

Exploring whether trauma-informed Occupational Therapy interventions could assist care leavers in meeting their personal outcomes, by improving functional skills and emotional-regulation

Learning from the experience of care leavers who received a UK-first evaluated Occupational Therapy support offer during a six-month period in 2023, and taking their views forward to improve services for care leavers.

Facing transitions into adulthood are 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.

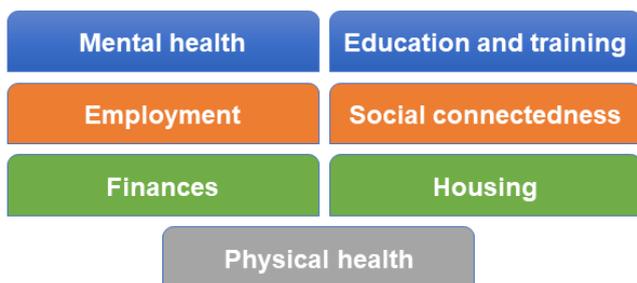
Nationally, over 10,000 young people each year transition from 'being in care' to being a 'care leaver'. This can often be a time of high anxiety, with many young people leaving the care system feeling unprepared and financially insecure.

Kent County Council supported 10 consenting care-experienced young people with OT support, supported by the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) and Canterbury Christchurch University, provided OT apprentices to support the study, supervised by a senior OT. The study aimed to explore how the profession were able to support the functional and emotional development of young people.

The study used the Young Persons Outcome Star[®] to evidence an overall 6% increase in self-assessment scores (greater independence), with the greatest *domain* increases seen within 'How I feel' and 'Daily Living' – the two areas the project was designed to support. Outcomes met included:

- Unpacked belongings after six weeks in new property
- Travelled to day opportunity unaided for first time
- Greater ability to self-regulate emotions (3)
- Requests for diagnostic reassessment (3)

Young People choose their own areas where they wanted support, and these were the main areas:



100%
of care leavers said they better understood themselves, as a result of the OT support

Some young people's feedback after the OT support (6 to 10 weeks in duration):

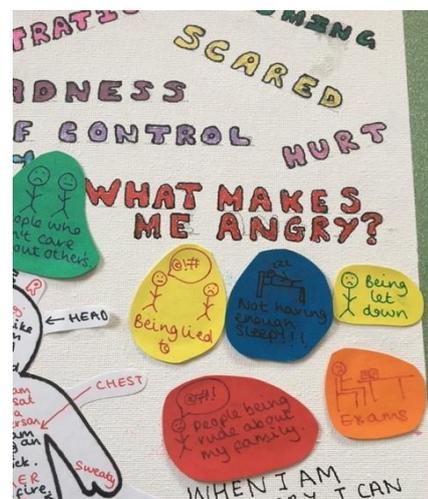
The OT helped in ways I didn't expect, you didn't realise how you were being helped until the end; now I know myself much better and more in control.

I genuinely found her support helpful, and we worked a lot on my self-worth which was an area I needed help within.

It was the most positive support I have had for a while, professionals normally let me down and don't offer anything.

That first call was one of the most powerful moments with a helping professional ever

An example of a tool used with a young person is shown below – an Anger Board (considering Interoception):



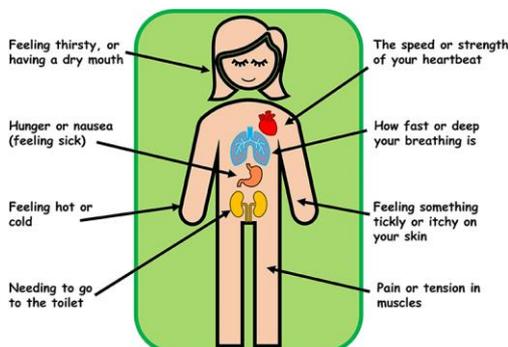
Some further results from the Pilot:

- ★ 50% of participants said that the support did not go on long enough
- ★ 40% of participants had needs that justified a sensory assessment, and the young people said they found the assessment transformative
- ★ 60% of participants said they would be happy to support care leavers to understand what a future OT offer could provide, because they didn't fully understand the potential at first
- ★ 60% of participants specifically mentioned that the offer helped them to trust professionals more
- ★ 70% of participants specifically stated that the OT helped them to 'open up' – one participant said it is hard as a male to discuss your mental health, but he quickly opened up to the OT

Recommendations from the study

The findings from this pilot service evaluation highlight the potential benefit of OT support for care experienced young people; an offer only provided minimally in one area of the UK presently (Essex). We made the following recommendations:

- ❖ **The wider consideration of OT within a multidisciplinary offer to care experienced young people.**
- ❖ **Consideration of up-scaling this pilot into a fuller research study. This study used OT students but a full study would include qualified OT.**
- ❖ **A larger project would explore how an OT can encourage a young person to utilise other care support as an enabler rather than themselves; the OT being an assessor, planner, monitor and reviewer; and consider where this support is best provided, for instance not at 18+ but 16+; and to engage asylum-seeking young care leavers to participate.**
- ❖ **A primary area of this upscaling as aforementioned could centre around a promising element within this initial research – exploring through OT support to care leavers, whether support to the neurodevelopmental/sensory bases including interoception could improve a person's ability to emotionally self-regulate.**
- ❖ **The results will be disseminated to the Dep of Education, ICB and National Leaving Care Benchmark Forum who support 88 Local and Unitary Authorities**



Further information

- › Visit [Starting Well: Children's Mental Health](#)
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