

# Support

# Every Step of the Way

End The Care Cliff report  
Executive summary

**BECOME.**

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE  
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

## **About Become**

Become is the national charity for care-experienced children and young people. We put young people at the heart of everything we do, supporting them to get the help they need now and empowering them to bring about change in their own lives, the care system and society.

## **Contact:**

Matt Blow, Policy and Public Affairs Manager  
[matt.blow@becomecharity.org.uk](mailto:matt.blow@becomecharity.org.uk)

[BecomeCharity.org.uk/ETCC](https://becomecharity.org.uk/ETCC)

“ —

Living alone has been very difficult. I was in a very dark place when I first left care and I'm terrified of being alone... If there's nobody to go home to it breaks me.

- Max, left care aged 17

# Introduction

**Every year, thousands of young people aged 18 or younger face a care cliff when leaving the care system, where vital support and relationships fall away, and they are expected to become ‘independent’ overnight.**

Whilst the average age that young people across England leave home has risen to 24, the majority of young people leaving care will be expected to live independently from a much younger age: becoming responsible for paying rent and bills, budgeting and managing a tenancy, at a time when they may be in the middle of studying or exams or starting employment or training, all without a family safety net to fall back on if things go wrong.

Forced to move out of their foster home or children’s home and into living situations which they are often not ready for is leading to a cycle of housing insecurity, inappropriate or unsafe living conditions, and high levels of homelessness.

To better understand the specific challenges that care-experienced young people face in accessing appropriate and secure housing, and the support available to them, we

carried out a series of semi-structured interviews and workshops with 33 care-experienced young people, and sent freedom of information requests to all tier-one local authorities and county councils in England. Our report is also informed by our analysis of Government statistics, the views and experiences of the care-experienced young people that we work with at Become; and insights gathered through the services that we provide, including our Care Advice Line.

There are examples of excellent practice across the country, where local authorities provide tailored support to young people leaving care. But we also found really worrying examples of young people facing a ‘double trauma’, feeling forced to leave care before they are ready and then feeling forced to move into inappropriate accommodation – disrepair and mouldy homes; being exposed to physical or verbal abuse; feeling unsafe in shared settings and being encouraged to present as homeless in order to secure housing.

The stories that young people shared with us detail their housing journeys after leaving care and are often punctuated by missed opportunities where improved planning, support or involvement in decisions at a key moment could have been transformational in providing them with the stable home and foundation that we all need as we move to adulthood.

## **But this can be fixed.**

With the right action now from national and local government, we can

### **end the care cliff**

and make sure young people leaving care have suitable housing options and the right support in place every step of the way.

“ —  
The place I have now I didn't choose, the hostel support worker had chosen it and you get two options so if you don't like the first option then you get one more but you have to take it otherwise you have to wait longer.

- A care-experienced young person

## Key findings

### 1. Too many young people who have left care face homelessness. Young care leavers are nine times more likely to face homelessness than other young people.

- The number of young care leavers aged 18–20 approaching their local authority as homeless has increased by 54% over the last five years and care-experienced young people are nine times more likely to face homelessness than other young people.
- Young people leaving care are being encouraged to present as homeless in order to secure housing, which may be part of the reason for the increase in statutory homelessness.
- Beyond these statistics are many more who are ‘hidden homeless’, sofa surfing or rough sleeping, who may be unaware of their rights and entitlements and haven't been in touch with their local authority for support.

“

They were using homelessness as a punishment for me going away and fulfilling self-development opportunities.

- Clara, moved into emergency accommodation after she went away for a few weeks

### 2. Care-experienced young people are facing a ‘double trauma’, feeling forced to leave care before they are ready and then feeling forced to move into inappropriate accommodation.

- We heard shocking examples of care-experienced young people living in accommodation that was in disrepair and mouldy homes, waiting months for housing repairs, or being forced to live in homes that weren't ready – with bare walls or no carpets.
- Young people also told us about facing physical or verbal abuse; and feeling unsafe in shared settings with older adults who are drinking and taking drugs or experiencing mental health challenges.

## Key findings (continued)

### 3. Care-experienced young people highlighted numerous missed opportunities to support them to secure appropriate housing.

- Poor quality or poorly timed support to leave care is leaving young people at risk of homelessness, in inappropriate living situations, or in situations where their needs are not being met.
- The Staying Put and Staying Close schemes can be invaluable in providing stability and improving outcomes, but almost two-thirds of 19-year-olds were not living with their foster carers in 2023, despite being eligible to stay with them until the age of 21 through the Government's 'Staying Put' scheme and only 30% local authorities in England had a 'Staying Close' scheme.
- We also heard that housing options were not communicated early or clearly enough, young people did not feel involved in decisions about their options and were not fully aware of their key rights and entitlements
- Young care leavers are being considered "intentionally" homeless for reasons such as going away to university or for travelling abroad.

“

It was a massive change for me from being with my foster family to suddenly going into this place where everyone had their own set of problems. I felt completely abandoned by social services.

- Duncan

### 4. Care-experienced young people are facing a postcode lottery as well as an age lottery. There is significant variation and inconsistency in whether and how care leavers are prioritised for social housing.

- Although local authorities have responsibility as corporate parents for care-experienced young people to the age of 25, often any additional priority given to care leavers for social housing ended at the age of 18 or 21.
- We found examples of the leaving care grant being used for tenancy deposits rather than helping young people to buy essential furniture (which is what it is intended for), which could leave young people moving into new homes without basic furniture like beds and white goods.
- Young people face significant barriers accessing private rented accommodation, yet only 38% of local authorities provide a guarantor scheme and 58% provide a deposit scheme for care leavers.
- We also found pockets of good practice; for example, several local authorities, such as Oldham and Walsall Councils, have extended automatic priority need status to all care leavers up to the age of 25, or have committed to not make homelessness intentionality decisions against care leavers.

# Recommendations

All care-experienced young people should be supported to make a positive move when leaving care, at a time that works for them.

The Government must:

## **1. Provide greater continuity of care -**

by making the Staying Put and Staying Close schemes fully funded, opt-out legal entitlements for all young people in care up to 25, so young people can stay in their homes or connected to support.

## **2. Increase access to safe, appropriate homes –**

by removing the local area connection test for care leavers as government has committed to do, without delay; and requiring all local authorities to provide a dedicated tenancy deposit and rent guarantor scheme for care leavers.

## **3. Provide a stronger legal safety net to prevent care leaver homelessness –**

by amending homelessness legislation to make all care leavers up to age 25 ‘priority need’ for homelessness support and removing intentionality homeless rules for care leavers.

## **4. Improve financial support to young people leaving care -**

by extending the over-25 rate of universal credit to care leavers, increasing financial entitlements with inflation; and exempting care leavers from council tax.

## **5. Strengthen the role of Personal Advisers to improve the support provided to young people -**

by introducing standardised training, development and qualifications, with a focus on supporting young people to secure safe, appropriate and affordable housing options.

“

I knew that I could always go to her [foster mum] if I needed to chat, or just needed someone to talk to, and I think that really, really helped. And I can’t imagine what it would have been like for me if I had faced that care cliff.

Zara, on her Staying Put arrangement after she turned 18

Find the references in the full report: [becomecharity.org.uk/become-the-movement/our-campaigns/ending-the-carecliff/#report](https://becomecharity.org.uk/become-the-movement/our-campaigns/ending-the-carecliff/#report)



END  
THE  
CARE  
CLIFF