Post Lockdown Support Matters:
For Care Leavers and their mental well-being

Impact Report

AUGUST 2023

Becca Randell - Implementation Lead, KSS AHSN (becca.randell@nhs.net)

Claire Vella - Research Fellow, ARC KSS (c.vella@sussex.ac.uk)

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

Click here for case study

Background

- Nationally, over 10,000 young people each year transition from 'being in care' to being a 'care leaver'.

- The Beyond Lockdown research project sought to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on care leavers' well-being and support needs.

- In response to the research project, stakeholders who work with care leavers (such as within local authorities, universities or the Department of Education) 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.*

- Two years after those pledges were made, a team from the Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex followed up with stakeholders to receive an update on their pledges, and to identify potential barriers to implementing them.

- A summary of the outcomes and impact of the pledges are outlined in this document. For more information, see the case study (left) or read the full impact report here.

Stakeholder Pledges

Pledges from across Kent, Surrey & Sussex were grouped into 4 topics:

1 Share Beyond Lockdown research findings and key messages

2 Establish social groups/activities and peer support

3 Improve digital access

4 Service development and service-user involvement

Kent & Medway

Surrey

Brighton & Hove

East Sussex

West Sussex

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

Develop the education training and employment workbook

Share findings with central government

Run a buddy initiative

Explore options for Wi-Fi in shared accommodation

1 **Share Beyond Lockdown research findings and key messages**

Pledges were made by stakeholders from the KSS AHSN, Department of Education, and researchers from the Beyond Lockdown study

Share key messages locally & nationally

Pledge: Disseminate research findings, resources & pledges, and organise another community of practice

Pledge: Reach care leavers with research findings, and build on study contacts to facilitate more work with marginalised care leavers

Outcomes

- Co-produced resources with care leavers - sharing key messages in the form of videos, audio clips and artwork.

- Widespread local and national dissemination across two communities of practice, national conferences, 88 local authorities through National Benchmarking Forum, and a range of care leaver services.

- Research findings fed into the National Care Review, and research involved care leavers invited to represent Kent, Surrey & Sussex on the Young People's National Benchmarking Forum.

"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"

Leaving Care National Advisor, Department for Education

"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"

Care experienced young person
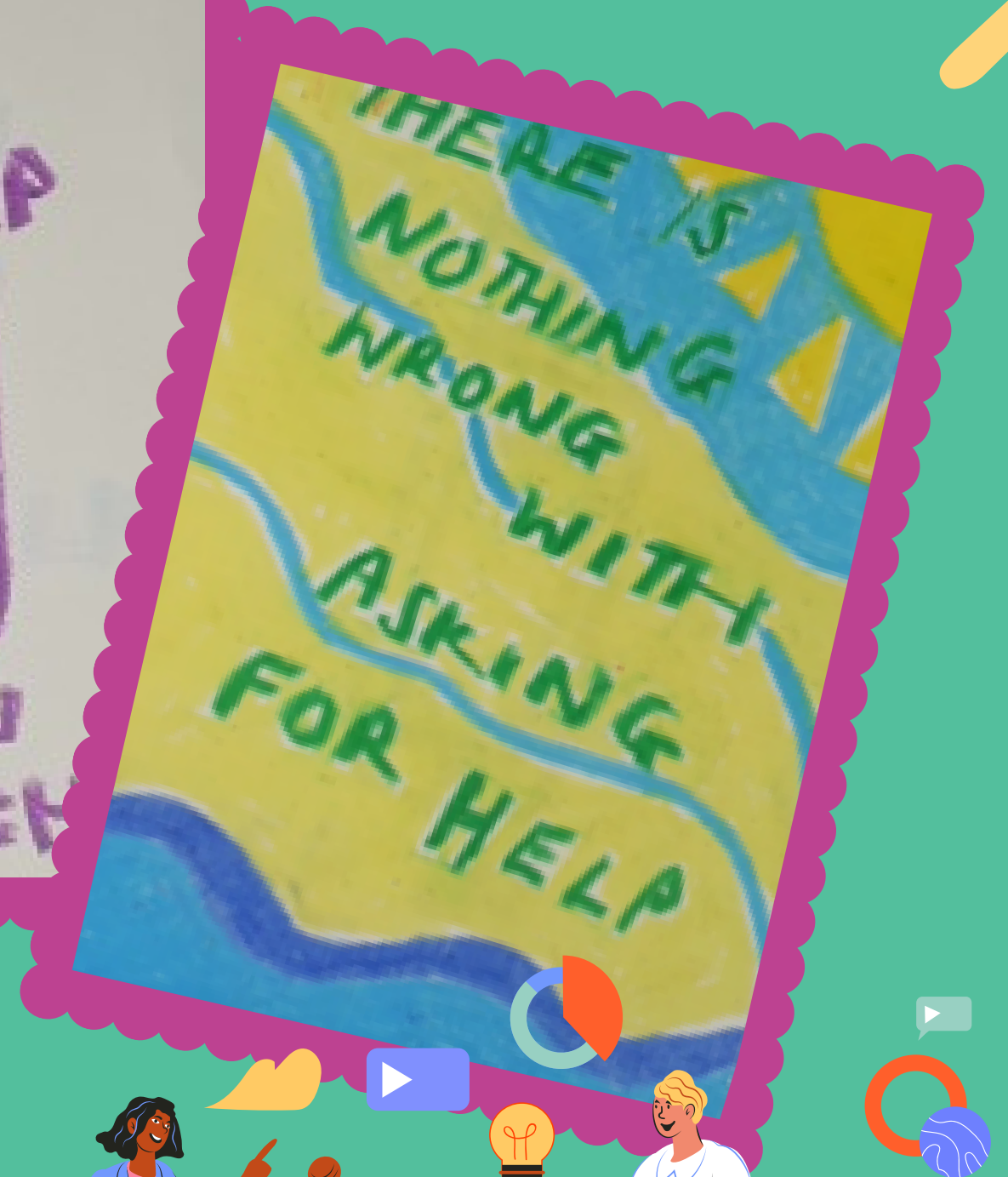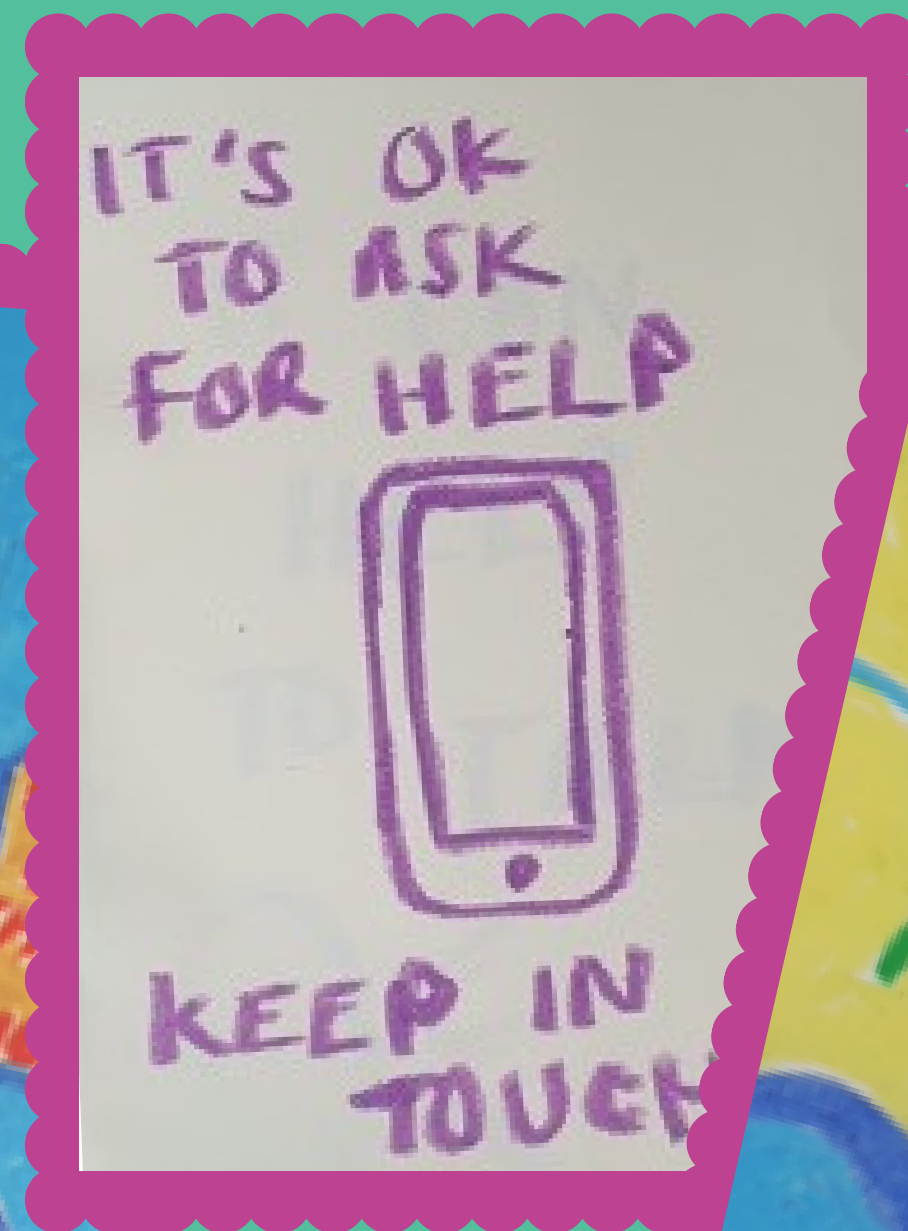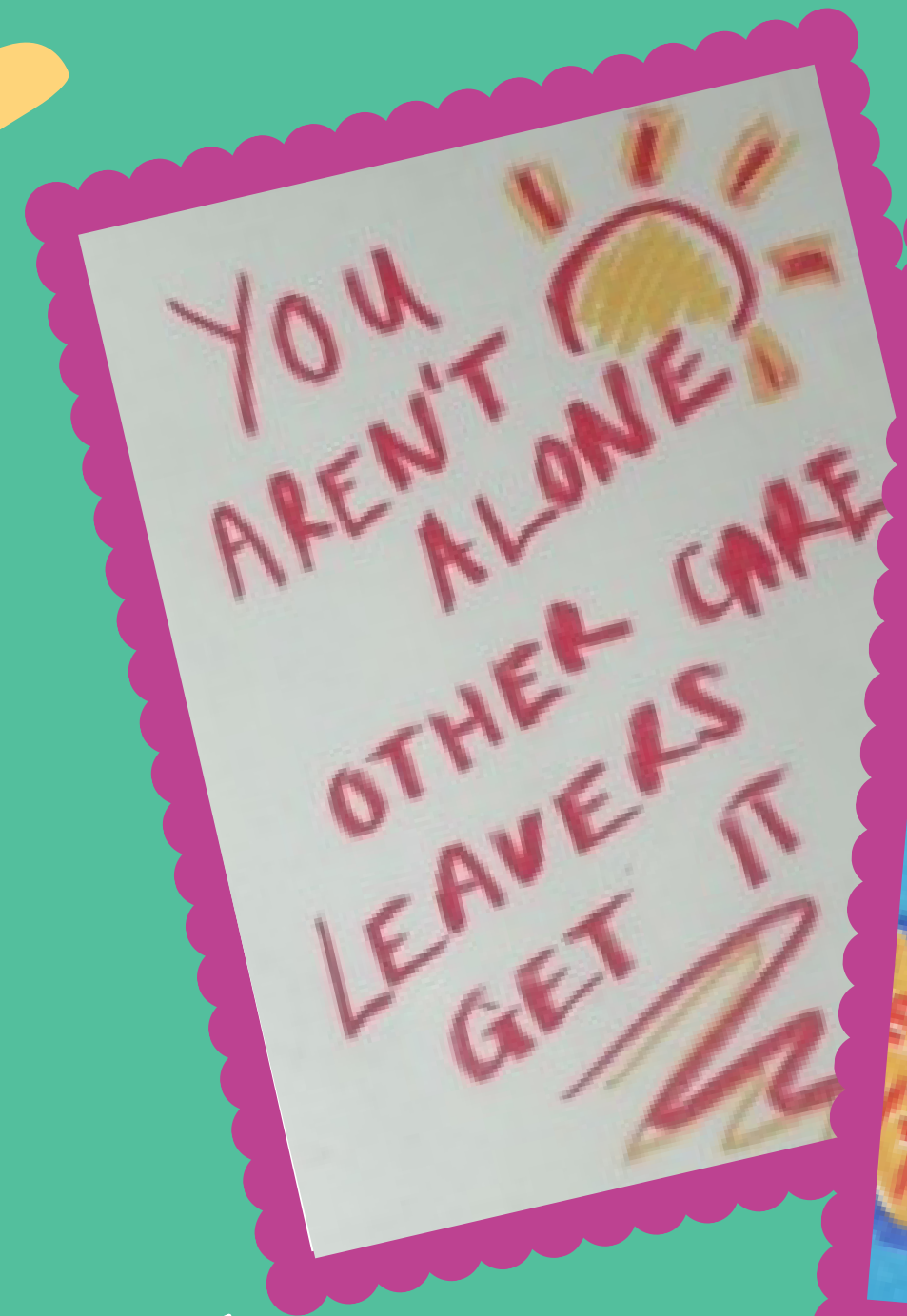
Examples of artwork co-produced with care leavers

2 Establish social groups/activities and peer support

Pledge: Provide drop-in sessions throughout and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic

Pledge: Set up a Facebook peer-to-peer contact and support group for care leavers

Pledge: Set up/ continue to offer Christmas events, support and/or gifts

Pledge: Start a coffee morning/parent and baby group for young parent care leavers

Pledge: Organise walking groups for care leavers

Pledge: Implement a peer champion project/buddy initiative for peer mentoring

Outcomes

- In-person drop-in sessions considered the most successful and useful (overall).

- ...but, online groups helped socially anxious young people to build confidence and social skills.

- Services successfully offered support around the Christmas period, with lunches, themed virtual events, or delivering three-course meals or gifts.

- Most pledges led to reflections and plans for future work - either expanding to more locations, or ideas to improve groups with a new format or focus.

"when we did train the first group [it] was brilliant...we did a mini graduation ...and they all got a certificate. The UASC [unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people] love it...for some, 'I've got a qualification' that's something, they've got something really important"

Stakeholder, Leaving Care Service

"the venue that we use for the drop-in works really well...we'd have some coffee with them, something to eat, but they could also go and see the job coach... that works for that group but it wouldn't work for a mother and baby group because its too public...[the group] it's on the back burner though, it's not gone away"

Stakeholder, Leaving Care Service

3   Improve digital access

This pledge was made by a stakeholder from a local authority Leaving Care Service

Pledge: Address challenges for care leavers to access the internet in shared accommodation

Outcomes

- Agreed for internet access to be available in all shared accommodation provided by the local authority for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people under the Leaving Care service.

- Work to provide internet access in the estimated 500 properties has started.

"For the UASC [unaccompanied asylum-seeking] people, living in those houses that are basically a rented house, they didn't necessarily have internet access...so our director has agreed for internet access to be hard wired into those properties"

4   Service development and service-user involvement

Pledge: Share local practice between Leaving Care teams

Pledge: Involve care leavers in the design and delivery of service-wide training and projects on key topics, such as higher education, accommodation, the Local Offer, and pathway plans.

Outcomes

- Care leaver advisory groups have been established

- Care leaver's have been consulted and involved in shaping and delivering a range of projects, workshops and training events for professionals and service-wide teams.

- Leaving Care teams from neighbouring local authorities met to share resources and to discuss how their services run and how service innovations have been implemented. This led to a proposal for changes to one of the services.
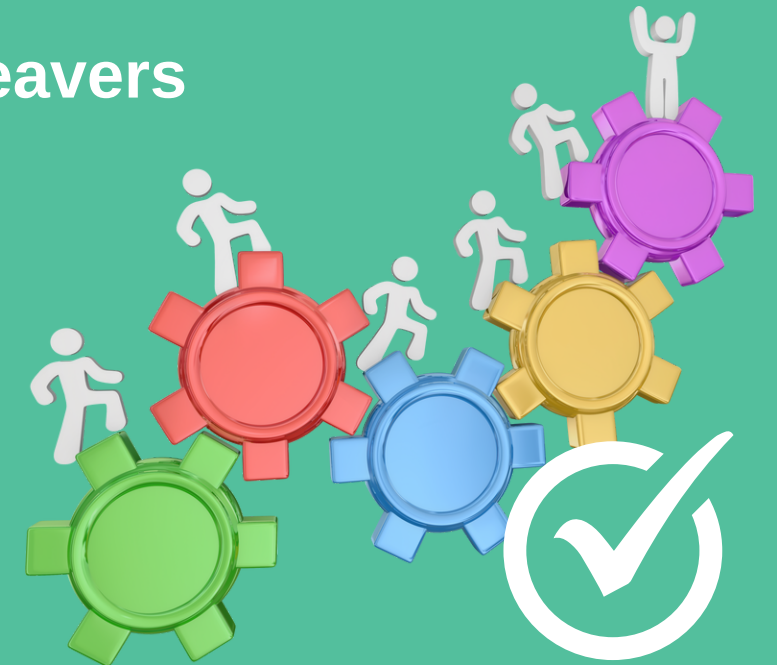
Learning for the future...

1. **Pledges** ...were a useful mechanism to call stakeholders to action, and to measure the impact and implementation of such action

2. **Care leaver voices** ...have the power to reinforce and drive local and national change.

3. **Relationships** ...(such as between personal advisors and care leavers) can be vital to support service innovation and engagement with new opportunities.

4. **Service flexibility** ...and support were needed to help care leavers share feedback and be part of the team

5. **Sharing** ...and collaborating with neighbouring authorities offered an insightful opportunitiy for service development.

6. **Attempts** ...to implement change (*even when not successful*) provided valuable and useful opportunities to learn from.

Learning for the future...
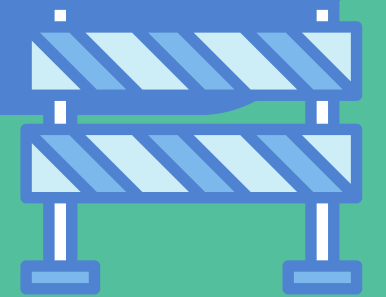
1. Funding ...and more resources were (and are!) needed to implement and maintain service changes.

2. Venue ...and choice of platform greatly impacted the success of events and groups.

3. COVID-19 lockdown ...made it hard for services to pioneer and maintain new opportunities. For example, services had to prioritise certain areas of support, and the changing social distancing restrictions limited what opportunities could be offered.

4. Remote communication ...(during the COVID-19 pandemic) hindered the ability to build relationships with organisations and young people (*particularly as some young people did not have the understanding or ability to access the internet*).

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Further information:

- full impact report can be found <u>here</u>

- resources from the Beyond Lockdown research project can be found <u>here</u>

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