

NNECL

National Network for the
Education of Care Leavers

SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS IN FE AND HE

A GUIDE FOR THOSE TAKING ON THE ROLE OF CARE LEAVER CONTACT

UPDATED 2016

Note: this is based on the laws and provision in England although aspects of the guide may be useful to those from the other home nations.



CONTENTS

Background	2
Local authority support	6
Supporting care leavers into and through higher education	8
Outreach	8
Recruitment	11
Retention	13
Monitoring and evaluation of support	15
Keeping up to date	16
National Network for Education of Care Leavers (NNECL)	16
Care leavers in HEI JISCMail	16
Become	16
National Care Leaver Association (CLA)	16
The National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH)	18
Catch22	18
Student Loan Company – Vulnerable Students Stakeholder Group (VSSG)	18
The Foyer Federation	18
Where to start	19



INTRODUCTION

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) was established in June 2013 by higher education institutions and national organisations committed to the progression and support of care leavers in higher education. Working together NNECL aims to transform the progression of young people in or leaving care into and through further and higher education, by championing the continuous improvement of local practice, multi-agency partnerships and national collaboration.

This guide has been compiled by NNECL to support colleagues in universities and colleges who are new to or expanding their engagement in supporting care leavers. We've reached across our network to gather advice, information and examples of practice throughout the education life cycle. This includes raising aspirations, outreach, supporting progression into further and higher education and subsequently maintaining and supporting care leavers' success.

The land of further and higher education is an eclectic place, with each institution working within their own unique identities.

This guide is designed to act as a signpost, pointing you in the direction of ideas, hints and tips that are proven to work in some situations. We've covered a lot of information and, whether you're after a source for up-to-date statistics, legal definitions, ideas for delivering activity or simply a starting point, you should find it.

We know that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't quite work when it comes students or institutions and therefore we encourage you to find your own path. Be assured your colleagues in NNECL aim to support you in your journey and want to hear how you are getting on.

We look forward to hearing about the good work you do in supporting care leavers.

Best wishes

The National Strategic Group

On behalf of NNECL

Note on terms in this guide:

'*Looked after young people*' (LAYP) refers to looked after children or people under the age of 18 in the care of a local authority.

'*Care leavers*' refers to people who have left care and, for the purposes of this guide, they could be any age and may or may not have access to support from a local authority.



BACKGROUND

STATISTICS

There are around 69,000 looked after children in England, which accounts for just 0.1% of the population. Numbers are steadily rising, with a 6% rise in the last four years. A majority (61%) of those will have incurred abuse or neglect, whilst 16% start to be looked after due to family dysfunction. Only a small minority will be in care because of their own behaviour. Most (75%) are placed in foster care and there has been a rise in the number of adoptions in recent years.

Over a third of looked after children are aged between 10 and 15-years-old. Fewer among this age group are ceasing to be looked after, resulting in higher numbers of older children in care. The good news is that there has been a fall in the numbers of 1 to 4-year-olds who are looked after.

4% of looked after children are unaccompanied asylum seeking children, which is a steep increase since 2014 but still below the highest rates seen in 2009.

Educational achievement of looked after young people is generally far lower than that of other pupils and the gap widens as pupils get older. Based on 2015 data that identified 26,330 former care leavers aged 19 to 21-years-old, 6% were in higher education whilst 39% were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Statistics are produced by the Government on an annual basis. For the most up-to-date figures and statistics go to: www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children

DEFINITION OF LOOKED AFTER YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people can go into care for any number of reasons.

Children (under 18) may be 'looked after' by local authorities (e.g. Newcastle City Council) due to:

- being subject to a care order (Children Act 1989, section 31), interim care order (Children Act 1989, section 38) or emergency protection order (Children Act 1989, section 44) where the local authority has acquired parental responsibility for that child;
- having a (criminal law) supervision order with a residence requirement to live in local authority accommodation;
- having a bail condition, following an appearance in court, to reside where the local authority directs – and who are being provided with a placement funded by a local authority;
- having been remanded to the local authority where release on bail has not been granted;
- being under a court-ordered secure remand and held in council accommodation; or
- being subject to a secure accommodation order where the local authority is funding the cost of the secure placement. They are not looked after if the young person is in secure accommodation due to their offending, and their cost of the placement is funded by the Home Office.

In some cases children are provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with the parent. If looked after by agreement this is referred to as being 'accommodated'. Children can be accommodated under the Children Act 1989, Section 20, and in a placement that is directly provided by the local authority or that is provided by an approved agency on behalf of the local authority.

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN

Following LAC (2003) 13 Guidance and the Hillingdon Judgement there is a clear legal presumption in favour of responding to unaccompanied asylum seeking children as looked after children under the Children Act 1989, Section 20.

A new eligibility category for higher education student support was introduced for the 2016/17 academic year. This states that students who meet either of the following criteria are eligible to apply for Student Finance England loans:

- applicants under the age of 18 who have lived in the UK for at least seven years (including three years' lawful ordinary residence);
- applicants aged 18 years and above who have either spent at least half their life in the UK or at least 20 years in the UK (including three years' lawful ordinary residence).

For sanctuary seekers who don't fit these criteria, Article 26 (a project of the Helena Kennedy Foundation) can provide help, advice and possible scholarships. For more information visit: www.article26.hkf.org.uk

CEASING TO BE LOOKED AFTER

There are several ways that a looked after young person ceases to be looked after, and where the local authority's legal obligation is limited.

Returning home – the child returns to live with their parents or relatives.

Adoption – the child is formally adopted.

Moving to independent living – this is often done with local authority support.

Residence Order – this settles the arrangements of who a child is to live with.

Special Guardianship Order – this appoints one or more people to be the child's 'special guardian'.

DEFINITION OF CARE LEAVERS

The level of support young people receive from leaving care teams depends on their status as care leavers. Definitions are as follows:

Eligible child – a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is being looked after.

Relevant child – a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care. This also includes young people who were detained (e.g. in a youth offending institution or hospital) when they turned 16, but immediately before that were looked after.

Former relevant child – a young person over 18 who was previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'. Local authorities support this group at least until age 21 or until 25 if in education or training.

Persons qualifying for advice and assistance – any young person under 21 (or 24 if in education or training) who ceases to be looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, or privately fostered, after the age of 16. This also includes young people who are under a special guardianship order.

Young people who return home – a young person's status as a care leaver can change if they leave care and return home to live with their birth family. A 16 or 17-year-old who has lived for a continuous period of six months with a parent or someone with parental responsibility will not be a relevant child, even if they fit the criteria above. However, if this arrangement breaks down before they turn 18 and the young person ceases to live with the person concerned they would again become a relevant child.

THE LAW

There is a range of legislation that affects young people both in care and leaving care. These include:

- Children Act 1989, with new regulations that came into force in 2015;
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000;
- Children Act 2004;
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008;
- Children and Families Act 2014;
- The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015.



LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER YOUNG PEOPLE

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to promote the educational achievement of young people they look after, regardless of where they are placed. All looked after young people in education should have the following:

Care Plan – this is the main plan; it outlines a child's needs, how they will be met and the plan for the child. It should include named contacts for health and support and is thoroughly integrated with the pathway plan and personal education plan.

Personal Education Plan (PEP) – this is the joint responsibility of the local authority and school. It is a record of what needs to happen for the child to fulfil their potential and reflects any existing education plans. The PEP should set out clear objectives relating to academic achievement and out-of-school activities as well as other personal and (if appropriate) behavioural targets. With the rise in participation age to 18, all looked after young people and care leavers should now receive a PEP until they are at least 18. This has led to the introduction of Post-16 PEPs in many local authorities.

Pupil Premium (previously Personal Education Allowance) – this should be used to provide additional support to prevent children falling behind or to help them catch up. It should not replace any services already offered by the local authority or school and should be directed towards buying non-school support for learning such as additional tutoring, music lessons or learning linked to the PEP.

Pathway Plan – this explores a young person's wishes and aspirations for the future and outlines steps to prepare the child for leaving care, ensuring relevant preparation and support. It takes into account relevant information from the PEP and integrates with the child's care plan.

Head of Virtual School (or equivalent) – because looked after young people are being educated across a large number of schools, the Head of Virtual School has a powerful role in tracking their progress as if they were in a single school. The core purpose of this role is to improve the educational progress and attainment of all children looked after by their local authority, including those who have been placed in schools in other authorities. The National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) has been introduced to improve the educational outcomes for looked after children. They work with partners and commission research to ensure that educational needs of looked after children are better understood. For more information visit: www.navsh.org.uk

Designated Teacher – this person has lead responsibility for the development and implementation of the young person's PEP within their school and is a central point of engagement between social workers, head of virtual school and other stakeholders. They also have lead responsibility for helping school staff understand factors that affect how looked after young people learn and achieve. For more information visit: www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213127/looked-after-children



LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT FOR CARE LEAVERS

The level of support young people receive from leaving care teams depends on their status as care leavers. The flow chart 'A Quick Guide to your Rights and Entitlements' on the following pages was developed by The Care Leaver Association, by care leavers, for care leavers. It provides a good indication of the level of support that a care leaver might expect. In general local authorities will only support former relevant young people through higher education.

SUPPORT FOR FORMER RELEVANT CHILDREN

The local authority that last looked after the former relevant young person must:

- take reasonable steps to keep in touch with the former relevant young person, and to re-establish contact if they lose touch with them;
- continue to keep their pathway plan under regular review;
- continue the appointment of their personal adviser;
- provide financial assistance, if their welfare requires it, by contributing to expenses of living near the place where they

are, or will be, employed or seeking employment;

- provide financial assistance, if their welfare and educational and training needs require it, to enable them to pursue education or training;
- provide suitable accommodation; and
- pay them the higher education bursary if they pursue higher education in accordance with their pathway plan. The bursary is currently set at £2,000.

These duties continue until the former relevant young person reaches 21 or, where the young person's pathway plan sets out a programme of education or training, until they are 25. If a former relevant young person aged over 21 but under 25 wishes to return or remain in education then they are entitled to a personal advisor, a needs assessment and a pathway plan.

The Children Act 1989 'Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (England Regulations 2010)' outlines the support for care leavers. Chapter 5, particularly 5.6 to 5.14, indicates the support available in higher education.



A Quick Guide Rights and Entitlements

Age 16– 17

Were you in care on your 16th birthday?

Yes
Have you been in care for 13 weeks or more since you were 14 years old?

No
You may still be entitled to services from Children's Services. You may qualify for 'advice and guidance' from your Local Authority

Yes
Are you still in care?

No
You may still be entitled to services from Children's Services. You may qualify for 'advice and guidance' from your Local Authority

Yes
Were you detained in the youth justice system or in hospital on your 16th birthday?

Yes
Were you under a care order?

No
Did you leave care after 1st October 2001?

Yes
Were you accommodated under section 20CA?

No
It seems that you are not clear about the contact you have with Social Services. Contact your Social Worker or Voice on 0800 800 5792

You are what the Leaving Care Act calls an **"Eligible Child"**. This means that you are still a looked after child and Children's Services must meet all your looked after rights. As any looked after child, Social Services should pay, for example, for your accommodation and personal expenses, as well as the expenses related with your education. You also have additional rights once you become 16. Children's Services must:

- Carry out a needs assessment
- Prepare a Pathway Plan that meets the needs identified in the assessment and prepares you to live independently
- Regularly review your pathway plan
- Appoint you a Personal Advisor

Age 18 – 21

Were you in care on your 16th birthday?

Yes
Have you been in care for 13 weeks or more since you were 14 years old?

No

Yes
Did you leave care after 1st October 2001?

No

Yes

You are what the Leaving Care Act calls a **"Qualifying Child"**. Children's Services must give you advice and support and must keep in touch with you. Children's Services may also help you paying expenses related to with your education

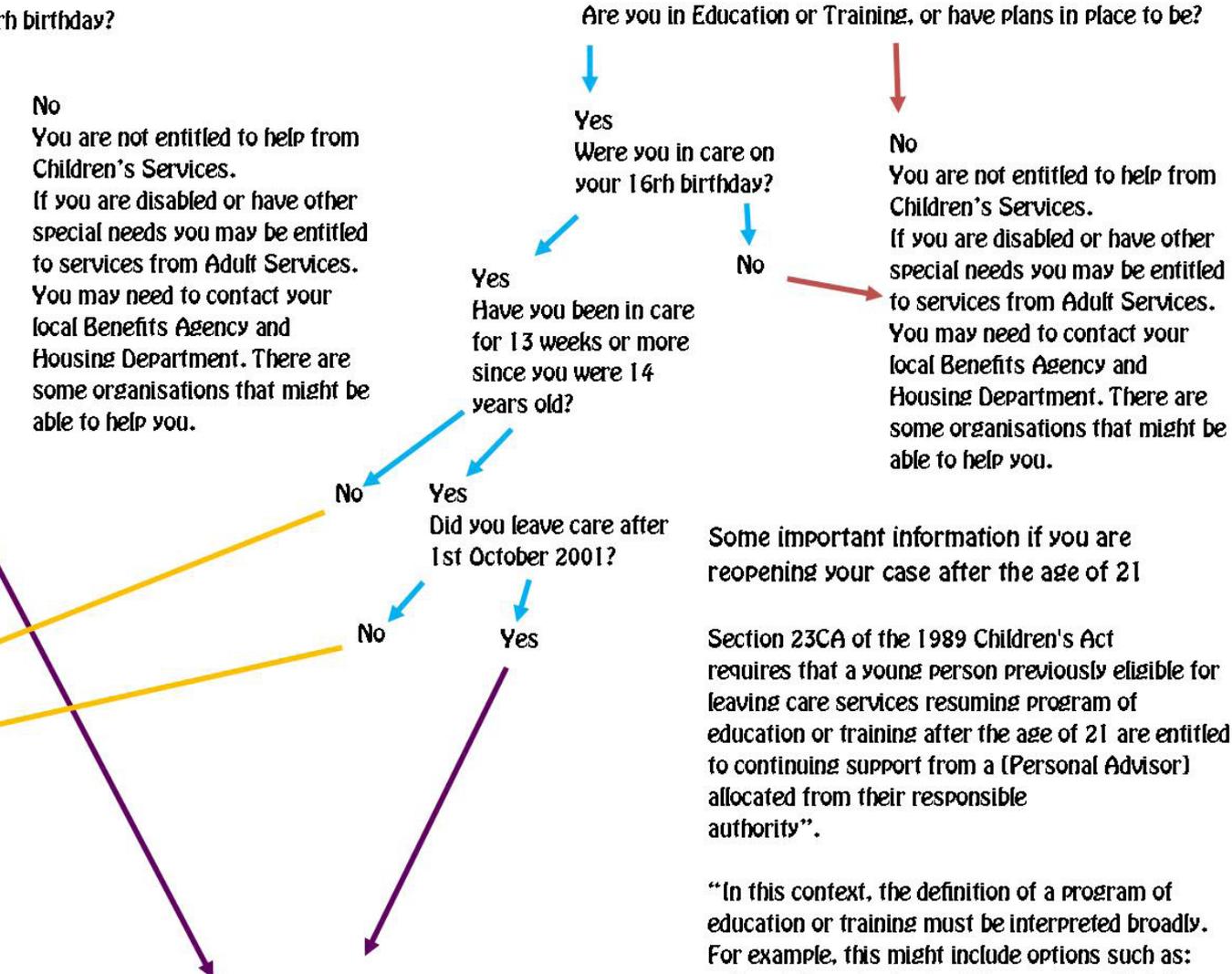
You are what the Leaving Care Act calls a **"Relevant Child"**. The law says that Children's Services must make sure your rights are met. They must:

- Carry out a needs assessment
- Prepare a Pathway Plan that meets the needs identified in the assessment and prepare you to live independently
- Regularly review your pathway plan
- Provide you with a Personal Advisor
- Give you somewhere suitable to live
- Give you weekly money which must not be less than you would have got on benefits (you can't claim benefits unless you are a single or a lone parent)
- Give you money or pay for things for you to help you furnish your accommodation
- Pay for other things to meet your specific needs which are not in your pathway plan

Access to your entitlements



Age 21 –25



No
You are not entitled to help from Children's Services.
If you are disabled or have other special needs you may be entitled to services from Adult Services. You may need to contact your local Benefits Agency and Housing Department. There are some organisations that might be able to help you.

No
You are not entitled to help from Children's Services.
If you are disabled or have other special needs you may be entitled to services from Adult Services. You may need to contact your local Benefits Agency and Housing Department. There are some organisations that might be able to help you.

Some important information if you are reopening your case after the age of 21

Section 23CA of the 1989 Children's Act requires that a young person previously eligible for leaving care services resuming program of education or training after the age of 21 are entitled to continuing support from a (Personal Advisor) allocated from their responsible authority".

"In this context, the definition of a program of education or training must be interpreted broadly. For example, this might include options such as:

- Completion of a basic skills course, so that the young person has the numeracy and literacy skills needed to compete in the jobs market
- Take up of a course of further education
- Take up of a university place
- Support to enable the young person to complete a recognised postgraduate Qualification
- Or participation in vocational training and apprenticeships".

"The duties of the local authority continue for as long as the young person continues to pursue the agreed program of education. The local authority's duties are as set out in the re-instated pathway plan".

You are what the Leaving Care Act calls a **"Former Relevant"** Child. Children's Services still have duties towards you. They must:

- Review your Pathway Plan
- Continue to provide you with a Personal Advisor
- Pay for the things set out in your Pathway Plan
- Help you to stay on in education by paying towards the costs of your education and having a place to stay (they will expect you to get a student loan if you are at university)
- You can also claim benefits as any other young person.



SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS INTO AND THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

There are a variety of ways that you can support looked after young people and care leavers. In this section we have brought together some ideas, examples of practice, and hints and tips that might help you in the future, whatever your role. We've split this section into Outreach, Recruitment, and Retention as that's often how work is divided within institutions, though there are blurred lines between them.

OUTREACH – RAISING ASPIRATIONS

It's important to recognise that care leavers may need aspiration raising at any age: pre-16, post-16 and post-21. We often see care experienced students entering further or higher education post-21.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect is to find young people to attend your activity. The key here can be to manage your (and management's) expectations, particularly for first events. Numbers are often in single figures. There is light at the end of the tunnel and usually, as word gets out and reputation grows, events do get bigger!

For most outreach activities schools are a safe bet for bringing in young people but this isn't so with looked after young people. Only selected teachers, usually the designated teacher, will know which pupils are in care; your usual outreach contact may not be able to help.

Here are some of the recommendations we've gathered for encouraging attendance at your activities by looked after young people (LAYP):

Tell everybody

Use multiple channels to promote your activity, include designated teachers, headteachers, virtual schools, local authorities and foster carer networks. The more people who can help you access LAYP the better.

Send direct invitations

Work with local schools, colleges and local authorities to identify and target individual LAYP who would most benefit from this type of activity. Ask your local authority or virtual school to address prepared letters on your behalf. One institution tells us that they even pre-pay and pack the envelopes so that the local Children's Services simply add names and addresses and put them in the post.

Collaborate

In recent years we've seen more and more wonderful collaborations taking place to raise the aspirations of LAYP. It's a great way to share resources and increase numbers and geographical area whilst using budget and resources effectively.

Advertise

Often local authorities, virtual schools and fostering teams have newsletters that go out to workers, carers or young people. They may welcome articles or 'adverts' to include and may do so for free.

NNECL.org

Add your activity or event to NNECL.org, which will help promote your event to local authorities, virtual schools, carers and young people. Importantly it might help identify LAYP that are living near you but in the care of a local authority further away.

Service level agreements

This is perhaps a longer term goal. Approach the virtual school and/or your local authority with a clear outline of what you can offer them and what you would like in return. Developing relationships with higher education institutions, and raising aspirations, is rated highly by OFSTED and sometimes the problem is just a lack of knowledge about what's available and possible.

Activities to raise aspirations

Once you have found your cohort, what are you going to do with them? Here are some broad examples:

Attend and contribute to existing activities delivered by the local authority/virtual school

These activities can often be difficult to access but they will provide you with a prime audience. The organisers are often happy to include talks, workshops or activities within an away day or planned activity for young people and/or those supporting them.

Offer your institution as a host venue for local authorities

By hosting a local authority event on campus, aimed at relevant



www.nnecl.org

NNECL
National Network for the
Education of Care Leavers

A dedicated website for those supporting children in care and care leavers.

Running an event targeted at looked after young people, care leavers or those supporting them?

List it on www.nnecl.org

Listing your event is quick and easy and it's free of charge. NNECL.org is used by supporters of LAYP and care leavers, and we want them to find your event.

Complete the short form on the website to promote your activity now.

groups such as foster carers or social workers, you will have great opportunities to engage with them.

Deliver an on-campus activity for looked after young people

You can provide a purpose-built activity for looked after young people, whether it's a one-off event like a taster day or residential, or a series of events over a period of time. For more practical advice on running your own event check out the hints and tips below.

Deliver a series of on-campus events in partnership with other institutions

Working in partnership often increases geographical area and work opportunities. A series of interventions will keep aspirations raised and provide more opportunities to get involved.

Mentoring looked after young people

This can be part of an existing mentoring system or a standalone programme. It can be delivered face-to-face or via e-mentoring, or a combination of both.

Foster Family Fun Days

By delivering activities for the whole family you can inspire carers and other family members to get engaged in LAYP educational aspirations.

Prioritise looked after young people in existing activities

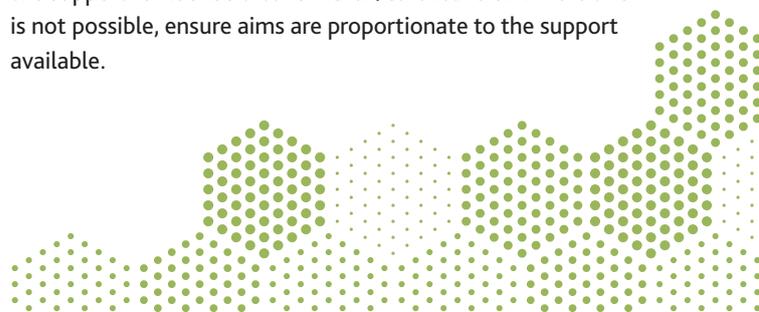
You can reserve places on existing WP/outreach activities for LAYP and encourage schools and colleges to include them in addition to their usual allocation. Note that this doesn't

necessarily guarantee that you will have LAYP attending your events.

Going beyond the well-known basics, occasionally things crop up with LAYP that could surprise you. Throughout this guide we've included hints and tips that colleagues told us they wish they'd known earlier. Here's what they have said about developing, designing and delivering activity for LAYP:

Developing activities

- 'Potential' is a long term goal. Encourage all LAYP to be involved in your activity regardless of what their current 'potential' is. Your activity may inspire them to turn their education achievements around. It will also ensure that students aren't ostracised from activity because someone else doesn't think they could go to college or university.
- Consider the value of discrete activities specifically for LAYP so that similar experiences can be shared, but temper this with not 'highlighting' individuals as being different/special. Some institutions told us they go so far as not externally labelling activity as specifically for LAYP.
- Try to establish senior managers' unequivocal commitment to the support for looked after children/care leavers. Where this is not possible, ensure aims are proportionate to the support available.



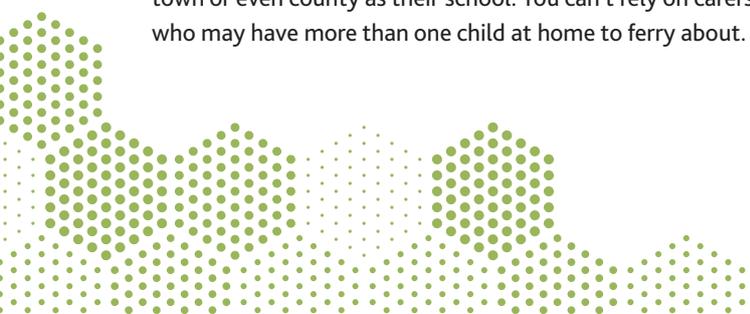
- Be prepared for how much time it takes when dealing with lots of agencies, local authority teams or schools. You have to send everything numerous times.
- If developing new activity, prepare long lead times and have contacts in place to help spread the word.
- Include social workers, headteachers of virtual schools and foster carers in any parent activities that you run.
- Aim to develop clear, transparent and jargon-free information that is made readily available through local authorities, schools and other agencies. This way, individuals don't have to ask for information but receive it automatically.
- Build in means to evaluate activity from the start, seeking support from relevant internal and external staff.
- Be assured that colleagues across the sector are happy to share even the most basic knowledge and experience with you. Just ask!

Designing activities

- Have realistic expectations in relation to numbers attending.
- Consider inviting a variety of ages in order to get a bigger group.
- Be aware of which students are likely to progress to HE soon and those likely to return later in life so you can adapt your delivery appropriately.
- Ensure the right safeguarding measures are in place; plan for an emergency safeguarding officer as well as having a designated safeguarding officer (DSO) on site.
- Be prepared for parental/guardian consent to take longer than you might expect. Depending on the student, paperwork might need to be signed by the foster carer, social worker or the parent.
- Deliver activity outside of school hours. Your cohort is likely to come from a number of schools so negotiating time off timetable for all may be difficult. It also means that your LAYP won't miss essential classroom time, or be treated differently to their classmates.
- Realise that coordinating transport can take time. Many LAYP get taxis to and from school and may not live in the same town or even county as their school. You can't rely on carers, who may have more than one child at home to ferry about.
- Aim to secure resources to cover travel costs for attendees.
- Try and get contact details for a foster carer and a school contact to help final planning and confirmation.
- Find out how long the young person has been at the school. Placement moves can indicate how settled they are.
- Work with social workers to identify potential risks in cases where students need individual risk assessments for their own specific needs.

Delivering activities

- Increase your staff to student ratios slightly. Some groups of LAYP can require additional support and attention.
- Be prepared with behaviour management techniques. Keep activities interesting and hands on to ensure engagement.
- Be flexible in your approach with LAYP; they prefer to be treated like young adults. You may also find that some smoke or discuss underage alcohol use openly.
- Be prepared for unexpected changes. Often LAYP come with extra friends at the last minute, which can cause issues.
- Have a backup plan for your activity.
- Be relaxed and casual; you'll be more approachable.



RECRUITMENT – ENCOURAGING CARE LEAVERS TO STUDY AT HIGHER EDUCATION

Once aspirations are raised, the next step is to make applying and transitioning to higher education as straightforward as possible. Below are some of the ways that colleagues in NNECL are supporting care leavers in moving on to higher education.

Encourage self-declaration

Make clear in applicant information that ticking the UCAS box will not influence their application but can trigger additional guidance and support during application and after arrival.

UCAS tick box

Contact your data management team (or whoever has responsibility for your HESA Report) to get an idea of how many students identified themselves as care experienced. It's worth noting that most institutions find that there are usually some students who tick the UCAS box in error; it may be that they have worked in care or have been a carer prior to university.

Enrolment

Ask all students if they are care leavers during your internal enrolment/registration process. This can take some coordination with student records or your data management team but it's worthwhile as it can pick up several additional students.

Scholarship promotions

If you have a specific care leaver scholarship or bursary promote it far and wide. Money has a way of bringing students out of the woodwork.

Virtual schools

Virtual schools now support students until 18 years of age and therefore will have good ideas about which students they anticipate will progress to higher education. Building a relation with your local virtual schools may help you identify, track and support students earlier.

Local authorities

In some areas a single leaving care worker may support all young people who are moving into higher education within the authority. Offer your assistance in helping them support their cohort of young people. They're often grateful for the help.

General publicity

It can be worth simply communicating your support offer to all students, for example using email or posters across campus and in student accommodation.

Academic and support staff

Promote the support internally across the university and ensure that academics, tutors and other support staff know to signpost relevant students to you.

Website

Make sure that your care leaver support is clearly set out on your student-facing website, along with your contact details.

Communication

Send letters and emails throughout the application process because the young people may move placements and miss important information and the support available.

Supported visits

Offer to attend an open day, applicant day or tour with them. Care leavers may be put off coming on their own and may not visit at all before they arrive.

One-to-one meetings

If they don't want to attend a full event with you, offer to meet with them informally to introduce yourself. Try and time meetings whilst they are already on campus, at an applicant day or open day.

Increase awareness within admissions

Some care leavers struggle to provide relevant ID and paperwork which can delay the admissions process or lead to rejections that could be avoided.

Liaison with local authorities

With the student's consent, work with the local authority to outline the support package that the student will receive.

Interview support

Offer preparatory interview sessions as interviews have been a stumbling block for care leavers in the past.

Support UCAS or SFE applications

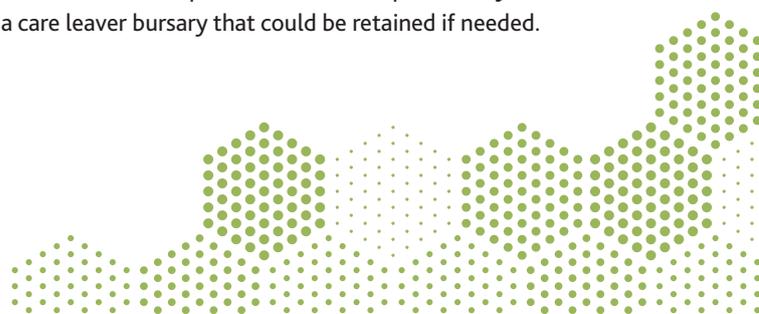
Reading through a personal statement or supporting them to complete relevant paperwork or apply for student finance can make a massive difference.

Information about scholarships

Keep them informed of any institution-specific scholarships or bursaries that they might be eligible for, in addition to the care leaver scholarship or bursary.

Guarantors

Highlight potential stumbling blocks sooner rather than later, such as any requirement for a guarantor of student accommodation. Some institutions are willing to be the guarantor for care experienced students, particularly where there is a care leaver bursary that could be retained if needed.



Attend pathway planning meetings

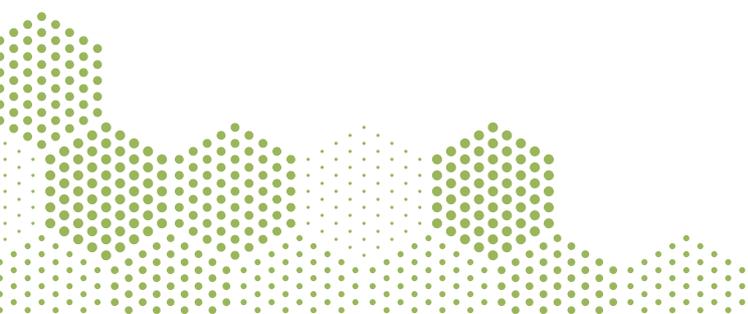
All care leavers should have pathway planning meetings to plan the level of support they will receive before they come to college or university. It is really useful for everyone involved if the university can be represented as it allows everyone to be clear on the support provision available and what's needed at university.

Prioritise care leavers for compact schemes or summer schools

We know this can really help with transition of vulnerable students. So make sure you're promoting opportunities to any LAYP or care leavers you work with.

Hints and tips

- Ensure a clearly visible named contact for prospective students and staff to contact.
- Ideally offer impartial advice and guidance pre-entry to all care leavers.
- Ensure local authorities in your area are aware of the support available.
- If a policy exists on additional considerations during application, such as a lower offer, make it clear to prospective care leaver applicants how to trigger recognition.
- Provide details of additional support available on results day if applicable.
- Be aware that care experienced students don't necessarily want to meet other care experienced students and may avoid it all costs.
- Keep things informal and friendly.
- Accept that students may be unwilling/unreliable or untrusting. Remain positive and don't see it as a reflection of your own skills. Transference should be avoided!
- Be aware that care leavers have often experienced a plethora of supporters and workers throughout their lives and they may consider you to be just one of many.
- Find out how your university contacts its applicants so that you can request them to run 'queries' for you at appropriate times of the year.
- Be flexible and be prepared to deal with ad hoc concerns or queries, which sometimes take a little time to resolve.
- Make clear in application information that ticking the UCAS box, while it won't influence the success of an application, can trigger additional guidance and support.
- Determine the level of support available on arrival on campus, e.g. is 24/7 support available during the first week? Communicate this in welcome packs along with other relevant information such as any additional financial support and accommodation services. Include a reminder of the key liaison/contact person who can provide additional signposting.
- Remember that many care leavers may approach you to access financial support but then do not want further contact with you for some time as they want to get along like any other student. If it's right for them at that particular time, that's fine. Be mindful that they may need support in their second or third years.



RETENTION – SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHILST THEY STUDY

In this section we'll look at who you might support, what types of support you might offer, what to watch for, and finally how to monitor and evaluate support.

Who to support

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 outlines statutory support for former relevant young people, apparently providing a neat definition of who to support. However the charity for people estranged from their family; Stand Alone, highlights that those care experienced students who fall outside the former relevant category, who do not receive statutory support, are most in need.

Many colleges and universities have developed their own definition of care experienced students or eligibility criteria of who can receive support. These vary widely; some will support any student who has been in care for three months or more at any point in their lives whilst others will support former relevant children and those who have been under a special guardianship order.

It's worth browsing through propel.org.uk to get an idea of what different institutions offer. Propel outlines the support available at colleges and universities across the country and in many cases includes the eligibility criteria.

An obvious point is that it's useful to have an indication of how many care experienced students you have at your institution. This will help you plan your capacity and therefore may help you develop your eligibility criteria. The number of care experienced students varies dramatically between institutions and this understandably influences how and which students are supported.

Types of support

Once you've identified your care experienced students the next steps are to contact them, identify how and if they meet your eligibility criteria, and tell them about the package of support that is available.

A variety of research projects have identified a number of key areas of support that can be invaluable for care leavers. If your institution is just starting to consider supporting young people in and leaving care then this is a good place to start:

Accommodation 365 days per year – care leavers may be concerned that they will not have accommodation in the college or university town over the lengthy vacations. Arrange to guarantee accommodation over the summer (not necessarily in halls of residence) to take that worry away.

Named key contact – make it someone's responsibility within the institution to support care leavers. Make that person's name and contact details visible on the website. We'd also recommend ensuring they are added to www.propel.org.uk. This is crucial for students and their support workers.

Money – do you have the capacity to guarantee additional funds or a scholarship to care experienced students? Or can you provide advice on how students can access extra funding as a care leaver?

Availability – ensure that relevant support, whether a key contact, buddy scheme or centralised student support, is available for care experienced students as and when they need it.

You may also look to develop more specific support:

Welcome meetings – arrange one-to-one support meetings at the start of term. It can be useful to use the care leaver bursary or scholarship as an incentive for the meeting. However ultimately it's about building rapport and checking that everything is okay.

Follow up meeting – touch base after the first couple of weeks to ensure that they are fully registered on the right course, they have received a full timetable with all their current modules, they have completed all necessary administrative details, and they have been entered into relevant examinations or assessments.

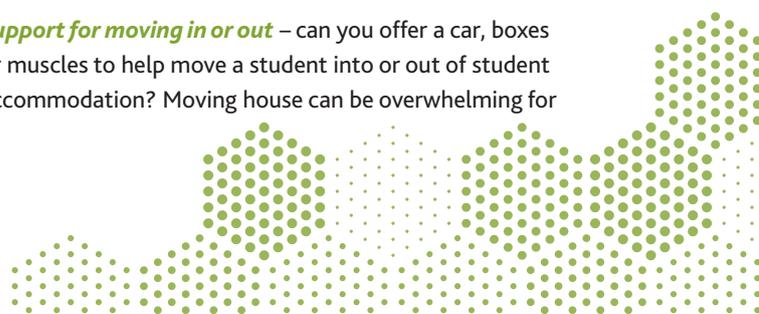
Welcome packs – provide a welcome card, pack or voucher as they move into student accommodation. This can be essential for those who might not have finances sorted with the local authority.

Disclosure agreement – set up an agreement with the student to clearly identify who can be informed of their circumstances and to ensure confidentiality. Disability support teams are usually well practised and are likely to have an agreement template that you could use as a starting point.

Signposting – know the range of student services available and who to refer students to when needed. Over time you will build up a useful catalogue of contacts.

Communication – continue to communicate with them throughout their course, even if you don't get anything back. In many cases students don't come forward for support until their second or third years.

Support for moving in or out – can you offer a car, boxes or muscles to help move a student into or out of student accommodation? Moving house can be overwhelming for



anyone, never mind when a person is on their own. Remember that care experienced students are often bringing all their worldly belongings with them.

Summer storage – students sometimes need somewhere secure to leave their belongings over the summer, especially if they are visiting, holidaying or working away. Some universities provide space or pay for self storage.

Actions that support the notion of 'belonging' – provide, for example, birthday and Christmas cards, and ensure invitations to events across campus are issued.

Being there – take the time to listen and be a student's advocate as and when needed.

Student ambassadors – invite care experienced students to become student reps or ambassadors. This can help immerse them in student life and develop life skills that could help their employability at the end of their studies.

Buddy or mentoring schemes – offer guaranteed places to care experienced students on any existing schemes aimed at new students on campus, or set up a scheme for current care experienced students to mentor incoming students.

Feedback to local authorities – take account of local authorities' desire to receive evidence that students are attending and/or progressing in their courses. This can be difficult and will depend on how your institution monitors attendance, the policy on sharing progression data, and resources for collating the information. Some institutions agree to confirm if they have seen or met with a student, or might provide a copy of transcript at the end of the year – all with the student's consent of course.

Data-sharing agreements – consider setting up an all-encompassing agreement between the institution, student and local authority to share vital information including attendance, support and progression. Three-way agreements are being trialled in the North West currently and the team have agreed to share their success and lessons with NNECL as it progresses.

Advice and guidance about life after university – support students in planning ahead through goal-setting and planning. A growing number of institutions are running 'life after university' events to help support care leavers transition post-university.

Graduation – attend their graduation to celebrate with them. Some universities also contribute to the costs of gown hire, photographs and even travel.

What to watch for

Self-sabotage is behaviour that interferes with, and eventually disrupts, a person's long-term goals. We've found that care leavers, in particular, often fall into this trap at some point during their student life.

It can be caused by self-doubt, fear of change, a sense that they can't/don't fit in, distrust that good things could ever last or, worse of all, a belief that they don't deserve success. Self-sabotage and mental health issues can be a very potent combination that completely undermines the ability to make the most of opportunities.

The signs to watch for include:

- failure to attend meetings;
- missing assignment deadlines;
- not attending classes;
- emotional breakdown;
- inappropriate behaviour in class;
- exacerbation of mental ill health; and
- simple procrastination.

It takes a certain amount of self-motivation to get through these spates of self-sabotage but there are things that can be done to help.

- Know the signs and be in contact with students often enough to recognise when they might need help.
- Take a full team approach to supporting the student and get everyone involved including the university, local authority and family if appropriate. The student's personal tutor or programme leader can help if catching up is needed.
- Also include university or college counsellors or retention teams. They regularly see students in similar situations and will have advice and expertise.
- Talk about the reason they entered the course, their end goal (whatever it is) and set out the small steps needed to get there. From then on work on the small steps, one lecture, assignment or semester at a time.
- Set up frequent meetings and stick to them. Use the whole team, with the college or university staff doing one week and you the other, and update each other after each meeting. Make sure the care leaver feels supported and secure. By making sure they know you believe in them they will increase their belief in themselves and be motivated to help themselves.



Hints and tips

- Be alert and sensitive to the possibility that care leavers may not have the same network of support as other students for handling difficulties. Always try to work with the care leaver towards the outcome they desire.
- Ensure that they are aware of the support available to them throughout their studies, but without applying pressure to use those services. Contact them at relevant points during the year to remind them of the support available.
- Arrange face-to-face appointments with care leavers before financial awards are released so they have a known person they can go back to should they encounter any difficulties.
- Make sure a private space is available so care leavers can speak openly in confidence. Ideally meetings should be with

the same person/people to help develop rapport and open communication channels.

- Take the time to address issues and act as an advocate where necessary to speak on behalf of the care leaver to alleviate their stress.
- Develop strong relationships with providers of student services to facilitate onward referral when necessary.
- Don't make assumptions.
- Build resilience. Some care leavers have experienced awful things so often they become almost blasé about them. Aim to show understanding and support but avoid shock or horror.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SUPPORT

Set up systems to capture care leaver student information

– relevant data includes UCAS data, internal disclosures, enrolment/registration data, and any SLC and HESA data

Seek feedback – use methods such as focus groups and questionnaires to ask students about what support has been offered, what is/was most valued and any additional support students would like/would have appreciated. Develop clear communication channels internally to report this to key service leads, and where applicable to support Access Agreement reporting.

Log student contact points – establish methods to monitor contact and to establish which services have been accessed.

Hints and tips

- Contact the team that produces the HESA report on care leaver data. This will help you identify students and you can also help ensure the correct details are included in the report.
- Work closely with the relevant internal department to set up regular reports to track progression of care leavers.
- Set up a database to include students who enrol and include details of their leaving care workers or supporters.



KEEPING UP TO DATE

There are a range of networks and charities across the UK who aim to support looked after young people and care leavers in some way. These can be invaluable for anyone supporting care leavers in HE, whether it's to expand your knowledge, share best practice or simply to get your questions answered.

National channels of communication are discussed below however it is highly likely that there are more groups near you. Please contact your regional NNECL representative to find out about what might be available in your local area.

NATIONAL NETWORK FOR EDUCATION OF CARE LEAVERS (NNECL)

NNECL is the national network for people supporting looked after young people and care leavers to progress into and through further or higher education.

Following a large-scale national consultation NNECL has adopted four strategic themes: we will CONNECT, INFORM, SUPPORT and CHAMPION the work of practitioners across the sector.

Local and regional groups enable practitioners to share effective practice, challenges and changing priorities, and to feed practitioners' voices into a national conversation. These diverse voices drive NNECL's priorities while a regular newsletter, our annual conference and the online 'hub' reflect the needs and priorities of professionals across the sector.

NNECL is currently going through its biggest evolution so far: to gain charitable status. This is part of a strategy to secure long-term sustainability for the network. An interim board of trustees is overseeing the transition to a new formal membership structure by 2020.

The trustees lead the strategic development of NNECL, oversee its charitable status and activities, and set the priorities for the NNECL team. A new national forum will facilitate the practitioner and organisational collaboration that is at the centre of NNECL's work.

We aim for consistency and indeed growth during this time and have some big ambitions for the next two years. Please visit NNECL.org or sign up to our newsletter for updates on our progress.

Website: www.NNECL.org

CARE LEAVERS IN HE JISMAIL

Keep up to date with issues, build networks and ask queries to others working with care leavers in higher education (HE). To join, visit www.jiscmail.ac.uk and search for CARELEAVERSINHEI.

BECOME

Become, formerly the Who Cares? Trust, provides help, support and advice to young people in care and young care leavers so they can recognize and nurture their potential and take control of their lives. The organisation helps improve the care system by ensuring that young people's voices and perspectives shape policy and service provision. They empower and support young people in care by:

- using their expertise and influence with policy makers;
- running projects which directly benefit young people, including one-to-one and group work;
- providing information and magazines for young people in care;
- offering advice and support to callers to the Care Advice Line, on issues such as rights and entitlements, housing, education and wellbeing; and
- delivering young person-led training to professionals.

Website: www.becomecharity.org.uk

Propel – Become have developed propel.org.uk, a website to inform and inspire looked after young people and care leavers considering Further and Higher Education. Alongside advice and case studies, propel.org.uk allows care experienced students to easily compare the support on offer at universities and colleges across the UK.

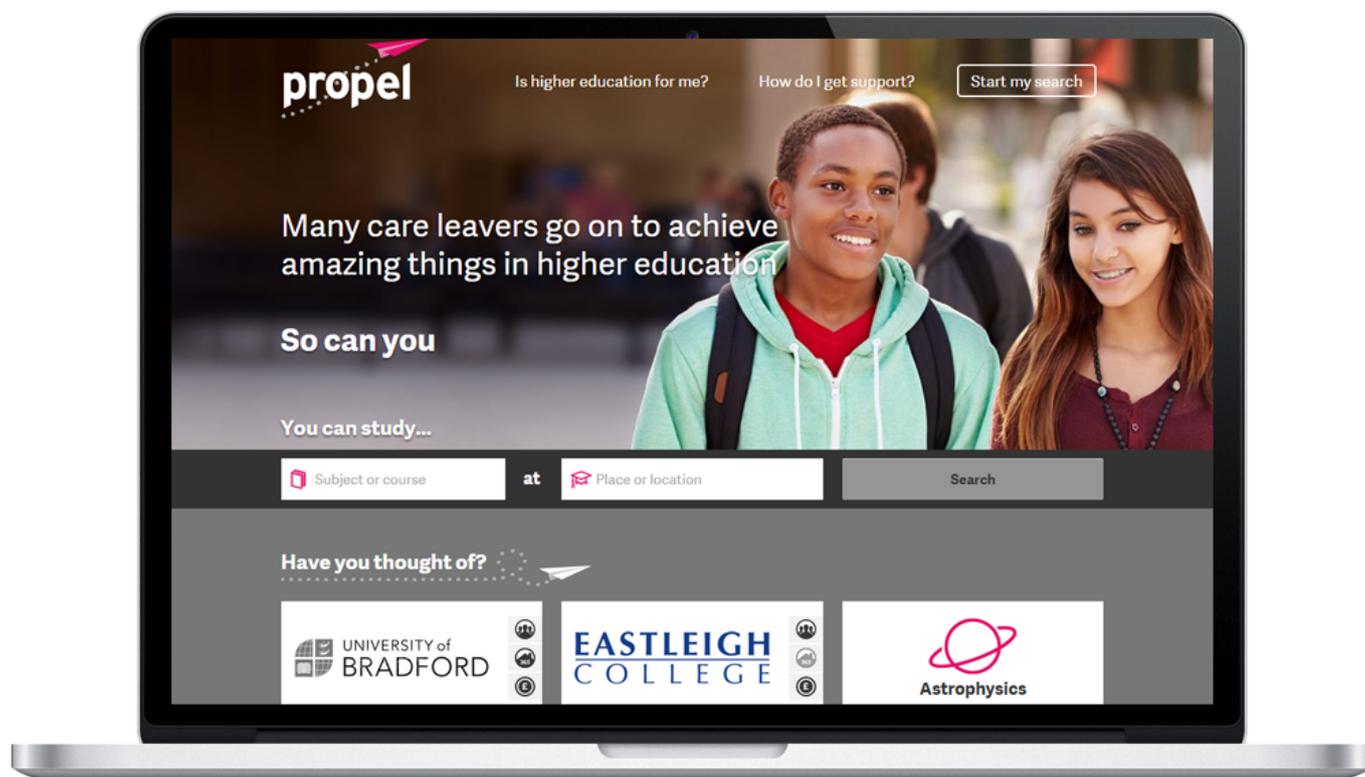
Website: www.propel.org.uk

NATIONAL CARE LEAVER ASSOCIATION (CLA)

The CLA is a user-led charity run by care leavers for care leavers. It aims to bring together the voices of care leavers of all ages to improve the current care system, improve the quality of life of care leavers throughout their lives and improve society's perception of people who have been in care as children. The CLA have developed a network of care leavers around the UK and use their strength as a national care leaver organisation to shape care and leaving care policy in England and Wales.

Website: www.careleavers.com

Are YOU on board with Propel...?



Propel.org.uk informs and inspires looked after young people and care leavers considering higher education. It helps them research, compare and access all the support on offer from FE colleges and universities. The site has received over 10,000 visitors in its first 12 months and so far, 300 institutions are represented.

If you're supporting young people in care or care leavers, Propel can show them that care leavers are achieving amazing things in higher education - and that they can too.

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADS (NAVSH)

NAVSH is a network of headteachers of virtual schools from across the country. It has been introduced to improve the educational outcomes for looked after children. NAVSH work with partners and commission research to ensure that educational needs of looked after children are better understood.

Website: www.navsh.org.uk

CATCH22

Catch22 is a not-for-profit business with a social mission, aiming to build resilience and aspirations in people and communities nationally. Catch22 has a whole life cycle approach and operates in four areas: education, employability, supporting young people and families, and justice services. The following are some key Catch22 projects that impact care leavers and looked after young people:

Care leavers research – Catch22 funds and gets involved with a variety of research projects across different aspects of leaving care, working in partnership with young people, universities, local authorities, public bodies and international organisations. These projects have included 'LIFT Children's Homes Project', 'Corporate Parenting', 'Head, Heart and Hands', and 'Siblings Together'.

Website: www.catch-22.org.uk/expertise/young-people-and-families/care-leavers-research/

National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF) – this national forum brings together over 80 local authority leaving care services for professional and practice development and aims to achieve the best outcomes for young people making the transition to adulthood.

Website: www.catch-22.org.uk/expertise/young-people-and-families/national-leaving-care-benchmarking-forum/

Email: nlcbf@catch-22.org.uk

Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) – this involves young people aged 16 and above from local authorities that are members of the NLCBF. The YPBMF works alongside the NLCBF to complete annual work plans with the aims of improving understanding of children in care, improving services, and producing advice, information resources and participation opportunities for young people.

STAND ALONE

Stand Alone is a charity that supports and raises awareness about adults that are estranged from their family or children. Stand Alone offers support services to prevent estranged adults becoming vulnerable. Their student support portal has advice and information about support, finance and accommodation for estranged students.

Website: www.standalone.org.uk

STUDENT LOAN COMPANY – VULNERABLE STUDENTS STAKEHOLDER GROUP (VSSG)

The Vulnerable Students Stakeholder Group (VSSG) advises and supports the operational delivery of specialist support to vulnerable students. The purpose of the group is to:

- highlight issues and analyse data regarding the application processing of Grants for Dependants (GFD) and support to other vulnerable groups requiring specialist support at key points in the annual application cycle;
- provide specialist input into information, advice and guidance (IAG); and
- provide input into any proposed changes and improvements to the services to vulnerable students.

The VSSG meets three or four times a year and the key outputs from the most recent meeting are updated on their website:

www.slc.co.uk/stakeholders-partners/stakeholder-working-groups.aspx

THE FOYER FEDERATION

A not-for-profit organisation the Foyer Federation has developed ground-breaking campaigns and initiatives through a network of 120 accredited learning and accommodation centres known as 'foyers'. Foyers provide up to 10,000 16 to 25-year-olds per year with mutually agreed, tailor-made programmes that give access to housing, learning, personal development, training and employment opportunities.

Website: www.foyer.net

The Foyer Foundation runs Foyer Uni Reg which helps students who have lived in foyers to access financial support at higher education institutions. The majority of this financial support comes from the Access to Learning Fund (ALF) which is a discretionary fund.

Website: foyer.net/what-we-do/projects-initiatives/foyer-university-registration/

WHERE TO START

There's a lot to take in so here's a quick guide to some of the things you can do to start your work with looked after young people and care leavers.

Sign up to the NNECL Newsletter.

- Sign up to the 'Care Leavers in HEI' group at www.jiscmail.ac.uk
- Ask your NNECL regional rep about local or regional groups and networks.
- Identify the headteacher of your local virtual school.
- Check your institution is listed at www.propel.org.uk.
- Ask your records department how many of your students have ticked the UCAS box to identify themselves as care leavers.

We hope this guide has been a useful starting point and we wish you luck in your endeavours to improve the progression and support of looked after young people and care leavers. We will be fighting the cause along with you.





© NNECL c/o The University of Winchester 2016

Authored by Megan Lunn, the University of Sunderland

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this resource, but the University can accept no responsibility for errors or omissions.

