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CARE LEAVER COVENANT OVERVIEW

In July 2016, the Government published a major policy document 'Keep on Caring' to support young people from care to independence. A key policy commitment in the paper is a strategic pledge to introduce a Care Leaver Covenant. The Covenant is a promise made by the private, public and voluntary sectors to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently.

All young people who leave care at 16, 17 or 18 are statutorily provided with some support from the local authority in the region in which they live. This includes being assigned a Personal Adviser to help them in the transition to living independently; there should be support with finding accommodation and with any costs of participating in education, training and employment. However, in order to provide a greater level of support at this crucial stage during the transition of care leavers to adulthood, wider society also needs to play a part.

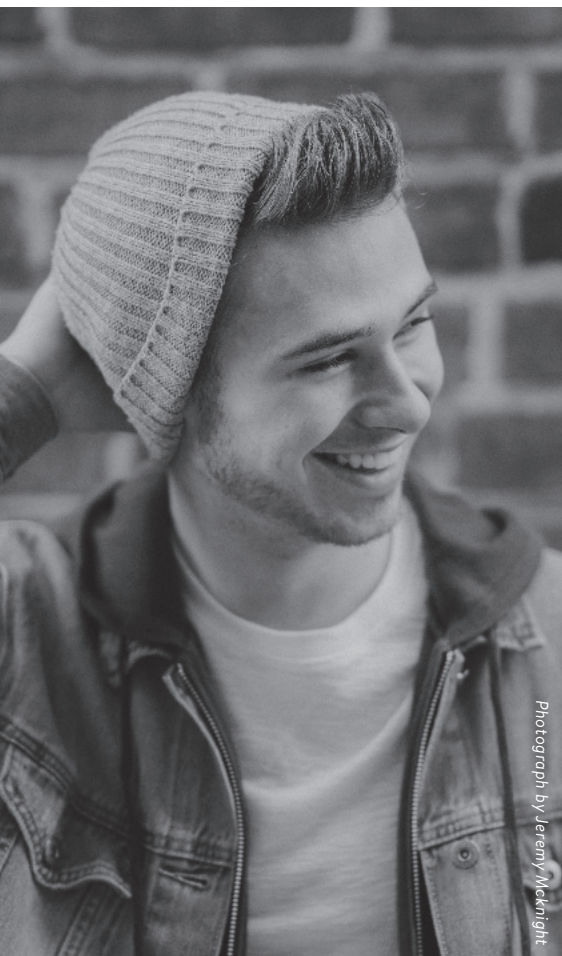
Undoubtedly, a large proportion of young people leave their care setting poorly prepared for independence. Typically, they lack the appropriate resource to acquire and hold down gainful employment as well as the skills needed to manage their financial affairs and domestic arrangements. They frequently do not have the social and emotional confidence or the family and friend networks that would provide the confidence and resilience to face the challenges of earning a living and making their way in society.





The aim of the Care Leaver Covenant, to which organisations commit, is to provide additional support for those leaving care; making available a different type of support and expertise from that statutorily provided by local authorities. Drawing on the resourcefulness and imagination of their staff and their working environment, organisations have the potential to offer new perspectives and professional expertise. These can offer opportunities and a new way of thinking to aid the care leavers in moving forward successfully to the next phase of their lives.

Each organisation that commits to the Care Leaver Covenant will be able to offer a support package to care leavers that is tailored to its specific expertise. The organisation would underpin its commitment to the Covenant with a specific 'offer', setting out what it can provide. Examples of the sort of activities that the offer might include, depending on the nature of the organisation, are:



Photograph by Jeremy McNight

- *Providing care leavers with opportunities to enter the world of work, such as offering work experience placements, work shadowing placements, internships, traineeships and apprenticeships;*
- *Providing care leavers with additional support. For example, one-to-one mentoring or pastoral support and guidance on various aspects of their lives, financial guidance, career/employment guidance, educational prospects and opportunities;*
- *Providing care leavers with opportunities to broaden their horizons e.g. concessionary access to sport, leisure and cultural activities along with discounted retail offers;*
- *Encouraging their involvement in specific activities and events which inspire their personal interest and widen their employment prospects;*
- *Providing or supporting them in educational and training opportunities that will improve their vocational and educational profile and open up future employment opportunities.*



STATISTICS ON LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS IN ENGLAND

There are some 70,000 children in care in England for which the state provides financial support of the order of £2.5 billion. A majority of the children (75%) are fostered and the rest are in residential care.

The following facts and figures illustrate the often blighted and frustrated experiences of children in care and care leavers:



Photograph by Kate Williams

- *In general about 38% of children in care have more than one placement during a year, while 11% had three or more placements*
- *14% of children in care in 2016 achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C compared to 58% of children not in care*
- *40% of all care leavers of 19, 20 and 21 years of age (in 2016) were not in employment, education or training compared to 14% of all 19, 20 and 21 year olds*
- *The percentage of children in care gaining entry to university is 7% and this figure has not been improved since 2006; compared to the university entry in 2016 of around 40% of their peer group*
- *20% of young homeless people have been previously in care*
- *Children in care are four times more likely to have a mental health difficulty, which in many cases is attributed to isolation and loneliness.*

The quality of care is highly variable and often falls considerably short of what constitutes good parenting. Some young people lack the support and encouragement to benefit from a good education and their experiences out of school are not rich, in personal, social and cultural experiences.

Whilst there is overwhelming evidence that care leavers can find themselves at the 'thin end of the wedge', we also have first hand knowledge of many success stories, detailing how care leavers overcome adversity and succeed in spite of their circumstances. The Care Leaver Covenant is a kite mark for organisations who want to celebrate their contribution to helping care leavers have a greater chance at success.



CARE LEAVER COVENANT OUTCOMES:

1. Care leavers are better prepared and supported to live independently.
2. Care leavers have improved access to employment, education and training.
3. Care leavers experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure.
4. Care leavers have improved access to health and emotional support.
5. Care leavers achieve financial stability.





Photograph by Alexandra Kirr



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