

End uncertainty for thousands of young people, says national charity following surge in demand for support

Each year nearly ten thousand young people leave care when they turn 18. During the Covid-19 crisis the Government stepped in to protect young people from this upheaval, where many have to abruptly leave their home. Its pledge to ensure 'no one has to leave care during this period' was a lifeline to many youngsters.

Now, Become, the national charity for children in care and care leavers is calling on the government to provide clarity on how long this pledge will last. And better yet, to permanently remove the 'care-cliff' – where turning eighteen often triggers a move out of home, into unfamiliar accommodation with less support.

CEO of Become, Katharine Sacks-Jones explains: "Government's commitment that no young person should have to leave care during the crisis is commendable. As part of the build back better programme, we now have the opportunity to remove this damaging care-cliff forever. In the same way Government has responded to calls for free school meals, there is a chance to make sure all eighteen-year olds continue to get the care and support they need.

"After all, young people's needs don't just change overnight as they turn eighteen. The government must enshrine this principle backed with funding, so local authorities can be flexible and always provide what's best for each young person.

"If they don't, we risk seeing local authorities desperately trying to transition a backlog of young people into potentially worse living conditions. This so-called independence is going to severely hit the most vulnerable young people in our society."

Calls to the charity's helpline for children in care and young care leavers have increased by 75%, with the sharp rise continuing as lockdown eases. Many of the calls are from young people anxious about what the future holds.

Zahra, (21), turned to Become for support after leaving care. "Just after my eighteenth birthday I was forced to move from supported housing to living alone. At the same time, I lost my emotional support and practical help with things like managing my medication.

"After leaving care, I felt really isolated and lonely. I was thrown into the world on my own and no-one cared about me. Everything was gone at once."

Become, is calling for change and support as it fights to balance the sharp increase in demand for support and a predicted loss of around a third of its income.

"There is no doubt the toll of the Covid-19 crisis has been exponentially higher on young people who have experienced care" says Sacks-Jones.

"Many of these young people have already been through severe trauma and adversity. Under normal circumstances the odds are already stacked against them. But now, things are even worse."

Sacks-Jones and a panel of young people who have experienced care put their concerns about how they have felt like a forgotten group during the crisis to the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson at a meeting with him yesterday (Wednesday 8th July). Become is also launching its *Care not Crisis* appeal to ensure it can provide the necessary practical support for young people as they face the impacts of Covid-19.

Samara (25, Bradford) has relied on Become's virtual hangouts for young care leavers during lockdown - the first time she's met a group of other people with similar experiences to her own. "Lockdown has been really hard. There's not much support where I live for care leavers, or much awareness of what we go through.

"Now things are easing for other people, but not for me. It's tough to see everyone talking about spending time with their families."

Visit www.becomecharity.org.uk to find out more and support the charity at www.justgiving.com/campaign/become

Ends

Embargoed until 00.01 Thursday 9th July

Charity warns of sharp rise in calls to helpline from young people

The national charity for children in care and young care leavers, Become, has warned of the severe impact of the coronavirus crisis as it reports a 75% increase in calls to its helpline.

Many young care leavers contacting the charity's helpline have faced the crisis alone and afraid, experiencing increased isolation, deteriorating mental health, hardship and risk of homelessness.

Today, the charity is calling on the government for clarity on how long its lockdown pledge that 'no one has to leave care during this period' will last.

The measure was welcomed as a lifeline to many youngsters. But CEO of Become, Katharine Sacks-Jones says the lack of certainty is now fuelling feelings of anxiety amongst thousands of young people who are already vulnerable and have been hit hard by lockdown.

"Fear of uncertainty is all too often a familiar feeling for care leavers, and this has been intensified by the crisis. At a time when they are likely to be especially vulnerable, they deserve to have clarity on when they might have to move and what support they will then be entitled to."

Become is also calling for the progress made during lockdown to better protect young people in care when they turn eighteen, not to be thrown away now.

"Government's commitment that no young person should have to leave care during the crisis is commendable. As part of the build back better programme, we now have the opportunity to remove this damaging care-cliff forever. In the same way Government has responded to calls for free school meals, there is a chance to ensure in the future, no care leaver faces a transition to independence before they're ready.

"After all, young people's needs don't just change overnight as they turn eighteen. The government must enshrine this principle backed with funding, so local authorities can be flexible and always provide what's best for each young person.

"If they don't, we risk seeing local authorities desperately trying to transition a backlog of young people into potentially worse living conditions. This so-called independence is going to severely hit the most vulnerable young people in our society."

The rise in calls to Become's helpline is set to continue as effects of the crisis deepen, impacting the mental health, wellbeing and safety of these already vulnerable young people. At the same time as demand for support increases, the charity is predicting a loss of around a third of its income and is launching its *Care not Crisis* appeal to provide practical support for young people.

Samara (25, Bradford) has relied on Become's virtual hangouts for young care leavers during lockdown - the first time she's met a group of other people with similar experiences to her own. "Lockdown has been really hard. There's not much support where I live for care leavers, or much awareness of what we go through.

"Now things are easing for other people, but not for me. It's tough to see everyone talking about spending time with their families."

Sacks-Jones and a panel of young people who have experienced care put their concerns about how they have felt like a forgotten group during the crisis to Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson at a meeting with him yesterday (Wednesday 8th July). Visit www.becomecharity.org.uk to find out more and support the charity at www.justgiving.com/campaign/become

Notes to eds

For more information contact:

Matthew Rogers

media@becomecharity.org.uk

07593004482

What are we calling for?

1. During Covid-19 Government pledged to ensure 'no one has to leave care during this period'. We now need clarity for young people on how long this pledge will last.
2. Outside of the crisis there generally exists a default position within children's social care services that young people in care are moved at age 18 to 'transition to independence/adulthood'. Young people tell us they often face an abrupt move to new accommodation and a significant drop in support around their 18th birthday, even if they are happy in their current placement and are at a point in their lives where stability is particularly important (e.g. during an important academic year). We are calling on Government to provide leadership and funding to ensure that the decision about leaving care is always young person centred, taking account of their wishes and needs.
3. We're launching our *Care not Crisis* appeal to allow us to cope with a 75% increase in demand and predicted loss of a third of our income. We need to provide practical support to help people navigate the post Covid-19 world, which is already hitting them hard. The appeal can be found at JustGiving: www.justgiving.com/campaign/become

About Become

Become is the national charity for children in care and young care leavers. Since 1992, we've been working to improve their everyday lives and futures.

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 and parliamentarians to make the care system the best it can be.

Become's programmes include a Care Advice Service, with a freephone advice line; coaching support; and guidance for care leavers considering university.

Find out more about Become at www.becomecharity.org.uk and on Twitter @Become1992.