

BECOME.

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

Press release

14/11/2024

New Government figures show almost half of children in care are now living out of area

New data released by the Department for Education (DfE) today shows that the number of children living out of area has increased by more than 5,000 in the past five years. Young people are moved often alone and without warning, compounding the trauma they have already experienced as they are separated from everything and everyone they know.

With the number of children in care still over 83,000, the figures reveal how urgently this Government must act to increase the number of foster and children's homes across the country.

Government figures show that, as at 31 March 2024:

- Across England, 18,040 children in care had been moved more than 20 miles away from home. That's 22% of all children in care.
- Over the last decade, there has been a 51% increase in the numbers moved more than 20 miles away. In the same period, the overall number of children in care increased by 22%.
- 49% of all children in care living in children's homes or secure units were living more than 20 miles from home.
- Many children in care experience multiple moves – more than 25,000 moved home at least once last year, whilst 10% had multiple home moves in last 12 months.
- Over 14,000 care leavers aged 19-21 were not in education, employment and training, 39% compared with to an estimated 13% of all young people aged 19-21.
- 2,570 care leavers aged 17 to 21 were living in accommodation deemed to be unsuitable by their own local authority.

Become's own research released in the summer found that children in private children's homes are 2.5 times more likely to be living far away, and 4 out of 5 children in secure settings are living more than 20 miles from home.

Today's figures reveal the situation on distance moves continues to go in the wrong direction, with more children than ever before being moved far away not because it's in their best interests – but because of a lack of suitable places locally.

The statistics also highlight the impact of the care cliff, when support is stripped away from many children in care when they turn 18, with over 2,500 care leavers living in accommodation deemed unsuitable by their own local authority and more than a third not in education, employment or training.

Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive of Become, the national charity for children in care and young care leavers, says:

“The persistently high number of children in care means no let-up for a system that’s already on its knees and failing to meet the needs of young people. It’s simply not good enough that more children are being moved far away from everything they know due to a lack of suitable homes close by.

“We’ve heard time and again from children in care the devastating impact this has when they are separated from brothers and sisters and pulled out of their school, which often happens without warning and sometimes multiple times a year.

“Young people in care can’t afford to wait any longer. The Government needs to take decisive action to stop these numbers getting worse by developing a national strategy so that all children in care have a safe and suitable home in the right area and get the love and stability they deserve.”

Become has recently worked with Labour MP Jake Richards to introduce a Private Members’ Bill that would make it a legal requirement for local authorities to collect and publish data about the extent to which they are finding local placements for children in care, and to develop and publish sufficiency plans, setting out what steps they are taking to meet their requirements to find local homes for children in care.

The Bill is due to have its second reading in March and represents an important first step in ensuring children in care are kept close to the people and places that matter to them.

-ENDS-

Note to Editors

As the national charity for children in care and young care leavers, we have young people wanting to share their story, as well as interviews available with our CEO, Katharine Sacks-Jones.

For more information or to make a media enquiry, please contact Become’s Press and Media Officer Suzy Barber on 07951 155246 / suzy.barber@becomecharity.org.uk or Victoria Wilson, Strategic Communications Manager on 07932 009761 / victoria.wilson@becomecharity.org.uk

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.

Note on data sources:

All statistics in the above press release are taken from the latest edition of the Department for Education’s annual statistical release ‘[Children Looked After in England Including Adoptions](#)’, which was published on 14/11/24 and can be found [here](#).

All statistics in this press release, unless specified otherwise, relate to children in care or care leavers on 31st March 2024.

In this press release, we include five- and ten-year comparisons about the number of children in care, and the number of children living out of area or more than 20 miles from home. Any data used that relates to years prior to 2020 can be found in the [previous releases of the DfE data series](#).

Note on total number of children in care:

On 31st March 2024, there were 83, 630 children in care in England. This was a slight decrease from the previous year: there were 83, 840 children in care on 31st March 2023.

The total number of children in care has increased by 22% from 31st March 2014 when there was 68, 790 children in care.

Note on children in care living out of area:

On 31st March 2019, 32, 380 children in care were living outside of their home local authority boundary (or out of area). The number of children in care living out of area on 31st March 2024 was 37, 520, an increase of 5, 140 children from five years prior.

Note on children in care living more than 20 miles from home:

On 31st March 2014, there were 11, 960 children in care who were living more than 20 miles from home. This number increased by 51% in the 10 years to 2024: on 31st March 2024, 18, 040 children in care were living more than 20 miles from home.

On 21st March 2024, there were 4, 220 children in care living in children's homes or secure units who were living more than 20 miles from home: this represents 49% of all children living in children's homes or secure units.

The data in the press release which shows that children in private children's homes are 2.5 times more likely to be living far away, and that 4 out of 5 children in secure settings are living more than 20 miles from home, relates to 31st March 2023. This data is from freedom of information requests carried out by Become. The data can be found here: Become (2024), [Still Too Far](#)

Note on care leavers living in unsuitable accommodation:

The criteria for defining whether accommodation is deemed to be suitable or unsuitable can be found on pages 104-107 in this [methodology document](#).

Notes on care leavers who were not in education, employment and training:

On 31st March 2024, there were 14,300 care leavers aged 19-21 who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). This represents 39% of all care leavers aged 19-21 and has increased by 9% from the previous year. On 31st March 2023, there were 13, 080 care leavers aged 19-21 who were not in education, employment and training.