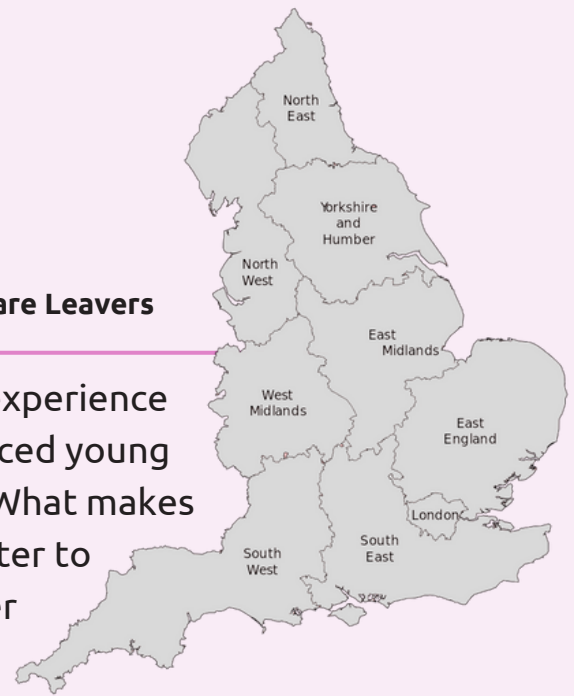




Spotlight Inquiry

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

The Spotlight Inquiry heard from 300+ people with experience of the care system, of which 130 were care-experienced young people across England. Our focus was 'community'. What makes young people feel part of the communities that matter to them? And how does the care system help and hinder them in feeling part of those communities?



In England

108,070

children in care

44,580

care leavers aged 17-21

Place

Young people told us that 'place' matters to them. They wanted stability so they could feel safe and build lasting relationships.

7,230



children moved more than three times in 2021

16,720

children placed 20+ miles from home



Stigma

It takes more than just stability to feel part of a community. Strong relationships matter too. During workshops, young people shared concerns around stigma.

“ I do think stigma prevents people like me from getting into the world where I'd ever be chosen to lead a review, become an MP, or even a civil servant. ”

“ Imagine your whole life as a child trying to explain what a problem is, and 9/10 times we are not believed because of our 'reputation' as a care kids. ”

Leaving care

Once young people leave care, 'community' becomes even more important because they often have smaller and more fragile support networks as a result of both going into care and the instability within the care system.

30%



of care leavers in foster care when they turned 18 were able to 'stay put' until the age of 19 or 20.

2,230



the number of care leavers aged 17-21 living in accommodation that their **own** local authority thinks is unsuitable for them.

What do we recommend?

In total, we make 15 practical recommendations and pose five wider challenges that the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, and subsequent reform, must address. Here are three recommendations to address issues covered in this briefing:

1

A stronger sense of place

To support children to build links with their communities we need serious action to reduce the number of placements being made 'out of area'. A national strategy for children's residential care needs to be developed to ensure there are the right placements in the right places for every child.

2

Reducing stigma

We recommend a national public awareness campaign and media pledge to improve the public's understanding of the care system, and a new requirement for professionals in children's services and all front line roles (including teachers, healthcare staff, and the police) to receive training to reduce stigma and prejudicial behaviour.

3

Improving support for leaving care

The current 'leaving care' system needs to be reimagined to end the care cliff of support typically experienced by young adults at ages 18, 21, and 25. This should guarantee a core level of support into adulthood regardless of where someone is living.