

Scottish Care Leavers Covenant

‘Agenda for change’

We must work tenaciously for change. We’ve been lulled into accepting systems without looking into the human faces that are impacted by them¹

Context

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 places new duties and powers on local authorities and other corporate parents to ensure the best possible outcomes for looked after young people and care leavers into adulthood. Part 9 (Corporate Parenting) of the Act places legislative responsibilities on the range of agencies and organisations identified as being corporate parents under Schedule 4 of the Act. Part 10 (Aftercare) of the Act increases the upper age from the 21st to the 26th birthday by which care leavers can request and receive ongoing advice, guidance and assistance. In doing so the legislation acknowledges that for many care-experienced young people, ongoing positive support is vital and necessary to ensure they have opportunities to make positive sustained transitions into adulthood. For the general population extended and graduated transitions, with ongoing family support well into adulthood, is the norm. Scotland’s looked after young people and care leavers should expect nothing less.

We know from research that care leavers are disproportionately over-represented across a range of negative outcome measures, and conversely, under-represented across a range of positive measures in comparison to the general population. These areas include educational outcomes, employment destinations, economic activity and housing and health measures. While there are many examples of good practice with some care leavers achieving very positive outcomes, we also know that aftercare support and assistance for care leavers in Scotland is still patchy and variable within and across local authority areas.² Despite having the research knowledge, policy, guidance and legislative drivers to provide a positive and enabling context, implementation into practice remains complex, challenging and inconsistent.

¹ Sieta, Mitchell and Tobin (1996) *In Whose Best Interests? One child’s odyssey, a nations responsibility* Elizabethtown, PA: Continental Press

² McGhee et al (2014) *A National Study: Throughcare and Aftercare Service in Scotland’s Local Authorities*, CELGIS <http://www.celcis.org/media/resources/publications/Throughcare-and-aftercare-in-scotlands-local-authorities.pdf>

The 2014 Act provides a real and renewed opportunity to close the gap between policy and practice and close the outcomes gap for care leavers into adulthood. However, in order to support a full and consistent implementation of the 2014 Act and particularly in relation to Parts 9 and 10 as they apply to care leavers, we believe that specific action must be taken to address this inconsistency and to close the outcomes gap.

While high quality support into adulthood is critical³, we know that improving outcomes for care leavers is built on the solid foundations of effective child-centred care planning; high quality, stable care experiences; the implementation of Staying Put⁴ and Continuing Care for all looked after young people regardless of placement; and graduated and extended transitions from care to interdependence. Therefore we would aim to ensure that all activity is linked to supporting the full and meaningful implementation of Staying Put Scotland and Continuing Care, and that all looked after young people are encouraged, enabled and empowered to benefit from this.

The development of a **Scottish Care Leavers Covenant** is the ongoing work of a cross-sector 'Alliance' of key stakeholders, which aims to close the gap between policy and practice for care leavers into adulthood. The Alliance includes: Who Cares? Scotland, Barnardo's Scotland, Life Changes Trust, Quarriers, Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice, IRISS, Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum and CELCIS and aims to consult with and include all other interested stakeholders.

The development of the Alliance draws on the work of NCAS/Catch 22 and the publication of the 'Access All Areas'⁵ report in 2012, and we fully endorse its principles. However, we believe that any approach needs to go much further and that this should be backed up by specific, coordinated activity with regards to the full and meaningful implementation of corporate parenting into adulthood. This requires ongoing political commitment with clear leadership at both national and local level to support organisations and services to fully and meaningfully discharge their duties and powers. We recognise there is a range of current activity and the Alliance seeks to work with all relevant partners to support, complement and consolidate that activity.

³ Stein, M. (2012) *Young People Leaving Care: Supporting Pathways to Adulthood*, London: JKP

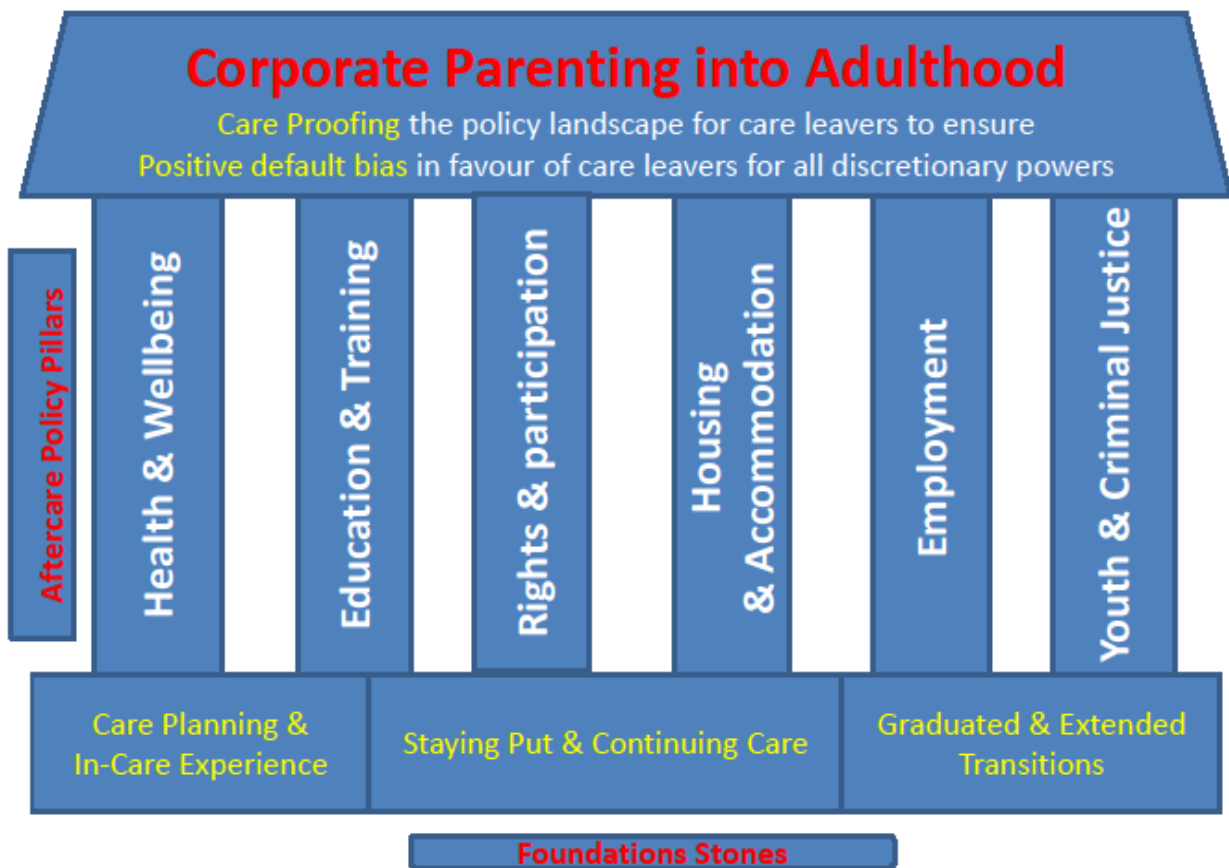
⁴ Scottish Government (2013) *Staying Put Scotland: Providing care leavers with connectedness and belonging*
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00435935.pdf>

⁵ NCAS/Catch22 (2012) *Access All Areas*
<http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/a061b11723876ecc89f36166cc622521.pdf>

We will aim to engage all corporate parents and other relevant stakeholders, at national and local level to endorse and sign up to the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant whereby they commit to making real the changes required to improve services, practice and outcomes.

In doing so the Alliance proposes an **agenda for change** outlining a range of actions and practice changes across key policy themes that are required to be delivered consistently by all relevant corporate parents across Scotland, at national and local level, to close the implementation gap. These identified actions are informed by research evidence, current practice and the voices and experiences of looked after young people and care leavers.

These key policy themes, or pillars, are identified as: **Health and Wellbeing; Education and Training; Rights and Participation; Housing and Accommodation; Employment; Youth and Criminal Justice.**



While each policy theme and related actions are important in their own right, it is the cumulative impact of progressing change across the range of these inter-related areas that will contribute to and drive forward the culture change necessary. Work on each of these areas will be delivered through discussion, influencing and partnership working, as well as exploring opportunities for joint lobbying and campaigning work.

In moving this work forwards we highlight two underpinning principles.

1. **Care-proofing of policy:** Explicit recognition of the vulnerability of care leavers as young adults, prioritisation of them in policy documents and mandatory impact assessments in all public policy areas where care leavers may be affected.
2. **Establish a positive default bias:** To ensure an automatic entitlement to provisions and services for care leavers, up to their 26th birthday. Where discretion exists in definitions of vulnerability or in giving priority access, these are exercised in favour of care leavers.

It is envisaged and expected that the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant will be endorsed and supported by all corporate parents and other relevant bodies, at national and local level. Practice and outcomes do not automatically change as a result of policy or legislation, and translating policy into practice requires sustained, focused activity. To make these changes corporate parents will need to think and act differently. The intention of the Covenant is to actively support the process of change. There is no single area or action that will provide the necessary improvements required but rather a range of inter-related actions which if fully implemented will create the enabling environment for all care-experienced young adults to benefit from increased levels of support and opportunity which they deserve and require. Therefore engaging all corporate parents and stakeholders is essential to this task. We believe that in Scotland we have positive, enabling policy and legislation, a committed and engaged sector, inspiring leaders and dedicated practitioners. The challenge for us all is to turn the aspirations we have for all of our young people into reality and to actively close the implementation gap.

Proposed Activity

May – October 2015

- The Alliance will identify and engage with key stakeholders across the sector to develop and agree priority actions within the six key policy themes, which will form the agenda for change.
- Named agencies from the Alliance will take ownership for progressing these, to drive forward progress at local and national level. This will include:
 - Engaging with Scottish Government, Local Authorities, Community Planning Partnerships, Corporate Parenting Strategy Groups and Champions Boards to ensure that these key actions areas are fully reflected in national and local policy and practice.
 - Engaging with national bodies, strategic leaders, decision makers and influencers who can inform, influence and drive forward change nationally and locally
 - Encouraging, enabling and empowering looked after young people and care leavers to ensure their voice is heard and that they can exercise their rights to access quality provision into adulthood.
 - Engaging with and influencing politicians and policymakers at national and local level to seek their active engagement and commitment to advocate for, and to support, changes in policy and practice.
- We will seek to promote and profile the development of the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant, encouraging and enabling others to become involved and participate.

October 2015 and beyond

The Scottish Care Leavers Covenant and associated agenda for change will be launched in October 2015 to coincide with National Care Leavers Week to ensure maximum profile and publicity.

- We will seek to have all named corporate parents, at national and local level, actively endorse and sign up to the Covenant.



- We will seek to have all relevant agencies and organisations involved in the development, commissioning or delivery of services to looked after young people and care leavers actively endorse and sign up to the Covenant.
- We will seek to support and promote those agencies and organisations who are able to demonstrate their active commitment to implementing the changes necessary.
- We will seek to establish a monitoring process which is able to chart progress and ensure that all actions are meaningfully addressed and implemented locally; and that care leavers and corporate parents are able to report on improvements to supports, services and outcomes.
- We will, where appropriate, engage with influencing work led by members of the Alliance aimed at ensuring that the wider public are aware of the significant adversities faced by care leavers, in order to generate public backing for the 'care-proofing' approach.
- We will aim to use the Covenant and agenda for change as a guiding driver to support full implementation of Parts 9, 10 and 11 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

By maximising the impetus and opportunities provided by the new Act, and by addressing the key policy areas and implementing all the actions consistently and meaningfully, then we believe we can begin to bring a greater congruence to policy and practice across Scotland to support the culture change required to close the outcomes gap for care leavers.

For further information on the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant, the agenda for change and the work of the Alliance please contact:

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