



What's Going On MY MESSAGE ABOUT THE CARE REVIEW

By Terry Galloway

The Care Review has the power to be one of the most impactful policies of our times – **if we get it right!**

We need a framework that creates systematic change to ensure children in care and care leavers are given the opportunity to level up. The right intention is there, but my concern is that the detail is not. Numbers on paper might not tell the whole story.

Working closely with the DWP, we have placed over 170 young people into jobs over the last 12 months. We are also currently running a pilot jobs programme with 30 young care experienced people. In this course we've provided one-to-one sessions and brought in actors from Coronation Street to do role play activities with the young people. We act out scenarios from the workplace and they call out behaviours that they do, but seeing it from a different perspective has really helped them. They've been really engaged and it's been brilliant to watch their progress.

The program is co-designed and changing as their needs develop. We have included things like parenting classes, integrity, and critical thinking, as well as providing practical advice on what to do when moving into a flat for the first time and paying household bills. Some of the young males even wanted help with knowing how to shave. These are all factors that could increase anxieties

in the workplace, and have the potential to contribute to losing a job.

On paper most of these young people are at college or on a training programme, but the reality is very different. Some of them are homeless, some don't have pathway plans, or are taking drugs, or getting arrested. Should the care review fail to take into account the detail behind the numbers and what is actually happening on the ground we will never create the change to support them into independence.

This is not about feeling sorry for care leavers – there is a real business case here. Our programme is based on a pilot in the USA. In the grocery industry, typical retention after 12 months is 35% but when care experienced people went through their programme the retention rate jumped to 89%. A lot of this stemmed from the sense of purpose and belonging they gained in the workplace.

However, coming up with an arbitrary number of jobs for care leavers is not good enough. Opportunity should be available to everyone, and creating a target figure turns it into a tick box exercise which doesn't drive real change. If you had ten children you wouldn't be happy if you were told that only three of them would be supported to get a job when they were older – you'd want the same opportunity for all your children. When we look at it this way we design the system slightly differently and create a more lasting and meaningful impact.

The Jobs Programme has to be available for every young person leaving care, it needs to be well funded and include a subsidy similar to the Kickstart Scheme. The Care Review needs to look at this very carefully and holistically, because it represents a way out of poverty and a changing trajectory for our care leavers that cannot be underestimated. But it requires a systematic approach. It must take account of all the government organs and agencies and businesses that our care leavers are likely to interact with - they all have a part to play, but my concern is the level of detail.

This is why we are arguing for an extension of corporate parenting responsibilities to all public bodies. Our care leavers are being pushed from pillar to post

and this needs to stop. Every time they hit a brick wall, they get retraumatised and lose hope.

I also recommend that they create a protected characteristic for care experience. This will give care leavers a voice whenever a decision is made or policy created. The Equality Impact Assessment that is undertaken during the decision-making process looks at the nine protected characteristics and how that policy will affect them. If they will be disproportionately affected then they have to change the policy or come up with a solution so it doesn't have a negative impact.

For example, I was recently talking with a care experienced adult who told me that he was not given the contact details for his brother for 40 years. Imagine that yearning to see family members that you know exist, but are not allowed to because of a policy that does not take account of you.

I was split up from my siblings and we all ended up in different places physically and mentally, but we stayed in touch. But imagine being thrown into care, then losing touch and not being able to get back a relationship because the Information Commissioners Office did not understand how their policies would affect you.

A protected characteristic gives care experienced people voice. It means that whoever is drafting policies will have to find out how it affects us, rather than people like myself and other care-experienced individuals retraumatising, when the decision makers should be taking account of care experience as part of their decision-making process.

MY LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER

I have drafted a letter to the Prime Minister using data we have collected from the Care Leaver Offer website with some suggestions to reduce the downward mobility that care leavers face when they reach their care cliff at eighteen. There are additional barriers for young people leaving care, and these are some quick and not very costly wins that would have a big impact on the lives of young people and support the government's mission to level up. These are my asks:

- **Give every young person leaving care a passport:** Some Local Authorities do this already, but they are buying directly from a government agency. Children are parented by the state, so this is like a father paying the mother for a service to the child.

- **Give every young person leaving care a provisional driving license:** This opens up their right to work. Banks need two forms of ID – if they don't have it they can't open up a bank account and they can't get paid for jobs.

- **National Council Tax Exemption Policy:** The Children's Society have approached the government about this many times before, but have always been rebuffed because council tax is devolved to Local Authorities. Because of the way the two tiered system of local government works we are seeing no consistency with how this is currently happening across the UK. Our data shows the divergence in support that Local Authorities are giving to care leavers, and by demonstrating that the current system is not working we are asking the government to step in to offer additional support.

My motivations always come back to my sister. When she left care she was vulnerable. She wanted love and healing, but instead she got abused. She was unable to leave a violent relationship because it had so deeply influenced her self-worth, and in the end she was killed by it. Getting care leavers into work and supporting them to develop positive relationships so they don't get preyed on is critical. This is not a handout, but a real solution that drives real change.

DOWNING STREET VISIT

To create a children's home you have to be registered by Ofsted which is a laborious process. To get around this, children were being housed in supported accommodation rather than children's homes. The government recognised that this was untenable and said they were going to stop it from happening, but it has only been stopped for children in care up to the age of 16. In reality, this means that 4,500 children aged between 16-18 are in houses that don't provide care.

Article 39 took the DfE to court, arguing that it is irrational for the government to say that a 15-year-old must have care, yet a 16-year-old does not. When you're taken into care, you're placed on a care order until the age of 18 and therefore you should be cared for. They also argued that this was age discrimination.

To get public awareness about this we created a petition that gained over 10,000 signatures and we went to Downing Street to hand it in. A week later we had the High Court case, though we have recently learned that we did not win... this time! We are appealing this decision because we believe that these regulations must be quashed and Local Authorities should provide care up to the age of 18.

The Competition and Market Authority report highlighted that some of the corporate children's homes are making in excess of £21,000 per child, per year. Costs have spiralled, but the level of care has gone down. The law tells councils to put a plan in place to show how they are going to meet the need of providing children's homes, but this is being interpreted in different ways.

When providers apply for planning permission to create a new children's home it takes 15 months on average. There are solutions where smaller local providers can respond faster as the need arises. If a small sibling group came into care in an emergency, a house could be leased and light upgrades such as fire doors and smoke detection could be done in days.

You don't necessarily need planning permission because a small children's home is not a material change. Children don't live in large institutions anymore; the rules and prejudices are outdated. When planning applications for children's homes happen, communities often come out in protest against them. What they are really saying is "No Care Kids Here" – and this kind of discrimination has to stop.

When baby Arthur was killed, people were out on the streets with candles saying he should have been in care, but where do these people think that is? It is in our communities. A family of three children in a house with a couple of care workers is not going to adversely impact an area more than a family home. Because that's what it is, a family home.

The Competition and Market Authority have stated that this needs to be clarified. The care review should be making really detailed recommendations around this so that Local Authorities can start making changes right now.

What my team and I really want the Care Review team to understand is that this is not about feeling sorry for care leavers, but about giving them a voice. There are plenty of practical solutions that drive real change, but in order to discover this we need to be heard and we need the complexities and detail to be understood.