



SOMEWHERE TO CALL HOME

REPORT ON
HOMELESSNESS &
CARE EXPERIENCE

Megan Sutherland
August 2019



CONTENTS

Executive summary	03
Methodology	05
Discussion	07



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. PURPOSE

This report is built by the voices of Care Experienced people to inform the Scottish Government's Care Leaver Pathway, the Away Home Scotland Coalition's workgroup and the wider public of the issues Care Experienced people face leaving care and having a home, and makes strong recommendations to address them. Many of the Care Experienced people who contributed have been or are currently homeless, while all feel passionate that more can and must be done for both the adults who are still suffering from a poor care journey, and the children still in care who can and should avoid homelessness with hard work, investment and aspirational change from their Corporate Parents.

B. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Care Experienced young people should always be given a say and provided with options in relation to their care and transition leaving care. For this to be realised there needs to be more supported accommodation placements and suitable independent accommodation available, with independent advocacy provision available to support all young people who are not getting their right to a say.
2. Care Experienced young people must be taught life skills no matter what placement they experience and should not be living independently until they are competent and confident to do so.
3. Care Experienced people call for co-designed, steady transitions leaving care which overlap placements and involve appropriately phased independence responsibilities and support which tapers off at the pace of the young person.
4. Homelessness can be avoided in many cases by providing Care Experienced people with the option relied upon by many others who benefit from the ongoing support of parents – somewhere to return to. The Right to Return to Care is a policy proposal which must be implemented at a national level.
5. There must be a national approach to supporting young people to leave care successfully, in order to ensure consistency of standards, available resources, effective collaborative working and sharing of best practice across the country.
6. Professionals, carers, corporate parents and the public need to understand Care Experience better and improve communication with Care Experienced people, to empower them to understand and realise their rights and to access without stigma or challenge the additional support they may need to be healthy and achieve their goals.



7. Care Experienced people's safety, security and wellbeing should not be determined by money. This means their personal finances and benefits must be sufficient to comfortably support their accommodation, while decisions about their care, placement or accommodation should not be determined by Local Authority or care-provider funding decisions.
8. The Housing System must prioritise children's rights and wellbeing, while recognising Care Experience and non-traditional family models without stigma to reduce the impact of homelessness on the often inter-generational cycle of care in families.
9. Care Experienced people should be placed in the best accommodation their corporate parents have available and should be supported to make their house a home with a sense of belonging.
10. The system needs to be truly person-centred, such that decisions are made in consideration of a person's needs and wishes, not their date of birth. The impact of care and ACEs should be recognised as lifelong and support should be available to Care Experienced adults who did not benefit from the progress being made for the community when they left care.
11. Recognising that mental health difficulties are a significant driver of homeless and further that unsuitable accommodation can compound and amplify existing issues, Care Experienced people should be automatically entitled to mental health support during and after transitions.
12. Corporate Parents and carers should encourage, value and protect relationships with young people which feel reliable, consistent, loving and real. These personal, meaningful relationships are crucial to ensure that Care Experienced people, like anyone leaving home, continue to thrive.



METHODOLOGY

The key recommendations were produced through analysis of the following primary and secondary sources.

A. WORKSHOP

A workshop session was held in partnership between the Scottish Government and Who Cares? Scotland on the evening of the 20th August 2019. It was attended by fifteen people with Care Experience and began with a discussion-based activity in two groups looking at what the best example of leaving care would look like and discussing the main reasons Care Experienced people might become homeless, or unable to live in secure, safe and affordable accommodation. To capture the information, each group had a scribe to take notes and record direct quotes during the conversation.

The second part of the evening was an interactive activity in smaller groups discussing case studies, during which participants were tasked with recording their thoughts on the scenarios presented and identifying what support or plan they would want for the Care Experienced person in the scenario. All scenarios were based on real situations the facilitator knew to have happened in Scotland recently.

The final part of the session brought the group back together to discuss the key themes that emerged in relation to the scenarios and main messages they would want to communicate to the Scottish Government about Care Experience, leaving care and homelessness.

The facilitators of the session made members aware at the start of the activities that they were free to share their views, opinions and/or experiences but could step back and leave the session at any point if they needed to. An identified member of staff was available for support at any point during the session and for the next 48 hours by mobile phone, this number being shared with all participants.

The facilitators also explained at the start of the session how the provided information would be shared, while confirming that data would be anonymised prior to publication, such that no individuals would be identifiable.

All notes taken by the designated scribes, post-it notes used by members in the scenario activity and notes written by members were photographed, typed up and anonymised for the purposes of compiling this report.

B. ONLINE CONSULTATION

A survey was open during August 2019 on behalf of the Scottish Government to gather views of Care Experienced people's views on leaving care and homelessness. It was widely shared on social media and gathered 30 responses from those with lived experience, of which 67% had been homeless after leaving care, 23% had not and 10% were still in care.



C. THE COLLECTIVE ON HOME AND BELONGING

The Collective are a group of Care Experienced young people and adults forming Who Cares? Scotland's national representative body. Evidence used in this report was notes taken from a discussion March 2019 in the Collective on housing and the difference between a house and a home for Care Experienced people in the process of creating the 2019 'We Don't Have to Wait' report accessible here.

<https://www.whocaresscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/We-Dont-Have-To-Wait-Report-compressed.pdf>

D. YOUNG RADICALS ON HOMELESSNESS

A secondary report produced from a session held in October 2017 on homelessness attended by twelve care experienced members of the Who Cares? Scotland group the Young Radicals set up to influence Corporate Parents.

<https://www.corporateparenting.org.uk/learning-hub/guidance-materials/young-radicals-homelessness-report/>

E. LIFE CHANGES TRUST ADVISORY GROUP ON HOMELESSNESS

A secondary report written by three Care Experienced members of the Life Changes Trust Advisory Group for the Local Government and Communities Committee in June 2017.

<https://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/Response%20to%20oCall%20for%20Evidence%20on%20Homelessness%20FINAL.pdf>

F. WHO CARES? SCOTLAND – CONTINUING CARE

A secondary report written by Who Cares? Scotland November 2017 as a response to the consultation of the draft of the Continuing Care (Scotland) Amendment Order 2018.

<https://www.whocaresscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Response-to-the-Continuing-Care-Amendment-Order-November-17.pdf>

G. WHO CARES? SCOTLAND – HAVING AND KEEPING A HOME

A secondary report written by Who Cares? Scotland as a submission to the Equal Opportunities Committee in 2014.

<https://www.whocaresscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/having-and-keeping-a-home-inquiry-response.pdf>



DISCUSSION

1. GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE A SAY

Summary of Findings:

Children and young people in care have a right to a say in decisions made about their care, yet often describe situations where they are given little or no choice and few options. Young people leaving care need to be able to access advocacy independent from the system during this time to ensure their rights are held and that they are able to access the accommodation and support which is best for them.

“We need independent advocacy delivered nationally which is completely separate from care deliverers and holds the sector to account on behalf of Care Experienced people.”

“I was respected because an advocacy worker was supporting me”

Choosing to move into supported accommodation after care was favoured by many, but participants said it often wasn't a choice they could make due to a shortage of those types of placements.

“Supported accommodation is great but there's only one in East Ren”

There needs to be a greater number and diversity of accommodation options available to meet different needs, in order to avoid Care Leavers living entirely independently in adult accommodation with no support.

“Have say, six options from supported accommodation, their own flat etc., so the young person feels empowered to live the life that will be beneficial to them, and hopefully they will be able to maintain the tenancy”

2. TEACHING LIFE SKILLS

Summary of Findings:

Many Care Leavers described feeling that they didn't have the necessary skills to live independently once they left care, yet were expected to fend for themselves. They called for carers to make sure they are taught and shown the life skills that someone preparing to leave home needs. A representative though non-exhaustive list would include cooking, cleaning and laundry, budgeting and paying bills, completing simple DIY tasks; “managing their door” and traveling independently.

Life skills young Care Experienced people are equipped with varies widely across placements. For instance, with those in kinship or foster care were considered to be far more likely to have had regular opportunities to observe or help with cooking than young people in residential or secure units whose institutional settings are far from replicating normal home life. Indeed, such placements often, in service of managing risk, effectively remove the



opportunities that come with growing up being able to watch and help parents perform household tasks.

“When I was at home I used to do everything for my mum but when I went into care they ‘deskilled’ me. I couldn’t do anything when I left.”

This is an additional and unnecessary barrier which young people face when leaving care and attempting to live alone successfully, especially as the resources to address this often already exist within the care system.

“we had a cook and a cleaner but nobody taught me how to cook or clean.”

Carers, parents, social workers and support workers need to better ensure that young people leaving care have learnt how to look after themselves and run their house, while those still in care are getting the opportunity to do so.

“It’s just the kind of things other people, generally speaking, are taught by their parents sort of as they go along, throughout their childhood. Whereas for us you can’t just assume that it’s going to be picked up, it has to be part of the criteria for anyone taking care of a young person.”

Participants also highlighted that they should have the chance to learn naturally through their upbringing like non-care experienced peers do, rather than as an exercise to determine independence that feels purposeful to tick a box regarding life skills.

“If the kitchen is always locked, and the knives are kept in a locked tool box for health and safety – how are you ever supposed to learn how to cook something healthy?”

3. CO-DESIGNED, STEADY TRANSITIONS

Summary of findings:

Care Experienced people have reported experiencing as many as 50 placement moves across their care journeys. Moves can be unexpected and the change in their environment, location and level of support available may be sudden and disruptive to education, work, commitments and friendships. Some people described their experience of being taken off their supervision order in a similar manner, these decisions seeming to be made without adequate planning or preparation. Such circumstances appear to continue despite the Housing Options for Care Leavers protocol being in place and recommending planning is undertaken between 6 months to a year before a young person leaves care.

For a transition leaving Care to be successful, Care Experienced people ask that these changes are managed steadily and over a time period led by the young person themselves. Transition planning should begin before the end of a young person's care placement, while guidance and support should continue to be provided to ensure care leavers are confident and continue to thrive in their new homes. For instance, young people should not move into a



new flat until it is properly furnished, while subsequently a move might be managed gradually, with the young person being supported to spend short periods away from their current placement, with carers being available to call for help and support.

“it should be a phased transition, we don't need cliff edges or reunions”

“remove formalised transition from care”

It was clear in all discussions that Care Experienced people felt there should be no need for someone leaving Care to present as homeless, and that the system had to change to work better for the young person instead of forcing the young person to comply with its clinical processes and paperwork, often alone despite leaving institutions with many staff who could help them navigate the process.

“Polmont [Young Offenders Institution] has lots of good support inside but none of it continues to support you outside. Abrupt stop and transition. Make it smooth and gradual for as long as needed, this will help people be able to move on and not reoffend.”

“she should have her benefits organised in advance and support during time in Young Offenders to access housing – it's got to be done before she leaves”

- in response to a scenario where a young Care Experienced person leaves Polmont YOI and presents as homeless.

4. THE RIGHT TO RETURN TO CARE

Summary of findings:

Like all young people living on their own, independent living can be hard and sometimes circumstances make it feel impossible. Most people at this point return to mum and dad's house, rather than a council office to make a housing application. Care Experienced people emphasise that the system should understand their need to be able to make mistakes. Instead, many currently find restrictions are put on their support and right to accommodation after life has not gone according to plan.

“let them make mistakes, everyone does. Let them learn from their mistakes and make sure they have the skills to be independent”

For example, accommodation funding for many Care Experienced students is dependent on progress in university. After failing a year or dropping out, as many students do every term, some Care Experienced students have consequently become homeless.

Young women in care have been forced to choose between staying in care or having an abortion as their placements won't support young people and babies.



Many young people are desperate to leave care at 16 on account of poor experiences, yet go on to discover that independent living and adult services are not any easier to cope with. Many young people choose to or are forced to return home, often around the age of 16, and have relationships with family which break down.

Care Experienced people suffering from mental illness have asked for help only to leave hospital well and find their care placement has been closed, with no alternative accommodation available. Care Leavers have volunteered abroad to return home and find there is no accommodation or support offered to them despite their right to aftercare, as they are considered by the system to have made themselves 'intentionally homeless' by taking a life changing opportunity.

"that's horrible but normal practice. It happens all the time... completely lacks human understanding, judgement and empathy"

"imagine having to move into homeless accommodation when you're pregnant, We need stability for young mums, not lots of changes"

- responses to a scenario where a pregnant girl in a residential home was told she couldn't stay there and have her baby and presented as homeless.

Sometimes things go wrong. As Corporate Parents, when preventative measures are not enough, presenting as homeless cannot be the only option for these young people experiencing vulnerability and stress. There must be other interventions available to the young person, like returning to their care placement or a supported care option. Like other young people, leaving home and becoming independent should not be a linear, exit-only journey for Care Experienced young people.

"there just needs to be an appreciation that these are the people that need those emergency services, need the back-up plans, it needs to be in place and it can't just be done on a when they need it scenario, cause when they need it – it's too late."

Returning to care should not only be considered during crisis point, being able to return to a carers for a short break to be looked after, fed well, be in company and relax from the stresses when things are difficult is a preventative measure that could support many young people to keep their tenancies and recover from challenges they are facing with independent living. This idea sounds ambitious, yet it is what most parents expect of their adult children at university without much scrutiny or reluctance. When people get older, it is the role of a parent to be there to return to when things are hard, to give their child a hug and help set them be back on their feet to try again. Care Experienced people need the same love and support to be given by their Corporate Parents and carers.



"It all comes back to not having that safety net, not having that fall back, there's no back-up plan."

5. A CONSISTENT, NATIONAL APPROACH

Summary of findings:

The 'postcode lottery' of services and strategies across Scotland has been a frustration of Care Experienced people and professionals for years. In improving the outcomes for this small subset of the population, a national approach should be used to implement change and a national, independent body be tasked with monitoring standards to ensure all areas are making progress, fulfilling their duties and have the resources to care for those under their Corporate Parent responsibility as well as many professionals would like to, but are limited by resource.

"[we] need to have a monitoring system nationally, with accountability and a national framework that can be personalised."

"We need an independent body to hold people to account."

Even amongst Care Leavers in the same Local Authorities there is still frustration at the inconsistent policies and support. The type of care young people had seems to dictate the support and through care after care provision that will be considered for them, despite this not being a condition of the legislation. Care Experienced people who were in kinship care or formally looked after at home are most likely to be refused or offered limited support, despite being recognised as Care Leavers in need of support by the law.

"I was in Care for eleven years, in both Looked After at Home and Kinship care placements. My household was a very toxic and neglectful environment, so moving into my own flat was very important for me. Throughout and after the moving process, was unfortunately denied a lot of support that I considered to be crucial. I was not entitled to a grant for household goods, I had to move all of my belongings myself, and I had to set up the gas and electricity by myself too. I was denied this support because I was not in 'accommodative care'. I felt ashamed. I felt like my Care Experience was not valid enough."

A national approach should encourage collaborative working between Local Authorities, sharing best practice and innovative projects that are successful, and break down the bureaucratic barrier many Care Experienced people are limited by when moving out of their Local Authority's jurisdiction, a common issue for Care Experienced people who move out their home Local Authority to pursue further or higher education.

"East Ayrshire Council only allow residents priority once for Care Experienced People who were looked after by another. If you



were looked after by East Ayrshire then as a resident Care Experienced Person you are given unlimited priority. If you live in North Ayrshire and studying they will cover rent. However they will only pay rent if living in within NA, not if you're a resident in another Authority. It's a postcode lottery, Local Authorities need to be instructed of the same and not given the freedom to do what they like."

6. UNDERSTANDING CARE EXPERIENCE

Summary of findings:

Most participants asked for Corporate Parents and carers to be trained better in Care Experienced people's rights, support they are entitled to and extra support available to them like bursaries, training courses or mentors. They also discussed how the current training is aimed at professionals in higher positions rather than those who actually come into contact with people with Care Experience face to face or by phone, and believe this current training approach is not working.

"I think by training on the ground workers that come into contact with young Care Leavers on a daily basis on what young people are entitled to Iwe could make sure every Care Leaver knows they are entitled to support and able to claim it!. It's great having all the extra support but if it's not filtered down properly then it can be missed."

Care Experienced people unanimously called for Corporate Parents and carers to communicate better with them to teach them about their rights and entitlements to support, through different means, such as regular conversations, social media, phone calls, and distributing paper materials and packs with information and all the organisations they can get help from to everyone in care. Only one respondent to the survey who had left Care after 2014 were aware of the support and options the 2014 Children and Young People Act entitled them to.

"Every young person is different and learns differently so there needs to be different options for information delivery."

Care Experienced people say there is a need for a public education campaign as Care Experienced people who become homeless feel two different types of stigma combined. Many people talked about the discrimination they had experienced from landlords and said the public needed to understand Care Experience better in order to break down the stereotypes people hold.

"Care Experience is seen as our fault and the reason we are homeless."

"[there are barriers to accommodation for Care Experienced people] with landlords wanting you to have a guarantor, ... asking questions why you receive funding and being sceptical of it."



7. FUNDING A HOME

Summary of findings:

Care Experienced people describe leaving care and struggling to afford their rent, bills and living costs. This added stress to their situation is harmful to people's mental health and causes many to lose their tenancy and become homeless. Many people were also frustrated that the cost of homeless accommodation could make work, education or employment unfeasible financially. Young care leavers need to have sufficient finances to pay and buy everything they need to in order to be able to focus their energy on achieving their aspirations instead.

"The financial aspect is also a barrier, if like me, you had a full time job you don't get any support to pay rent and bills. On top of not having my leaving care grant, I struggled with money for a long time and ended up in debt as a result. We need financial help with rent, utilities etc. whilst we get on our feet, regardless of whether we are working or not."

Leaving care into accommodation that had no furniture or even a bed was a common experience, and should never be allowed to happen.

"your first home, you get no furniture. I slept on the floor for a couple of months until I could afford to buy a mattress."

Many Care Experienced people feel that decisions about their placements and accommodation are restricted by resources and influenced by funding within the Local Authority. In particular, many felt they had been pushed to leave care at 16.

"My local authority and the children's reporter decided - you're 16 now, care placements ending, you are going back home even if I didn't want to."

The state have parental responsibility for these young people, with just one of their 24 Corporate Parents being the Scottish Government. The policy intention of the 2014 Children and Young People (Scotland) Act was to encourage the workforce to do all they can to ensure children in care get the support and accommodation they need to be healthy and happy. Money should never be a reason this doesn't happen.

"I was taken off my supervision order just before my 16th birthday. Very bad decision and I suspect, a financial one."

8. JOINED UP, RIGHTS BASED SERVICES

Summary of findings:



The housing and care systems must join up better to ensure children's rights are upheld and the welfare systems are not working against each other and negatively impacting their wellbeing. Young people should not have to navigate bureaucracy to have their basic needs met.

"the system knows when a child is leaving care, make the system work for the child"

Professionals in both housing and social work need to be able to support Care Experienced people as Corporate Parents. Collaboration between teams needs to be efficient and automatic so that young people are not being sent from office to office in order to secure accommodation that they are entitled to.

"Tailored support with a single point of contact - relationship-based practice. Care Experienced people should not be being referred to various departments of a local authority to deal with separate issues - the local authority is responsible for their Care Experience and that should encompass everything including housing, social work, etc."

Children in care should have the same expectation other families with children would have that if there were issues with accommodation, they would be supported to stay as a family unit and be rehoused together. Often children with social work involvement would be removed if the family became homeless, these placement moves are traumatising and not necessary with good social work and housing partnership working.

"They should be considered his children and given the same rights and legal support as parents in this situation"

"they should have been considered a family, you wouldn't split up a normal family like this."

- in response to a workshop scenario where a kinship carer became homeless and the children were placed in separate emergency foster placements.

9. BELONGING

Summary of findings:

As anyone can imagine, living in accommodation that is dirty, unfurnished, doesn't feel safe, in an unfamiliar area or far away from education, friends or employment affects emotional wellbeing and resilience, making it harder for young people to successfully live there. Care Experienced people describe poor accommodation as 'setting them up to fail'. There is no need for Care Experienced people with Corporate Parents in control of the nation's housing system to face isolation, poor mental health or barriers to employment, training or education due to unsuitable housing.

"stop making 16 year olds live in homeless units."



The difference most Care Experienced people identified between their needs whilst homeless and the needs of others was the impact of previous trauma and the retraumatisation of the circumstances. Sharing homeless facilities with adults in difficult circumstances who may have addiction issues or mental ill health is and must be recognised as completely inappropriate for Care Experienced people.

“I came from a drug dependent household and being occasionally on the street occasionally absolutely broke me as I had to witness the same actions I had growing up”

“end the use of B&Bs”

Many used the word 'exploited' when describing how they felt Local Authorities often offered them the worst houses, because they knew their situation and knew they had no other options or voice to say this wasn't suitable.

“they offer you the bottom of the barrel but you can't refuse and they know it because they know your situation”

In addition to choice and options in placement types, these options need to be the best quality Local Authorities have, as parents would want to provide for their own children.

“Assume from the start when a child is removed from family that the state takes that role/responsibility and all it entails unless the family can reassume it. So litmus test: would any of those features, steps or support be good enough for my child?”

Some Care Experienced people are happy to live in privately rented accommodation however securing deposits and guarantors cause barriers. Older Care Experienced people who hope to buy a home again face barriers due to their experience of Care as a child. More needs to be done by local and central governments to remove these obstacles preventing people with Care Experience from securing housing like most of Scotland's young population now do.

“If any Care Experienced person is homeless at any point they should receive first month's rent and deposit if housing are unable to provide suitable accommodation... The local authority should act as a guarantor for Care Experienced people if they go private... There should be a separate government funding within the help to buy scheme to encourage and help Care Experienced people own their own homes”

The difference between a house and a home was also discussed in depth, with Care Experienced people describing the difficulties they face after multiple placement moves feeling settled and making roots somewhere, and the impact this has on their sense of security, wellbeing, and ability to invest in relationships and activities in the area.



“[a house is] confined shelter that meets minimum requirements. In a house I have to restrict where my stuff is kept and don't get to decorate it... restrictions on visitors and fire-proofing like no candles, it's not a home. You're always unsettled somewhere like that”

“for a home, future thinking must be invested in it.. my house felt like a home once I decided I wanted to stay long-term and make it a nice home for my children”

They want help to make their accommodation their own, personalised, comfortable, and safe space they felt proud of.

“home isn't a place it's where you make a home... being proud of my home, self-love and pride are all connected”

This help needs to be both financially to be able to buy soft furnishings and small touches, and practically to help them carry furniture, paint walls and learn how to hang pictures, for example.

“never had furniture before, now I love the things I buy”

Housing is a human right, everyone should have shelter. But to be happy and reaching their potential, Care Experienced people need accommodation they feel they can call home. Home also meant choice for Care Experienced people who had often spent much of their childhood in care institutions - choice to have pets, have their belongings spread outside of their bedroom, invite visitors with no restrictions, light candles, choice to make it 'their own space'. Many mentioned Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which defines the first layer as physiological needs like the shelter of a house, but the second and third layers as safety and belonging, feelings Care Experienced people agreed were part of feeling at home.

“wellbeing improves when you have a place to call home”

10. CARE EXPERIENCE IS LIFELONG

Summary of findings:

The average age of leaving home in the UK is 25 however for Care Experienced people, despite their extra difficulties, it is only 17.¹ Young people over the age of 16 describe trying to utilise the support legislated for them in the 2014 Act and stay in their placements until they are 21 or ready to move on, but are accused of bed-blocking and pressured to move on to free space.

¹ CELCIS – “In Scotland, the average age for leaving care is between 16 and 18 years old, but the average age for leaving home is 25. We believe that too many young care leavers are expected to be able to cope, whether or not they're ready for the 'outside world', simply because they have reached an age where it is expected they will move on.”



“Older care experienced people shouldn't feel the pressure to leave as they get older, because a younger Care Experienced person is labelled as more in need.”

Professionals recognise that care should be person-centred however the services working to meet people's needs enforce hard cut-off points based on people's age, not their needs, wants or situation. The workshop group were in agreement that the system's actions were ageist.

“Imagine your parents kicking you out because of your birthday.”

The Scottish Government describe ACEs as 'stressful or traumatic experiences that can have a huge impact on children and young people throughout their lives'. Care Experienced people of all ages have experienced ACEs by the nature of being Care Experienced.

“Support should be there regardless of age due to complexities. These do not go away when someone turns 21 and has an impact on a person's whole life.”

The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry is investigating the abuse of children in care that took place as recently as 2014 and the support legislated for in the 2014 Children and Young People Act did not begin to be implemented until February 2015, excluding many Care Experienced adults the State let down whilst having parental responsibility. This strengthens the argument Care Experienced people are making that the impact of care and their experiences pre-care are lifelong and support for Care Experienced people should be available for life.

*“F***ing cut off that age thing, services should be lifelong. I was 27 when I managed to get my life together. The age limit is nonsense, it's about 25 years old the emotional part of your brain is fully developed.”²*

11. UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

Summary of findings:

People with Care Experience are far more likely to suffer from mental ill health than their non-Care Experienced peers, with a commonly used statistic in the sector reporting that around half of children in care having a diagnosable mental health issue. The stress, isolation, change and pressure of living independently without the support of parents relied on by most people their age understandably affects the mental health of many people leaving care, and many Care Experienced people described the horrible feelings of isolation and loneliness transitioning to living independently gave them and the adverse effects these experiences had on their mental health.

² Mental Health Daily – “although brain development is subject to significant individual variation, most experts suggest that the brain is fully developed by age 25. For some people, brain development may be complete prior to 25, while for others it may not end until after age 25. The mid-20s or “25” is just an average age given as a checkpoint for when the brain has likely become mature.”



"It's really dangerous, isolation."

"The companionship side of things is absolutely massive. Like even to this day if both my flatmates are away for the weekend, I feel it. Like if you're stressed or if you're thinking about stuff, being able to go, aw like just put the kettle on to have a cup of tea. It sounds so stupid but that's a massive thing just having other people around if you want to go vent. Like what you were saying about the mental health issues, like its... I can't think of a single mental health issue that's going to be benefited by isolation."

For some they felt it emphasised that they had no family, friends or anyone to call for help. Others said they struggled to adjust to the quiet after living in a large institutional setting where people were around all of the time.

"People say the first night on your own is like the worst. Going from like that transition from being around so many people to being on your own can be quite traumatic."

The workshop group named mental health difficulties as the main reason Care Experienced people lose their tenancies and become homeless after leaving care and said there should be mental health support automatically offered to any person beginning the leaving care transition for as long as they needed it. This support should be opt-out rather than opt-in as some people feel they have to prove they can cope independently and don't ask for help until they are in crisis, and recognised as a preventative support measure Care Experienced people are entitled to rather than an intervention people have to try and access once they are really struggling and already likely to be unable to keep their tenancy.

"All Care Experienced people should be offered mental health counselling throughout and after their care experience, regardless of whether they are seen as a 'good outcome' (i.e. removed from supervision and returned to parents). Even a short period in care can cause significant trauma and have a life-long impact if not managed proactively with proper support and counselling.... It makes more sense to deal with things proactively at the time thereby avoiding crises."

12. RELIABLE AND LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

Summary of findings:

Young people leaving care need relationships that exist outside working hours and office buildings. A plan can describe intensive support available to someone but these plans rarely seem to consider the options for young people who need help after p.m. on Friday and abandon Care Experienced young people every weekend without a back-up plan or 24 hour support. Most people would never ask their mum for help working their new washing machine via email and wait three working days for a response.



"I spent a whole weekend in the dark because the lightbulb blew Friday afternoon and I didn't know how to buy the right one or change it and didn't have anyone to ask until I could go to school Monday morning and ask my maths teacher."

"You need to be there with 24 hour support for when things go wrong, we have no back up plans."

"my next of kin was my social worker but she couldn't be contacted most of the time due to her busy case load and her working hours. If social workers are your only network of support you can be stuck at all other hours when you are worrying if you do not have work to distract you, or you do have work but you can't concentrate because you don't know if you can hold off until the next pay day to be able to eat or pay for gas and electricity. I found it easier to run away from my flat and go to a friend's and stay because I had company. Sometimes I'd just walk for hours throughout the night because I was scared being in the flat at night, I had no heating or plumbing."

Care Experienced people have been speaking out for years about the need for loving, supportive relationships. Relationships with someone who Care Experienced people believe cares about their wellbeing, happiness and future are invaluable. It is relationships like these that can stop them feeling isolated, stuck without options, unsure how to cook or pay bills, encourage them to go to work or university, help them move into a new house, send them birthday cards and say their proud of their achievements. Care Experienced people are far more likely to be able to leave care successfully and live independently when they can know and feel they are loved by somebody who wants them to do well.

"Some young people's self-worth and self-esteem can be a barrier to positive transitions"

"We don't have the support network as well... many people at Uni came to Uni absolutely clueless, but it was fine because they could call up their parents at home."

Many Care Experienced people have felt a meaning, personal relationship be restricted due to job roles and strict boundaries imposed on staff.

"The staff where I live, like they're told they're not support workers, they're just staff and their boundaries are supposed to be you hand in your keys when you go out the building and you get your keys when you come in the building and that's it. And they do a check on you, 10 o'clock at night and 8 o'clock in the morning and that's it. But, the staff get really annoyed because if you're coming in and being like I don't know how to fill in my housing benefit forms, so I might lose my room and I don't know how to work my hob in my room or my shower or whatever then the staff go help you, they get into trouble."



Meaningful, personal relationships should be encouraged in professional workplaces to be nurtured where they start to flourish naturally and protected to ensure young people experience no more unnecessary loss in their life. The Stand Up for Siblings campaign is raising awareness and changing practices that were restricting the time siblings in care were getting to spend together and the right to time with parents and grandparents is protected by law. But relationships with friends, staff, carers or professionals who developed meaningful, personal relationships with them are not protected or currently recognised for the importance they hold in young people's lives who do not have the normal family or societal support systems to rely on. This needs to change to reflect the importance and value Care Experienced people recognise these relationships hold.

“No other child has to worry about restrictions or legal implications to what they do, so how on earth can we build genuine relationships when we're told it has to fit criteria?”

There can be no invoice, legislation or contract that gives Scotland's Care Experienced people these loving relationships so important to preventing this group from experiences like homelessness and isolation but the practice, culture and ethos to make this happen is the responsibility of all Corporate Parents, professionals, carers and citizens of Scotland to own and embrace.

“Care Experienced people deserve better. We need to identify the support that is most required for each type of care, and work with various other organisations and Corporate Parents to ensure that we get it right for them. We want our leaving care journey to be embedded with positivity, stability and love. Even though we are leaving care, we do not want to actually leave care.”

