

# No Place Like Home.

A look at young  
people's experiences  
of leaving the care  
system.

by Rosie Fortune and Nicola Smith



## About Barnardo's

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. In 2019-20 we supported work with 358,800 children, young people, parents and carers across the UK, thanks to our network of services, our partnership and the expertise and commitment of paid colleagues and volunteers.

Our services include support counseling for children who have been exploited , and specialist mental health services.

We support children across the care system. In 2019-20 we supported 3700 people in our leaving care/accommodation support services. We also support children and young people in care through our fostering and adoption services, advocacy and network of National Independent Visitors. In 2019-20 our adoption services placed 117 children with adoptive families and our fostering service cared for 822 children.

## About IKEA

At IKEA we have a vision to create a better everyday life for the many people. We do this by offering a wide range of well-designed, sustainable, home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible can afford them.

IKEA Retail – part of Ingka Group – has been in the UK for 33 years and has 21 stores, 2 Order and Collection Points and 1 Planning Studio in locations across the country. IKEA supports around 11,000 quality UK jobs.

Ingka Group (Ingka Holding B.V. and its controlled entities) is the largest of 12 different groups of companies that own and operate IKEA retail under franchise agreements with Inter IKEA Systems B.V. Ingka Group comprises IKEA Retail, Ingka Centres and Ingka Investments.

# Foreword

A safe and stable home is something many of us take for granted.

In the UK, on average young people now live in their family home until the age of 23. Yet when it comes to the highly vulnerable in our society – those who have been in foster care or a children's home, the expectation is that young people start to live independently at 18, or in some cases even younger.

Sadly, we know that care leavers often have far poorer outcomes than their peers. By the time they reach 19-21 years old, 4 in 10 are not in education, employment or training. Many suffer with poor physical and mental health, and are at even greater risk of suicide.

That's why Barnardo's and IKEA have come together through a three year national partnership, to help improve outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the UK.

Barnardo's has been supporting children who can't live with their own families for 155 years and we are the UK's largest voluntary adoption and fostering agency.

Meanwhile, IKEA have been the experts in the UK for over 30 years when it comes to making a better everyday life accessible for the many. Across the world they strive to have a positive impact in all that they do, both for customers and co-workers as well as throughout supply chains and in local communities.

Together, we have already made a real difference: working together in communities across the UK, utilising IKEA's skills to transform the spaces where Barnardo's deliver services and bringing digital skills to vulnerable young people. Since the pandemic struck we have

provided 500 care leavers with 'Life at Home' packs, filled with day-to-day essentials like plates, cutlery and towels. IKEA generously provided funding at a time when we needed it most, to guarantee that Barnardo's care leavers services could continue delivering vital support.

However, we know that to transform care leavers lives, we need to go further. The 10,000+ young people leaving the care system each year in England face huge challenges, and lack of safe and appropriate accommodation plays a crucial role.

This new report is based on direct interviews with young people supported by Barnardo's. We found that many care leavers have been placed in unsafe and unsuitable conditions – ranging from extreme mould to exposure to drug abuse.

The solutions are complex – but we believe everyone would agree that in the UK in 2021, we must do better.

This report builds on the Government's welcome recent investment of £51 million for additional support to care leavers. It includes a number of recommendations to ensure every care leaver has a safe and secure home, including allowing more young people to stay in foster care, and offering more support for those in independent or supported accommodation.

The Government has a unique opportunity to build upon their commitment to children in and leaving care improve the system for care leavers, through the Independent Review into Children's Social Care.

Our vision is that all young people should have the care, love and opportunities that we would hope to provide to our own children.



*Javed Khan*

Javed Khan,  
Chief Executive,  
Barnardo's



Peter Jelkeby, Country Retail  
Manager and Chief Sustainability  
Officer, IKEA UK and Ireland

**“I wanted something that I can prosper in, so that I can belong there but we had no choice but to take the property.”**

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## Key findings

# 8%

**care leavers aged 18-21 live with former carers, which supports them toward independence** – *“I had everything I needed, it was already there, they bought most of the stuff, bookshelves, desk, chair...I have been pretty blessed I suppose.”*

# 15%

**live in semi-independent accommodation – which is sometimes poor quality with little support** – *“it is scary, scary how are someone like me who never did drugs or drank and then I moved in and everything changed, you just lose yourself.”*

# 25%

**of the homeless population are estimated to have been in care** – *“I used to jump on the trains to keep myself warm, then get kicked off and walk around.”*

# 35%

**living in their own flat – often with loneliness and isolation** – *“When you’re not in supported accommodation all you really have is your leaving care worker and mine is not really around.”*

# 39%

**of care leavers aged 19-21 years are not in education, employment or training** – *“I am happy it turned out this way, I have the opportunity to get the apprenticeship, if I came out of foster care and straight to living by myself it would have been too much.”*

# £2k

**one off grant to furnish a whole flat, which doesn’t go far** – *“£2000 is not a lot – social housing usually has no carpets or cooker which take a big part of the money.”*

# **1. Summary of recommendations**

## What needs to change?

It is clear from our research that care leavers need access to secure, safe and supported accommodation as soon as they leave care, and ongoing support in their journey towards independent living. We need to do more to prevent care leavers becoming homeless in the first place, and we also need better support in place for when they do.

### 1. Make it easier for young people to stay with their foster carers until the age of 21:

- The Government should commit to long term funding of the 'Staying Put' scheme.
- Introduce a minimum statutory allowance for Staying Put carers, similar to that provided for foster carers.
- Extend eligibility for 'Staying Put' so that any young person who would benefit from being in foster care post 18, irrespective of whether they currently live with the carers who would be providing the staying put support.

### 2. Legislate for a national 'Staying Close' scheme for children leaving residential care:

- As part of this the Government should amend the Children and Families Act 2014 to place the 'Staying Close' scheme on similar legislative footing to the 'Staying Put' scheme.

### 3. Provide robust quality standards for semi-independent accommodation:

- The Government's consultation on new statutory standards for supported accommodation should seek the views of care experienced young people as well as charities and providers in the sectors. This should ensure the new regime is robust and workable.
- These quality standards should apply to semi-independent accommodation for all care leavers up to the age of 25.

### 4. Reform housing benefit to make it easier for care leavers to access properties:

- The Government should introduce an exemption to the 'over occupancy penalty' allowing care leavers to rent larger properties in the social sector if that is all that is available in their area.

### 5. Provide care leavers with free bus travel to help tackle social isolation:

- The Government should amend the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme to make all care leavers between the ages of 18 and 25 eligible for the scheme, as a means of tackling loneliness and help to keep young people connected.

### 6. Increase the "setting up home allowance" for care experienced young people to ensure there is enough to make a house a home:

- Government guidance should increase the minimum "setting up home allowance" to £4000, to help make sure care leavers can afford to set up a comfortable home.
- The guidance should also be expanded to discuss best practice in particular by encouraging local authorities to provide flexibility over the level of the allowance where there is additional need, for example a care leaver who is also a parent, or where they have to move because their safety is at risk.

### 7. Improve understanding of support needs and outcomes for care leavers with additional needs:

- The Independent Review of Children's Social Care should seek to gather specific information about how far the needs of care leavers facing additional challenges (such as young parents and unaccompanied asylum seekers) are met by the current system; whether their outcomes are in line with other care leavers; and what additional support they may need, to inform findings and recommendations for the Government.

### 8. Reform homelessness legislation to provide better support for care experienced young people who end up with nowhere to live:

- The Government should amend the Housing Act 1986 to abolish the requirement of 'unintentionality' for care leavers aged 18-25.
- The Government should introduce a duty on local authorities to secure accommodation for homeless care leavers up to the age of 25, irrespective of whether they are considered particularly vulnerable or not.

# 2. Introduction

## Every year, around 10,000 children and young people in England aged 16 to 18 leave local authority care<sup>1</sup>.

While some young people have a positive experience, going on to university or into apprenticeships or employment, others find moving on from care a difficult and unsettling time. The average age for leaving home in England is 23<sup>2</sup>, yet young people in the care system, for whom the state acts as ‘corporate parent’, are expected to leave at 18 or even younger. As the largest voluntary independent fostering and adoption agency in the UK, and with many decades’ experience in supporting young people after they have left the care system, Barnardo’s knows that this means that many vulnerable young people are expected to manage alone before they feel ready. Sadly, we regularly see young people struggling as they leave care, with issues ranging from managing their own tenancy, to living on a low income, to struggling because they feel lonely and isolated.

As a group, care leavers often have much poorer outcomes in adult life than their peers. They are more likely to not be education employment or training (NEET) – 39% of care leavers aged 19-21 years are NEET<sup>3</sup> compared to around 13% of 18–24-year-olds overall<sup>4</sup> – they are more also likely to be homeless<sup>5</sup> and take their own life<sup>6</sup>.

Having a safe and stable home has long been recognised one of the most important factors in helping care leavers on their journey to independence. In fact, housing is often described as “a vehicle for stability<sup>7</sup>” for care leavers which can lay the foundations for positive outcomes in other areas of a care leaver’s life.

This report seeks to shine a light on care leavers’ lived experiences when they leave care, and to look specifically at the accommodation they are asked to call ‘home’. It draws on the findings of 23 in-depth qualitative interviews with care leavers it supports, conducted during February and March 2021, as well as existing literature and expertise from the charity’s service base. A full copy of the questions used for these interviews is found in Appendix A of this report<sup>8</sup>. The care leavers had the opportunity to reflect on all of the support they had been provided by the local authority up to the present day. The report draws on the direct voices of care experienced young people to illustrate their accommodation journeys: where they lived, the challenges they faced and what support they received. Based on these experiences, we have drawn up a set of policy recommendations which we hope will be of assistance to the Westminster Government in seeking to ‘level up’ outcomes for some of the most vulnerable young people in our society.

The Conservative party manifesto in 2019 recognised that the care system in England required reform, and rightly committed to a *“review the care system to make sure that all care placements and settings are providing children and young adults with the support they need”*<sup>9</sup>. In January 2021, the Government established an Independent Review of the Care System in England, and its lead reviewer Josh MacAlister has committed to addressing a big question *“How do we ensure children grow up in loving, stable and safe families and, where that is not possible, care provides the same foundations?”* Today many young people benefit from the support of their families well into early adulthood, with parents who help them find accommodation and support them as they move towards independence. The recommendations in our report would help the Government to ensure we provide a similar type of support to children leaving the care system.

1 HM Government (2013) ‘Care Leaver Strategy – A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care’. Available at: [Care Leavers Strategy \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/244243/care-leaver-strategy.pdf)

2 Office for National Statistics (2019) ‘Milestones: journeying into adulthood.’ Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/milestonesjourneyingintoadulthood/2019-02-18>

3 Department of Education (2013/2021) Statistics on children under local authority care at national and local authority level. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children>

4 Office for National Statistics (2021) ‘Young People not in education, employment or training (NEET)’ Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/unemployment/datasets/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneetable1>

5 Cardiff University and Crisis (2014) ‘Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain’. Available at: [crisis\\_nations\\_apart\\_2014.pdf](https://www.crisis-nations-apart-2014.pdf)

6 Department of Health (2012) ‘Preventing suicide in England. A cross-government outcomes strategy to save lives’

7 Demos and Barnardo’s (2010) ‘In loco parentis’. Available at: [https://www.demos.co.uk/files/In\\_Loco\\_Parentis\\_-\\_web.pdf](https://www.demos.co.uk/files/In_Loco_Parentis_-_web.pdf)

8 Appendix A – Research methods

9 Conservative Manifesto (2019) Available at: [5dda924905da587992a064ba\\_Conservative 2019 Manifesto.pdf \(website-files.com\)](https://www.conservative.org/manifesto-2019/)

# **3. Current law, policy and practice governing care leavers' accommodation**

Local authorities have a range of duties aimed at supporting young people when they leave care. Section 23 of the Children’s Act 1989 lays out in detail what these are. This states:

*it is the duty of the local authority:*  
**(a) to continue the appointment of a personal adviser for a former relevant child; and**  
**(b) to continue to keep his pathway plan under regular review.**

The expectation is that through ensuring that each care leaver has their own support worker – a personal adviser – and their own plan for how they will be supported by the local authority going forward – the pathway plan – care leavers will be able to access the help they need as they move towards independent living. The accompanying regulations which explain these requirements in more details<sup>10</sup> make it clear that accommodation should be a key part of the pathway plan, with schedule one of those regulations stating that the plan should set out:

*Details of the accommodation the child or young person is to occupy including an assessment of its suitability in the light of the child’s or young person’s needs, and details of the considerations taken into account in assessing that suitability*

Schedule two of the same regulations also include a list of what the issues that should be considered when assessing the suitability including factors such as the state of repair, safety, and the facilities nearby.

Furthermore, the accompanying statutory guidance to the regulations also emphasise the need for there to be a diverse range of options available for care leavers. This specifically states that due to the diverse needs of care leavers local authorities.

*“A range of semi-independent and independent accommodation options for care leavers will be required”<sup>11</sup>.*

Statistics are collected annually on where care leavers in England live, with the latest published

on 21 February 2021 – this shows that care leavers can be in different types of accommodation; some living independently, others with parents, former carers, while others end up in custody, homeless or go aboard. The statistics show that for care leavers aged 19-21 (the age group that made up the majority of the care leavers we interviewed) in 85% of cases where we know where a care leaver is living the accommodation is deemed to be “suitable”. However, there are no hard and fast rules on whether accommodation is deemed ‘suitable’; the decision will depend on the circumstances of the individual case.

The following table shows where care leavers aged 19-21 are currently living<sup>12</sup>.

Type of accommodation	Percentage
With parents or relative	11%
Community home	4%
Semi-independent, transitional accommodation	15%
Supported lodgings	4%
Foyers	2%
Independent living	35%
Former foster carers	8%
Homeless	1%
Custody	3%
Other	4%
Information not known/not in touch	14%

## Definitions of types of accommodation

**Living independently** – Care leavers living independently in social housing or private rented accommodation.

**Living in semi-independent transitional accommodation** – Care leavers typically living in a shared house or hostel type accommodation, with support from a key worker.

**Live with parents or relatives** – Care leavers moving in with parents or relatives.

**Living with former foster carers** – Also known as ‘Staying Put’ arrangements where care leavers stay living with their foster carer usually until the age of 21.

<sup>10</sup> The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010. Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2010/2571/schedule/1/made>

<sup>11</sup> The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/397649/CA1989\\_Transitions\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Percentage rounded to the nearest whole number, numbers do not necessarily add up to 100

# 4. Findings from our research

## What did young people tell us about moving into their own accommodation?

Despite the legal framework set out above, a clear message from the care leavers we spoke to was that they did not feel that accommodation was given appropriate attention in the ‘pathway planning’ process. They often said they had had little or no choice about where they moved after leaving care, and despite the ‘pathway planning’ process, they often did not feel ready to live independently when they left care, between age 16 and 18. Many young people, and particularly those who moved into independent accommodation, told us that they found the whole process of finding somewhere to live and moving in to be daunting and ‘scary’, with describing a long journey before it felt welcoming and homely.

Many young people said they did not feel that they had been prepared with the practical skills needed to live independently. As one young person explained:

*“There should be a 2-week course for care leavers where they can go in where they can learn how to change a lightbulb, learn how to change a fuse, learn where to store food in the correct places.”*

It is clear from our research that young people have a wide range of different experiences in relation to post-care accommodation. Some moved multiple times in a short period, so those we spoke to had typically experienced a range of different types of accommodation, including shared housing, supported accommodation, hostels and emergency accommodation. In some cases, young people need to move a number of times as their needs change, but in other cases it is a sign that the right decisions were not made first time round.

A particularly worrying finding was that some care leavers who we spoke to told us that they felt unsafe in the accommodation they were given.

*“The amount of antisocial behaviour that was there, my neighbour smoked crack which leaked into my flat, I witnessed knife fights outside my front door... I spoke to the council and the police...they don’t think if this was happening to my child what would I do, they don’t seem to have that approach.”*

## 4.1 Living with a host family: ‘Staying Put’ or a supported lodgings placement

The Children & Families Act 2014 introduced a duty on local authorities *“to support young people to remain with their former foster carers to age 21 where both the young person and carer want the arrangement to continue”*.<sup>13</sup> Currently data suggest that 8% of care leavers aged 18 to 21 in England are living with their former carers<sup>13</sup>.

In other cases, young people live in supported lodgings, which means they have a room of their own in a private home. The young person is a member of the household but is not expected to become a member of the family. At least one adult in the household is trained to provide practical and emotional support to assist a young person in developing the confidence and capability to live an independent adult life. Eligibility for these schemes varies but in general, young people tend to stay two or three years.

Two of the care leavers we spoke to had lived in family homes over the age of 18. Both reflected benefits in avoiding the ‘cliff edge’ of leaving care and having to live independently straight away. This is a way of moving towards independence gradually, with additional support. This is consistent with the findings from ‘Staying Put’ pilot (2008 – 2011) which also found that young people who ‘stayed put’ were more than twice as likely to be in full-time education at 19 than those who did not.<sup>14</sup> Professionals we spoke to also said anecdotally that young people in ‘Staying Put’ arrangements were more likely to go on to university. One of the young people we spoke to explained how by not facing such a dramatic change to independent

<sup>13</sup> Department of Education (2013/2021) Statistics on children under local authority care at national and local authority level. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children>

<sup>14</sup> Department for Education (2011) Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18 Plus Family Placement Programme: Final report. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/183518/DFE-RR191.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183518/DFE-RR191.pdf)

living at 18, they had been able to concentrate more on their studies:

*“I am happy it turned out this way, I have the opportunity to get the apprenticeship, if I came out of foster care and straight to living by myself it would have been too much of a drastic change, here I am pretty independent, but I have people to speak too especially with lockdown happening.”*

Young people living in a family home were more likely to feel like they lived in a homely environment, where they could access everything they needed – this contrast starkly with the experience of many young people who moved into more independent accommodation:

*“It had everything I needed, it was already there, they bought most of the stuff, bookshelves, desk, chair and I have a den to stay in to hang out/work, and upstairs is where I sleep, I have been pretty blessed I suppose.”*

‘Staying Put’ and supported lodgings are not the right options for all young people leaving care, but they are often beneficial. In many cases where it is judged to be the best approach, placements cannot be secured often because of a lack of financial support for carers<sup>15</sup>, suggesting a proportion of young people are missing out on the best placement for them, which could have long-term negative consequences.

### **What could be done to provide more family-based accommodation for care experienced young people?**

It is generally agreed that these types of accommodation offer significant benefits for young people. However, while the numbers of care leavers in ‘Staying Put’ placements have been rising slightly in recent years – 28% of 19- and 20-year-olds who ceased to be looked after in 2019/20 entered ‘Staying Put’ arrangements,

up from 26% in 2018/19 and 23% in 2015/16<sup>16</sup> – this could be used more widely. A survey by the Fostering Network in 2018 found that in 44% of cases where ‘Staying Put’ arrangements did not go ahead, it was because they were prevented by local policies and payments<sup>17</sup>.

A significant barrier to young people ‘Staying Put’ in their fostering placement is the financial support available to carers. While there is usually an allowance for the period of the placement, in contrast to fostering arrangements (for children in care), there is no minimum, and in many cases, it is less than would be received for a foster placement.

Although allowances are rarely the primary driver for foster carers, they can make a crucial difference, especially if a carer is not in other paid work. The lack of equivalent allowances for ‘Staying Put’ arrangements can therefore be a disincentive.

In addition, while the government has provided two short term funding boosts to the scheme – £33 million a year for 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 respectively, we believe the scheme would benefit from a more suitable and long term approach to funding going into the next comprehensive spending review period. This would provide greater certainty at a local authority level when it comes to implementing and promoting the scheme at a local level.

Given the advantage to care leavers who ‘stay put’ in their fostering placements, we would urge the Government to consider providing a long-term commitment to fund this scheme.

Even if reforms are made to the ‘Staying Put’ scheme as outlined above, the scheme also excludes young people who are in care but not looked after by foster parents. Currently most young people in the care system are in foster care (around three quarters) but there are some young people who are accommodated in residential care settings<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> The Fostering Network (2018) ‘Staying put: An unfulfilled promise’. Available at: <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/default/files/content/stayingput-anunfulfilledpromise.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Department of Education (2013/2021) ‘Statistics on children under local authority care at national and local authority level’. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children>

<sup>17</sup> The Fostering Network (2018) ‘Staying put: An unfulfilled promise’. Available at: <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/news/2018/staying-put-unfulfilled-promise>

<sup>18</sup> Department of Education (2013/2021) ‘Statistics on children under local authority care at national and local authority level’. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children>

### Recommendation – make it easier for young people to stay with their foster carers until the age of 21.

- Central Government should commit to long term funding of the ‘Staying Put’ scheme.
- Introduce minimum statutory allowance for staying put carers similar to what is available to foster carers.
- Extend eligibility for the scheme to any young person who would benefit from being in foster care post-18, irrespective of whether they currently live with the carers who would providing the ‘Staying Put’ support.

### Recommendation: legislate for a national ‘Staying Close’ scheme for children leaving residential care.

- As part of this the government should amend the Children and Families Act 2014 to place the ‘Staying Close’ scheme on similar legislative footing to ‘Staying Put’.

## 4.2 Semi-independent or supported accommodation

Supported accommodation is generally provided to individuals who are in need of support to maintain their accommodation. The theory is that by working in partnership with other support agencies and stakeholders, residents can develop the life skills they require to live independently in the community. Criteria to be housed in different supported accommodation therefore differs some have quite large age ranges for residents for example from 16 up to 50, some may be mixed sex while others single sex, many take residents with significant problems such as a history of drug and alcohol abuse or homelessness. This purpose of this type of accommodation (when it works well) is to focus the young person on preparing for independence –it can act as a bridge between living in care and living in their own flat or house. However, rent in these types of accommodation is typically very high, due to the cost of providing support from key workers. Therefore, while they are an option for young people claiming housing benefit, those in employment can struggle to afford it. One young person we interviewed said that because she had found a job, she was expected to pay over three quarters of her wages on rent, while other young people in the same property were claiming Housing Benefit (which covers the costs).

Care leavers we spoke to reflected very varied experiences of supported accommodation. At best, they had access to onsite help from workers, for example with cooking skills, while

In July 2016, the Government announced pilots of a new “Staying Close” scheme for young people leaving residential care. The aim was to enable young people *“to live independently, in a location close to their children’s home with ongoing support from that home”*<sup>19</sup>. The Government has provided money to run eight pilot projects of this initiative across England since 2018. through to 2022 with the Government recently promising a further £3.6 million worth of funding. This will fund the projects as well as learning events associated with them. Initial evaluation of one of these projects showed very positive results, finding that *“independent living skills had improved after 6 months and young people showed increased happiness with life over time, had better stability in their accommodation [...] and there was increased participation in activities, whether education, employment or getting involved with activities”*<sup>20</sup>.

The Government has already indicated that it intends to roll out the ‘Staying Close’ scheme nationally which is welcome, although few details have been provided as to how this is to take place<sup>21</sup>. To achieve faster progress in this area, and to prevent a ‘two-tier’ system, the Government should expand the legislative framework so there is a clear duty to provide appropriate accommodation for all care leavers at least until the age of 21.

19 The Department for Education (2016) ‘Putting children first: Delivering our vision for excellent children’s social care’ Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/putting-children-first-our-vision-for-childrens-social-care>

20 The Department of Education. (2020) ‘The Break Staying Close, Staying Connected Project’. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/931987/Staying\\_Close\\_Break.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/931987/Staying_Close_Break.pdf)

21 UK Parliament (2020) Question for Department for Education: Care Leavers. Available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-13/91946>

also having the opportunity to build bonds with other young people in a similar situation. Charities such as Barnardo's have a long history of providing this type of accommodation with much success.

However, in some cases, high quality semi-independent accommodation can be difficult to access. Some young people said they knew there was local accommodation that would provide them with a high support package, but the thresholds to access it were very high. One young person described how she had specifically decided to "act out" to raise her perceived support needs and gain access to this higher quality accommodation.

*"I had to be a naughty kid to get that, if I was a quiet kid I wouldn't have got the care I wanted."*

Other young people gave examples of inappropriate accommodation, which provided them with very little support. This is often associated with providers that are less experienced in supporting care leavers and can result in vulnerable care experienced young people being housed alongside people from a variety of different ages and backgrounds. This can lead to them feel unsafe and vulnerable. Some young people we spoke to (not in Barnardo's accommodation) talked about using drugs and alcohol as a result of being housed with other young people who were doing the same, and in the context of limited support from workers. Some of the young people we spoke to said they were unable to view the supported accommodation before moving in and were not aware of the other people living there, adding additional anxiety and stress to the experience of moving. It also meant that some young people found themselves living in places that specifically did not meet the needs they had explained to their worker before moving in. The experience can be very traumatising for vulnerable young people as "Shannon's" experience shows.

Shannon moved into a hostel, a type of semi-independent accommodation following leaving care at the age of 17 and moving on from her residential home. Shannon describes her first day of moving in the hostel as 'strange'. As she walked through the building on her first day, she remembered hearing "you aren't moving in here are you, you will get on everything here". She walked into her new room and she describes it as tiny, barely big enough to fit the furniture and her belongings. Shannon was unable to view the property or find out about the people who lived there before she moved in. Shannon mentioned drugs, alcohol and mental health are the main problems when living in supported accommodation. She mentioned the security in the property was very poor and residents "would rob from each other because they didn't have anything else, they had no money". She was placed next door to someone who was constantly smoking weed. Shannon struggles with depression and anxiety and soon became involved in smoking weed and drinking a lot of alcohol. She said, "it is scary, scary how are someone like me who never did drugs or drank and then I moved in and everything changed, you just lose yourself". She described the support she received when living in the supported accommodation as "[staff in supported accommodation] don't actually understand what a child in care actually goes through or what support they actually need". She felt that if she was better supported and listened too, things would have been different.

In some cases, young people were left with very limited support or none at all. Left alone, young people struggled with their problems, not knowing where to go even when things reached crisis point.

*"I took an overdose and none of the [support workers] knew."*

## What could the Government do to improve the use of semi-independent accommodation for care leavers?

There has been much debate about the use of this type of accommodation in recent years, both for young people who have left care and children still in care. The Government has recently confirmed that in the future the use of this accommodation will be limited to those young people aged over 16. Currently it is estimated that 6% of 17-year-old care leavers, 30% of 18-year-olds, and 15% of care leavers aged 19-21 are living in this accommodation type. Barnardo's knows from our service experience that high quality semi-independent accommodation can work well for children 16+ in care and care leavers, however this research showed that currently standards are too variable. At its worse it throws together very vulnerable young people with a range of complex problems, including addiction to drugs and alcohol and puts young people at risk of dangers including gang activity, criminal and sexual exploitation<sup>22</sup>.

Following a consultation, in March 2021<sup>23</sup> the Government committed to developing a set of standards for this type of accommodation when it is used for 16/17-year-olds. Furthermore on the 24 May the Government issued a consultation document setting out these standards and a light touch approach to inspection of supported accommodation – which will be the responsibility of OFSTED. We very much support this proposal and hope that the Government will make clear that these standards should also apply to this type of accommodation when used by young people up to the age of 25. This should improve consistency across the sector, encouraging best practice and stamping out some of the worst practice.

### Recommendation – provide robust quality standards for semi-independent accommodation.

- The Government's consultation on new statutory standards for supported accommodation should seek the views of care experienced young people as well as charities and providers in the sectors. This should ensure the new regime is robust and workable.
- These quality standards should apply to semi-independent accommodation for all care leavers up to the age of 25.

## 4.3 Living in independent accommodation

In addition to the more “supportive” accommodation options outlined above, it is also common for care leavers to be offered their own private accommodation – either immediately on leaving care or after time spent in a family or semi-independent accommodation setting. These may be provided either through social housing or through the private sector. This type of accommodation is typically the end goal in the accommodation journey of all care leavers, even if they move into a family or semi-independent based setting initially. Therefore, it is important to consider the extent to which care leavers can access independent rentals that offer high quality and comfortable accommodation that will provide a long-term home and a stable ‘base’. This was reflected in our conversations with young people, with many describing moving into their “own” flat as a bittersweet experience offering them stability often for the first time in their lives.

*“[I] loved it, it was a massive weight lifted, it felt like for the first time in 17 years felt like I had found a home, even with all its faults, I didn't know about them straight away, so it was like my home, where I belonged.”*

22 Local Government Association (2019) ‘Local Government Association Briefing 16-17 year olds in unregulated accommodation’ House of Commons.

23 The Department of Education (2021) ‘Reforms to unregulated provision for children in care and care leavers’. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/962686/Unregulated\\_government\\_response\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962686/Unregulated_government_response_Final.pdf)

However, securing this type of tenancy is not always easy for care leavers, who can face significant discrimination, particularly from landlords reluctant to rent to what they see as “at risk” groups. Some of the young people we spoke to recalled specific challenges, including not being able to access things like a rent guarantor – which is a common challenge for young people who grew up in care and are less likely to have family members who can support them in this way. One young person described moving into university accommodation and having to pay for a company to act as a guarantor which she found independently, singling her out from her peers:

*“Other people don’t have to worry about [finding a guarantor] because they have family. Why do I have to pay all this money just because I don’t have parents to be my guarantor.”*

Given that tenancy accommodation is intended to be “permanent” it is particularly important that care experienced young people have a choice over where they move to. However, our research suggested that this is not often the case and that although care leavers in principle had the right to refuse up to three properties, it was often made clear to them by their worker that they should take the first property offered, particularly in the social sector, irrespective of whether it was suitable to meet their needs. The moving in process was often quick and there was little support with the practicalities leaving young people to struggle as they negotiated everything they needed for the new property themselves.

*“We got a trolley from ASDA and had to push our stuff in the trolley to our new home.”*

There was also significant evidence in the interviews of the accommodation being offered to young people being of very poor quality. Several of the care experienced people we spoke to described problems with mould and damp. One care leaver we spoke to who moved into a council flat with her baby described:

*“There was mould everywhere, it grew on my curtains and on my clothes, it was everywhere, I got a dehumidifier and after*

*an hour I had to empty it because there was so much water in there, when I spoke to the council about it they didn’t really care.”*

Others described how the poor quality of the accommodation affected them, including how the surrounding area and the experience of living with anti-social neighbours, had an extreme impact on their health and well-being.

### **Moving into their own flat – Jessica’s experience**

Jessica moved into her own socially rented flat when she left care at the age of 17. She was excited to have left care and move into her own place. She described the first day as “a massive weight lifted off my shoulders, I didn’t realise the faults, so it finally felt like a home where I belonged”. She feels that she should have had the support from her worker to view the property as it was only after she moved in that she realised the extent of the mould and damp in her property. The leaving care worker only visited 3 or 4 times between the age of 17 and 21. In 2015, she was rushed to hospital with blood clot on her lung which is linked to the mould and damp and has since developed lung disease. Jessica’s medical tests showed extremely high levels of spores in the blood and further investigation showed that she had had a serious reaction to the spores. In response, the council knocked down the conservatory which was the main source of the mould but there is still mould in the property itself. In the last year, she has been having problems with her neighbour such as consistent knocking on the walls, calling the police to her property in the early hours of the morning and people using drugs which has had a significant impact on her mental health and her university studies. She described it “as reliving my childhood and waking up having panic attacks”.

Independent living is different from the supported accommodation and family options outlined above, but it should not mean care leavers are left to fend for themselves. Leaving care guidance suggests that local authorities should seek to develop “floating support” for care leavers living independently.



It specifically describes independent accommodation should be provided *“with flexible floating support as needed”*<sup>24</sup>, meaning there should be support for young people to develop the practical and financial skills and the emotional resilience they need to live independently. However, in practice this type of support has been reduced significantly in recent years – a problem which has been recognised across providers of semi-independent accommodation and in relation to all vulnerable groups<sup>25</sup>. This can result in many young people feeling very alone in their accommodation.

*“When you’re not in supported accommodation all you really have is your leaving care worker and mine is not really around because she has 2 children of her own to look after and so she takes a lot of leave.”*

### What needs to be done to improve rented accommodation for care leavers?

It is clear from our research that being able to move into their own independent flat is an important step for care leavers – whether it happens immediately after care or at another stage before they reach 25. It is therefore crucial that the right financial and practical support is available to help young people identify an appropriate property and to move in.

Ensuring care leavers can access suitable and high-quality properties also requires changes in the housing and benefits systems. For example, local authorities are not legally required to prioritise care leavers for social housing, and we received information from professionals during the progress of this research that while many local authorities give care leavers a priority allocation as part of their social housing policy they are not always placed in the top category.

The recent decision to exempt care leavers from the single room reference rate until the age of 25 is welcome – previously this meant that for those renting in the private sector leavers faced a

reduction in their benefit entitlement when they turned 22 with some finding that they had the move to a new house as they could no longer afford where they were living. However, in social housing care leavers can still find themselves subject to the ‘over occupancy penalty’ – meaning they are only entitled to a one-bedroom flat in the social sector, even in areas when there are few of this property type in the social housing stock. This significantly reduces the options available to care leavers, particularly in areas where there is a shortage of one-bedroom properties in the social sector.

**Recommendation: reform housing benefit to make it easier for care leavers to access properties.**

- The government should introduce an exemption to the ‘over occupancy penalty’ allowing care leavers to rent larger properties in the social sector if that is all that is available in their area.

### What support is available for care leavers when they move into their own accommodation?

All care leavers are entitled to support from a personal adviser until the age of 25. These workers are there to support young people by helping prepare them to live independently and to offer advice and support after they leave care. However, many personal advisers have large caseloads (far larger than social workers who support children) and don’t have the same level of professional training or recognition to advocate on behalf of those leaving care. The care experienced young people we spoke to explained that in practice this meant that their most important support networks came from their friends – yet many of their friends live far away (as a result of a history of placement moves and other disruption), meaning they are vulnerable to social isolation. As one young person described:

*“It can get very isolating and very lonely.”*

24 The Department of Education (2010) ‘The Children Act 1989. Guidance and Regulations. Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers’. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/397649/CA1989\\_Transitions\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf)

25 St Mungos (2018) ‘Home for Good: The role of floating support services in ending rough sleeping’ available at <https://mungos.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Home-for-Good-floating-support-report.pdf>

Feeling socially isolated can leave young people very vulnerable. Some care experienced people who had moved into independent living explained how feeling lonely had caused them to fall into friendship circles where they were exploited because they had their own place, leading to problems with drugs, alcohol and anti-social behaviour.

*“When I moved into my first flat, I was put really close to friends and had people constantly coming to my property, I had to move further away because my friends were causing problems, smoking, bringing strangers into the flat and neighbours were complaining to the council.”*

The challenge of keeping in touch with existing support networks is exacerbated by the financial difficulties faced by many care leavers, who are often reliant on minimum wage jobs, or the benefit system to make ends meet. The young people we spoke to explained that after struggling to meet the costs of living and upkeep of their property, there was often no money left over for travel on public transport to see friends and family.

*“I don’t have the money to go and see friends or family, I can speak to them on the phone, but it is not the same as seeing them in person.”*

Care experienced young people are often told to go to the local authority housing departments for problems with their independent accommodation, however some told us that they did not find this accessible due to long waiting times and automated services.

*“They’re not supportive enough, they don’t listen, when I was having a dispute with my family they never helped me, I had to go through the police to get help, it was horrible.”*

In-person support particularly from friends was highly valued by care leavers, but they also valued the ability to connect digitally. This is particularly true in the pandemic, and while many

of the young people we spoke to had the ability to connect digitally, others were living in ‘digital poverty’. Barnardo’s has been acutely aware of the issue of ‘digital poverty’ in supporting young people and families during the pandemic, and we have been working with corporate partners and raising funds specifically to ensure care leavers and others can access the technology that they need<sup>26</sup>. In addition The DfE made available laptops, tablets and 4G wireless routers to care leavers who did not have access to them through another source, such as their education institution. As of 13 October 2020, 148,000 laptops and routers had been provided to children with a social worker and care leavers<sup>27</sup>.

### How can we improve the support available to care leavers living in independent accommodation?

Our conversations with care leavers highlighted that moving into their own accommodation often disrupted existing support networks given they were often moved further away from their friends or to places with difficult transport links. Given the importance of these networks, especially given the limitations of ‘light touch’ statutory support from personal advisers, the system must support young people to find independent accommodation that does not take them away from friends of other networks. Personal advisers should routinely ask young people about those in their life who are important to them and seek to place them within a reasonable distance of these support networks.

It should also be easier for care leavers to travel, so they can visit friends and family in other areas, as well as get to work or college. Providing free public transport has been recognised as important by some local authorities who have provided care leavers with free bus passes. However, policy in this area is patchy. Bus passengers aged over 65 or with a disability have been entitled to travel free of charge on any off-peak local service in England since 2007 as part of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme. Given the need to tackle loneliness and help support care leavers, we would like to see this type of

<sup>26</sup> Barnardo’s Big Tech campaign is distributing 10,000 digital devices to disadvantaged children and their families

<sup>27</sup> PQ HL 8580 [Care Leavers: Digital technology], 13 October 2020 see: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-29/HL8589>

national scheme introduced for all care leavers up to the age of 25.

**Recommendation: provide care leavers with free bus travel to help tackle social isolation.**

- The Government should amend the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme to make all care leavers between the ages of 18 and 25 eligible for the scheme, as a means of tackling loneliness and help keep young people connected.

## 4.4 Access to financial support

Government guidance to local authorities states that all care leavers should receive a “setting up home allowance” of “at least £2,000” to ensure that young people have the appropriate equipment and household items to set up safe, secure and stable accommodation<sup>28</sup>. In addition, once they turn 18 care leavers who are not working or are on low wages can claim Universal Credit. This was the main source of income for many of the care leavers we spoke to and was what they relied on to pay bills and other costs associated with living independently.

The young people we spoke to said the costs of setting up a new home was a significant cause of worry and stress. This is particularly relevant when young people move into their own independent flat, which is often unfurnished. One young person described their experience of moving into a place with no washing machine, no carpet and no cooker. This means while local authorities do typically provide a “setting up home” allowance, this is quickly spent on essentials:

*“Just think about one room, the kitchen is the most expensive room to kit out, because if you look at one drawer you can spent £30 in a drawer, imagine you’ve got no stuff, utensils are £5/6 each, knives, spoons, pans, ladles, you buy the cheaper stuff and it all breaks.”*

Many young people found that the allowance was not enough to buy everything they need. After the essentials, little or nothing was left to for the smaller items that make a house feel like home. Therefore, many young people found themselves having to borrow money to make up the shortfall.

*“£2000 is not a lot – social housing usually has no carpets or cooker which take a big part of the money.”*

The process for receiving a setting up home allowance also seem to vary considerably between different local authorities, with some setting very rigid criteria for spending the money, which limited how economical young people could be.

*“We couldn’t buy anything from marketplace or Ebay because it doesn’t come with a warranty, so we have to go through places like Argos and Currys and they are not the cheapest places.”*

Care leavers told us about having to take out pay day loans to pay debts, which then proved difficult to pay back, leading to a further cycle of debt and financial difficulties. As one young person described their situation:

*“[you’re] constantly in a deficit, going behind on one bill to pay another one.”*

*“...I had to get loans and I am still paying them back because the interest is so high, because I wanted to buy the stuff I wanted, I didn’t know about the interest being so high, it is really easy to take out but they don’t tell you the bad side of it.”*

Care leavers often reach financial independence at a younger age and with less support than their peers<sup>29</sup>. Barnardo’s has previously given evidence to a report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Financial Education for Young People, about financial education for care leavers, and we support its recommendations to include financial education in the national

28 The Department of Education (2010) ‘The Children Act 1989. Guidance and Regulations. Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers’. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/397649/CA1989\\_Transitions\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf)

29 All Party Parliamentary Group on Financial Education for Young People Report (2019) ‘Care to talk about money? The Importance of Financial Education for Children in Care. Available at: <https://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/APPG-Fin-Ed-for-children-in-care-2019.pdf>



curriculum and to upskill foster carers to help provide them with the skills they need to manage independently when they leave care. We need a national programme of financial education delivered to children in care as part of the transition process. This should ensure they can effectively manage independently when they do move into their own accommodation.

### How can we improve access to financial support for care leavers moving into their own accommodation?

As highlighted above, the allowance for setting up home is often insufficient to meet care leavers' needs, which is unsurprising given that the figure set out in the guidance was based on research by the Care Leavers Foundation in 2011 and does not reflect inflation over ten years.

Care leavers we spoke to also reported little flexibility in the amount. There is often a one off £2000 payment, regardless of circumstances – for example if they have a baby and need to make the accommodation suitable for an infant, or if they end up leaving a property for example due to domestic violence and need to start again.

Given the important role the 'setting up home' allowance can play in improving the overall living experience of care leavers we believe the Government should specifically look to improve practice in this area.

#### **Recommendation: increase the setting up home allowance for care experienced young people to ensure there is enough to make a house a home.**

- Government guidance should increase the minimum "setting up home allowance" that care leavers should be offered to £4000, to provide more money to provide everything they need to set up a comfortable home.
- The guidance should also be expanded to discuss best practice in particular by encouraging local authorities to provide flexibility over the level of the allowance where there is additional need, for example a care leaver who is also a parent, or where they have to move because their safety is at risk.

## 4.5 Vulnerable groups with additional needs

Our research found that while many care leavers faced significant challenges in finding suitable accommodation, these issues were particularly acute in particular groups of care leavers. This includes those who are pregnant or have children, and unaccompanied asylum seekers. Some care experienced people with children have had to leave their home due to domestic abuse and been placed in safehouses or a women's refuge. They told us that living conditions in these properties could be unsuitable and unsanitary, with problems such as mould and ant infestations. It was also very difficult for them to access support from their family and friends. One care leaver "Katie" described her experience of living in inadequate mother and baby facilities with her toddler.

Katie, a care experienced parent moved into a safe house with her 1-year-old toddler following a domestic violence relationship. She described the property as "unsanitary" with gone off food and rubbish being left in the kitchen leaving her unable to cook food for herself and her toddler. There were 9 other families living in the house with varying vulnerabilities and mental health issues. She described one morning waking up "and there were ants all over me and my baby". She found the very limited access to support difficult especially considering the condition of the property she was living in and struggling with a cleaning disorder, it had a very negative impact on her mental health.

Despite their additional needs, care experienced people with children told us that they were often housed in areas with anti-social behaviour and drug use, resulting in them feeling unsafe and fearing for their children.

*"I don't want my daughter to experience what I have experienced, that is a big thing for me."*

We also found that unaccompanied asylum seekers could be placed far away from support services, and away from community facilities. For examples, Muslim asylum seekers placed

nowhere near a Mosque, making it difficult for them to practice their religion and seek support from the community to help with other opportunities such as finding work. Language barriers can also make it difficult for asylum seekers to build relationships with support services and access financial support.

### How to improve provision for care leavers with additional needs

Government guidance to local authorities provides some recognition that additional support will be needed where care leavers have particular needs – with a specific reference in the guidance which *“requires local authorities [to] set out how they will support specific groups of care leavers such as lone parents, young people who are detained in hospital and custody, disabled young people and UASC [Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children]”*<sup>30</sup>. However, there is little evidence of the extent to which this is happening on the ground.

#### Recommendation: Improve understanding of support needs and outcomes for care leavers with additional needs.

- The independent review of children’s social care should seek to gather specific information about how far the needs of care leavers facing additional challenges (such as young parents and unaccompanied asylum seekers) are met by the current system; whether their outcomes are in line with other care leavers; and what additional support they may need, to inform findings and recommendations for the Government.

## 4.6 Homelessness

Research suggests that a high proportion of the homeless population has been in care at some point. Research by Crisis and the University of Cardiff in 2014 found this was true of around a quarter of people who were homeless<sup>31</sup>. The Government has recognised the need for policy and practice specifically to support care leavers who are homeless. Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure accommodation for certain ‘unintentionally’ homeless care leavers under the Housing Act 1996. Those who have recently left care were also specifically mentioned in the Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy<sup>32</sup> in 2018 which committed the Government to funding support for areas with the highest number of at-risk care leavers. £3.2 million in funding was provided by the Government in 47 local authorities to employ specialist personal advisers to provide intensive support, appropriate to young people’s needs, to the most at-risk care leavers in their area.

Several of the care experienced people we spoke to told us they had been street homeless or ‘sofa surfed’ for various reasons. This was often the result of having been placed in the unsafe “semi-independent” accommodation described above:

*“I’ve spent all this money to live in the house with people that are just trying to get me in trouble and instead of supported accommodation staff trying to address the issue they move me and make me pay the exact amount of rent for a tiny little room, not even a flat, it’s a communal kitchen that the entire building uses, it closes at 8pm, I finish work at 9pm, I wouldn’t be able to eat, that is why I moved out (became homeless).”*

This resulted in many young people living in very dangerous and precarious situations passing their time in public buildings and on public transport systems:

30 The Department of Education (2010) ‘The Children Act 1989. Guidance and Regulations. Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers’. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/397649/CA1989\\_Transitions\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf)

31 Cardiff University and Crisis (2014) ‘Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain’. Available at: [crisis\\_nations\\_apart\\_2014.pdf](https://crisis-nations-apart-2014.pdf)

32 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2018) ‘Rough Sleeping Strategy’. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy\\_WEB.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf)

*“I used to jump on the trains to keep myself warm, then get kicked off and walk around.”*

If a young person is discovered to be homeless or at risk of homelessness, given the duties under the Housing Act, the priority is to get them into emergency accommodation to ensure they have a place to stay. This can take many forms from emergency accommodation for homeless people, to bed and breakfast accommodation and hotels. Given the emergency context, young people in these situations are often put in the same place as older people. In some cases, care experienced young people have had to share their rooms with older people with drug and alcohol issues:

*“It was hectic there were people coming off the streets, constantly seeing people coming off of drugs and fights going on, I wouldn’t call it somewhere to live, it was more somewhere to sleep.”*

Care experienced young people placed in these settings are significantly less able to make the place feel like home, as they do not know how long they will stay. However, accommodation designated for use in an emergency is in practice often used for much longer periods of time.

### **How can we improve support for care experienced young people who are homeless?**

Despite the legal duties already in place it is clear from our research that more needs to be done. All local authorities need a joined-up process between the Housing and Children’s Services Departments to provide suitable emergency accommodation for care leavers who become homeless. This would ideally include Nightstop (accommodation specifically set aside to give emergency 1- or 2-night accommodation to care leavers in need), short-term supported lodgings or supported housing specifically for young people.

The Government should also review the duties under the Housing Act which relate to care leavers. Currently the legislation differentiates between care leavers under the age of 21 (where there is nearly always a statutory duty

to secure accommodation) and those over the age of 21 who only qualify for this duty if they are deemed ‘vulnerable’. In addition, care leavers of any age lose this right if they are deemed ‘intentionally’ homeless. Our research found this is a concept which is fraught with difficulty as it can result in young people being ‘blamed’ for their situation. For example, we heard from one young person who had been made homeless as a result of fleeing domestic violence, and others who had left because the anti-social behaviour of other residents in their semi-independent accommodation had made them feel unsafe. Given the vulnerability of this group and that many young people of all ages will make mistakes when they first start living independently, such as not knowing when or how to pay rent, we suggest this provision is unduly harsh on young people and could prevent them accessing the support they need.

#### **Recommendation: reform homeless legislation to provide better support for care experienced young people who end up with nowhere to live.**

- The Government should amend homelessness legislation to abolish the requirement of ‘unintentionality’ for care leavers aged 18-25 and provide a duty on all local authorities to secure accommodation for homeless care leavers up to the age of 25, irrespective of whether they are considered particularly vulnerable or not.



# 5. Appendix

We conducted 23 in-depth qualitative interviews with care leavers aged 18-24 who are currently being supported in 6 Barnardo's services across England. This included representation from care leavers living in London, Bristol and Lincolnshire. The interviews took place during February and March 2021. The care leavers reflected on their experiences of local authority support over the time since they left care. The purpose was to understand the experiences of care leavers accessing accommodation when they leave care and the impact this has on their wellbeing, in order to shape recommendations about how the system should be improved.

### General questions on accommodation

1. What type of accommodation are you currently living and how long have you lived there for?
2. Is this the first place you have lived since leaving care, if not where types of accommodation have you lived in previously?
3. What 3 things are important to you when moving into independent living?

### Questions on moving on/setting up home

1. When you first left care did you have a choice about the accommodation you moved into?
2. Would you have liked to stay with your foster family or in your residential placement after the age of 18? Did you have that option?
3. Can you describe your first day living in the accommodation you moved to?
4. Did the accommodation have everything you needed, such as a bed, furniture, gas, electric, internet access and other items?

### Thinking of where you live now...

#### Questions on where you live

1. Thinking about where you currently live on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is very poor and 10 excellent can you rate each of these aspects of your current accommodation:
  - The place where you live
  - The area where you live
  - The support network you have available to you
2. Have you been able to make your current accommodation feel 'homely'? Are there any barriers to making your accommodation feel more like home?
3. Do you think your current accommodation helps support your physical health and mental health/well-being?

### Questions on what support you have available

1. What social networks or community groups are important to you? (prompt if necessary with friends/family/community groups/sports groups/religious groups)
2. Thinking of the support that is important to you:
  - a) Do you live near them?
  - b) Does your accommodation affect you being able to access support?
  - c) Are you able to connect to your support networks whether in person or digitally from your home?
3. Do you have the support you need to help you with any problems to do with your accommodation? If you had a problem with your accommodation or needed some advice where would you go/who would you go to?
4. Does where you live affect your ability to access employment, education or training?

### Questions on finances and paying for accommodation

1. Are you currently on housing benefit? Does this have any impact on the accommodation you have been able to access?
2. Is your monthly income (where from benefits or wages) enough to meet the costs associated with the upkeep of the property? (e.g. heating, gas, electric, Wi-Fi etc.)
3. Have you had access to a leaving care grant? If so:
  - a) Was this money easy to access?
  - b) What did you spend it on?
  - c) Was it enough to allow you to buy the things you needed?
4. Have you ever had to apply for credit/loans to pay for any costs associated to living in your home? If so where did you borrow this money from and have you faced difficulties paying it back?

### Care leavers and homelessness

1. Have you been homeless since leaving care? If yes:
  - a) How did you become homeless?
  - b) What support did you get to find new accommodation when you were homeless?
  - c) Was it helpful?
  - d) What more do you think could be done to stop care leavers becoming homeless?

[barnardos.org.uk](http://barnardos.org.uk)

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