

## Trainer's notes

### Unit No. 16: Leaving Care Well

#### Unit objectives

- To recognise the importance of the transition out of care whenever it occurs
- To recognise the importance of stable secure care and continuing relationships into adulthood
- To examine the outcomes for young people leaving care
- To identify the factors that make the move into adulthood particularly challenging for care leavers
- To recognise what factors can make a difference for young people leaving care.
- To enable and encourage participants to reflect on their own journey to independence and make **meaningful** connections and comparisons with care leavers experiences, to better contextualise the issues/challenges faced.
- To explore effective planning, support systems and strategies for making the process of leaving care positive.
- To promote the concept of corporate parenting through the leaving care transition into adulthood.

#### Outline of Unit

- Introductory Activity
- Presentation: What are the issues?
- Large Group Activity
- Presentation: Planning and strategies for improvement
- Video clips
- Small group activity: Improving practice
- Pairs/Small group activity: Leaving home – the practical & emotional journey
- Final presentation and discussion: Children leave care at any age!

#### Resources required to deliver unit

- Video Clips: Mandy, Saffron, Tony, Zoie (young adults) and Ian & Ros (workers)

- Handouts: Quality Indicators for Best Practice; Leaflet on leaving care; Factors affecting young people's engagement with work; Sweet 16? Summary of Recommendations; Staying Put Scotland (2013); Scottish Care Leavers Covenant (2015);
- PowerPoint slides

### **Resources required to support this unit**

- Helping Care Leavers:
- Problems and Strategic Responses;
- Pathways handbook;
- Pathways Plan;
- Sweet 16?
- Still Caring: Supporting Care Leavers in Scotland CELCIS Briefing RS-2013-02
- Staying Put Scotland Guidance (SG, 2013)
- Housing Options Protocols Guidance (SG, 2013)
- Throughcare & Aftercare in Scotland Local Authorities: National Study (CELCIS/Staf, 2014)
- Scottish Care Leavers Covenant (2015)
- Making Not Breaking (Care Inquiry, 2013)
- Life After Care Report: Children & YP Now/Care Leavers Foundation
- In Loco Parentis: Demos Report
- Resilience and Young People Leaving Care: Mike Stein/JRF
- Education Matters In Care
- Staying Afloat
- Our Family Firm: A Working Framework for Community Planning Partners and Employers: Scottish Govt: 2011
- From Care2Work Creating Opportunities and Raising Expectations: NCAS 2010
- Person-Centred Planning In Social Care: JRF Publications
- Personalisation Through Person-Centred Planning: DoH
- 16+ Learning Choices Policy and Practice Framework
- The Buttle UK Quality Mark Model: Working with your institution to support Care Leavers in HE (Buttle UK / University of Bradford 2012)

- Review of Research on vulnerable Young People and their Transitions to Independent Living
- How good is your Throughcare and Aftercare service? Quality Indicators for best practice
- <http://www.scottishcareleaverscovenant.org>
- <https://www.celcis.org/our-work/key-areas/throughcare-and-aftercare/>
- <http://www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk/>
- <http://www.whocaresscotland.org/>
- <http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/relationships-matter/>
- <http://www.leavingcare.org/professionals/wmtd/>
- <http://www.buttleuk.org/index.php>

### **Introduction to trainer**

The main focus of this unit is young people leaving care and moving into adulthood. A wide range of issues face young people who are leaving care to become independent. This is acknowledged within the unit but for this course the emphasis is on education, training and work.

However, it is important to emphasise the holistic needs of care leavers and the importance of stable secure accommodation, and ongoing emotional and social support as being critical to supporting and sustaining education, training or employment. Although care leavers are over represented in a number of groups that are socially excluded and under-represented in the higher education system, it is important to emphasise throughout this module that this is not inevitable and that effective targeted support can change this.

All professionals involved with looked after children as they approach adulthood have a responsibility to ensure that they receive the support necessary to negotiate the transition as well as possible. Carers, social workers and teachers can all affect this process positively.

However, due emphasis should be placed on the age at which too many looked after young people move on from care, the often accelerated and abrupt manner in which this transition is managed, and, the variable and inconsistent levels of aftercare support available.

It is also important to be aware that children can leave the looked after system at any age and to a variety of destinations. Educational professionals, such as teachers or early years workers, involved with these children need to be aware of the importance of such transitions and be proactive in providing support before during and after any move or change.

- It is important for looked after children whatever their age and stage, to receive consistent positive messages and support regarding their

education and academic potential, and for all staff to have high aspirations for them.

- The importance of stability and consistency for looked after children cannot be over-estimated; and next to family, schools are the single most important constant for children. A connectedness to school, regardless of academic ability or attainment is a vital protective factor for children and young people. The importance of a “sense of belonging” is particularly crucial for looked after children, and school/college staff and educational settings should aim to help looked after children belong and feel connected to their school.

This unit relates back to the Transitions and Trajectories Unit and participants should be reminded of the issues that were covered in that unit.

### **Presentation and discussion: Children leave care at any age! (10 minutes)**

Use the first two slides to remind participants that although the main focus of policy and practice is often on young people leaving the looked after system to become independent, children can cease to be looked after at any age. Some children are looked after for only a matter of days while others spend all or most of their childhood being looked after by the local authority.

Ask participants for suggestions of practical things they can do to help children cope with this transition. These transitions are very important and making them a success is not just the responsibility of social workers or carers. Educational professionals can be very important in maintaining security, stability and safety for children during and after these transitions.

- Children and young people do not always leave care post-16. Many experience transitions back home from temporary care settings at a younger age.
- It is important for these children to experience as little disruption in other key areas of their lives at these times.
- Maintaining consistent school placements, key relationships, access to hobbies, clubs and friends is crucial in maintaining a sense of control and normality to counter the emotional vulnerability many can experience.

### **Timeline activity (30 mins): Leaving Home: The practical and emotional journey**

Think about your own life between the ages of 15 and 26.

Individually and in pairs/small groups initially, consider the following aspects of your own journey to independence.

- At what age did you leave home

- Was this planned or in a crisis – did you have choice over when you left and where you went?
- Did you move onto college or university – for example into halls of residence or sharing student flat with friends; or move into your first home with a new life partner e.g. getting married
- If you went off to college or Uni, did you/could you go home at holiday time
- How sure were you that if it all went wrong you could go home – did you ever do this? What mistakes did you make/ How were these resolved
- How did you manage your money – did your parents/family help with your living costs & expenses? How was this negotiated and managed? What about the “bank of mum& dad”?
- How did you feel? Excited, scared, lonely, abandoned, happy, confident, optimistic - what was your emotional journey like, and where did you get your emotional support?
- What about key people who supported you – immediate/extended family, friends, college tutors, work place colleagues
- Who could you turn to when you got stuck?
- Who were the relationships you could rely on for emotional support?

Create a timeline highlighting the events and experiences that marked your transition to adulthood and full independence. Discuss your timelines in small groups. Are there differences in your experiences – what are they and why do you think they existed?

- Reflect on people experiences and ask them to reflect on, and contrast with care leavers experiences
- What are the key differences, thinking about your childhood, family, stability, educational experiences etc.?
- What do they expect for their own children and young people?

### **Trainer’s notes**

The purpose of this activity is to remind participants that for most people the transition to adulthood and independence is spread over several years.

Although the age of legal capacity is 16 in Scotland there are a number of other legal milestones that mark a young person’s emerging adulthood.

- It should be stated clearly that leaving care should be viewed as a life process, and not a bureaucratic event.
- Good parents do not generally abdicate active parental concern or responsibility based on arbitrary age thresholds; and good Corporate Parents must avoid this also.

Most people achieve independence through a series of steps, none of which alone marks a clear moment of becoming an adult. Some people feel that they only truly became adults when they have their own children which may not happen until well beyond the age of 26. This is in marked contrast to the experience of most looked after children who are still expected to become independent much earlier than most of their peers.

- Whilst it is important to consider and ensure practical support to prepare and support young people moving to independence, the issue of **emotional support** and emotional resilience is often central to sustaining successful transitions. This is what care leavers tell us.
- What do participants think helped them make successful transitions?
- How might this contrast with young people with a care background?
- Be aware that in the group you may well have participants who did leave home while they were very young or indeed who have a care experience themselves. Although it is important that young people should be allowed to leave care when they are ready, not under pressure from the system it is also essential to emphasise that early independence does not have to be an automatic route to failure. There are numerous young people who left care at 16 and are leading very successful lives.
- However, research clearly states that, if we delay, or positively extend, the age at which young people exit the care system, and extend the timescales for a supported, graduated transition from care, avoiding abrupt “cliff edge” transitions, then care leavers outcomes and chances for success are greatly enhanced.
- We need to remind ourselves not to set different standards and expectations for care leavers who have often had troubled and traumatic childhoods, and who may lack the practical and life skills, and emotional resilience to successfully make this life changing transition at such a young age and without the consistent, support of family.
- We need to have big aspirations but realistic expectations - and continually ask ourselves: “would this be good enough for my child”?

### **Presentation: What are the issues? (15 minutes)**

Create a presentation using the PowerPoint slides (3-23) handouts and supplementary material. This presentation is to build on the first activity by underlining both the difference in experience of young care leavers from most of their peers and the relative lack of resources, external and internal, with which they face the move into adulthood. The slides draw on a range of research publications on care leavers. The first three slides make the point that care leavers are expected to become independent much earlier and in a more accelerated fashion than their peers.

The Sweet 16? Report/One Year On: Is Life Any Sweeter? emphasised the perceived pressure on looked after young people, particularly in residential care, to leave the system when they are 16. This emphasises the instability of accommodation and the high number of young people not engaged in any economic activity. Disabled young people face even greater disadvantages in engaging in economic activity than other care leavers.

- Acknowledge the clear links between stable and supportive accommodation and its influence and impact of the ability to engage with and sustain education, training or employment opportunities.

### **Large Group Activity (10 minutes)**

Ask participants for suggestions about what might improve outcomes for young people. Concentrate mainly on education and employment but encourage participants to think across the entire age span. Make sure that they consider individual good practice as well as policy responses. Remind them that many young people identify the support and commitment from individual adults as particularly important in achieving their aspirations.

The importance of relationship-based practice and positive connection and belonging for looked after young people is particularly important at points of transition, and especially so when they transition from care settings to adulthood and independence.

It may be better to think of the term 'interdependence' rather than 'independence' as the importance of positive support networks - family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, teachers - is central to the wellbeing of us all. The 'Making Not Breaking' Report (Care Inquiry, 2013) highlights the importance of continuing relationships for care experience children and young people. The Relationships Matter website offers a range of reference material to support this also.

Prompt with:

- The power of individual relationships – someone, somewhere made a real really positive connection and believed in the young person's potential and helped them believe in themselves. They did not define them by the label of being a "looked after child" or "care leaver". Care leavers tell us this can be fundamentally important.
- What about the concept of Family Firm – dedicated employment opportunities offered by to care leavers LAs and other corporate parenting bodies.
- Has your local college or FE institution signed up to the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant – is there a named contact; what additional supports do they offer to care experienced students?

- If emotional resilience and consistent emotional support are crucial to making successful transitions, how do we ensure that care leavers have this?

Research informs that the single most important factor in improving outcomes for care leavers is the age at which they leave care. As a consequence, recent policy and legislative changes have offered new opportunities to address that issue.

The 'Staying Put Scotland' Guidance (Scot Govt, 2013) sets out the principles and philosophy of care which expects all looked after young people to be 'encouraged, enabled and empowered' to stay put in a stable care placement until they are **ready** to move. And when they do move on to more 'interdependent living' they do so in a more graduated and extended manner, avoiding the often abrupt and accelerated bureaucratic transition that to many experience.

Part 11 (Continuing Care) of the Children & Young People (Scot) Act 2014 now places **duties** on local authorities to enable looked after young people, who cease to be looked after, after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, to effectively 'stay put' in stable care placement up to the age of 21.

Whilst there are some caveats to this, the general expectation both in guidance and law, is that no looked after young person should leave care before they are 18 years old, and they should be encouraged, enabled and empowered to stay put until they are ready, with duties to provide this up until the age of 21.

### **Presentation: Planning and strategies for improvement (15 minutes)**

The most critical and important changes are those contained within Parts 9 (Corporate Parenting), 10 (Aftercare) and 11 (Continuing Care) of the Children & Young People (Scot) Act, 2014.

The 2014 Act changed the legal definition of a 'care leaver'. From April 2015 any young person who ceased to be looked after on or after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday will be classified as a 'care leaver'. (The previous definition restricted the category of 'care leaver' to young people who ceased to be looked after beyond their minimum school leaving age.)

Corporate Parenting duties are extended to a range of public bodies, who now have a range of legal responsibilities under Part 10 of the Act to consider and address the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers.

Aftercare support to care leavers has now been extended up to the age of 26. Whilst this is subject to an assessment and the identification of eligible needs, a care leaver can request an assessment for support and a local authority has a duty to carry out an assessment; and if there are eligible needs identified, to ensure that these needs are met up until their 26<sup>th</sup> birthday. Duties to provide aftercare support extend to all care leavers, regardless of care placement.



'Continuing Care' is a new legal term established by the 2014 Act. It means the continued provision of the accommodation (placement) and other assistance that was being provided by the local authority immediately before the young person ceased to be looked after.

Please note that this is not a new category of 'looked after'. Young people will have to cease to be looked after (i.e. ending a supervision requirement or voluntary arrangement) to be eligible. However, this does not mean that potentially eligible young people need to come off Supervision Requirements (or end voluntary arrangements) earlier than planned.

If a looked after young person was born on or after 1 April 1999, they become a 'care leaver' in or after April 2015, and their last placement was 'away from home', they will be eligible to 'Continuing Care' whenever they cease to be looked after.

These are key changes in legislation and policy and offer the opportunity to radically transform the landscape for looked after young people and care leavers.

Use the PowerPoint slides (24-33), handouts and supporting materials to develop a presentation that describes the responsibilities of Local Authorities to care leavers.

Use the slides and supporting materials to describe the Pathways planning process. It may be helpful to print off a few copies of the Pathway plan to circulate among the group so that participants can understand exactly what is being undertaken. It may be useful spending some time exploring how planning into adulthood is informed by the Child's Plan and the GIRFEC/SHANARRI wellbeing indicators. How do these sit with the emerging needs of young people leaving care?

It would also be worth creating a couple of slides with up to date local statistics outlining the percentage of young people leaving care with a Pathways plan in place (nationally the rate is only 57% - Scottish Government Children's SW Statistics 2012) and any local initiatives for care leavers.

Spend some time talking about the factors that influence outcomes for care leavers.

- The age of leaving care
- Clear plan with identified sustainable supports; flexible person-centred support which takes account of changing needs into adulthood
- Holistic needs, joined up supports with key supports/agencies collaborating and working together with the young person at the centre
- Importance of relationships and positive networks in supporting emotional resilience and wellbeing

Obviously the support available after a young person leaves care is crucial but it is equally important that adults working with looked after children, of whatever

age, are aware that what they do with them and how they relate to them can have an impact well into their adult life. Emphasise also that many of the most important factors are to do with education. Use the quote from the young person to lead into the video clips that follow.

### **Video clips:**

Select one or more clips from Mandy, Saffron, Tony, Zoie (young adults) and Ian & Ros (workers). Ask participants to identify what they thought had helped the young people to achieve success in their movement towards adulthood? What barriers or constraints existed? What were the important differences in their experiences? What factors were most important in the work described by the two workers?

**Small group activity:** Improving practice (45 minutes including feedback and discussion)

In their own professional groups (usually this would be three groups: educational professionals, direct carers and social workers) ask participants to spend a few minutes reflecting together on the video clips. Then ask them to identify what they and others in their profession could do to improve the long term outcomes for looked after children with whom they work. Five minutes before you wish them to stop ask them to identify one challenge for each of the other professional groups.

Refer to the Agenda for Change contained within the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant as a guide and prompt.

Remind them that this should be done in a respectful way but that it should be the key factor that they believe might make a difference. During the feedback concentrate mainly on the strategies that they have identified for themselves. There will be some policy issues identified but there should also be plenty of examples of direct practice improvements.

- Ask for suggestions about how they can influence local policy.
- Can they achieve more by working together across their agencies and supporting each other?
- What about local housing and accommodation policies for care leavers?
- What about the Family Firm concept for work opportunities for care leavers
- What about improving links with local HE & FE establishments
- Do they need to collect robust local data to prove their argument?
- Ask how people intend to implement the practice changes they have identified for themselves.
- Finally ask the groups to share the challenges they have for each other.

It is likely that participants will already have identified the particular issue for themselves but to hear it again from their colleagues will emphasise its importance.

### **Key messages:**

- Children can cease to be looked after at any age and they need careful support from all the adults involved with them to manage this transition
- Care leavers experience an early and accelerated transition to adulthood compared to their peers, often having to manage multiple transitions in a short period of time.
- Their negative experiences prior to becoming looked after and in some cases while they were being looked after, have adverse effects on their future outcomes
- Good experiences with individual carers, social workers and teachers can improve children's chances of success – encourage positive ongoing relationships, which transcend role, boundary and setting should be encouraged.
- **Relationships count:** being that person who stops and listens, who takes a genuine interest, who goes the extra mile, who "believes" and who actively promotes a positive culture of care.
- Positively remaining in foster care or residential care settings longer, staying up to at least 18 years and through to 21 years and beyond can significantly improve longer term outcomes for young people in terms of health, education and employment -encouraging enabling and empowering young people to 'stay put' in positive care settings, until they are better ready to move on is a critical factor in improving outcomes across a range of measures.
- Staying longer helps narrow the gap between LAC/Care leavers and their peers.
- Avoiding the abrupt "cliff edge" of leaving care and extending the transition period for leaving care and moving to independence/adulthood improves outcomes.
- Helping LAC/care leavers cultivate a "sense of belonging" to a care setting, school or college, is crucial in helping develop emotional resilience.
- Enabling young people to return "home" to their care setting, (even for a short time) just like their peers, if/when the need extra support or things don't go smoothly, can be a crucial support, both emotionally and practically.
- Local authorities and other corporate parents have specific responsibilities to plan for and support young people after they leave care

- Young people's active participation in the planning process is essential for successful outcomes
- Educational achievement is a crucial factor in improving outcomes for care leavers
- Becoming independent at a later age is associated with greater success