
Experiences of housing and home for young care leavers: an exploratory research report

The Care Experienced Young People's Network



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Introduction

The Care Experienced Young People’s Network (YPN) is a small group of care experienced (CEP) young people, campaigning for improved support for care leavers. The YPN have been supported by a care experienced project lead to develop and realise our own ideas since March 2020. The project is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, who gave us the freedom to shape the YPN in a way that reflects our own interests. Following a series of podcasts and a research project about the impact of COVID-19 on care leavers in 2020, this 2-year project comes to a close by bringing together our key ideas and passions in three research projects.

The motivation behind this research project was to better understand the experiences of housing in terms of what makes a home as well as accommodation for care leavers, and what the enablers and barriers for finding and maintaining a home are for care leavers as they become independent.

This short report presents the main findings from our research into housing and home for care leavers and concludes with our thoughts on what this means for professionals working with CEP in this space. We have not named those who responded to our survey or took part in an interview in the report but would like to thank them for their time, openness and support for this work.



What did we do?

The research began with a survey, which was open for five weeks. We developed the questions as a network, with multiple choice answers and checking for anything confusing or upsetting before it was advertised. We made sure every question was optional and also included space for open responses so that people could add additional thoughts and insights. We promoted the survey to care experienced people (CEP) and professionals who work with CEP on social media and through targeting charities and leaving care teams who could reach these audiences. In total, 79 people responded to our survey.

You can find the key questions we asked in the survey at the end of this report in appendix A. We also asked a set of questions to understand who was responding to the survey, and you can find a detailed description of who responded to the survey at the end of this report in appendix B.

We analysed the survey responses by reading and discussing the strongest themes. This allowed us to create a set of questions which we then put to some professionals who support CEP around housing and home. We reached out to charities and projects that were also on the Esmée Fairbairn Leaving Care Funding Stream and invited them to do a half-hour interview. You can find the questions we asked professionals in Appendix C.

Given there is limited information available on the characteristics and experiences of CEP across the UK, we cannot compare our sample to national statistics and draw rigorous conclusions. However, our research has given us valuable insights into the experiences of housing and home for CEP and the views of professionals that support them. The remainder of this short report presents the key findings from this research along with our thoughts on what they mean.

What did we find out?

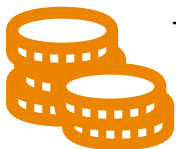
These were the four key themes that define what 'home' means:



Challenges

The top three challenges CEP face while trying to find and secure a home were:

1. Cost of rent and bills
2. Lack of available housing
3. Not knowing what to do/where to start



Those who left comments raised issues such as needing a guarantor and to pass a credit check, and having to rent an unaffordable property, relating to cost of rent and bills. Low self-esteem and feeling alone were mentioned too.

The top three challenges CEP face while trying to maintain and keep a home were:

1. Cost of rent and bills
2. Taking care of myself/feeling isolated
3. Not getting consistent support

Those who left comments mentioned caring for the wellbeing and health of dependents, like children, as well as themselves and that people (like friends or neighbours) trying to take advantage as a further challenge. We know from our own experiences that 'taking advantage' can, at best, mean friends using our new flat as a 'party pad' or being drawn into taking drugs.

When we spoke to professionals, they highlighted that care leavers often need more support when they go into independent living, but this is when the support offer starts to reduce. They also noted that care leavers must suddenly start making a lot of decisions themselves. CEP find themselves needing to navigate complex systems at an unusually young age when they have not had any practice.



What helps

The top three things that helped CEP whilst trying to find and secure a home, and whilst trying to maintain and keep a home, were:

1. Support from leaving care worker/personal advisor/social worker
2. Support from family (including foster carers) and friends
3. Grants (from a charity, local authority, university)

Those who left comments flagged loans and secure, well-paid employment as key factors for both finding and keeping a home. They also mentioned building resilience over time and learning to manage alone.

When we spoke to professionals, they highlighted the importance of proactive and long-term support to build confidence and self-worth so that CEP can feel able to seek employment and education. They also flagged the importance of having someone around who understands the housing and available funding systems. Finally, it is crucial to have support in place to help CEP get set-up, settled, and learn the basics of housekeeping like cooking, laundry and paying bills.



Key themes

The key themes that came from the survey respondents' open responses and the interviews were:

1. Finance: a lack of financial stability and support system leads to a cycle of borrowing, and the universal credit system can be hard to navigate given that CEP cannot apply for this until they have a flat, and so cannot budget for the right amount of rent. They also find that a guarantor and deposit are hard to come by, and that the leaving care grant is insufficient.

2. Consistent support: this makes all the difference to navigating the challenges of housing and home.
3. Mental health, isolation, and the importance of support networks: in order to protect young people against their vulnerability to exploitation. Professionals highlighted how easy it is to misinterpret the reasons for a young person's behaviour, when limited support is pushed away.

We know this is not new information, but we noticed how important employment is to housing and home, and how important relationships are to both housing, home and finding employment.

"I am 35 and still haven't found safety"

- care experienced survey respondent

"My first home was at 16. Under prepared and alone. I found myself searching to make a family to help me keep afloat"

- care experienced survey respondent

We also found a final theme:

4. Having to take accommodation they are not happy with: this was repeatedly flagged as something that often happens to CEP, partly because professionals are reluctant to explore options due to fears around eviction from private housing, there are limited options available, and low communication or understanding of young people's preferences and the drivers of behaviour. It is also partly because care leavers do not know much about their housing options, their rights or the processes they need to follow - they are reliant on their network/professionals to tell them about the housing market, what's available to them and how to access it. Professionals often make a judgment call on the right option for a young person and then present it, rather than explain the options and enable them to learn and make choices.

This finding was new to some of us due to going straight onto university when we left care. Realising this led to some challenging discussions about our own privilege, and our disappointment that those who do not go onto university are potentially living in considerably more expensive properties than us with a poorer quality of life simply through lack of knowledge.

Recommendations



We want to see more focus on housing rights and enabling care experienced people to make choices they feel are suitable for them by teaching them about the housing market (this doesn't mean professionals can't offer guidance about what the right choice for them might be) and providing them with necessary support for finding and maintaining a home. Some survey respondents referred to being homeowners, and we want to see more ambition around this; teach care leavers about buying a house so they know for later and see it as an option. We also want to see more support for care leavers graduating from university who may end up with the same problems but at a later age, as their peers go back to their family home for a while.

We also want to see more focus on building confidence and skills in young people so they can find employment and on enabling young people to combat loneliness and build healthy relationships. You can see our report on relationships (launching in November 2021) for more on this.

These are a few projects funded by Esmée Fairbairn, supporting Care Leavers with housing, social skills and employability. We'd like to see more of this as standard for Care Leavers.

[Home | The National House Project \(thehouseproject.org\)](https://thehouseproject.org)

[Getting Ready – vfcc.org.uk](https://vfcc.org.uk)

[projects | Include Youth](#)

[What is a Care Leaver? | St Christopher's Fellowship Care Experienced](#)

[Programmes - Greater Manchester Youth Network \(gmyn.co.uk\)](https://gmyn.co.uk)



Appendix A – what (key) questions did they survey ask?

We asked the following questions in the survey, after a set of questions about their characteristics and informing them about how their data would be used and stored (in-keeping with GDPR)

1. What from the following best describes the main challenges you/the CEP you support have faced while trying to find and secure a home? [select three]
 - lack of available housing
 - cost of rent and bill
 - finding a deposit
 - the process e.g. forms
 - setting up e.g. getting furniture and internet
 - just not knowing what to do where to start
 - not being able to access support
 - other: please specify
 - prefer not to say
2. What from the following best describes the thing that have helped you/the CEP you support while trying to find and secure a home? [select three]
 - support from leaving care worker/personal advisor/social worker
 - support from family and friends
 - support from a counsellor
 - support from a community organiser e.g. a youth or arts club
 - support from teachers/tutors
 - advocacy service
 - welfare rights teams
 - grant (from a charity, local authority, university)
 - housing advisor
 - other: please specify
 - prefer not to say
3. What from the following best describes the challenges you/the CEP you support have faced while trying to maintain and keep a home? [select three]
 - cost of rent and bills
 - relationships with people you live with
 - relationship with landlord
 - maintenance e.g. repairs and mould
 - taking of myself/feeling isolated
 - not getting consistent support
 - other: please specify
 - prefer not to say
4. What from the following best describes the things that have helped you/the CEP you support while trying to maintain and keep a home? [select three]
 - support from leaving care worker/personal advisor/social worker
 - support from family and friends
 - support from a counsellor
 - support from a community organiser e.g. a youth or arts club
 - support from teachers/tutors
 - support from neighbours
 - advocacy service
 - grants (from a charity, local authority, university)
 - other: please specify
 - prefer not to say

We then asked a series of open question with a 500-word limit for responses:

1. Do you want to tell us anything else about the challenges you/the CEP you support have faced while securing and maintaining a home, and what's helped you/them?
2. Please tell us about the difference between the first time you/the CEP you support found and maintained a home, and later times. For example, was the support available different?
3. What is a home, to you?

Appendix B – who responded to the survey?

Of the 79 people that responded to our survey, 48 people were care experienced, another 14 were care experienced and worked with care experienced people, and 11 were professionals who work with care experienced people who did not have care experience themselves. 6 people opted not to tell us their connection to care experience.

Of the care experienced respondents, most were 17-24 years old though some were older. None were older than 49. Most care experienced respondents stayed in care until they were 16 or older and almost all were in care for 13 weeks or longer - meaning most of the care experienced respondents would have been legally classified as a care leaver.

Of the care experienced respondents, about a third were not in education or employment. Some were in full time or part time employment and some were in full time or part time education.

The care experienced respondents were fairly spread across the UK in terms of where they live now and where they had lived while in care. Most said they live independently, with a small number living with family, friends or housemates. Around half rent from a housing association, some said they privately rent and a few owned their homes, lived in sheltered or supported housing, were in the process of moving out of foster homes or were temporarily homeless and staying with friends.

The majority of care experienced respondents described themselves as Female, and White British. A small number described themselves as Male, and one or two non-binary, and a small number described themselves as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British or as Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups or White other. Most did not describe themselves as having a disability, but a few did.

Of the professionals who work with CEP, there was a fairly even split across social worker/personal advisor/leaving care worker, researcher, housing officer/advisor or a project-based role.

Appendix C – what (key) questions did you ask professionals?

We asked professionals the following key questions, after an introductory chat which included letting them know how their data would be stored and used (in-keeping with GDPR).

1. What have been the main barriers to financial security and stability, for the CEP that you know?
2. What has enabled CEP you know to gain financial security and stability, where they have been able to?
3. What specific support have the CEP you know had, that has helped them with setting up and maintaining their home, and from who?
4. We noticed that some of the CEP who responded to the survey have stayed in accommodation they're not happy with, that was provided by the council. Why do you think CEP stay in accommodation they are unhappy with?