

BECOME.

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

Become's submission to CRAE to inform civil society's shadow report for the UK's examination by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

September 2022

About Become - Become is the national charity for children in care and young care leavers. Our vision is that care-experienced people have the same chances as everyone else to live happy, fulfilled lives. Our mission is to help children in care and young care leavers to believe in themselves and to heal, grow and unleash their potential. We work alongside them to make the care system the best it can be.

Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to submit evidence to CRAE to inform the civil society shadow report ahead of the UK's examination under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We were signatories to the [civil society shadow report](#), which informed the development of the List of Issues Prior to Reporting in 2020. We are grateful for CRAE's efforts to lead this process on behalf of civil society in England.

Building on our submission from 2020, which can be found [here](#), and the UN CRC's [list of issues prior to reporting](#), our submission will focus on two main areas: stability for children in care, and support for children leaving care. Our submission will not focus on areas of progress, as this has been covered in the 2020 civil society submission and the [UK Government's state report](#), but will focus on existing challenges with the fulfilment of children's rights.

1) Children in care continue to face instability in their home, communities, education and relationships.

Relevant UN CRC articles: 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 19, 20, 25, 27, 28, 39, 42

Children in care need stability in order to heal and thrive. However, for too many children, their experience of the care system is characterised by instability, which can compound the trauma they've experienced before coming into care, and have long-term negative impacts on their health, wellbeing and development.

a) Too many children in the care system experience multiple placement moves:

- Feeling settled is incredibly important for building psychological safety and for creating an environment in which children in the care system can recover from past experiences, and develop positive relationships and childhood experiences.
- However, the latest data, from 2018/19 shows that just over 10% of children in care experienced two or more placement moves in a single year and almost half (47.3%) experienced at least one move in the last two years.ⁱ
- Moves become more common as children get older, with 11.5% of 11-15 year olds having two or more moves in 2018/19 and 14% of those aged 16+.ⁱⁱ
- In 2018/19, children leaving secure/specialist residential, and children's homes, were more likely to experience multiple moves than children leaving other placement types.ⁱⁱⁱ Another indicator of children in the care system feeling unsettled is the number of times that children are recorded as going missing. The data for 2021 suggests that around one in ten (10,880 children) went missing some 71,470 times. An average of 6.6. missing incidents per child that went missing.^{iv}

b) A growing number of children in care system are placed far away from home, and the relationships that matter to them the most:

- In 2021, 57% of all children in care were living inside their local authority boundary and 74% were living within twenty miles of their home. However, just over a fifth (21%) were placed more than 20 miles from home.^v
- For these young people, placed in areas they are not familiar with there is additional instability making it harder for them to settle in, see friends and family who are important to them, leaving them at risk of isolation and loneliness.

c) Many children in care face instability in their education:

- In 2018/19 some 11% of children in care experienced a mid-year school move in the last year, with some 31% experiencing a mid-year school move in the last two years.^{vi}
- Research by Ofsted found that 9% of children living in children's homes attended unregulated education provision (such as in-house or online tuition) while 6% were not in education, employment or training.^{vii}
- Following an inquiry into the education of children in residential care settings, the Education Select Committee concluded that, despite the law clearly stating that schools

rated good or outstanding by Ofsted should be prioritised for children in care, they are in fact less likely than their peers to attend these schools. The inquiry report states that there is a 'culture of impunity which allows schools to block the admissions of children in care'.^{viii}

d) Children in care face instability in their relationships – losing connection to friends, family and loved ones – and having to regularly build new relationships with social workers and other professionals.

- Many children that we work with have highlighted that their experiences and placements within the care system have had a negative impact on their connection to and contact with friends, family and the relationships that matter to them most. This can be compounded for children who are placed miles away from home.
- Bright Spots research found that of children and young people in care aged 8-18, some 26% reported they saw their mother too little, 19% reported this for their fathers and 27% for their siblings.^{ix}
- Social workers are a crucial part of the experience of children in the care system and forming a strong relationship with a social worker can be a key protective factor for young people in care. There is however significant instability in the social work workforce and turnover is high.
- Bright Spots research suggests that only 35% of children in care reported having their social worker for 12 months and that only 59% of children trusted their social worker all or most of the time.^x The research found that 27% of children reported having had three or more social workers in the last year.

Potential recommendations:

- The Government should invest in boosting regulated sufficiency to ensure that there are enough options of the right placement type and in the right places to keep more children and young people close to the communities which matter to them.
- The Government should introduce legislation and binding targets to reduce the number of children being placed outside of their local area, separated from their siblings, and experiencing numerous care placement and educational moves.

2) Too many children leaving the care system are expected to become independent overnight and without the support they need to thrive.

Relevant UN CRC articles - 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 20, 39, 42

a) Children leaving care are expected to become independent abruptly, and much earlier than their peers.

- In 2021, there were 35,590 care leavers aged 17-21 in England^{xi} but the young adult population of care-experienced young adults is much larger – encompassing further numbers of care leavers aged 22-25 and adults over the age of 25 with care-experience.
- Too many young people are expected to leave care before they feel ready, falling at a time in their life when they need stability the most. Young care leavers that Become supports have described that time as a “cliff edge” or “like being on death row, counting down the days” until they turn 18, their placements are abruptly stopped, and they are expected to become ‘independent’ overnight.
- The introduction of the Staying Put scheme^{xii}, in 2014, provides an opportunity for young people to remain with their former foster carers until the age of 21 if they wish to and their foster carer agrees. There are also a limited number of ‘*Staying Close*’^{xiii} that support young people to live near and continue to be supported by their children’s home. Both these forms of support are dependent on a young person’s final placement whilst in care and on the agreement of their placement provider. They are not an entitlement.
- The ‘Staying Put’ scheme continues to have relatively low take up. Firstly, not all care leavers are eligible. There were 11,600 care leavers aged 18 in 2021 but only 3,540 (30%) finished their time in care in a foster placement. Of these 3,540 eligible, 2,120 stayed put (60% of those eligible). This equates to only about 18% of all care leavers aged 18 being able to stay put, less than 1 in 5.^{xiv} In comparison, the average age when young people leave their parental home across England has risen to 23.^{xv}

b) Children leaving care are not always given the support that they need to have a positive start to adulthood.

- In 2018-19 the relative poverty line, after housing costs, for a single person in the UK was £156 a week.^{xvi} Given that the vast majority of care leavers receive Universal Credit on turning 18, and receive the lower 18-25 rate of £257.33 a month^{xvii} (£60 a week) it’s clear that most care leavers begin their adult life significantly below the poverty line.
- There is a range of support for care-experienced young people pursuing further or higher education, or apprenticeships, including the 16-19 Bursary Fund, a £2,000 higher education bursary or a one-off £1,000 bursary. However, we have heard from young people that this support can be insufficient, given the financial costs associated with education and apprenticeships, in the absence of familial financial support. Overall, 39%

of care leavers between the ages of 19 and 21 are not in education, employment, or training, compared to 13% of all young people of that age.^{xviii}

- Research shows that care-experienced children and young people are at a much higher risk of mental ill health than their peers. It has been estimated that 45% of all children in care and 72% of children living in residential care have a diagnosable mental health condition,^{xix} compared to 11.2% of the wider population of 5- 15 year old children.^{xx} Almost two in three children and young people with a diagnosable mental health condition are currently unable to access NHS care and treatment.^{xxi} This is exacerbated for young people between the ages of 18-25 as they transition from child and adolescent mental health services to adult mental health services due to higher eligibility thresholds.
- In 2021, local authorities deemed that 5% of care leavers aged 19-21 were in accommodation that was not suitable and they were unaware of the living arrangements of a further 7%.^{xxii}
- In 2019-20, some 3,130 care leavers aged 18-20 received statutory homelessness support from a local authority.^{xxiii}

Potential recommendations:

- The Government should extend the Staying Put and Staying Close schemes for all care-experienced young people up to the age of 25, and make access to these schemes an opt-out legal entitlement. The schemes should be sufficiently funded to improve uptake. There should be national guidance on the operating principles and criteria of the Staying Close scheme to provide consistency, based on the evaluation of previous pilots.
- The Government should provide an enhanced, comprehensive offer of support for all young people leaving care, which builds on the 5 Missions proposed in the Independent Children’s Social Care Review, and includes additional and targeted support across health, education, employment, housing, relationships and financial support.

ⁱ Children’s Commissioner, ‘Stability Index 2020’ [ONLINE]. Available at - <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/cco-stability-index-2020.pdf> [Accessed: 21 September 2022]

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} HM Government (2021) ‘Children looked after in England including adoptions’ [ONLINE] Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2021> [Accessed: 21 September 2022]

^v HM Government (2021) ‘Children looked after in England including adoptions: 2020 to 2021’ [ONLINE] Available at: [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2020 to 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions-2020-to-2021) [Accessed: 21 September 2022]

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- vi Children’s Commissioner, ‘Stability Index 2020’ [ONLINE]. Available at - <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/cco-stability-index-2020.pdf> [Accessed: 21 September 2022]
- vii The overall sample size was 2, 600 children living in children’s homes. Ofsted (2021), ‘The education of children living in children’s homes’ [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-education-of-children-living-in-childrens-homes/the-education-of-children-living-in-childrens-homes> [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
- viii House of Commons Education Committee (2022), ‘Educational poverty: how children in residential care have been let down and what to do about it’ [ONLINE] Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/23006/documents/168514/default/> [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
- ix Briheim-Crookall, L. Baker, C. Selwyn, J (2018) ‘Our Lives Our Care: Looked after children’s views on their wellbeing 2018” (Coram Voice, University of Bristol) [ONLINE] Available at: <https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/OLOC-Snapshot-online-2.pdf> [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
- x Briheim-Crookall, Michelmores, O. et al (2020), ‘What makes life good? Care leavers’ views on their well-being’ (Coram Voice, Rees Centre) [ONLINE] Available at: <https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/1883-CV-What-Makes-Life-Good-Report-final.pdf> [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
- xi Department for Education (2022) ‘Children looked after in England including adoptions’ [ONLINE] Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2021>, Care leavers tab [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
- xii Department for Education (2013) ‘Staying Put Regulations’. [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-put-arrangements-for-care-leavers-aged-18-years-and-above>. [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
- xiii Department for Education (2021) ‘Staying Close: 2022-2025’ [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-close-expression-of-interest> [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
- xiv Department for Education (2022) ‘Children looked after in England including adoptions’. [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2021>, Care leavers tab, including underlying ‘Staying Put’ data [Accessed: 20 September 2022] Also see Table 1 in document.
- xv Office for National Statistics. (2022). ‘Young adults living with their parents’ [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/datasets/young-adultslivingwiththeirparents> [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
- xvi Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020) ‘Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2020’ [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/R170-Living-standards-poverty-and-inequality-in-the-UK-2019-2020%20.pdf> [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
- xvii Gov.uk (2022) ‘Universal Credit: What you’ll get’. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/what-youll-get> [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
- xviii HM Government (2021) ‘Children looked after in England including adoptions’ [ONLINE] Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2021> [Accessed: 21 September 2022]
- xix What Works for Children’s Social Care, Mental health of children and young people in care: evidence summary (2022) [ONLINE] Available at - Mental health of children and young people in care Evidence Summary (whatworks-csc.org.uk) [Accessed – 1st October 2022]
- xx NHS Digital (2018), ‘Mental health of children and young people in England, 2017’ [ONLINE] Available at: [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2017 \[PAS\] - NHS Digital](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-people-in-england-2017). [Accessed: 20 September 2022]
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- xxiii Department for Levelling Up (2021) ‘Annual statutory Homelessness 2020-21’ [ONLINE] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1016146/Annual_Statutory_Homelessness_2020-21.pdf [Accessed: 20 September 2022]