people today, leaving home for the first time is a time filled with opportunity and expectation. Moving out to pursue opportunities in education, employment or travel is exciting and sometimes overwhelming yet knowing the safety net of home remains in place can offer reassurance. For young people leaving care, the experience can be very different. Despite difficult early life experiences, and often multiple moves during childhood, young people leaving care are often expected to leave their home at an earlier age, with less preparation, and with less support than young people without care experience.

One example of good practice that we are aware of within a local authority is a youth housing forum where social workers work with housing colleagues to discuss the needs of young people with care experience, and to address any tenancy-related issues at an early stage.

Another example is the Rock Trust's Housing First for Youth's approach which was set up specifically to support care leavers who were homeless or at risk of homelessness by working with a local authority and the local housing association to put in place dedicated project officers and the support of housing officers and accommodation in permanent, unconditional tenancies with these providers. An independent evaluation of this work that began in West Lothian with the local council and Almond Housing Association found that engagement with the project directly resulted in positive changes to the lives of the young people service being supported in these ways and this approach has now been rolled to others areas of Scotland including in Fife and Glasgow and a similar model is being used in Wales.

One of CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience has shared a positive experience whereby they had been provided with accommodation close to the children's house they had previously been living in. This allowed them to easily maintain the trusting and positive relationships they had built whilst living at the children's house. The consultant believed that this had been possible due to a social worker who went "above and beyond" to support them.

The Council Tax Exemption for care leavers is a helpful support for young people with experience of care. However, this also serves as a reminder of all the responsibilities care leavers face at a young age.

The Rock Trust is a good example of peer support and mentoring for young people leaving care age 16-25 in Edinburgh. They recruit and train people who have experience of care and/or homelessness who are matched with a young person leaving care. The Trust offers support to:

- Move into and sustain more appropriate long-term housing.
- Greater opportunities to move into volunteering, education, training or employment.
- Greater social confidence and experience improved personal support and positive relationships.
- Explore what is available to do in your local community reducing social exclusion and increasing physical and mental health.

The Rock Trust offers a shared accommodation model known as "supportive flatmate." It is a peer support model available to young people as they transition to their first tenancy and offers a gradual transition from group living. Supportive flatmates share a tenancy with up to three young people and help them to make a success of independent living. They support young people to build positive relationships within their community while developing skills required for managing a tenancy.

Sources:

- Rock Trust, Housing First for Youth: Evaluation Report (2020)
- Housing First for Youth in Glasgow: <https://www.qcha.org.uk/qc-wellbeing/young-people>
- Housing First for Youth in Fife: <https://www.rocktrust.org/housing-first-for-youth-expansion/>
- Homelessness and care experience: Beyond the headlines: CELCIS: May 2019

Question 33

What do you think are the main barriers in securing appropriate housing for a young person with care experience?

"I have stayed in abusive relationships because I couldn't afford to live alone or have anyone to help me move out." – CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

This quote highlights the fundamental importance of having access to appropriate housing. However, we know that, for many young people with experience of care, there are many barriers to having a secure home.

The housing crisis across Scotland

Housing is a continual and pressing issue: twelve local authority areas in Scotland have declared a housing emergency, with the Scottish Government announcing a national housing emergency in May 2024. This lack of affordable housing in general, plus a lack of local authority housing, has meant that many young people with experience of care simply cannot access suitable accommodation at this key point in their lives.

The most recent available year data for Scotland from 2015 shows the average age care experienced young people leave care at 17 years old, while their non care experienced peers leave their parental home at 26 years old on average.

This shows how particularly pertinent and crucial housing needs, and therefore the challenges, are for young people with experience of care. Evidence from our consultants with lived experience reveals how common it is for care experienced students to be homeless whilst they are studying at college or university, with no steady base and needing to 'sofa surf.' Even where such accommodation is available, waiting for this is destabilising. One consultant's experience was of being told that it would be at least a year wait before they could access council housing, leaving them with no choice but to seek an expensive private let.

However, we know that when suitable housing is provided for young people with experience of care that it can have a significant beneficial impact on their lives:

"The change in my quality in life since getting social housing and out the private rental market is huge. I couldn't afford to study or anything like I am right now if I wasn't in social housing" – CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Private rental market

"I will never be able to afford to get out of the private rental market as I can't save on top of my extortionate rent." – CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

"I have no savings as my rent is so high." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

"The minimum wait even for mid-market rentals are 2-4years, let alone social housing." – CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

The private rental sector is prohibitively expensive for many young people, and for young people with experience of care this is particularly acute, especially as they are unlikely to have the 'bank of mum and dad' to fall back on. CELCIS's Consultants have told us that having to rely on private rental accommodation can seriously impact their ability to save money, and it can negatively impact on their ability to, for example, travel for work or studying. This is particularly true in the current 'cost of living' crisis and can lead to homelessness.

Lack of national approach

The experiences of our Consultants with lived experience have also highlighted what we understand are the significant flaws in local support, access and approaches to housing support. In many local authority areas, they had been required to present as 'homeless' to access housing. However, this was not a uniform approach required across Scotland. There must be a better, and a consistent, approach to supporting young people with experience of care with their housing needs. This is fundamental to implementing Continuing Care and to also upholding corporate parenting responsibilities. No young person who has been 'looked after' by a local authority ought to have to present as 'homeless' to seek suitable housing.

Sources:

- Barriers and enablers to care-leavers engagement with multi-agency support: A scoping review: Prendergast, L.; Davies, C.; Seddon, D.; Hartfiel, N.; Edwards, R. T. (2024)
- Housing Options and Care Leavers: Improving Outcomes into Adulthood: Glasgow: CELCIS (2015)
- Rock Trust, Housing First for Youth: Evaluation Report (2020)

Question 34

How can we ensure there is sufficient support, planning and preparation provided to care leavers moving into their own accommodation for the first time?

Implementation of current legislation

Successful and consistent implementation across Scotland of current duties and responsibilities in respect of young people with care experience is a key component to ensuring there is sufficient support, planning and preparation provided for young people moving into their own accommodation for the first time. This includes attending to importance of having ongoing support relationships, in the provision of financial advice and support with life skills, to help young people prepare and navigate having and running their new home. Current inconsistency in practice and availability of support is a barrier to ensuring all young people with experience of care have this help at this crucial stage in their lives.

Re-imagining of financial resources

Currently many local authorities pay for private rental accommodation for students who are care leavers. One CELCIS Consultant with lived experience estimated that their local authority had spent £36,000 on their rent whilst they were studying at university. Whilst this was appreciated, our Consultants questioned whether this money could not have been used in a more strategic way. For example, could this money have been used to support care leavers with a deposit to buy their own properties? Might local authorities, as corporate parents, be guarantors for young people with experience of care to support them to get on the property ladder?

Right to housing

The solutions offered by Who Cares? Scotland in their 'Lifelong Rights Campaign – Housing Paper' are supported by CELCIS.

Sources:

- Who Cares? Scotland: Lifelong Rights Campaign – Housing Paper: https://www.whocaresScotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Housing-Issue-Paper_Final_19.06.24.pdf

Question 35

What forms of support do you think would help someone leaving care and entering their first tenancy to stay in that property for as long as they want to?

"The reality of it is, we aren't just not giving people the safe housing they deserve, we are actively putting people in risky situations. Care experienced people have experienced trauma, and are more at risk of/around drugs and alcohol etc, yet we put young people in tenancies that are known to have challenges with drugs and alcohol." – CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Relationships

Noted throughout our response to this consultation is the importance of supportive, ongoing relationships to support young people with experience of care as they move into adulthood. This can never be underestimated; it is the cornerstone on which all else rests. For all young people, this is a time of transition and change, when support and guidance is required. For young people with experience of care, this can be even more important, as they will be facing new responsibilities and they may not have the same familial network to support them.

Life skills

CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience have shared with us that a key support that was required at this stage is support with life skills, such as what is required to run a home. These could be simple things such as learning how to manage cooking, bills, parking permits but they will be entirely new experiences and "these add up when you don't have them."

Some local authorities offer dedicated support around this, for example, programmes to learn basic life skills. However, again, there was inconsistency across Scotland in the availability of such programmes.

Young people with experience of care would also benefit from bespoke financial advice from a trusted adult in their life to better understand options available to them. It is also vital that this support is ongoing to reflect the changing needs and opportunities that may arise.

Flexibility in support

Regardless of what support is offered, it is important that this support can be flexible to respond to an individual's differing needs over time. For example, some people with experience of care may, due to past experiences, prefer to live alone, which is more expensive than sharing with others.

It is also important to note that all young people will make mistakes – as everyone does at that stage in life, and making choices and mistakes is crucial to learning and development. The issue is that the stakes are often much higher for young people with care experience as they often have less support around them. The need to manage finances so young can lead to homelessness, and debt. It is essential to view adolescence as a developmental stage, and that part of this is making mistakes and having the room to change course and recover from these. There must be suitable 'safety nets' in place, including trusting relationships, having sufficient financial support, and having a secure home.

Question 36

How can we ensure the views and needs of people leaving care are taken into account when decisions are made about where they should live when they leave care?

The full inclusion of children and young people in discussing, planning for and access to their entitlements when 'leaving' care is a right and entitlement of care experienced children and young people, as set out by The Promise, that children and young people must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care. Article 12 of the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) also set out the right for children to be listened to and meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them, and in Scotland the UNCRC has recently been enshrined into Scots Law. The inclusion of children and young people is also aligned to the values and principles of Scotland's GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) approach, including "placing the child or young person and their family at the heart, and promoting choice, with full participation in decisions that affect them."

Beyond these rights and entitlements being in place, children and young people's inclusion is an essential component of planning and implementation of good transitions to adulthood. Planning for transitioning from a care setting where a child or young person lives needs to be conducted alongside or in partnership with young people. For example, this could mean introducing the idea that the young person could stay in their care setting at the earliest possible time, in a manner that is appropriate to having these conversations depending on their age and stage of development. Evidence from [our research in 2022](#) with practitioners shows that Continuing Care, a critical entitlement for care experienced children growing up, is too often discussed with young people too late into their teenage years (at ages 15-18) when they may have already made tentative plans, perhaps due to a feeling of necessity or fear about what to do or what happens next. When implemented well, Continuing Care supports young people to be and feel part of their family, and to have the stability of support as they navigate adolescence and then adulthood.

Our 2022 research raised the idea that how reviews are conducted and child-led care plans are developed, for example, should be part of this. This research with practitioners also found that discussions about entitlements such as Continuing Care might not take place with young people unless the young person raised the topic themselves, to reduce worry around future transitions. While the desire to reduce worry and stress around future transitions is understandable, this runs the risk of actually stoking stresses relating to transitions for young people. Young people are likely to be aware of their legal status as 'looked after' or a care leaver, but may not be aware of their rights to continuing living in care under Continuing Care support. Not addressing the long-term nature and stability of a young person's care may encourage them to make plans for when the arrangement for their care is due to formally end, which they are likely to understand is at 16 or 18 years of age, in part from witnessing the care experiences of older young people in similar situations.

To support ongoing and relationship-based conversations, children and young people, as well as their carers and practitioners who support them, must have access to information about their rights and entitlements when 'leaving' care. This information must be freely available in various age and needs-appropriate formats. This should clearly, and appropriately, cover entitlements into adulthood, focussing on relationships and emotional security. CELCIS have produced a resource '[Your Right to Continuing Care](#)' which is one example of this type of information provision.

Sources:

- Scottish Government (2022), Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) - <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>
- The Independent Care Review (2020) The Promise. Glasgow: Independent Care Review.
- Lough Dennell, B.L., McGhee, K. and Porter, R. (2022) Continuing Care: An exploration of implementation, CELCIS: Glasgow (pg. 41)

Question 37

In what areas would you like to see improvements to the service, support and funding for students who are care experienced? Please explain your answer and provide any suggestions in the open text box.

"...a series of ways you fell through the cracks because [you were] not eligible enough." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

"At university, through the summer period there is nothing." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Entering further and higher education can be daunting for any student; however, being a student with care experience has additional complexities and challenges, for example, in relation to housing, financial circumstances, and potentially complex family relationships which may impact on their support network. Consequently, it should be made as easy as possible for students with experience of care to access all available support and entitlements.

There are inherent difficulties in knowing how many students have care experience in Scotland due to differences in definitions, the way student numbers are monitored in further education and higher education, and how, where and whether students declare their care experience. Whilst the number of learners going onto further and higher education is increasing in Scotland, the rates for care experienced learners going onto and remaining in further and higher education is lower than their non care experienced peers.

Services and support at times of transition

CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience note that there is still a need for better awareness around young people can be vulnerable at points of transition. These transition points are where students are most likely to leave education. This is particularly true of students with experience of care who may not have the same support networks as their non-care experienced peers; and who may be dealing with other challenges such as securing suitable housing, and perhaps working longer hours in paid employment to support themselves and their studies compared to other students.

There is also a need for support when care experienced learners are preparing to attend university or college. This can include support with writing personal statements and applications, finding accommodation, and learning about specific opportunities such as scholarships. Often, young people with experience of care may not have the same wide support network of adults who can assist in such applications, so paying particular attention to this part of the process is important.

For care experienced students who graduate from university, the transition post-graduate studies or to employment is an area which has been under-resourced and under-researched but needs attention. The Care-Experienced Graduates' Decision-Making, Choices and Destinations Project explored in detail the challenges which these graduates faced at this point in their lives, alongside an understanding of the impact their care experience had on this transition. The project has created a wealth of resources including policy recommendations and peer developed resources for care-experienced graduates. This is further explored in our answers in the Employment section of this consultation response.

It is important to note too that there is still a 'postcode lottery' in terms of the support available for students with experience of care, which varies between educational institutions. CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience have told us that finding out what support and services are available is much harder for young people who have lived in more than one local authority area. A potential solution to this might be a national information hub to support care experienced young people to find information around courses, scholarship opportunities, housing, student finances, and other relevant opportunities which were unique to each college or university so that they might make an informed decision about which institution would best meet their needs.

All those working with children and young people must recognise the part they have to play in enabling children and young people with care experience to reach their full potential. Many of CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience have told

us that they received a lot of support from people who worked at colleges and universities; however, that has not always been the case. Practitioners and educators working alongside children and young people must have the same aspirations for all children as young people regardless of their life experiences.

One further area for improvement is the need to provide for all year-round support. Care experienced students need to be able to live in stable, secure accommodation for the entirety of the calendar year, and not only during academic terms; access to funding; and support from staff at colleges and universities.

Housing

There is a need for improved access to housing for students with care experience. Whilst some improvements have been made in this area, there still requires to be guaranteed accommodation provided all year round. This would mean that students would not require to move out at the end of every term or during the holidays and would have a consistent home. It should also be noted that sometimes students with experience of care may, due to their previous experiences, wish to live alone, which in turn can be more expensive than sharing accommodation with friends.

Evidence from our CELCIS Consultants with lived experience reveals how common it is for care experienced students to be homeless whilst they are studying at college or university, with no steady base and needing to 'sofa surf.' One consultant's experience was of being told that it would be at least a year wait before they could access council housing, leaving them with no choice but to seek an expensive private let.

Guaranteed accommodation for 365 days of the year, and higher priority for access to social housing being given for learners with experience of care, would be a much-welcomed improvement for learners with experience of care and those who work alongside them.

Ongoing dedicated support from universities and colleges

Colleges and universities should maintain a focus on meeting the needs of their care experienced students. Many Widening Access and other teams and functions have built understanding and approaches and these need to be maintained. An initiative such as Strathclyde Cares, at the University of Strathclyde offers specific support and mentorship to students with experience of care is a model that could be followed by all further and higher educational institutions. Colleges and universities should also support students to set up peer support groups – for example, at the University of Strathclyde has a Care Experienced and Estranged Student Society.

CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience also noted that a centralised information hub to support care experienced young people find information around courses, funding, scholarships, housing, and other relevant opportunities would be helpful. The Hub for Success is a similar useful resource that supports learners with experience of care at all point in their further and higher education journeys.

Funding

"It's expensive being care experienced." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

In Scotland, domestic students do not pay tuition fees for attending higher education institutions in Scotland. This is helpful for all students, including those who have experience of care. The reality is, however, that the financial starting point between care experienced and non care experienced students can be very different. The Promise of the Independent Care Review found that adults with experience of care are over one and a half times more likely to have financial difficulties than those without care experience. When it comes to being student, often a safety net of 'the bank of mum and dad', which many students lean on during their studies, will not be there. Care experienced students may also not have the wider support networks of trusted adults that could otherwise help offset costs, whether these costs are anticipated or an emergency.

The Scottish Government gives money to support students through the Student Awards Agency Scotland (for learners at university) and the Scottish Funding Council (for learners at college). Financial support is available from these bodies for any student with experience of care - not only 'care leavers'. This is important as it demonstrates that these bodies have acknowledged the needs of all their care experienced learners and have considered this in the support they provide.

It may be beneficial for all student funding to be administered by one organisation to ensure consistency, better alignment, ease of access, and to reduce inequity. Within this, however, there still requires to be flexibility to allow for a relational approach to meet the needs of individual students.

There is evidence that people who work in colleges and universities have been extremely helpful when supporting students access resources, such as discretionary funding, and people who have been care experienced learners have noted that the Care Experienced Bursary was helpful if they did not have the support of family. However, care experienced young people who study full time are also at risk of financial hardship, as the funding provided through the Care Experienced Student Bursary is unlikely to cover rising living costs. Consequently, it is vital that support such as the Bursary is uprated in line with rising living costs.

A suggested improvement could be that there be recognition at a senior national level that it can be more expensive to be a young person with experience of care. Entitlements, especially those that flow from corporate parents, should reflect this.

Links between further and higher education funding, the Department of Work and Pensions, and Social Security Scotland

One of the biggest challenges for students with experience of care is the lack of connection between the Student Awards Agency Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council, the Department of Work and Pensions, and Social Security Scotland.

Our Consultants with lived experience have cautioned that that 'the systems don't talk to each other' which makes applying for entitlements and support stressful and, at times, may disincentivise learning.

One of the biggest challenges here is that a student cannot claim financial benefits whilst also receiving the Care Experienced Bursary. One CELCIS Consultant with lived experience explained that, as a care experienced parent and student, they were told they could not claim additional financial support for parents, as they were not in receipt of welfare support. This example is indicative of the difficulties caused by the lack of collaborative working between the many agencies responsible for providing financial support. It should also be noted that not every student will have the capacity, skills or support to advocate for themselves to receive financial support.

There are also difficulties with how the Care Experienced Bursary interacts with financial entitlements offered on certain courses. For example, one Consultant noted that a bursary offered to students studying NHS courses is more financially beneficial than the Care Experienced Bursary and that a student cannot be in receipt of both bursaries. Naturally, a student would be more inclined to apply for the NHS course and be supported by that bursary – however, the Consultant's experience was that the NHS bursary did not provide financial support over the summer period. Improved collaborative working between Social Security Scotland, Student Awards Agency Scotland, the Department of Work and Pensions, and the Scottish Funding Council would be beneficial. This should include clear pathways so that no student with experience of care loses any financial support due to 'falling down the cracks' in the system.

Whilst many improvements have been made to application processes, in particular by the Student Awards Agency Scotland, CELCIS's Consultants noted that applying for entitlements still required 'jumping through hoops' (for example providing identification such as three months' bank statements with the same address) and, crucially, having to re-tell their story and 'evidence' their experience of care. This can be potentially re-traumatising for students with experience of care. There is a need to remove the need for students with experience of care to have to 'evidence' their financial situation, and re-tell their story, to access support. It ought to be enough that they have experience of care. There is a need to work relationally here and, crucially, to be trauma-informed. Consideration could be given to some form of 'passport' or an automatic recognition across all systems to ensure that the onus of accessing entitlements does not fall on students.

Advice

"If I don't have a financial deficit at the beginning of the year, I don't get support. I would get into debt on purpose to receive help." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Clear, consistent advice needs to be available to all care experienced students navigating their finances and the costs involved of living independently and studying from an adult they trust. One CELCIS Consultant with lived experience explained that they been told they would be able to be reimbursed for costs for

setting up their new home for starting university and they used all their savings to pay for this. However, when they sought to claim the money back, they were told that they were no longer entitled to be reimbursed the money as it had appeared they must not need it. This is far from an isolated example of receiving conflicting advice and being in receipt of differing forms of financial support.

More significantly, care experienced adults have told us of how they realised that they had to subvert the system in order to claim financial support and entitlements when they were a student – sometimes to their own detriment, including having to deliberately fall into poverty in order to be 'eligible' for financial support from colleges and universities or having to give up their employment for the last weeks of their summer break so that they could evidence they were in debt in order to access support.

There is a need for clearer and consistent advice given across Scotland regarding what support is available so that no care experienced student falls foul of a 'postcode lottery' of support.

Sources:

- Scottish Funding Council (2023) Report on Widening Access 2021-22. Scottish Funding Council: Edinburgh.
- The Independent Care Review (2020) The Promise. Glasgow: Independent Care Review
- National Union of Students (2022) Cost of Living Students and Apprentices Cheshire: NUS

Question 38

How can we better support care experienced students to complete their studies? Please explain your answer and provide any examples of good practice in the open text box.

There are ways in which care experienced students can be better supported to complete their studies. Underpinning any and all ways to support care experienced students, understanding and considering three key factors is paramount if Scotland is to get things right for our learners with experience of care:

- Care experienced learners have unique needs and benefit from formal support that can adapt and mirrors their trajectory through education and into employment.
- The importance of a relational approach creating opportunities for learners to be able to experience empathy and continuity from agencies that are there to support them.
- Care leavers often leave home at an earlier age, and many will not have the safety net of financial support from family.

Themes that consistently and repeatedly come through in research evidence, reports on education reform, and from the work and practice within our professional networks, are that care experienced learners need:

- those who are working with them in post-school education to have a sophisticated understanding of their needs
- staff and agencies that are empowered, supported and equipped through the process of change
- to be at the heart of all decisions that are made in post school education.

Good practice needs to build on this evidence. Care leavers can experience instability in where they live and who cares for them during their childhood and this might involve less encouragement to achieve or succeed in their learning. Flexible, personalised pathways to succeed in education are required. One study showed that 38% of care leavers were more likely than their non care experienced peers to withdraw from university, with young men and learners with additional needs being disproportionately affected.

Care experienced learners can often benefit from what is termed as 'second chance pathways', for example, to switch from one study programme to another and tailored support systems that extend beyond minimum statutory requirements. The transition to university, for example, can be isolating, with some learners reporting that they had minimal possessions to support their living and learning needs and limited emotional or financial backing. This further highlights the need for comprehensive, long-term support. A research study suggests that a 'triangle of support' which comprises of the young person's direct relationships, informal networks and the crucial support that comes from professional care and 'systems,' is needed for care experienced students to have the best chance at success.

Studies into workforce wellbeing have tended to focus on professions that directly work alongside, live with, or teach care experienced learners. However, parallel lessons can be drawn and applied to staff who work in Student Awards Agency Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland who all offer direct and indirect financial, practical support and guidance. The studies point towards the need for staff being provided with time and space to build relationships with care experienced learners, as these connections are part of the overall package of support and contribute to success. Care experienced learners need a workforce with a nuanced understanding of their needs.

With the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law there also needs to be an emphasis on respecting learners' rights. Care experienced learners have historically faced a number of barriers to their right to education and they need an education system that recognises their voices and experiences and meets their needs. We agree with the International Council of Education Advisors' (ICEA) report that advocates a 'universal design' approach, one that ensures that educational environments and agencies are created inclusively from the outset rather than adapted later. An approach that is designed to meet the needs of care experienced learners will benefit all learners.

Components of good practice:

- Entitlements and support should be made available for all students with experience of care, including those who were previously 'looked after' at home and in 'informal' kinship care. This support should be available at any point throughout a student's studies and this is especially important for learners who may not know they have experience of care when they start college or university.
- Ongoing, trusted relationships with practitioners and college and university staff so that people with experience of care are aware of all the entitlements and support available to them, and they have the support they need to access it. This should be from school, throughout further and higher education, as well as supporting students when they graduate. This should include support to access opportunities such as scholarships; financial education to assist with budgeting; skills development and careers advice.
- Guaranteed housing throughout the entirety of the calendar year for students with experience of care. Given the national housing crisis in Scotland, local authority partnerships could consider being more creative with their housing stock to support care experienced students. For example, could money spent on expensive private rental accommodation be redirected to buy dedicated housing for the exclusive use of students with care experience?
- No student should 'lose out' financially due to having experience of care. This will require more intentional working between Social Security Scotland, the Department of Work and Pensions, the Scottish Funding Council, and the Student Awards Agency Scotland.
- There should be no requirement for a student to additionally 'evidence' their experience of care to access entitlements and support. Further consideration is required here to ensure that all processes are trauma-informed and responsive. Much can be learned from the approach taken by Student Awards Agency Scotland; however, the system needs to go further. For example, could there be a form of 'passport' that states a student has care experience and therefore no further 'evidencing' processes are required?
- Financial entitlements should be connected to the recognition of needs. No student should be actively putting themselves into poverty to access support they are entitled to.
- Colleges and universities should provide dedicated support for their students with care experience and support students with their own peer support networks.
- CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience have noted that there have been differing experiences in the support received when going to college or university. There needs to be equity in support to eradicate this 'postcode lottery.'

Examples of good practice:

- Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) has worked to develop specialist processes and systems to administer the care experienced bursary. Over the course of several years this has led to the implementation of specialist guidance, the use of a standardised evidence form, training for all SAAS staff, and the creation of a specialist team. This team processes all applications from care experienced learners. There is a commitment from SAAS that students will have one member of staff who is allocated to support them throughout their funding journey to promote a relational, non-stigmatising approach. This minimises the likelihood of students having to re - tell their story and explaining their circumstances to numerous different members of staff. SAAS also have procedures in place for a senior manager to review any circumstances where there is any ambiguity over eligibility. There is a generosity and understanding of the nuanced needs of care leavers in their approach. CELCIS's Consultants with lived experience have noted that this approach has been beneficial.
- The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has worked alongside stakeholders to consider issues around the definition of care experience. Until the academic year 2022-2023 guidance for further education providers did not include young people who had been cared for in informal kinship care. This is a group of learners who are care experienced and evidence indicates that they need more support but may not be included for this due to strict, sometimes overly legalistic, interpretations. SFC held workshops with colleagues in the further education and higher education sector, alongside other stakeholders, to explore the issue and consider an alignment of policy. This led to the Scottish Funding Council widening the eligibility of care experienced bursary to include students in informal kinship care where this could be confirmed by the local authority. Through a consultation process the agency listened to practitioners, deepened its understanding of the unique needs of care experienced learners.
- Resources such as the [Hub for Success](#) and [Strathclyde Cares](#) are so valuable for students with experience of care and are available to students at all points in their learning journey. These provide good models that could be replicated across Scotland's further and higher education sector and institutions.

Sources:

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- Scottish Government (2023). Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation.
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- Hub for Success: <https://hubforsuccess.org/>

Question 39

What would help young people with care experience find secure and fulfilling work, develop their skills or build their confidence?

Right to enjoyment and aspirations

First and foremost, all care experienced children and young people should be able to grow up with the same access to activities that bring them joy as their non-care experienced peers, activities that make them happy, support their development and enhance their wellbeing. This is fundamental to the ethos of The Promise of the Independent Care Review. This applies to finding secure and fulfilling work as much as to life outside of work.

All those working with children and young people must recognise the part they have to play in enabling children and young people with care experience to reach their full potential. Practitioners and educators working with children and young people must have the same aspirations for all children and young people regardless of their life experiences.

Relationship-based support

Any services or support developed for young people with care experience to find secure and fulfilling work should prioritise strong consistent relationships

between young people and employability workers or other relevant practitioners. For all children and young people, supportive, enduring relationships with those who care for them are the 'golden thread' in their lives. Research from the 2013 The Care Inquiry in England states that for children and young people who have experienced disruption or adversity in some of their important relationships, that the quality of their supportive relationships should be prioritised. This is relevant not only to the developmental needs of children as they grow up, but also for access to services, throughout their lifetime, in which building trust will be critical.

Evidence from The Independent Care Review and the Coram Voice points to the value of ensuring all care experienced people have access to trusting, relationship-based support. This is a core foundation of The Promise. CELCIS's recent [Children's Services Reform Research study](#) also points to the role of relationship-based support in enabling effective provision of a service to children, young people and families requiring support.

Financial Education

Providing formal and informal financial education should be a priority alongside, or in advance of, employability support. Many children, as they grow up, may gradually learn skills about how to manage money from the adults around them like their parents or carers, along with many other important life skills, such as budgeting and money management. These skills will come about through consistent, natural conversations that change as a child grows up. However, if children's parents or carers are not confident in their own financial skills or are not able to pass on financial skills to their children, children may have less access to financial education.

All children and young people in Scotland should receive financial education consistently as they grow up at home and school, as mandated by Education Scotland. Wider numeracy and literacy skills, such as learning mathematics and English in school, are fundamental to financial education, so attention must be paid to any support needs children and young people may have with developing their numeracy and literacy skills.

Young people with care experience are more likely to encounter circumstances that mean they have specific needs for support and financial education when they move into adulthood. They are more likely to need to take on responsibilities they expose them to new and complex things to navigate such housing agencies and contracts for financial payments. It can be a stark transition from little financial responsibility to complete financial independence. They need to budget and manage their rent, bills, living expenses, benefits, or student loans. Efforts to mitigate some these responsibilities and financial burden have been made in Scotland, including a council tax exemption for care experienced young people up to the age of 26, and the provision of a Care Experienced Students Bursary.

Industry visibility and career pathways

"Care experienced people are overrepresented in social work, health care and social care because those career paths and the opportunities are most visible to care experienced people. There is a need to make other industries visible to care experienced people and create pathways for care experienced people to enter those industries." - CELCIS consultant with lived experience

When considering the development and planning of career pathways for young people and adults with experience of care, we need to enable the widest possible options to be accessed. Assumptions should not be made that young people know about all the options available to them. Targeted work with industries where care experienced people are under-represented would enable a greater understanding of the available roles and the skill base required to attain these.

Digital inclusion

Corporate parents and those working directly with care leavers in Scotland need to see digital inclusion as a fundamental right for the young people they work with, supporting them to access this world through the provision of technology, internet connection and/or data, skills training and ongoing support.

Digital inclusion for people with experience of care must be seen as a priority when developing employment pathways. CELCIS's work on the digital divide and the impact of this on the rights of care leavers in Scotland set out the following recommendations to enable people with experience of care to access the same rights to digital environments as their peers and these are critical if people with experience of care are to be afforded the same employment opportunities in an increasingly digital-first world:

- Roll out digital access for all care leavers by integrating this into the pathway planning and support process in all local authorities.
- Upskill workers to ensure they can better support young people to develop their digital skills.
- Undertake research into the experiences and needs of Scottish care leavers which includes attention to digital access and online experiences.

Transitions for graduates

One area which needs to be further considered is the transition for people with experience of care when they graduate from university, either to post-graduate studies or to employment. This is an area which has been under-resourced and under-researched. The Care-Experienced Graduates' Decision-Making, Choices and Destinations Project has explored in detail the challenges which this group of people faced at this point in their lives, alongside an understanding of the impact their care experience had on this transition. The project has created a wealth of resources including policy recommendations and peer developed resources for care-experienced graduates and offers the following recommendations

Higher education institutions to:

- Collect data on care experienced student status upon application to postgraduate programmes. This will help higher education institutions

identify who to proactively offer a care-experienced support package to ensure that Corporate Parenting strategies extend to the postgraduate level.

Higher education support services to:

- Offer a named contact for care experienced students at the postgraduate level.
- Create postgraduate scholarships for care experienced students to assist with the cost of living.
- Provide accommodation support to care experienced postgraduate students that is comparable to the support offered at the undergraduate level.
- Provide bursaries to care experienced postgraduate students that are comparable to the support offered at the undergraduate level.
- Provide access to disability support to care experienced postgraduate students that is comparable to the support offered at the undergraduate level.
- Relax age restrictions when devising eligibility criteria for the above support. This acknowledges that care experienced students are more likely to commence their higher education studies when they are older than direct school-leaving age.

Local authorities to:

- Extend summer bursary payments to cover the period between undergraduate degree completion, and the start of taught postgraduate studies.
- Continue to support with living costs for postgraduate care experienced students in a way that is comparable to that offered at the undergraduate level.
- Relax age restrictions when devising eligibility criteria for the above support. Again, this recognises that care experienced students are more likely to enter higher education when they are older than school-leaving age.

Employers to:

- Offer sponsorship, where applicable, for postgraduate taught degrees alongside graduate roles. Such opportunities could be advertised to care experienced graduates via a national online resource.

The Scottish Government to:

- Increase the amount of funding available from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland for postgraduate students' living costs. Ideally, this should be offered as a combination of loans and grants; grants can be awarded on a needs-assessed basis.

Sources:

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Question 40

Can you share any examples of good practice, in the private and public sector, where young people leaving care have been supported into employment or training, or have been supported to build their confidence?

Groups, networks, and collaborative partnerships

There has been good work happening by intermediary and delivery bodies in Scotland to bring stakeholders together to focus on supporting people with experience of care into employment or training. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, Skills Development Scotland's Care Experience Focal Point Group, the Scottish Funding Council's Care Experience National Policy Group, local employability partnerships with a range of private, public and third sector partners and established schemes within higher and further education institutions to focus on supporting those with experience of care, for example, Hub for Success and Strathclyde Cares.

Employers

Some employers run bespoke schemes to enable those with experience of care to access employment opportunities. Some examples are John Lewis's Building Happier Futures employment programme; the Care Inspectorate's Guaranteed Interview Scheme; and the Civil Service Care Leavers Internship Scheme. Additionally, there are many employers who provide bespoke apprenticeships for people with experience of care. Further information can be found in the 'Resource on Care Experience For apprenticeship learning providers' developed by Skills Development Scotland.

Often, it is large employers who have the capacity to develop tailored schemes for employees with experience of care. We would urge other businesses, public bodies and third sector organisations to learn and adapt these for their specific

contexts, enabling people with experience of care to have fulfilling careers in a range of industries.

Question 41

How do you think employers can be better supported or encouraged to recruit, train, support and retain young people who are care experienced?

Working cultures

"It's also about finding a balance as treating someone like an adult and any other employee, but also that little bit extra because I do remember not to speak badly of [...], but I definitely felt like the care experienced staff were treated very differently than the non care experienced staff. Sometimes a bit like children because some of them, you know had different issues, but everyone was put into the same bucket." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

Our Consultants with lived experience have identified the following qualities which make a good employer or manager:

- Employers who show up, offer help, and have regular conversations
- An employer who has compassion and empathy
- An employer who treats someone like the adult that they are but are mindful that they may need extra support, and
- An employer that does not 'other' care experienced staff or 'expose' them to non-care experienced staff.

Support for parents

"Reflecting on my previous role, I started to really panic because I was a parent myself and it was the first year that I really had to consider childcare... I was like oh God... this is how people manage with their child and the holidays, and I think... the majority of people get 28 to 30 odd holidays a year. Now the summer (school) holidays alone up here were seven weeks and I just thought 'Oh my God,' I'm going to let my employer down.

"I was so... I felt like shameful. I felt guilty.

"And then I was stressing out, so it was impacting my work. It was impacting the way I was feeling about my work and it's just, it's so unrealistic to expect care experienced parents to have that, you know, network around them." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

There are a number of ways which employers can make sure they recruit, train and support all parents well. Employers need to be open to being flexible and work with their staff to facilitate their role in the workplace and help the workplace get the best out of them. For example, if possible, the default presumption of flexible hours, regardless of whether staff are care experienced or not, can reduce stigma in the workplace.

"Having that flexibility built into working practice without having without it having to be discreet and specific... it can tackle barriers to going into the workplace like, for example, parenting. Parenting can be a huge barrier to being able to engage with certain roles. But having that flexibility says well actually

you don't need more annual leave if we're just thoughtful about how we structure your work." - CELCIS Consultant with lived experience

There needs to be a consideration by employers of the childcare needs and costs of all staff but for care experienced employees there may be less access to a support network to help with childcare that their peers may have.

Stigma

How we talk about care experience matters. We must never underestimate the impact that stigma and discrimination has had on children, young people and families needing the support of services for generations. Addressing the language used and public attitudes remains essential. Scotland is leading the way with the Each and Every Child initiative in how care and care experience is framed and understood. This initiative which began in 2021 is evidence-informed and the learning is shared freely through training and online resources. We would encourage employers to learn from this and for the recruitment, training and support of employees who are care experienced to be informed by this to ensure that they are a welcoming and supportive workplace for staff.

Sources:

- Each and Every Child: <https://eachandeverychild.co.uk/>

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