

State of Children's Rights – evidence from The Who Cares? Trust

This evidence is based on re-occurring enquiries we have had to the Care Advice Line¹, from July 2015 to July 2016.

Housing

The Care Advice Line regularly receives calls about care leavers who are struggling to access independent accommodation once their case has been closed. This is a particular issue where authorities only offer a very small number of care leavers council accommodation, discharging the remaining care leavers into the private sector, which is an arrangement that often breaks down. We have also heard from care leavers who are finishing university, have had their case closed, but no longer term plan for accommodation has been made or discussed.

Southwark Judgement

The Care Advice Line also regularly receives calls from young people who were accommodated under the Southwark Judgement under section 17 as children in need, but did not realise they were not in care and have found themselves without support facing issues such as debt or eviction. We also receive calls from 16 and 17 year olds who are struggling to get their local authority to take responsibility for them when facing homelessness.

Financial issues

Financial issues, particularly around debt, money management and having adequate financial support is a cause for concern among care leavers. Young people regularly call the Care Advice Line for advice when they have fallen into debt. This is usually to do with rent arrears. It is also quite common for young people who are in higher education to call about debt issues.

We regularly get calls about access to the leaving care grant. Issues related to this include general access, but also whether it can only be used for independent accommodation, whether it can be accessed once their case has been closed.

Access to legal representation

Many young people get in touch with the Care Advice Line wanting to access to legal advice or to make legal challenges against their local authority but do not know where to go for legal advice.

Pathway planning

Young people who ring the Care Advice Line often do not understand the role of pathway plans. Many of the young people who call have been given copies of their plan, or have been involved in the review process. This was an issue identified by the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers in their 2013 Entitlements Inquiry, and appears to still be an issue.

Emotional issues

Young people also ring the Care Advice Line seeking help for trauma, anger management, relationships and the need for counselling, indicating that they are not receiving adequate support

¹ The Care Advice Line is run by The Who Cares? Trust and is open Monday to Friday between 10:30am and 3pm. Children in care and care leavers can contact the Care Advice Line either by telephone or by email.

while they are in care or as care leavers. Young people also report inconsistencies with CAMHS provision across the country, with some services only supporting young people until they are 16, while others support young people until they are 18, or even 25.

Children in care often ring the Care Advice Line and report that they generally feel unsupported while they are in care.