Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway

Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathways

The Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

CELCIS Centre for excellence for Children's Care and Protection

A WAY HOME SCOTLAND

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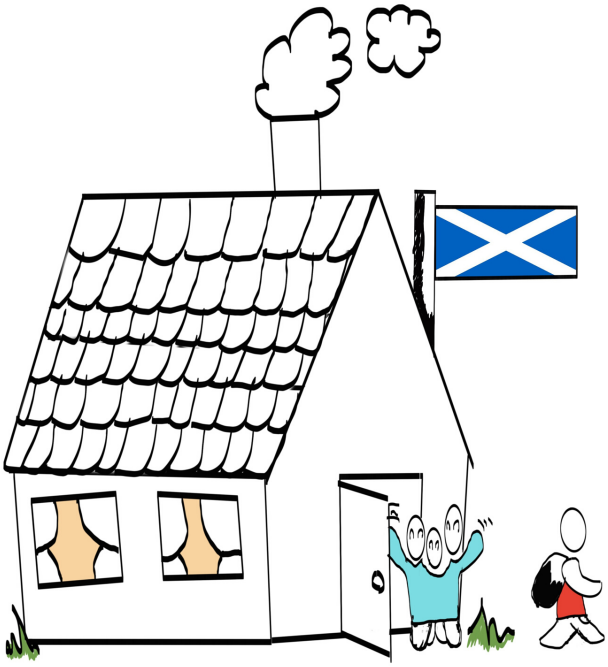


Foreword

Scotland has a history of progressive policy and legislation in relation to housing and homelessness and more recently improved the legislation for young people with care experience. Despite this, youth homelessness stubbornly persists and continues to cast a shadow over our ambitions for our young people. It is widely accepted that stemming the flow of children from care into homelessness is a key part of reducing the youth homelessness figures. Most importantly, it is a basic requirement to ensure national and local public bodies fully honour their responsibilities to all young people, and especially those who are care experienced.

All of the organisations, professionals and young people involved in the A Way Home Scotland coalition have committed to do something about it. The national and local political will for change is there, the Independent Care Review is about to publish its findings, Corporate parenting is here to stay and we are slowly chipping away at the need for a more compassionate response to deep-rooted and complex problems. The key to change is turning progressive policy into meaningful implementation. Making the changes set out in this document, developed through committed partnership working, will be at the heart of delivering improvement at national and local levels.

I am proud of the 'A Way Home Scotland' coalition, demonstrating the power of partnership working – a power that can transform our approach to youth homelessness through prevention, timely support and appropriate accommodation. We have a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that no young person becomes homeless and that particularly applies to care experienced young people. Time to make the step-change happen – let's start here and now.

Tam Baillie
Chair of A Way Home Scotland

Foreword

As corporate parents, we are personally committed to the well-being of all our care leavers. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group recommended prevention approaches should be developed for groups at risk of homelessness, highlighting care leavers as a priority.

We are therefore grateful for the dedicated work from experts and those with lived experience which has gone into the practical recommendations in this document, aimed at ending the trauma of homelessness for care leavers.

We look forward to working with the A Way Home Scotland coalition as we move to end homelessness in Scotland for good.

Kevin Stewart, MSP
Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning

Maree Todd, MSP
Minister for Children and Young People

Introduction

This report and recommendations have been developed to improve the housing journey of care leavers in Scotland, and prevent homelessness for people with experience of care. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group {1} (HARSAG) recommended that pathways to prevent homelessness should be developed for groups which evidence tells us are more at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping, including care leavers.

This guidance is the result of work undertaken between May and September 2019, including assessment of the problem, ambition, activity, partnerships and implementation process required for improvement.
A multi-agency working group (see Appendix 1) has progressed this work, which has been coordinated by the A Way Home Scotland coalition. The working group has engaged closely with the Independent Care Review to ensure recommendations and advice set out in this paper are in line with the direction of travel the Review is taking. Key members of the working group and the A Way Home Scotland coalition have attended meetings of the Care Review's 'Edges of Care' workstream, and the Chairs of A Way Home Scotland and the Independent Care Review have also held discussions. Together with continuous engagement between Ministers and officials from both homelessness and children and families policy areas, this has ensured that both areas of work have gone forward with strong understanding of one another. An agreement has been reached that the Independent Care Review will seek to endorse and build on this work as it draws its conclusions in 2020, and it is intended that implementation of the recommendations from the Independent Care Review and from the Care Leavers Housing Pathway work will be taken forward in tandem.

The primary aims of this document are to set out sensible, evidence backed next steps to:

- Support the full implementation of the policy and legislative frameworks which mean corporate parents can and do prevent care leavers experiencing homelessness, at the point of leaving care and later.

- Ensure that if they do experience homelessness, care leavers can rapidly access support which is effectively tailored to their specific needs and circumstances from their corporate parents, recognising that their care experience may make them uniquely vulnerable in particular ways, at the point of leaving care and later.

- Support practice and culture shifts, including in partnership working and shared responsibility between all corporate parents, to help ensure young people are prepared for and supported through the transition into adulthood, and beyond, once they have moved into their own accommodation.

[1] https://www.gov.scot/groups/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-action-group/

It is widely acknowledged that the key elements which inform a positive transitional pathway from care to sustainable accommodation for care leavers already exist in recently published strategies and policies. The challenge, in practice, is to deliver their consistent implementation for all care leavers.

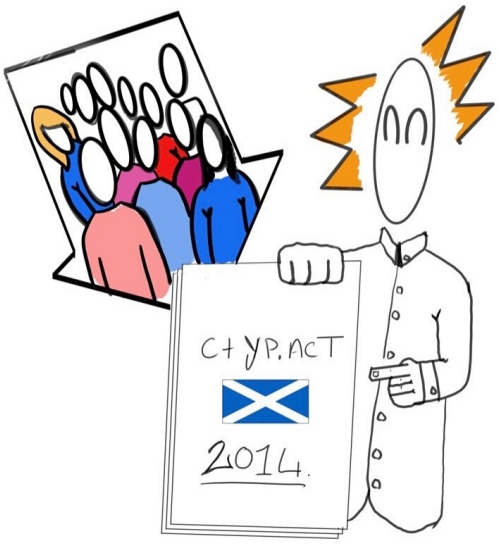
"[we] need to have a monitoring system nationally, with accountability and a national framework that can be personalised." [2]

In 2014/15 CELCIS undertook a survey [3] of the use of Housing Options Protocols by local authorities, with a follow-up survey carried out in conjunction with Scottish Government in late 2018. Survey findings continue to highlight significant variations in the interpretation and implementation of national policy intentions into local practice, with evidence that key actions are not being implemented. The Throughcare and Aftercare National Study [4] highlighted the variation that exists, and how this in itself can be problematic for care leavers. Simply put, the future life chances of care leavers can be dependent on which local authority they were in the care of, and receiving Aftercare from [5].

"It's a postcode lottery."

Therefore, this paper aims to set out a specific series of actions, which if carried out will support the full implementation and consistent delivery of relevant parts of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 [6] ("the 2014 Act"), particularly:

- Part 9: Corporate Parenting
- Part 10: Aftercare
- Part 11: Continuing Care



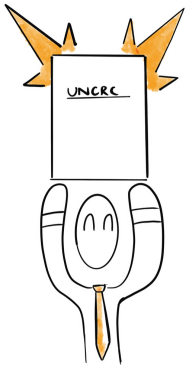
[2]The quotations included throughout this document are drawn from the report, 'Somewhere to Call Home: Report on homelessness and Care Experience', by Megan Sutherland, August 2019 (https://www.whocaresscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Somewhere-to-Call-Home-Megan-Sutherland-August-2019.pdf). This document was produced by Scottish Government and Who Cares? Scotland to draw together the views of people with experience of care and homelessness particularly to support this work. The report provides additional bespoke responses, in addition to the significant amount of material already published on this subject which draws on lived experience. The pathway working group itself benefited from two members with lived experience of the issues, as well as years of expertise in frontline services from most people around the table.
[3]McGhee et al (2014) Thoroughcare and Aftercare in Scotland Local Authorities: A National Study, Glasgow: CELCIS https://www.celcis.org/files/7114/3938/6983/Inform-Housing_Options_and_Care_Leavers.pdf
[4] https://www.celcis.org/files/1814/4050/5854/Throughcare-and-Aftercare-in-scotlands-local-authorities.pdf
[5]https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/pcr073_care-leavers-financial-exclusion-final.pdf
[6]http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2014/8/contents/enacted

The importance of the key elements of the 2014 Act are re-stated, to reinforce the need for all those involved in delivering care, support and services to looked after young people and care leavers to re-double their efforts and fulfil their responsibilities to the fullest. Scottish Government Guidance reinforces both the legal and ethical duties of corporate parents towards care leavers to re-emphasise local authorities' powers and duties towards them and to enhance and improve personal support for them [7]. Fully implementing the 2014 Act further supports Scotland's ambitions to 'get it right for every child' and 'be the best place to grow up', which apply to all of our looked after young people and care leavers into adulthood. However, it is not enough that local authorities and other corporate parents simply fulfil the letter of the law. To achieve meaningful change and improvement, they must embrace the core and spirit of the law throughout their organisational structures, systems and practices.

"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, I 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."

Part 1 of the 2014 Act (Rights of Children) requires Scottish Ministers and public authorities to report on the steps they have taken to secure better or further effect the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [8] (UNCRC). Furthermore, the Scottish Government has committed to incorporating the UNCRC into domestic law in Scotland within this parliamentary term. A number of the UNCRC's articles have clear relevance to the aims of this pathway, including:

- Article 20, which states that children who have not been able to remain in their family environment shall be entitled to special protection and assistance from the state;
- Article 12, which sets out the rights of the child to express their views, to be heard, and to have their views given due weight;
- Article 3, which establishes that in all actions, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration;
- Article 6, which requires states to ensure the child's development to the maximum possible extent; and
- Article 4 which specifies that states shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative or other measures for the implementation of children's rights, and that where they cover economic, social and cultural rights, these shall be undertaken to the maximum extent of their available resources.



[7] https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-part-10-Aftercare-children-young-people-scotland-act-2014/
[8] https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf?_ga=2.100216861.2017447.1564497034-164657242.1548250590

Children and young people with care experience come from a range of backgrounds, and like all children and young people, are individuals with their own unique strengths and needs. However, all young people with experience of the care system have experienced adversity, and often share distinct vulnerabilities and needs.

Clearly, young people without a care background can also have significant needs and vulnerabilities, but for young people with care experience, Scottish Ministers and a range of other public bodies as corporate parents have specific statutory duties and responsibilities designed to ensure the needs of this particular group are met.

Because not every child or young person with care experience is included within the legal definitions of a 'looked after child' (an individual currently looked after in a formal arrangement by the local authority) or a 'care leaver' (an individual 'looked after' on or beyond their 16th birthday, who is currently under the age of 26), some children and young people who have care experience do not have the same legal protections as those to whom corporate parenting legislation applies. Some young people may have similar needs and backgrounds to care leavers, yet remain outside the legal definitions. All corporate parents are committed to delivering services based on the needs of individuals, and many may be able to extend enhanced supports and services to all individuals with care experience, recognising that supporting young people as early as possible could protect them from experiencing further disadvantage in later life.

The guidance and recommendations established through this pathway are necessarily restricted by current legal definitions (changes to which are not within the scope of this guidance). However the A Way Home Scotland coalition is committed to securing improvements for all care experienced people, and as such encourage the broadest possible application of this guidance, as well as supporting cultural and practical changes to maximise the number of people legally recognised as 'care leavers', and so legally entitled to additional supports. The transition to adulthood can be hazardous for many young people, and the approach set out in this document establishes best practice, which is desirable for all vulnerable young people. The A Way Home Scotland coalition is also taking forward broader based work intended to set out actions to prevent homelessness for all young people, which builds and expands on the analysis in this document.

Meeting the needs of Scotland's care experienced young people can be achieved through fully realising Scotland's excellent policy and legislative framework to address their often unseen needs. Closing the implementation gap for this group of young people, and to achieve our collective National Outcomes [9] , will require specialist and collaborative approaches. A recent CELCIS report on 16+ Supported Accommodation [10] highlighted the need to ensure much greater levels of collaborative planning at both strategic and operational levels to ensure that Continuing Care and access to positive housing options are not binary choices or mutually exclusive.

[9]https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/index.php/national-outcomes/children-and-young-people
[10]https://www.celcis.org/knowledge-bank/search-bank/study-independent-supported-accommodation-providers-scotland/

Transition from Care: Background and Context

Research consistently highlights that care leavers are more likely than other young people to become homeless or experience housing instability (CELCIS, 2019) [11] . Despite difficult early life experiences, and often multiple placements during childhood, looked after young people continue to leave care at an earlier age, with less preparation, and with less support than young people leaving home without care experience, often before they are ready. Unlike many of their peers, it is very unlikely that care leavers will have the option to return to their care setting if their housing situation breaks down or they need additional support for a period. These factors combine disproportionally to increase the risk and occurrence of homelessness.

Care leavers often lack a functional social support network upon which they can rely during the transition from child welfare dependence to their place in society as an adult. Many face independence alone and isolated, and lacking a 'safety-net' of family and friends [12].

"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 payday 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."

The importance of relationships and positive social connection and networks cannot be overstated, and it is highlighted in the Staying Put Scotland Guidance:

The notion of independence is perhaps better expressed as 'interdependence', more accurately reflecting the day-to-day reality of an extended range of healthy inter-personal relationships, social supports and networks (Scottish Government, 2013, p.5).

The importance of 'interdependence' and relational connections is reinforced across international research and academic writing on supporting young people moving on from care, with an increasing recognition that the term 'independence' is inappropriate in the context of young people's transitions [13].

[11]https://www.celcis.org/files/7215/5835/3996/Beyond_The_Headlines__Homelessness_May_2019.pdf f
[12]Mendes and Moslehuddin (2006) From Dependence to Interdependence https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/car.932
[13]Moodley et al (2018) Youth Transitioning Out of Residential Care in South Africa: Toward Ubuntu and Interdependent Living https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329807095_Youth_Transitioning_Out_of_Residential_Care_in_South_Africa_Toward_Ubuntu_and_Interdependent_Living

Relationships are therefore at the heart of good practice. Person-centred decision-making and support, built on trusting relationships, will ensure not only that the most appropriate accommodation options are made available to care leavers, but will also attend to the range of holistic factors which can impact the likelihood of sustaining that accommodation in the longer term.

There is a growing body of theory and literature on the concept of 'emerging adulthood' which recognises the significant shift in the age at which young people enter adult roles, which increasingly often does not happen until mid to late-20s [14]. While this might be obvious in the context of a young person living in a normal family environment, young people moving on from care can find the system pressuring them to take a step to do so before they are ready and without an obvious return if something does not work out. This arises because systems and legislation tend to be based on arbitrary definitions, or simplistic chronological triggers and thresholds, which do not reflect the reality set out in the academic research in the way young people's needs evolve and emerge.

"Imagine your parents kicking you out because of your birthday."

Becoming an adult is not something that simply happens on an 18th birthday: becoming an adult is a process not an event. Research highlights the negative impact of the multiple abrupt and accelerated transitions, the 'instant adulthood', which many care leavers experience [15]. Evidence clearly demonstrates that the transition from care is often when looked after young people and care leavers are at their most vulnerable [16].

"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 responsibilities that come with 'independent' living can be daunting and, at times, potentially overwhelming. For young people moving on from care, often still dealing with complex issues and a lack of support from parents and services, this transition can result in homelessness.

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

Feelings of loneliness, isolation and fear can be exacerbated for young people who had been used to group living, for example, particularly if they are housed and accommodated in a new area where they had no family or friends to support them. This can affect mental health and emotional wellbeing, which can be compounded by practical challenges, for example, poor transport links which can make travelling to maintain social contacts complicated, time-consuming and expensive. Consequently, young people can became dissatisfied with their lives on leaving care, affecting their ability to cope, and ultimately affecting the likelihood of successfully sustaining a tenancy [17]. Whilst appropriate practical and financial support is vital, addressing any sense of loneliness and social isolation is a critical factor in the prevention of homelessness amongst care leavers.

[14]Mann-Feder, V and Goyette, M. eds. (2019) Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood, New York: OU Press
[15]Stein, M. (2012) Young People Leaving Care: Supporting Pathways to Adulthood, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishing
[16]Staying Put Scotland Guidance p.5 https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2013/10/staying-put-scotland-providing-care-leavers-connectness-belonging/documents/00435935-pdf/00435935-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/
[17].https://www.celcis.org/files/7114/3938/6983/Inform-Housing_Options_and_Care_Leavers.pdf

"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."

Care leavers will by definition have experienced some trauma associated with a move into a care setting and of separation from birth families [18] , and, if they reach the point of homelessness, at least one other source of major trauma in their lives. Further, unlike the wider population, because of their early life situation they are likely to have fewer emotionally supportive social networks, which means fewer people to support them in managing a greater burden of challenge, in turn putting them at greater risk of mental ill health. These two factors combine to mean they have fewer resources to manage the difficult process of growing up.

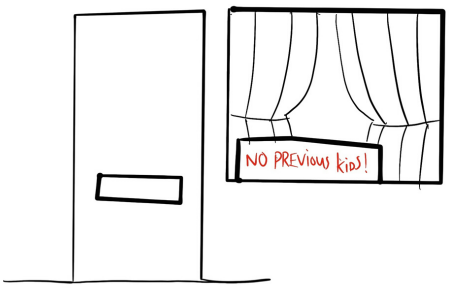
"All care experienced people should be offered mental health counselling throughout and after their care experience, regardless of whether they are seen as a 'good outcome' (i.e. removed from supervision and returned to parents).

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."

Therefore, it is critical to see care leavers' risks of homelessness and housing instability within the broader context of the care system: it often follows an experience of instability and a sense of impermanence in care, poorly supported transition from care, limited access to ongoing education and employment[19] and critical issues of financial precariousness and poverty [20].

The specific issues that increase the risk of homelessness for young people leaving care include:

- leaving care too young
- multiple in-care placements and transitions
- the linear movement out of care with no capacity to return
- fracturing, and lack of, supportive adult relationships and networks
- inappropriate post-care accommodation destinations
- unresolved trauma
- limited/inconsistent emotional, practical and financial support
- financial precariousness and risk of financial hardship and poverty



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

[18]Furnival and Grant (2014) Trauma sensitive practice with children in care, Iriss Insights 27
[19]http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/75159/1/Document.pdf
[20]https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/pcr073_care-leavers-financial-exclusion-final.pdf

Our expectations, and structural supports and services, for young people leaving care are simply out of kilter with the age of young people leaving the family home as illustrated in the 2017 ONS survey, which states that:

"The figures show that nearly a third (32 per cent) of males aged 20 to 34 years are currently living with their parents, [and...] a fifth (20 per cent) of females in the same age group".

Official statistics on care leavers and homelessness are published both by Homelessness and Looked After Children teams in the Scottish Government, and are hard to interpret jointly. Neither set of statistics sets out to understand with depth and accuracy the nature of the problem of homelessness for people with experience of care. Additionally, the Homelessness statistics rely on self-declaration of care experience by the applicant. With no obvious incentive to declaring, it is possible a significant proportion of people do not declare experience of care.

Most recent statistics, published in June 2019, indicate that over the past year, while 7% of applications concerned an individual with care experience, 40% of applicants' responses to this question are recorded as 'not known/refused' [21] .

Available figures only reflect those who actually apply for housing and omit a significant proportion of young people who may experience many different forms of homelessness e.g. rough-sleeping, living in temporary accommodation (such as hostels, shelters, B&Bs) and some short-term private or social housing.

Homelessness also includes what is referred to as 'hidden homelessness', where people are in informal and unstable housing arrangements, such as 'sofa-surfing'. These forms of homelessness are more likely to be hidden from services and therefore from any official recording, and this form of homelessness may be experienced by a significant number of care experienced young people [22]. CELCIS's (2019) briefing on homelessness and care experience [23] goes into more detail about the data issues, and its conclusion is generally accepted: 'we do see with clarity that young people with care experience are statistically more likely to experience homelessness than young people in the general population.'

[21]https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2018-2019/ (Supporting files, Tables 2019, Table 5)
[22]https://www.celcis.org/files/7215/5835/3996/Beyond_The_Headlines__Homelessness_May_2019.pdf
[23]ibid

There are currently 6,109 care leavers (young people eligible for Aftercare) in Scotland [24]. 436 (7%) of these young people are known to have experienced one or more spells of homelessness. 52% have not experienced homelessness, and the experiences of the remaining 41% are not known, in part because (for a range of reasons) not all of these young people are actively receiving Aftercare from the local authority [25].
Overall, homelessness statistics over the past 5 years illustrate a fairly consistent picture in terms of applications involving individuals known to have previous experience of being looked after, of between 6-7% of all applications. As previously noted, there are also significant unknowns with this data, with the 'previous looked after status' of individuals in 34-40% of applications over the past 5 years listed as 'not known/refused' [26].

Whilst numbers vary year-to-year, Scottish Government statistics indicate a fairly consistent pattern of between 1,200-1,400 young people ceasing to be looked after on or beyond their 16th birthday (previously recorded as beyond their school-leaving date) each year.

[24]https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-2017-2018/pages/1/ (Supporting Files, Additional Tables, Table 1.15)
[25]https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-2017-2018/pages/1/ (Supporting Files, Additional Tables, Table 1.19)
[26]https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2018-2019/ (Supporting files, Tables 2019, Table 5)

Scottish Policy and Legislative Context

The commitment to overcoming the challenges faced by care leavers in terms of housing and homelessness is recognised in a range of existing policy and legislative commitments in Scotland.

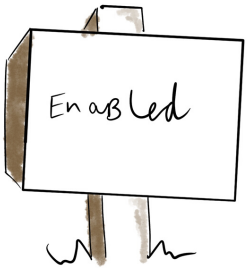
In 2013, the Scottish Government launched the Staying Put Scotland Guidance [27] which sets out a philosophy of care where young people are 'encouraged, enabled and empowered' to remain in care for longer, rather than expected to leave before they are ready. Additionally, the Housing Options Protocols for Care Leavers [28] is intended to assist Community Planning Partnerships and corporate parents to ensure that there are a range of suitable high standard options available to meet the housing and accommodation needs of care leavers.

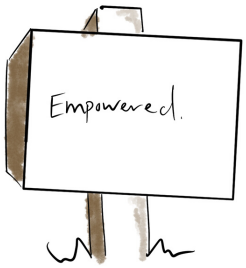
In April 2015, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 came into effect. This sets out the duties and responsibilities of designated statutory corporate parents which includes the provision of a safe, caring and appropriate home for every looked after young person and care leaver. Whilst there is no legislative mechanism through which a care leaver can formally return to care (i.e. return to 'looked after' status), both the Staying Put Scotland Guidance and Housing Options Protocols Guidance for Care Leavers set out clear principles and expectations, along with positive practice examples which outline the comprehensive support care leavers should receive.

These principles and expectations have been further consolidated by the legislative underpinning of the 2014 Act and with particular regard to Part 9 (Corporate Parenting) [29], Part 10 (Aftercare) [30] and Part 11 (Continuing Care) [31].

While it is recognised that we are still in a transitionary phase, the clear expectations and this enabling context have not yet fully changed young people's experiences; they often continue to find themselves moving on from care at too early an age, before they are ready, often poorly prepared or poorly supported and with limited or no choice.

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





[27]https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2013/10/staying-put-scotland-providing-care-leavers-connectness-belonging/documents/00435935-pdf/00435935-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00435935.pdf
[28]https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2013/10/housing-options-protocol-care-leavers-guidance-corporate-parents-improving-housing/documents/00435939-pdf/00435939-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00435939.pdf
[29]https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2015/08/statutory-guidance-part-9-corporate-parenting-children-young-people-scotland/documents/00483676-pdf/00483676-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00483676.pdf
[30]https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2016/11/guidance-part-10-Aftercare-children-young-people-scotland-act-2014/documents/00509198-pdf/00509198-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00509198.pdf
[31]https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2016/11/guidance-part-11-continuing-care-children-young-people-scotland-act/documents/00509205-pdf/00509205-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00509205.pdf

The Scottish Government 'Ending Homelessness Together - High Level Action Plan' [32] (2018) states that:

We will ensure a clear, effective focus on preventing and responding effectively to youth homelessness .

The consistent application of the Staying Put Scotland provision for care leavers is viewed as a critical component of this, and there is a vital role for Continuing Care in relation to the prevention of homelessness agenda. The Action Plan also notes that Staying Put Scotland and its consistent implementation in relation to Care Leavers is critical for meeting the commitments of the Scottish Government Missing Persons Framework [33].

The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework [34] sets out key commitments including the objective '...to improve the well-being of children – and adults – to give the best chance for those who have suffered adversity to go on to live their lives to the full...'. Improving transitions from care into settled and safe accommodation is central to meeting these commitments. The policy and legislative landscape in Scotland provides an enabling context to eliminating homelessness for care leavers. Despite this, homelessness continues to be a common feature in the lives of care leavers.

The Prevention of Homelessness Guidance [35] (published 2009), states that: "...care leavers should never leave the looked after system without careful advance joint planning to ensure that they do not enter the homelessness system at all. Appropriate accommodation and any required support should be in place prior to any looked after child leaving care."

Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee Report 'Having and Keeping a Home: Preventing Homelessness amongst Young People' [36] (published October 2012), made specific reference to care leaver protocols:

We recommend that the Scottish Government establish which local authorities do not operate effective care-leaver protocols appropriate to the young person and that it take action as necessary to address the situation [37].

Whilst increasing the range and quality of post-care housing and accommodation options is very important, care leavers' need for stable, sustainable housing and accommodation, and their increased risks of homelessness cannot be separated from their in-care experience and transition pathways.
The current age-related triggers and thresholds, differing procedures and processes between agencies, and within and across local authority areas, along with, at times, unhelpful established culture and practice issues can too often work against the needs of care leavers.

"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."

[32]https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2018/11/ending-homelessness-together-high-level-action-plan/documents/00543359-pdf/00543359-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00543359.pdf
[33]https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2017/05/national-missing-persons-framework-scotland/documents/00517676-pdf/00517676-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00517676.pdf
[34]https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/
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[36]https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/74872.aspx
[37]https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2013/10/housing-options-protocol-care-leavers-guidance-corporate-parents-improving-housing/documents/00435939-pdf/00435939-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00435939.pdf

The recent study into supported accommodation in Scotland, 'Getting by, but is that good enough?' highlights the impact that the daunting and unstable nature of temporary accommodation can have on care experienced people [38]. These are young people who require access to services which are designed to meet their particular needs for stability, rather than experience further insecurity. Housing and accommodation options and ongoing supports for care leavers need to be regarded more as a graduated extension of the care system, albeit offering an increased flexibility and responsiveness that better serves the needs of 'emerging adults'.

The legislative and procedural divisions and the abrupt child/adult thresholds for service registrations for example can frame and influence expectations and responses.

A greater acknowledgement of the changing developmental needs and issues impacting on young people in general and care leavers in particular must be at the heart of how we design and deliver services and supports. It is therefore necessary to work with relevant regulatory and improvement bodies to explore and agree how this challenging cultural shift can be achieved safely.

Research tells us that raising the age at which young people move on from care is the most direct way of increasing their likelihood of a successful transition into adulthood. This consistent research evidence from home and abroad informs both the Staying Put Scotland Guidance and Part 11 (Continuing Care) of the 2014 Act.

Despite having the most progressive and supportive legislative and policy context, Scotland has the lowest average age of leaving care in the UK (17 years). This is in stark contrast to the average age for the general population leaving the family home in Scotland, which is around 26 years. For some young people, especially those who enter care in their teenage years, stability and continuity is an important factor in promoting resilience and improving longer term outcomes. Research evidence shows that extending placements is associated with sustaining better educational and employment outcomes than leaving care early and with young people receiving more assistance after leaving care [39].

"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."

[38]Frame, J. (2018) Getting by, but is that good enough? Supported accommodation: a study Glasgow: CELCIS
[39]McGhee(2017) Staying Put and Continuing Care: The Implementation Challenge, SJRCC, 2017
https://www.celcis.org/files/4215/0641/7391/2017_Vol_16_2_McGhee_K_Staying_Put_and_Continuing_Care_The_Implementation_Challenge.pdf

In practice, there is a view that little attention has been paid to 'age-appropriate care' – especially as we move towards expecting young people to stay in care, or in their care setting, up to age 21 years – and possibly beyond as policy develops.

As young people get older, their needs naturally evolve, and settings need to be able to support young people as they go through the normal experiences of emerging adulthood. In addition to always being fully supported to acquire the range of skills necessary to manage their own future household (including but not limited to cooking, cleaning, shopping, paying bills and more), young people should be supported to learn to manage their own risks and vulnerabilities like their non-looked after peers – including exploring intimate personal relationships, having independent and unmoderated relationships with their peers, and developing a healthy relationship with alcohol for example. These are acknowledged as normal experiences for teenagers and young adults as they gain greater autonomy and interdependence. However, for care leavers and those under greater public scrutiny (including their carers) such activities can have disproportionately punitive consequences. This can also create anxiety and risk for professionals and carers and inhibit opportunities for learning and development for young people.

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

Managing differing expectations regarding these behaviours and freedoms, including in some places the more core life skills like cooking and cleaning, poses challenges for staff and managers accustomed to operating within the risk-averse culture and practice that often prevails in regulated foster and group-care settings.

"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?"

There is therefore a need to address unhelpful practice and cultural issues, to support carers and practitioners, to highlight positive practice examples, and to work alongside other key stakeholders including the Care Inspectorate and Scottish Social Services Council to inform a practice culture which explicitly acknowledges and supports the complexities of caring and supporting young adults.

Ensuring Equality

Like the rest of the population, care leavers have a variety of different equalities characteristics, which can mean individuals may be additionally vulnerable in particular ways, or need particular additional supports. Scotland has a strong framework of equalities legislation, and training and monitoring around equalities is already in place in local authorities and commissioned services. However for young people with many different professionals and services involved in their lives, it is particularly important that consideration is given to how care leavers experience stigma and inequality.

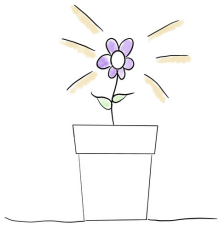
For care experienced people, their sense of identity and belonging is often disrupted by being removed from their birth families, managing new living circumstances and relationships, and often having to relocate to a new area. Challenges associated with identity and self-esteem can be especially acute where children and young people are placed in families who do not share or necessarily wholly support or understand issues such as their ethnicity and cultural background, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or gender reassignment.

The transition of leaving care must not be made more difficult for young people who are making sense of their identity by having to move to places where their characteristics are not all accepted, understood or supported.

"I was already carrying the judgment of being in care in my early life. I didn't want to add the fact I was LGBT to that too." [40]

Particular consideration must be given whilst planning leaving care transitions with young people with disabilities, to ensure they are able to live independently. This could mean ensuring accommodation is accessible and adapted as necessary; planning to ensure they do not receive less support from personal networks due to being relocated far away; or ensuring individuals do not need to move on from or change specialist provisions or supports including community mental health centres due to geographical restrictions.

Leaving care is a vulnerable time for most young people, which can be helped with support and stability. It is important that health services are not reduced or changed at this time for procedural or bureaucratic reasons. As corporate parents, local authorities and health boards are required to promote and protect the health interests of care leavers. Collaborative work between these services, to minimise the disruption care leavers with disabilities experience whilst leaving care, is part of statutory corporate parenting responsibilities. Implementing flexible age and geographical eligibility criteria for young people transitioning out of care are examples of policies which are highly beneficial to this group.



[40]https://www.whocaresscotland.org/who-we-are/blog/lgbt-history-month-kierans-story/

All services and professionals should be aware of the discrimination and stigma care experienced people often face and actively challenge this. These individuals may face discrimination against any protected characteristics that form part of their identity, as well as their identity as a person with care experience, and as a person with experience of homelessness.

Care experience is not recognised in the Equality Act (2010) as a protected characteristic, but the Scottish Government recognises it to be widely misunderstood and stigmatised.
The Scottish Government is working with partners to launch a public education initiative [41] to challenge misconceptions around care, in addition to ongoing work tackling unhelpful public perceptions on homelessness.

"I've been outed twice in my life... A lot of people might not realise that, for me, there was the same amount of stigma, the same damaging stereotypes, and the same fear surrounding the exposure of the care experienced part of my identity, as the LGBTQI part. I think everyone finding out I was in care was scarier. People understand what it means to be gay now, but people still don't really understand what it means to be in care." [42]

Young women are sometimes pressurised or required to leave their care placements after becoming pregnant. This can be for a range of reasons, including restrictions on providers, and undoubtedly adds to the stress they are experiencing in a particularly challenging time. The housing situations many young care experienced parents face, such as returning to an unsettled family home, placements in a temporary mother-and-baby units, or leaving care with no relational support, do not establish stable homes, which has an impact on their opportunities, and their children's young lives.

Care leavers have also described feeling judged by antenatal services enquiring about their identity as a care experienced person, and often automatically considering it as a risk factor in assessing their suitability as a parent.

"A lot of women who are care experienced are automatically assessed if they become pregnant, to make sure they can be fit mothers. My parents didn't teach me how to be a great mum when I get older, but they did show me a lot of what not to do. It's not fair, for someone to assume I would be the same, for someone to assume the worst of me." [43]

For care leavers who are parents, compassionate, non-judgmental services based on stability are essential to support them to live independently and raise their children without fear of extra scrutiny or prejudice. Care leavers consulted for this work spoke about the excellent support they had received from family nurses who work with new mums up to the age of 19 to care for their baby. With a lack of family support most new parents rely on and the added pressure to leave care once young people become parents, considering an increase to the age restriction on the family nurse support to 26 and facilitating the stable home conditions for care leavers all young parents want for their family would be welcome steps towards supporting care experienced parents in their own homes and reducing stigma.

[41]https://www.whocaresscotland.org/who-we-are/media-centre/press-releases/first-minister-backs-care-experienced-call-for-a-public-information-campaign-on-care/
[42]https://www.whocaresscotland.org/who-we-are/blog/josh-lifetime-equality/
[43]https://www.whocaresscotland.org/who-we-are/blog/iwd2018-with-danielle/

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

Supporting care leavers into accommodation where they feel safe is imperative to their wellbeing and sustaining a tenancy. For some young people leaving care, many of whom will have experienced abuse and/or neglect in their early lives, and particularly young women who have experienced domestic, sexual or honour-based abuse, this means taking a gendered approach to sourcing accommodation, in addition to working with trauma-informed services. Examples of this could be providing additional security measures, single-sex accommodation, a private flat, or accommodation in a different location to abuse perpetrators.

Pathways to settled, safe, sustainable accommodation

Established 'pathways' from care and into settled safe accommodation already exist, and speak to the prevention of homelessness.

A central assumption is that care leavers' homelessness will be at least dramatically reduced if these elements are fully implemented. The key consideration and principle assumption is that all transitions are planned, managed and supported based on identified and assessed needs and a young person's demonstration of 'readiness' to move on, rather than inappropriate bureaucratic drivers, or simple legislative or chronological triggers or thresholds. These are robust pathways, and form the basis of the care leavers homelessness prevention approach. All of these pathways must come with flexible person-centred support from trusted adults. The focus needs to be on what additional steps are required to implement them fully and consistently.

1. Staying Put & Continuing Care

a. From the earliest appropriate age (but well in advance of 16th birthday) young people looked after in alternative care are informed about 'staying put' options and transitions support.

b. Every young person is encouraged, enabled and empowered to 'stay put' and this is the default option within individual care plans.

c. Individual care planning, via reviews and Hearings, and the associated actions incumbent on local authorities and care providers, ensures that all necessary steps have been taken to remove any practical, systemic and relational barriers and to proactively and positively facilitate staying put practice.

d. This must include long-term planning and commissioning considerations and agreements for outwith authority/purchased care placements which facilitate and enable continuing care until 21, in line with current legislation.

2. For young people moving on from care:

there is a contextual planning framework [44] (illustrated in Appendix 2) and established good practice for what this encompasses.

a. Looked after planning and reviews and pathways planning processes which encompass the principles of GIRFEC apply to all looked after young people and care leavers up to age 26.

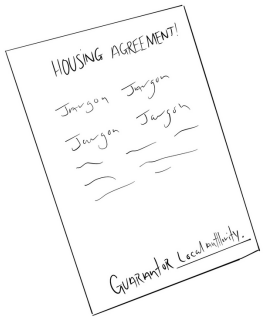
b. Transitions are graduated and extended over realistic timescales including anticipating possible return to care settings at times of need or crisis, and ongoing direct relational contact with key individuals. Planning should be a collaboration with the young person themselves, fully involving them in decisions about their care and supporting them to understand the options and choices available to them.

c. Whilst seeking legislative change to enable young people to formally return to care (return 'looked after' status) is outwith the scope of this guidance, all flexible practice which uses discretionary powers, and enables responsive, person-centred Aftercare support to care leavers experiencing crisis, is positively encouraged.

d. The Children's Hearing System, as a key decision-making forum, will take steps ensure there is no 'early termination' of compulsory supervision orders and be confident and reassured that looked after young people are fully supported and enabled to remain in continuing care placements. They will want to ensure that unless there are robust Aftercare plans and provisions in place prior to termination of any compulsory supervision order the young person should remain 'looked after' up until the age of eighteen years if that is in their best interest. In particular, this System has a role in recognising that maintaining the supervision order to the person's 16th birthday in the first instance, and beyond, confers the additional protections and support of legally defined 'care leaver' status.

e. At the point of leaving care, no care leaver should be homeless – corporate parents should seek to avoid, at all costs, a young person feeling that they have no option but to exercise their right to make a homelessness application. A young person leaving care and making a homeless application should be regarded as a self-referral for care and accommodation, not as a homeless application.

While there is a clear budgetary challenge in offering all choices to all young people, it is clear that young people need to know they always have some degree of choice and that there are options which allow them to change their mind.



[44]https://www.celcis.org/files/1914/6470/1754/2016_CELCIS_flow_chart.pdf

Examples of creative ways of offering choice in housing options for young people could include:

- Local authorities undertaking guarantor functions for young people accessing private rented tenancies;
- Supporting young people to access equity share schemes and get mortgages;
- Offering temporary self-contained tenancies and supported lodgings, to allow young people to try out more 'independent' living with support;
- Using the 'Housing First for Youth' model tailored for care leavers;
- The development of small scale shared tenancy schemes, where young people can share with friends and have the same experience as their peers.

3. Addressing and reducing risk or homelessness for young people in difficulty or impending crisis includes:

a. The default position is that any care leaver at risk of becoming, or presenting as, homeless, should be regarded as having eligible needs under the terms of the 2014 Act. As such, a holistic assessment should be completed as standard practice which addresses all support needs and ensures that these needs will be met in full at least until aged 26. Local authorities and other relevant corporate parents should be proactive in this regard and it should not be the sole responsibility of any individual care leaver to have to 'request' assistance if in need. Good corporate parenting, delivered via relational support, should be alert to changing circumstances and needs and take proactive measures to address these in partnership with the individual young person, and in collaboration with all relevant agencies and supports.

b. Ensuring flexible multi-agency person-centred responses for care leavers until their 26th birthday, which include access to trusted professionals and support staff to provide emotional and social support; access to debt/financial and practical support; support re health/wellbeing; and employment and educational support.

c. Having in place multi-agency forums to coordinate support and intervention provides the opportunity for professionals to share information, highlight concerns and issues, monitor changes in circumstances, respond to crisis situations and identify gaps in service delivery which informs future strategic planning.

d. This might include explicitly expecting e.g. social landlords, health partners, the police, etc. to share information with Throughcare and Aftercare teams when they have concerns about a care leaver's wellbeing.

4. Rapid response to crisis homelessness for care leavers:

a. All corporate parents have a duty to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of care leavers. Therefore, the development of a 'no bystander' or 'no wrong door' approach is essential to ensure that those care leavers in most acute need are responded to timeously, holistically and appropriately. This requires clarity regarding the shared responsibility of corporate parenting, and robust local-level partnership working.

b. No care leaver under the age of 26 years to whom corporate parenting duties apply should be regarded as homeless – and if they do report as homeless, they should be referred to the corporate parent for appropriate accommodation and care; emergency accommodation aimed at the wider group of older adults experiencing homelessness does not count as 'appropriate'.

c. Should a homeless presentation and application be made, local authorities as whole bodies should ensure their primary response and role is as a corporate parent, with all relevant agencies and departments working closely in partnership to consider how to ensure their response does everything possible to support the young person in their new setting. This coordinated support should be assertive and persistent, recognising and responding to the young person's needs which may have been affected by trauma and challenging relationships.

d. Housing and accommodation options and ongoing supports for care leavers need to be regarded more as a graduated extension of the care system, albeit offering an increased flexibility and responsiveness that better serves the needs of 'emerging adults'. The legislative and procedural divisions and the abrupt child/adult thresholds for service registrations for example can frame and influence expectations and responses.

What is success?

- All professionals and carers involved in supporting and caring for looked after young people ensure that all looked after young people are encouraged, enabled and empowered to 'stay put' in caring, supportive kinship, foster or residential homes.
- Every young person knows they can remain in their positive care placement, until 21, and knows they are entitled to ongoing Aftercare support up until 26.
- Care providers and corporate parents proactively and persistently provide support to young people so that they never reach crisis point.
- Care providers and corporate parents encourage, enable and empower young people to know and exercise their rights and entitlements, so that if something goes 'wrong' they know how to access additional support they are entitled to as looked after young person or care leaver. This includes ensuring young people are aware of and linked effectively with advocacy support services operating in their area such as Who Cares? Scotland, the Citizens Advice Scotland and others.
- Every young person has access to a network of positive and nurturing relationships with people in services who can help them with their housing and support needs up to 26 at minimum.
- Positive relationships which form between staff in any service and looked after children and care leavers are nurtured and valued, and recognised as the most powerful pillar of support which can be offered to a vulnerable young person. These relationships are an asset to be protected, acting as a powerful support as people move between services and out of care. Staff should be able and feel supported to maintain these relationships beyond their immediate day job.
- There is consistency across Scotland in the range and quality of provision and support offered to and received by looked after young people and care leavers with their housing, accommodation and support needs, before and after they leave care – the expectation should be that care leavers are always entitled to the best support available from their corporate parents.
- Processes are designed so that there are no artificial barriers placed in young peoples' life choices (e.g. around going to university, taking a job, or accessing a settled home).
- People involved in supporting young people need to own their responsibility as corporate parents and be committed, empathetic advocates for young people in the way a parent would.

Success will see lower numbers of care leavers presenting as homeless and appearing in the national statistics. However, these data would not guarantee care leavers are necessarily in positive housing situations. The Care Inspectorate have a role in ensuring that transitions are effective, and corporate parenting plans will be an opportunity to demonstrate how local authorities and others are implementing the spirit as well as the letter of the legislation.

Further, we would expect to hear regular feedback from young people's, practitioners' and carers' forums as to whether their experience of the system is evolving positively. Established forums such as local Champions Boards and Network Hubs, Who Cares? Scotland Care Experienced Forums and Care Collective, Staf Practitioners and Managers Forums, alongside specific follow-up monitoring and feedback processes are valuable sources of qualitative evidence to support or validate data monitoring measures.

Recommendations for change: What are the steps towards these goals?

A focus is required on two main themes in order to effect change: practice and culture, and systems and frameworks. Systems need to be effective, without perverse incentives and within a fully coherent, logical, legal and policy framework; and corporate parents as organisations and as individuals need to practice in ways which ensure they always treat young people in their care as they would their own children.

It is people must make any changes work [45]. Organisational change ultimately requires people to develop not just new skills and knowledge (technical aspects) but a different way of looking at things (adaptive aspects) [46]. This highlights the inter-related factors of leadership and management and learning and development and how these inform, and are informed by, organisational and team culture.

Practice and culture: People & leadership

Scotland's strong ethos of corporate parenting poses a critical question to all individuals involved in the care and support of looked after children and care leavers, and asks them to consider 'would this be good enough for my child?'. This consideration must be at the heart of every decision from policy development and strategic planning and commissioning, through to everyday frontline practice.

"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 re-assume it. So litmus test: would any of those features, steps or support be good enough for my child?"

The 2014 Act and associated policies, protocols and guidance can be seen to represent a concerted and determined effort to change systems. However, this has not translated fully into consistent change on the ground. There is a question around how corporate parents, at all levels, can be supported and empowered to act as a parent would for a child or young person's best interests – on every occasion, not limited by factors such as budgets or priorities. How, in practical terms, can we empower practitioners across organisations and systems to prioritise the needs of care leavers?

There is a responsibility on managers to attend to the psychological and emotional needs of workers, so that when workers are making decisions they feel that their organisation is 'with' them, rather than feeling concern for having to meet particular budgetary constraints or key performance indicators. Whilst issues of budgets and sufficiency of funds require consideration, this must not take precedence in decision making. It may be that most elected members and staff from senior management to frontline are aware of, and feel, their position as corporate parents at an individual level, but that organisationally, teams do not feel empowered to act on that impulse.

"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?"

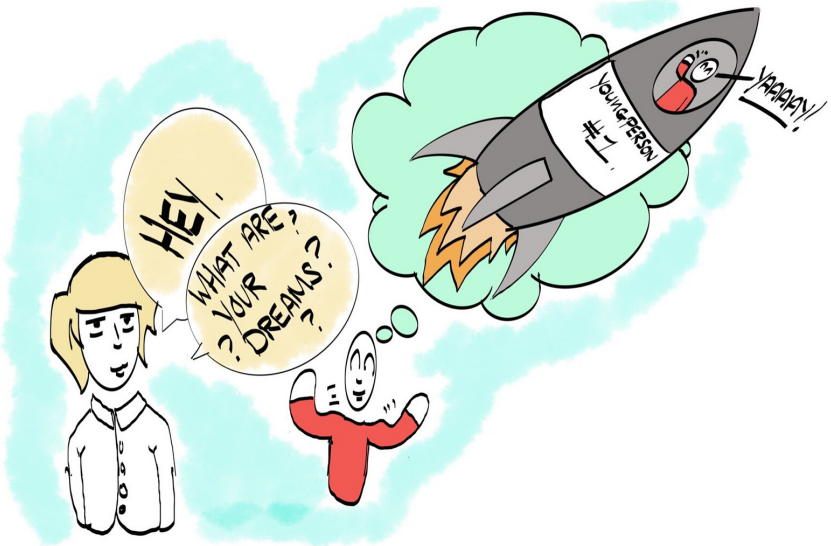
[45]Hanson, R. (2008) Organizational Change: How to Survive and Thrive
http://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/pod/leaders/orgdev/alliance/articles/OrgChange_Hanson2008.pdf
[46]Heifetz, R. and Linsky, M. (2002) Leadership On The Line, Boston: Harvard Business School Press

The role and influence of managers is interwoven with the themes of learning and development and culture and practice. Leaders lead through creativity and innovation, by providing and sharing a vision and by enabling others to see that things can be different, by inspiring, motivating and empowering others to act [47].

Clear messaging from leaders is vital both to provide consistent information and create an enabling context for practitioners, and also to enable them to confidently convey these messages to the young people in their care. To achieve this, leaders must prioritise the identified policy aims of Staying Put, Continuing Care, Corporate Parenting, etc., and work with their operational teams to develop strategies that are financially and logistically workable. This will be supported effectively where leaders connect more strongly with the experiences of young people, to ensure that strategic decision making proactively drives Staying Put practice [48].

"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."

In developing that workable strategy in terms of local authority provision of care and support for care leavers, leadership is required to ensure the often 'side by side' departments of housing and social work can work collaboratively to generate the most effective outcomes for the benefit of care leavers. There must be greater emphasis on integrated planning at strategic and operational level. Shared strategic goals combined with joint learning and development plans are practical ways in which a shared agenda could be supported.

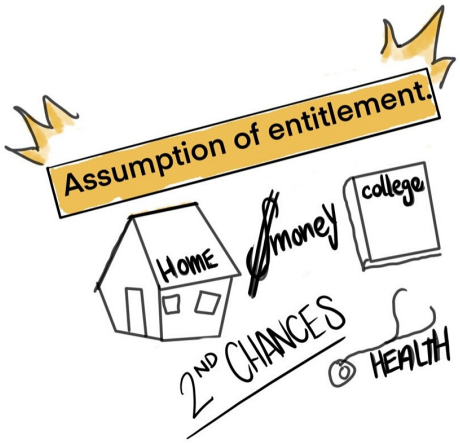


[47]McGhee (2017) Staying Put and Continuing Care: The Implementation Challenge, SJRCC, 2017 https://www.celcis.org/files/4215/0641/7391/2017_Vol_16_2_McGhee_K_Staying_Put_and_Continuing_Care_The_Implementation_Challenge.pdf
[48]Clough, R., Bullock, R. and Ward, A. (2006) What Works in Residential Child Care: A review of research evidence and the practical considerations, National Children Bureau, London.

Recommendation 1

Scottish Government and partners should implement a programme of engagement, to facilitate the required sense of shared aims. This should cover all local authorities in Scotland, focused on, but not limited to, housing and social work departments and senior officials with corporate parenting responsibilities. This programme should seek to establish practical actions which will support better integration between all parts of councils which interact to support people in/leaving care.

This conversation could be usefully framed by the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant (2015) [49], which details specific actions related to housing and accommodation, and is designed to support corporate parents implement their duties and responsibilities. Over half of the Scottish local authorities have signed up to this. Applying and embedding the SCLC's principles of 'assumption of entitlement' and 'care proofing of policy' more broadly would support the technical and adaptive changes needed to create the meaningful practice and culture shifts necessary.



An engagement programme will:

- Explore the reasons why the existing comprehensive guidance on how care leavers should be supported in practice has not translated into change on the ground.
- Develop effective strategies for translating policy into practice, including learning and development programmes which draw together practitioners – both frontline and managerial – from housing and social work. There is a question as to whether overarching guidance bringing the various protocols together would be of value at the practical level [50].
- Explore and address the systems-related reasons for why care leavers sometimes are made to apply as homeless or are designated homeless when all guidance and corporate parenting approaches are clear this should not happen. While there is general agreement that people with a corporate parent should never be defined or have to present as homeless, we are aware of both technical and adaptive challenges to making this happen in practice, including budgeting and the use of section 5 referrals.

[49]https://www.scottishcareleaverscovenant.org/
[50]Guidance referred to includes but may not be limited to:
- Staying Put Scotland Guidance (2013)
- Housing Options Protocols Guidance (2013)
- Part 10 (Aftercare) Guidance (2016)
- Part 11 Continuing Care Guidance (2016)
- Statutory Guidance on Part 9: Corporate Parenting (2015)

- Raise awareness among all staff interacting with care leavers, who need to be more aware of what they can, should and must offer – it is not sufficient for this knowledge and understanding to be held only by 'specialists'.
- Explore models of good practice for delivering multi agency responses, and support local areas to develop these, (a) at the operational every day level and (b) at the strategic service planning level. This conversation should use Housing Options Protocol for Care Leavers and Scottish Care Leavers Covenant good practice examples as a starting point, emphasising the duty on Corporate Parents to collaborate to deliver the best outcomes for all young people.

Such a programme may generate additional recommendations for change at the national level, and a report on findings should be produced and considered.

Recommendation 2

The fostering regulations should be aligned and amended to ensure Fostering Services can legally provide care for young people up to the age of 21 in line with the Continuing Care provisions within the 2014 Act. This should become the minimum default position and removes the bureaucratic obstacles, barriers and triggers that see the artificial separation between childhood and adulthood services for care leavers. Foster carers must be recruited and supported with this in mind, and all placements must suitably funded, as outlined in Staying Put Scotland (2013) [51].
Funding reductions may contribute to destabilising placements, limiting the ability of carers to provide continuing care for young people once they reach 'official' adulthood.

National improvement and regulatory agencies such as the Care Inspectorate should play a much greater proactive role in addressing the transitionary pathways between children's and adult services and promoting progressive practices. There should be robust thematic reviews which transcend age-defined service boundaries and focus specifically on transitions from care to interdependence and adulthood. This will support local authorities to ensure they are delivering on their corporate parenting responsibilities by providing effective care and support across the whole of the time in which they have responsibility to support their young people, including ensuring they have the life skills they need to make a success of adult interdependence.

Recommendation 3

The Scottish Government should work with the Care Inspectorate to develop and undertake robust thematic integrated reviews of 'transition services' involving key stakeholders and providers, focusing on partnership working, 'outcomes', improved destinations (such as housing and accommodation and further and higher education) and Aftercare engagement up to 26.

Every corporate parent in Scotland must create and publish a Corporate Parenting Plan, which must be reviewed regularly. These contribute to a Ministerial report to Parliament every three years. The next report will cover corporate parenting activity from 2018-2021, and represents an opportunity to ask corporate parents to set out their responses to particular priorities and concerns in subsequent plans.

[51]https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2013/10/staying-put-scotland-providing-care-leavers-connectness-belonging/documents/00435935-pdf/00435935-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00435935.pdf

Recommendation 4

In the 2021-2024 Corporate Parenting Plan cycle, all corporate parents should be asked specifically to set out how they plan and deliver integrated services for care leavers transitioning from care to adulthood. This should have key focus points in relation to Staying Put and Continuing Care; housing and accommodation options including the Housing Options Protocol; further and higher education uptake for care leavers; and improved Aftercare engagement up to age 26.

We have noted that success will in part be measured through statistical measures of care leavers presenting as homeless and appearing in the national statistics. It is important to recognise that since the 2014 Act this is a system in transition, and while we rightly expect to see improvements coming through in the data these will take time. To capture a more real time sense of change, we hope to see records of changes in strategy and approach coming through in other fora such as Corporate Parenting plans, Care Inspectorate reports and through feedback from both young people's and practitioners or carers forums.

Recommendation 5

The Scottish Government, the Care Inspectorate, third sector partners and other bodies should develop, agree and implement a more robust process to gather accurate useable data and qualitative measures of improvement, with the ultimate aim of making clear what progress is being made on a national basis in fully implementing the relevant terms of the 2014 Act.

Systems and Frameworks

Systems vary significantly from place to place, and it is difficult for young people to know what they should expect and for staff to know what they must offer. Despite accepted local variations in systems, there should be a clear expectation around practice standards for both young people and staff. The system may have been set up appropriately, but staff in different parts of local authorities, carers in different kinds of settings, and other corporate parents are not always clear about the tools available to them to help the young person in their care.

Despite the repeated assertion in guidance and policy that care leavers should not have to present as homeless to access services, local responses do not always facilitate this. It is often repeated that this just 'shouldn't happen', but it does, and it is important to understand the reasons for this, which may include genuine technical reasons (such as budgets, or the use of 'section 5 referrals' to housing associations), as well as cultural drivers. Additionally, some young people choose to disengage from Aftercare support and not disclose their previous care experience. Understanding the reasons for decisions and responses is key to facilitating positive change.

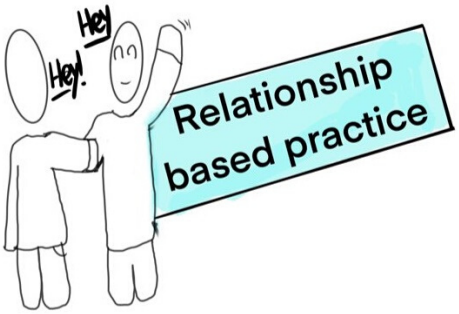
It is well understood that young people need access to meaningful relationships of trust with support workers for a significant period of time after they have moved on from their care setting, and that those relationships need to be responsive and flexible to support young people as they need. This is provided for in legislation through the requirement to provide Aftercare, however, how that service is conceived and provided varies significantly from area to area.

Young people have reported that they see good quality Aftercare as providing the practical supports they need as they begin to live by themselves, but crucially going beyond this to support their personal wellbeing as actively as possible.

At one end of the scale, this means ensuring that young people who need it are effectively referred for formal mental health support, outside the direct purview of the local authority. The provision of mental health support for care leavers within the health service, while an issue which should be given serious consideration, is beyond the scope of this analysis.

However, there is a spectrum of support for well-being that is part of providing good Aftercare within the local authority and this should be explored more fully. This includes valuing and protecting young people's relationships of trust, supporting social networks, providing space and opportunity to engage in sport, exercise and other positive activities, and facilitating access to other services which individuals may require to enhance their wellbeing, including with employment, education or other meaningful activity.

An element of supporting wellbeing is in ensuring young people have access to homelike support if and when they need it. A right to return to a formal care setting was explored in the run up to the 2014 Act, and while there may be benefits there are practical and financial challenges which make short term changes impractical. There are, however, examples of practical and innovative light touch responses to this need, like care providers who offer their young people in Aftercare a regular Sunday lunch, the occasional overnight stay, or who have accommodated young people for a short time when they needed to convalesce following a hospital procedure.



Recommendation 6

An analysis of good Aftercare which sets out best practice examples should be developed as a valuable tool for local authorities and the young people under their charge to develop approaches which work effectively for their area. This should be developed with the benefit of the views of people with lived experience and should be maintained and widely publicised to help local authorities, carers and others navigate their responsibilities under the 2014 Act, considering how the needs of care leavers evolve between the time they leave care and the age of 26 and beyond.

Care leavers needs and issues cannot be seen in a socio-economic vacuum and the reality for many, which impacts on their ability to access and sustain suitable accommodation, is their financial wellbeing and precariousness. Care leavers are particularly vulnerable to the impact of poverty and financial hardship, lacking the financial safety net – the possibility of accessing the 'bank of mum and dad', even in a small way – that many others take for granted. Therefore ensuring that all systems work together to maximise care leavers' incomes and financial stability is a critical factor in reducing the risk of homelessness.

Universal Credit poses particular challenges for care leavers. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has already conceded that care leavers have particular vulnerabilities and a Care Leaver strategy (publication date forthcoming) has been created at the UK level. Much of this strategy applies in Scotland, and further work is underway to ensure the emerging Care Leavers strategy for Scotland is effective in the devolved context. One particularly important element is that young people in care will be able to claim Universal Credit 28 days in advance of their 18th birthday, meaning they can avoid the 5 week delay in payment – this is already being piloted in some areas of Glasgow. There is also a commitment that there will be effective sharing of information between the local authorities and their relevant Job Centre Plus to support income maximisation and benefit support for care leavers.

Recommendation 7

Scottish Government and local authority officials and others should continue to engage with DWP to ensure the advance claim facility is effective and made available across Scotland in a timely manner. DWP should be pressed to ensure care leavers can always speak to the same person in their local Job Centre, and discussions should explore whether there are any further facilities which the DWP could extend to care leavers.

Recommendation 8

Further work to streamline and communicate the variety of financial supports available to care leavers must be developed, to ensure these facilities work effectively together, and young people and their Corporate Parents are able to claim them in a straightforward way. In particular, this should consider DWP benefits, support available from the local authority, and other support.

Some key targeted supports include but are not limited to:

- the Care Experienced Bursary
- exemption from council tax
- access to the targeted Discretionary Housing Payment for Care Leavers
- additional entitlement to early learning and childcare
- grants provided on leaving care

Engagement and Development

This document reflects the thoughts and comments of people with experience of care and homelessness, as well the experience of those who have worked with them in different capacities. In addition to the body of evidence produced in discussion with young people previously, a bespoke report was produced in partnership between Who Cares? Scotland and the Scottish Government – available here [52] .
This report is the main source of quotations used throughout this document.

In addition to organisations directly involved in the working group and A Way Home Scotland coalition (see appendix 1), this document has been widely circulated for comment ahead of publication, to organisations including but not limited to the below. Comments received have been incorporated:

- Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)
- Care Inspectorate
- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)
- Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA)
- The Fostering Network
- Life Changes Trust
- Social Work Scotland

Approach to Implementation

This document will be published shortly in advance of the completion of the Independent Care Review. Members of the Care Review have welcomed this work, and members of the team drafting the Care Leavers Pathway have presented to those developing the work of the Care Review. Implementation plans will be considered across the breadth of changes being brought forward, and jointly managed between officials and organisations working in housing and social care.

[52]https://www.whocaresscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Somewhere-to-Call-Home-Megan-Sutherland-August-2019.pdf

Appendix 1

Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathway: Working group membership

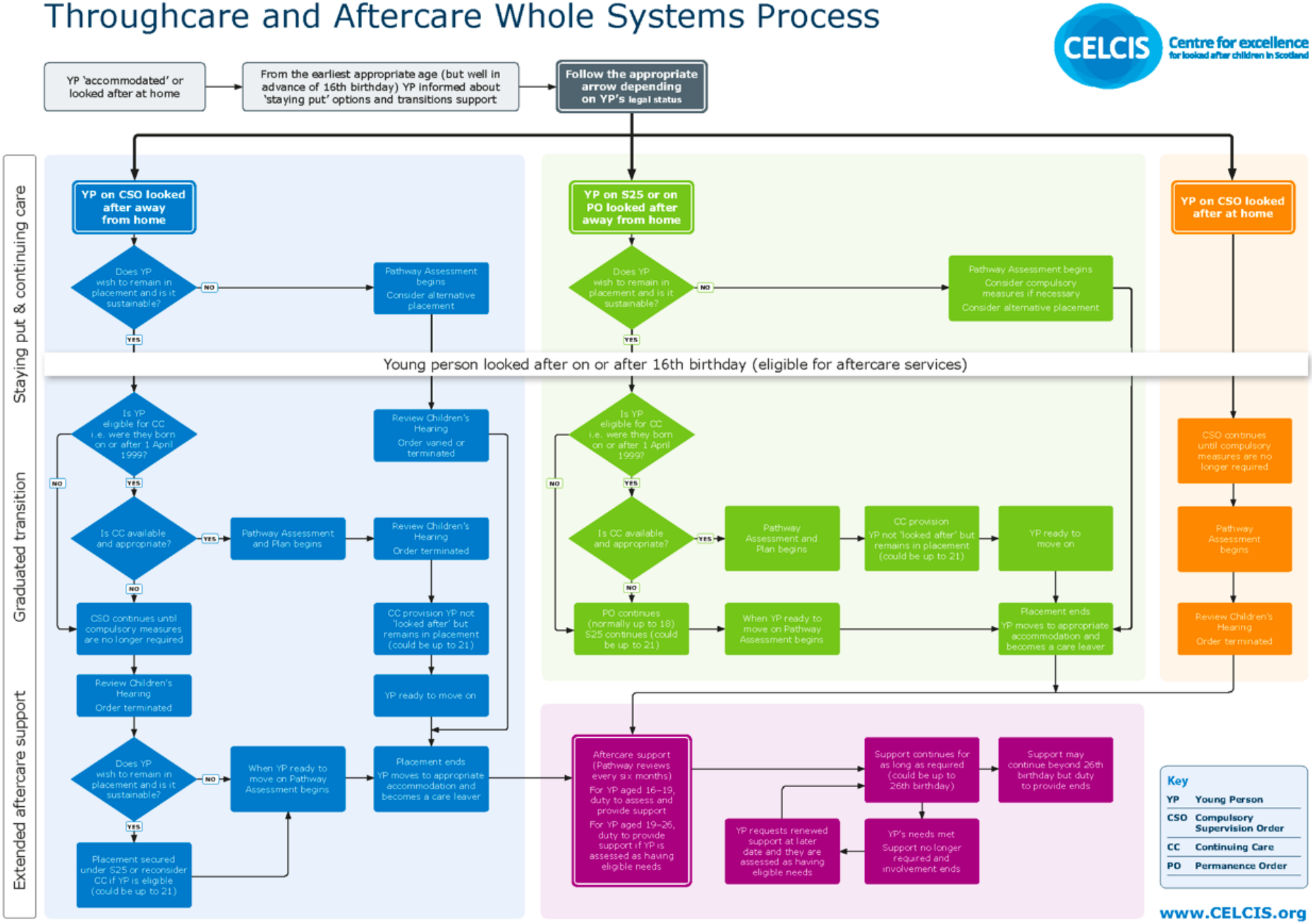
Kenny McGhee, Throughcare and Aftercare Lead, CELCIS (Chair)
Lizzie Morton, Policy Associate, CELCIS
Gordon Birrell, Service Manager Housing, Dundee City Council
Jennifer McKean, Team Manager Youth Intensive Support Service, East Renfrewshire Council HSCP
Grace Fletcher, Interim Senior Manager, East Ayrshire Council
Heather Kelly, Children Service Manager (Youth Housing Support) Barnardo's Scotland
Michael Stewart, Implementation Manager, Independent Care Review
Sabrina Galella, Policy and Influencing Coordinator, A Way Home Scotland
Kate Polson, Chief Executive, Rock Trust
Allison Calder, Head of Services, Rock Trust
Pamela Graham, Head of Learning and Development, STAF
Sharon Berrie, Advocacy Manager, Who Cares? Scotland
Lynn McAteer, Scotland Partnership Manager, Department for Work and Pensions
Hazel Bartels, Homelessness Team, Scottish Government
Julie Stuart, Homelessness Team, Scottish Government
Megan Sutherland, Homelessness Team, Scottish Government/ Vice Chair, Who Cares? Scotland
David Hannigan, Looked After Children Team, Scottish Government
Shea Moran, Aff the Streets

A Way Home Coalition group membership

Tam Baillie, A Way Home Chair
Sabrina Galella, A Way Home Coordinator
Kate Polson, Chief Executive Officer, Rock Trust
Ally Calder, Head of Services, Rock Trust
June Osbourne, Equalities and Inclusion Director, Young Scot
Nick Harleigh-Bell, National Policy and Practice Co-ordinator Youth, Homeless Action Scotland
Ian Mclaughlin, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Scotland
Cara Spence, Senior Programmes and Influencing Manager, LGBT Youth Scotland
Janice Stevenson, Commission on Housing and Homelessness Lead, LGBT Youth Scotland
Roseann Gorman, Specialist Lead (Priority Groups), NHS
Louise Duffy, CAMHS Learning Coordinator, CAMHS Lothian (NHS)
Hilary Parkey, Housing Strategy Officer (North Hub), Highland Council
Lewis Hannah, Policy Manager (Homelessness/Housing Options), Highland Council
Lorraine Stewart, Housing Manager, Aberdeenshire Council
Elaine Ritchie, Homelessness Service Manager (Perth/Tayside Hub), Perth & Kinross Council

Martin Smith, Team Leader (Homelessness), Perth & Kinross Council
Jennifer MacMahon, Strategic Housing Officer (West Hub), West Dunbartonshire Council
Jules Oldham, Quality Development Officer South East Hub), West Lothian Council
Claudia MacDonald, Director of Influencing Who Cares? Scotland
Megan Sutherland, Who Cares? Scotland
Kenny McGhee, Throughcare Aftercare Lead - CELCIS, Strathclyde University
Lizzie Morton, Policy Associate - CELCIS, Strathclyde University
Fiona King, National Campaigns and Policy Manager, Shelter Scotland
Alison Watson, Deputy Director, Shelter Scotland
Beth Watts, Senior Research Fellow, Heriot Watt
Pauline Beirne, National Lead AHP CYP, Scottish Government
Carolyn Younie, Looked After Children Unit, Scottish Government
Chris Gosling, Attainment/Poverty Policy Unit, Scottish Government
Hazel Bartels, Homelessness Team Leader, Scottish Government
Lynsey McKean, Homelessness Unit, Scottish Government
Julie Stuart, Homelessness Unit, Scottish Government
Nicola Dickie, Chief Officer - Children and Young People, COSLA
Eddie Folan, Policy Officer (CYP), COSLA
Mandy Watts, ESOL Development Officer, Education Scotland
Gayle Gorman, Director, Education Scotland
Andrea Rodriguez, Senior Research Fellow (Smile4Life), Dundee University
Derek Logie, Chief Executive Officer, Rural Housing Scotland
Liz Cooper, Housing Policy Lead, Scottish Prison Service
Cameron Anson, Development Officer, Rural Housing Scotland
Darren Rocks, Health Improvement Manager Childhood Adversity, NHS
Leona McDermid, CEO Aberdeen Foyer, Aberdeenshire Council
Ryan Taylor, South-West Hub, East Ayrshire Council
Pamela Morrison, Practice development advisor CYCJ, Strathclyde University
Will Kerr, Deputy Chief Constable, Police Scotland
Shea Moran, Member, Aff The Streets

Throughcare and Aftercare Whole Systems Process



www.awayhome.scot

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