

Post-lockdown support matters: for care leavers and their mental wellbeing

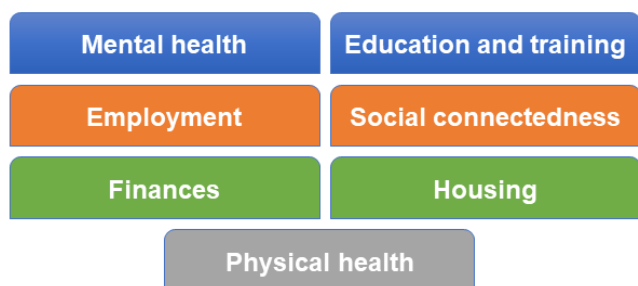
Learning from the experience of care leavers during the pandemic, and taking their views forward to improve services for care leavers.

Leaving home is a challenge for everyone, but young people leaving care often do so without the help of a family, or the support networks most of us take for granted.

Nationally, over 10,000 young people each year transition from 'being in care' to being a 'care leaver'. This can often be a time of high anxiety, with many young people leaving the care system feeling unprepared and financially insecure. As a result, care leavers are particularly vulnerable to the effects of coronavirus (COVID-19) and lockdowns.

To understand the impact of COVID-19 on care leavers' daily experiences and wellbeing, NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) commissioned a research study. The study aimed to draw on these lived experiences to identify future support needs.

The study identified seven main areas that care leavers wanted support:



They wanted support in accessing mental health services, managing their finances, support in gaining right benefits, getting food, help getting a job, and somewhere safe to live.

The care leavers also produced key messages for service providers regarding who should provide the support and how it can be provided (right), and also for other care experienced young people.

Messages to other care leavers included:

- Seek help if you need it.
- Let people know how you feel.
- Stay positive, this has been a difficult time and things will get better, so ask for help.



70%
care leavers said their mental health had deteriorated

'Being part of the research project, I have been able to share my personal experience during the pandemic and in particular how this can impact on asylum young people. I enjoyed presenting to other local authorities to help them think about how to support care leavers.'

- Luwam, care experienced young person

'It was just such an interesting piece of work that I thought. I mean a lot of research ends up on shelves and doesn't go anywhere, but actually it was fundamentally important. The voice of young people was really powerful and that's the bit that gets me all the time.'

- Mark Riddell, Leaving Care National Advisor, Department for Education and co- chair of the workshops



The findings were presented at a workshop attended by stakeholders who work with care leavers within local authorities, universities, voluntary sector organisations, NHS England and Department for Education.

At the workshop, stakeholders made a total of 33 pledges – practical ways in which they would use the research findings to help support care leavers and those working with care leavers.

More support for parent/pregnant care leavers

Set up walking groups

Explore how mental health teams can better support care leavers

Have a face-to-face Christmas lunch

Share findings with central government

Run a buddy initiative

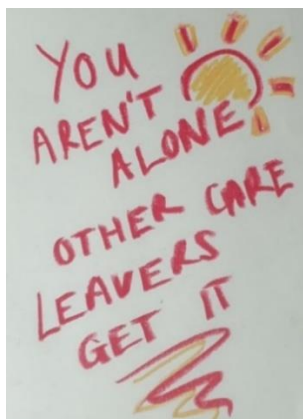
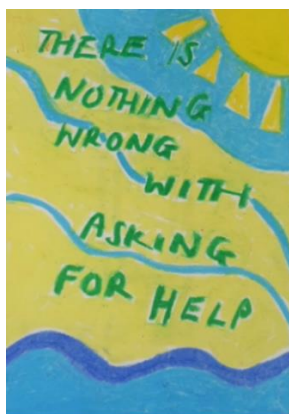
Develop the education training and employment workbook

Explore options for Wi-Fi in shared accommodation

Measuring the impact

Two years after those pledges were made, the ARC KSS team followed-up with the stakeholders to obtain an update on their pledges as well as identify the barriers to implementing their pledges. Some examples include:

- › Brighton and Hove City Council Leaving Care Team successfully hosted a face-to-face Christmas lunch for care leavers.
- › Kent County Council were in the final stages developing an education, training and employment workbook and had funded and installed wi-fi into shared accommodation.
- › The National Care Leaver Advisor for Care Leavers took the findings from the original project back to Department for Education and NHS England Team took findings and key messages to Directors of Children's Social Care across the South East.
- › Setting up opportunities for peer support as Facebook groups, virtual drop-ins and face to face events for care leavers.
- › Sharing the research with local authorities and government bodies to further co-produce key messages with care leavers from National Care Leavers Benchmarking Forum and sharing them with those working with care experienced young people across 88 local authorities to encourage changes to be made.
- › Implementing regulations to support care leavers with issues such as housing, accessing services digitally and reducing stigma.



Further information

- › Visit [Starting Well: Children's Mental Health](#)
- › Contact Becca Randell, becca.randell@nhs.net

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