

CELCIS Education Forum Highlights, October 2022



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(Linda O'Neill) It's lovely to see you all, and a very warm welcome to our third and final Education Forum of 2022. For those of you that I have not had the chance to meet, I am Linda and the Education Lead at CELCIS, and it's really nice to see some of our regular forum members here. But a really warm welcome to you if this is your first forum meeting. Like the majority of places, we have had to move our meetings online in the last few years. And there's been loads of positives to that. But we're also really looking forward to getting the chance to meet face to face again, which we've got plans in place for again next year, so we'll keep you up to date with that. I'm really delighted today to be able to welcome on Kenny McGhee, who is our Throughcare and Aftercare lead at CELCIS, and he's going to be talking to us today about the theory of emerging adulthood. And helping us to think together about why this is important and relevant to the education of care experienced children and young people. Kenny is going to be doing an input and a Q&A, but I'll just let Kenny say hello quickly before we kick off.

(Kenny McGhee) Good morning, everybody. Thanks very much for having me along this morning. I hope everybody's tickety boo.

(Linda O'Neill) Just to give some context to today's theme, we have chosen emerging adulthood for today because in education we talk consistently about transitions. We talk about the really big ones like children going from Primary to Secondary or Nursery to Primary or when people leave school, right through to the smaller every day, every hour, transitions from coming into school in the morning, going home at night, and even moving between classes. We do loads of planning for transitions about how to support people through them. And we also know the long lasting impact that it can have, both positive and negative for children and young people. And there's been a significant amount of work done on our understanding of what makes good or positive transitions. And there's more research coming out all the time, about what we can do as practitioners and leaders, what our services and our systems can do to try and support positive transitions. What we all know, though, is that our services and really society as a whole, still basis the majority of our transactions on specific ages or specific points in time so the majority of children start school around 5 and move on to high school when they're about 11 or 12. Most people leave school between 16 and 18. And we know for care experience that on average that that age is in much younger than all other children around 16 or 17. We also know that care experience can be an additional vulnerability for children and young people in terms of the poor school transitions in destinations. What the data tells is that initial and follow up school leaver destinations show that care experience people don't go on to what is termed positive destinations, in the same numbers

as all other children and that they're not able to sustain them for as long as all other children. And while there's been a significant increase in the number of young people with care experience going on to further and higher education straight from school, we still know that that number is disproportionately low for people with care experience compared to all other young people. And there's very little research at all about what happens for those that go into the labour market.

There's loads of factors that we'll unpack the reasons for this. And we know that more to young people journeys through education or life are the same. But what we are starting to learn through some research coming out in England is that for care experienced people who go onto university later, their outcomes are the same, and sometimes better than their peers. And it's really interesting to think about why that is. Why is it that those who are going later on during what we would traditionally view is into adulthood doing better than their peers. Is that longer transition playing apart and the success that we're seeing, is their being older a factor in their success, and how does our current system which is set up for people to make transitions based on chronological age, rather than where people are developmentally impact for people with care experience and I personally find the theory around emerging adulthood really helpful in thinking about these questions, and how emerging adulthood might be a good frame for us to think about how we support care experienced people through their transitions through and out of education, and on to emerging adulthood. So that's why I have invited Kenny along today to help us think a wee bit more about that. Before I hand over to Kenny, I just want to acknowledge that everybody's experience, knowledge and comfort levels with this subject will be different. And that's okay. And if you do need to step away for any reason, during today's session, please feel free to do so. I just ask that you keep yourself and, and the children, young people that that you've worked by safe in your contributions and your discussions, we know that we won't agree with everything or each other all the time. And again, that's alright, but we just ask people to be respectful in their contributions, and discussions. And if there's anything that you want to talk to myself, or Kenny or any other facilitators about afterwards, then please just drop us a line. So without further ado, I will hand over to Kenny and asked him to kick us off this morning.

(Kenny McGhee) Thanks very much Linda. And again, thanks very much to everybody for having me on this morning. I'm going to share my screen if that's alright, I'm not trying to do a kind of death by PowerPoint, but given this is virtual it does help a little bit.

As Linda was talking there and setting the scene, I was thinking quite a couple of incidents or a couple experiences that they had. And I thought I should have probably retitled this session, something a bit more engaging, because it's exploring the implications and sounds a bit kind of academically or, you know, brainicky. And I thought I should have described the session as death and pants.

And the reason for that is when we become adults, or when we consider ourselves to become adults will be very much dependent on our own experiences, those we live with the context or just our general lifestyle. And the reason I wanted to call it death and pants is not to minimise it or trivialise it. I did a session an input quite a while ago now on transitions from care, it wasn't anything about emerging adulthood in theory, but we were just talking about when you become an adult, and when you kind of think you've got things sorted

for yourself and you can wear the mantle of adulthood quite comfortably. And it was and it was a group of professionals – I think they were teachers and health people. And there was a woman in her early 40s, quite a senior manager and very accomplished, very experienced. She was married, happily married with three kids and her own home and all the kind of adult tickbox things that you'd think that would say, right I'm a grown up. And we were exploring this notion of when you when you felt you were a grown up, if you like, and she said it only happened in the last year. And that was when her father had died. And they had sold the family home. So for her there was this big emotional connection to going back home. And the fact that she was now the adult in the family, she was the kind of matriarch in the family and there wasn't a parent to look up to. So that was a fairly significant and poignant marker for when she thought she became an adult, despite the fact that, you know, for 20 odd years she had raised a family and grown a career and had the house and all the rest of it. So I thought that was a fairly telling thing, quite a poignant thing. But it also made me think back to when I was a group worker, many many years ago, working with groups of young boys and young men on gender issues and you know, groups of scallies running about the scheme causing havoc, as we might clumsily describe them.

And we did this thing about when you became a man, what it meant to become a man and an adult. And there was a wee guy, and I'm only about five foot six, and there's a wee guy that came up to my waist, he was about 14 and a half. And he said, I think I am a man now, think I am a man now, and I'm thinking, really? That's, that's interesting. What makes you think about that, and the guy was dead genuine, dead genuine, when he said, Well, my mum lets me now go and buy my own pants. And, you know, he didn't have to wear Homer Simpson, or Mickey Mouse or Disney underwear, he got to wear grownup men's pants that he chose for himself. And for him, that was a genuine mark of being a grown up and being an adult. So two ends of the spectrum, two very different experiences, and two very genuine, heartfelt concepts of when they wore the mantle of adulthood with some degree of confidence and ease. So without further ado, let's crack on. Now, I present this as an exploration. And I do that deliberately, because there are, as I've just tried to illustrate, no definitives and society changes, society evolves. And we adapt another adapted by it as we have over the last number of generations.

So but just to crack off, emerging adulthood kind of started as a theory in itself, the initial versions of it as a concept as a standalone concept, came from a paper by JJ Arnett in 2000. And he put together this notion that emerging adulthood is neither adolescence nor young adulthood, but theoretically and empirically distinct from and both. It is distinguished by the level of independence from social roles, and from normative expectations. But having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews. So this kind of grey zone, this exploratory stage, that you are not quite the grown up you want to be - you've not quite fitted into that role that you think you want to become, but you're testing it out. And you might have different relationships, you might be at college, or you might be going through work training or moving away from home and moving back. And it's a kind of fluid and transitional phase, it's not an overnight sensation, in many ways. And Arnett goes on to suggest that it's a

time of life when many different directions remain possible and when little about the future has been decided or is for certain. And when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities, is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of their life course.

What we know is that societally transitions to adulthood is longer than it was a few years ago, a few decades ago. And this has led to more young people becoming less autonomous. It asserts that identity consolidation - and this is this is nearly 20 years we're so there's been quite a lot of kind of academic ponderance over this . The theory of emerging adulthood asserts that identity consolidation is a relatively late accomplishment and that exploration and instability dominate individual development through the 20s - that is until their late 20s - as opposed to the 1920s. So that's 27 or 28. According to Arnett this reflects social and economic changes and therefore is not universal. Now, I'm aware that people are dialling in from different parts of the globe this morning. It may be a bit of a grandiose description, but in the global west or the global north, in the west, in post industrial society, he's locating this theory that because of some of the things have happened, socially and economically, that's also changed the frame in which we become adults. And I shall go on to explain a little bit about what we mean by that. However, there are alternative views. The dangerous myth of emerging adulthood. And suggesting as I've just identified, there is not culturally universal. And this is from Schoon and Schulenberg: Although the term "emerging adulthood" may be a useful synonym for the prolonged transition to independent adulthood, it does not take an account the social and economic conditions that have produced it extended transitions, instead of offering a psychological model of free choice focusing on the postponement of commitments... Transition outcomes are however dependent on structural opportunities and constraints as well as individual resources and capabilities...

So I suppose if you're talking about other societies, where you've got very traditional rites of passage, and perhaps some tribal or other indigenous communities where you've got very set kind of overnight processes that suggest you become adults, this notion of emerging adulthood doesn't necessarily fit neatly with them. However, there is, again, a growing body of knowledge, which we're not going to go into today, about how it neurological development kicks in at various stages in adolescence and in their mid 20s. So I suppose it's worth pausing to reflect here, what the sentence previously suggests that these relate to factors that are more common in global north and developed Western style economies. And that the social changes that have taken place over the last few decades, have actually driven and fueled and helped shape and frame this notion of emerging adulthood.

"Economic and social changes in the developed West, as well as a prolongation of educational requirements, in many fields of work, have resulted in significant shift in the age at which young people enter adult roles. By now a significant percentage of young people remain at home, and are financially dependent on the parents until the end of the 20s."

And again, that's, shaped right across Western Europe, certainly in the UK, States, Australia, these sorts of countries. And it's really important to point out that. For example, the extension of education - my father left school at 14, for example, went into an apprenticeship finished that at 18, did three years National Service, and by 21, he was he was a man in every sphere, he could get an adult job with an adult wage, and he got access to housing and he could start

a family. That was very different. It's very different now to what it what it was a few decades ago. So these delayed notions of staying in education longer, people are getting married later, they are delaying their families or they have got a delayed career or they are starting different careers at different points, means that assuming that comfortable, and I suppose squared away mantle of what you think your adulthood is like, can be a much longer and drawn out process. As Sarah and I say in our most recent paper, and it's a kind of summary in comparison to previous generations, there's been a range of interconnected social and economic factors, creating significant changes in the transitions to adulthood for the general population. These external factors include the increase in the school leaving age; more young people continuing in a tertiary education, and a real drive to get folk into further and higher education; an accumulation of student debt in some areas as a consequence of that. And therefore a delayed entry into the labour market. And then when young people are moving into the labour market, either from university or from school, you're quite often encountering minimum wage or zero hours contracts, or adult rates of pay not being applicable until your mid 20s. And that, again, aligns with the adult rate of Universal Credit not kicking in until your mid 20s. So there are structural and financial issues there which delay this notion of when you become a fully-fledged adult? And also alongside that is less access to affordable housing and accommodation. So these combined factors with young people, either by choice or by default, to have an increasing reliance on the family support network, the ability for the parents to help them out through college, for example, or the return, or inability to move on their own accommodation, therefore, they're staying at home longer. And we've just seen over the last number of years, certainly in Scotland in the UK, much, much less access to council, what used to call council houses in which you've got a 10 year waiting list in many, many areas. Finding a private rented place without deposits etc, becomes quite a financial challenge for people. And also, as we've just seen very, very recently, and potential major challenges with access to mortgages, for example. So these things converge and interplay to delay that whole move on to adulthood and I suppose what we'd call more independent living. And so we have this notion of the general population staying at home, with their parents in some shape or form, to the mid to late 20s. Now, that may be temporary, it might be permanent and might be transient - you move out, you move back, you move out, you move back. But that is a general trend across most of the Global North. And so although the transition to adulthood for the general population has become more complex and personalised, or care systems, arguably have been overtaken these into account.

Mike Stein (Emeritus Professor in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of York) who is a great a great writer on transitions from care and writes about care leavers being expected to undertake multiple accelerated abrupt transitions to instant adulthood, which is damaging and traumatic, and that is at odds with the general population. And because what we have is a care system and generally care systems around the world, which have long adopted definitions of adulthood that coincides with chronological age, so that the substitute care typically ends when a young person attains the age of majority – the ability to vote at 16 or 18. And at the same time, these systems have stressed financial and residential independence as an ultimate goal for young adults leaving care.

We're not alone in Scotland, as the quote here suggests, with a care system that has been framed by social bureaucratic and legislative constructs, chronological triggers, and as my relatively, hopefully, jovial example at the beginning shows, we do become adults at different points, we see ourselves as adults at different points and it isn't the same for everybody, this overnight thing. On your 18th birthday, you don't suddenly become an adult. And we've been already shown that the goal of financial and residential independence for the general population has become a much longer term goal, and generally with extended practical, financial and relational and emotional support. So I suppose it begs the question for us why we remain tied in Scotland and other similar jurisdictions, to these overly simplistic chronological triggers and thresholds. When they're at odds with everything else we know about the impact of childhood trauma, for example, about young people's development, and about what we might consider as notions of emerging adulthood. Transitions to adulthood can also become a lengthy process marked by frequent reversals and contradictions that make children and young people, both grownups and children at the same time. So thinking about this and the setting of care, in the context of care and what it means for or for young people to move on from care. The first quote here goes back to Skinner in 92. Enough people remember the work of Angus Skinner who wrote *Another Kind of Home*, which was a kind of review into residential care, and this is 30 years old. So it's it wasn't just written yesterday. Preparation for adulthood is not simply "preparation for independence"... For most people, parental support, however intermittent carries on in the 20s. Young people in care also need the support... Security is provided for children and young people through consistency of care and in an environment, which is predictable and consistent.

He recognised at that point, the young people moving on from care, in particular in residential care, were met with increasing challenges in terms of what they were expected to do moving on at 16 or 18. He recognised this, this discord or this disconnect for them against the general population, 30 years ago. It doesn't seem a long time ago, but 30 years later, we still have, arguably, these notions that young people need to make this journey from care to adulthood, much more rapidly, much more abruptly. And it's very, very unlikely that any young person will get the opportunity to return to a care placement in their early 20s, where for going back home after you finish college or university, it's a fairly standard acceptance for many young people and their families. This further quote is an interesting one by Tarren-Sweeney. And what he's suggesting is that the state is a pure substitute parent everywhere in the developed world. Within-care adversity and the reverberating impact of impermanence of a flawed care system and looked after young people's mental health... Is a key issue. What he talks about is the systemic and psychological damage dynamics of placement instability. And that is when young people come in to care, it tends to be through a process of trauma or the consequence of trauma or it's traumatic in itself, quite often their settled sense of place, their settled placement can take some time to be arrived at. And for young people, they can have multiple placements. And therefore this notion of this reverberating impact of impermanence has a significant impact on their mental health. So what we've got is a system which is predicated on chronological and bureaucratic triggers and constructs for young people. And which probably doesn't take enough account of the journey into and through their career placement. But then we still have this notion that they should be moving on from care at the age of majority, or 16, or 18, or in Scotland to an extent at 21, through these bureaucratic

constructs. It is wholly at odds with the broader population. And if we take the concept of emerging adulthood is something that we acknowledge and we see playing out, regardless of the psychological, neurological, or changing social demographic aspects of it, if we take it as a thing, which is we know that people, young people will stay at home much longer. It poses a question of why our care systems and our care system in Scotland and the other support structures round about it are predicated on chronological age. What Sarah and I would also suggest is our systems of policy and practice, remain stuck and at times appears unable to effectively comprehend and engage with young people in a way which appropriately recognises some of the complexities and contradictions of becoming a young adult. Although the transition to adulthood, for the general population has become longer and more complex and personalized, our care systems have barely taken these changes into account. These overly simplistic chronological triggers that we've got, in most of our jurisdictions continue to accelerate young people from care to instant, and in many, many cases, damaging versions of adulthood.

In Scotland, despite probably having the most progressive, permissive and enabling legislation, we still see the average age of leaving care for young people in Scotland around about 17 1/2. It's an estimated figure because we don't accurately or consistently collect that data. But it's still around 17 1/2 last time there was any significant perception to it. What we've got as the average age for most people leaving home in Scotland being around 26. So, I'll just pose a question for a moment. How much growing up do young people do between the ages of 17 and 26? To reflect on that. How much life experience can you gain in those nine years? What kind of things do you do? What kind of things do you experience? And if we take the average age for most people leaving home in Scotland as 26. Having come from family environments, where this ongoing, if intermittent, support is offered in terms of financial, practical, residential, and emotional support. Whereas young people, leaving the care system, tend not to have those same safety nets of practical financial and emotional support. I think we've set a very uneven bar, a very uneven playing field for young people. We then then need to consider the impact of abuse, and trauma and developmental delay that can occur for young people who have had significant early childhood trauma. These things can impede the negotiation of age appropriate developmental milestones, and the consolidation of a stable and healthy identity. We would argue that care experienced young people are an inherently disenfranchised group, too often characterised by experiences of abuse and neglect, rejection, loss, poverty, educational interruption and family disruption. And yet, they're still expected to make multiple accelerated abrupt transitions, when often they are least able to cope. Leaving care too early, without the proper levels of support, and with all the pressures and responsibilities that come with instant adulthood, is further traumatic and further damaging. And I suppose to sum that up, leaving care later matters because leaving care to young is, if we acknowledge, emerging adulthood, at odds with normative cultural and neurobiological development.

This was a bit of research I did in 2016 on staying put in continuing care and residential settings, and across three local authority areas. And it was in to why we were still finding some of these sticky issues around despite having the legislation and the policy and the guidance, why young people were struggling to

be retained, encouraged to stay and what that meant for them when they were leaving too soon. So this came from residential manager. And they were saying, for the brightest minds, the smartest, they tend to go to university and stay in student halls and it's an absolute riot and they cook tins of beans and nobody manages their money... Usual student affairs, you know, you get your grant, and you blow it in the first few weeks, then you're going back home, looking for a bail out. And they've had great backgrounds, so to speak, their needs met and everything. And it's not like until they're 25 - 26, that things start happening for them. So how can we expect our kids or residential kids or kids that we're caring for in residential homes or foster placements, who've not had any of that, to go into these similar settings when on their own 17 and 18 and they absolutely crumble? Why don't more people understand that's going to happen? I suppose it comes back to that different benchmark that different yardstick by which we judge young people. And then we wonder why outcomes can be poorer or are poorer across a whole range of measures. These are significant additional hurdles that young people have to navigate. If we take into account the fact that trauma has an impact on developmental delay, and many of us without being pejorative or disrespectful to young people, will be working or have been working with young people and they are 17 - 18 and are going on 12 on a good day emotionally.

Many of us will recognise that person whose emotional development is at odds and out of sync with their chronological age. Would you give a 12 year old a set of keys for a flat and expect them to manage successfully? A rhetorical question, but we do it. That is assuming we can get them a flat quickly right enough. But we do expect the young people to manage when their emotional age is at odds with their chronological age. And we know that because of the trauma that they've endured, and are sometimes still living with, but we expect them to make a good fist of it. And then we wonder why outcomes aren't quite so good. We talk about poorer outcomes, and this is an Education Forum and I would imagine, we're all concerned with young people having much better educational outcomes, getting their Highers and the NAT fives, their standard grades and whatever it is, that you get in new money and going on our successful academic or school career and post school tertiary education experience, and the poorer outcomes that are around it. And as Linda said earlier, it is not until the older adult returners go, that they start having much greater success in some respects. But I would argue that when you talk about the outcomes gap, we really need to think about closing the input gap. So if we expect that our 17 - 18 year olds to do things that we would expect our own 25 and 26 year olds to do, we need to try and close that input gap, otherwise the outcome gap will always be there, and the front of the train will continue to go at a faster pace than the back of the train. We talk about helping young people become independent when they leave care. And we still talk about independent living programmes and some things that rips my knitting to hear about that. And partly to do with the fact that as Moodley says your independent living, and her notion of it is wholly unrealistic to human nature. Human beings are social animals, we're hardwired for connection, we're actually hardwired for connection. And I would we would pose the question are any of us truly independent? Do we not all rely on family, on partners, on parents, on children, on our colleagues, our friends and our neighbours for support? Adults can move in and out of dependency as we move through life, we will become dependent on each other at various points for a whole bunch of things. I'm dependent on my

mate, Billy, helping me do practical stuff in the garden, or practical stuff in the house because I'm useless, with a hammer and a saw. And I'm dependent and my partner for emotional and psychological support, we're all dependent on each other in some shape or form, but we drill into our care experienced young people that you need to be independent, independent living skills - nonsense. And, they're quite often entrenched in these neoliberal ideals. For example, certainly in the UK, that you could trail these back to Thatcherism and the notion that there's no such thing as society or community that we're all individuals and we're not, we're all interdependent on each other. And so she would put forward this notion that interdependence, interdependence is a much more healthy way to look at it. And the work that she did in her 2019 paper, when she was interviewing young people, they didn't confuse this notion of being independent, with not needing ongoing support. And the more support you have, the more independent you can sort of be. So having support, ongoing support that you can use dip in and out of actually allows you to make great steps into an independence. But there's an interdependence concept here.

Young people's interpretation of being independent does not exclude receiving support. Rather, it is the avoidance of dependence. And I spoke a residential manager who's got a really good track record of supporting their young people into adulthood, and they still have lots of young people coming back in their early and late 20s, is to the place they grew up with and he would get berated sometimes by his, managers sometimes for having these young people coming back and encouraging them to come back. But his concept was and it was borne out, that the more support that was available to them, the more emotional security they had to move on, because they knew there was a safety net emotional and psychological security for them there. They could come back and check things out. So it allowed them to be a wee bit more bold and risky, to take risks moving forward. The whole notion of interdependence I think is intertwined with whole concept of emerging adulthood because as we as we grow in adulthood, we rely on others to help us shape and hone who we are and help us develop a sense of resilience and interdependence.

The relationship centred resilience if you're talking about this interplay, in terms of interdependence, aligns well with an African concept of Ubuntu and Ubuntu values, which Adrian van Breda states as emphasising that social connections are the crucible of personhood, who we are is reliant on the relationships we have. And this whole notion of emerging adulthood is wrapped up in the quality and experiences that we have in our relationships. I just wanted to kind of drop in the notion of The Promise here. The Promise talks about supporting young people into adulthood, we are being challenged in Scotland to think very differently about how we support our young people, our care experienced young people The Promise is a bold and ambitious commitment from the Scottish Government and sits at the heart of political power, championed by the First Minister. And what it says in relation to adulthood and transitions, is that young people who are currently in the care system in its broadest sense - either staying in their care setting as they enter adulthood, if they want to, and when they've ready to be fully and completely supported to move on. So it's arguing in a broad sense, for a greater understanding that young people need more support more security, as they move to adulthood. 30 years after Skinner we are still repeating the same call for action, that we should have a greater degree

of support and stability for young people when they're in care and when they do move on from care, that they have a greater degree of holistic support, recognising that their needs and rights in relation to housing, education, finance, employment, all these interconnected factors that help us bring stability and security to who we are and how we are. I suppose summing up, as I am conscious of time and I will just finish in a minute. We're thinking differently about this in Scotland, this affects every agency that will impact or interact on the lives of care experienced young people. And we would argue that if we really want to be transformational in our practice, and our approach for care experienced young people, we have a great opportunity with the political driver The Promise is to actually fully consider and incorporate notions of emerging adulthood in to what we do, so that we move away from these chronological and legislative frames that we use to deliver services. None of us become adults, on our 16th, 18th or 21st birthday. Some of us may think we become adults, and feel like it when we get a first set of grown up pants, or when we become the oldest member of our family, and take on that mantle and all other points in between. The more we try and fit young people into constructs, the more we will fail them, arguably. So what I want us to consider before we move into some sort of breakout groups. Think about the bureaucratic, chronologically driven transitions and thresholds that we all work to both from a care setting and from an educational setting and some things from health. Think about the age of leaving care against the age of leaving home generally either in Scotland or in your area. Think about what the impact of unresolved trauma and developmental delay means for young people. That notion of 19 going on 12 on a good day. That chronological and emotional dissonance, what it means for our developing sense of felt security and our identity. And then think about unrealistic expectations that the residential manager highlighted, we judge young people with a different yardstick that access to housing, employment, income, and the impact of enduring poverty. And the fact that this is generally systems driven care, rather than needs led care.

What does it mean for our care experienced young people, and those who care for them? Thinking about policy and legislation, thinking about practice, thinking about how we structure our services, and thinking about the culture? How do we view our young people? I have a notion that in Scotland, we have this great idea that when kids are wee they are all wee bairns and they need protected with a cosy blanket around them, 'poor wee souls and bonnie wee bairns;; we have that sort of narrative in Scotland, of our kids, which is very nurturing. But when they get to their mid-teens or late-teens, and they become a bit edgy and a bit difficult and a bit truculent and typical teenager, it is a good kick up the backside some times they need. And we've seen that played out in policy and legislation for years, particularly with things where youth crime initiatives. Thankfully, we're moving away from that. But we do have this sort of schizoid, split notion about how you see young people arguably, that they move from, you know, the kids that need our care and nurturing protection to all of a sudden, well, you know, 'you've grown up now, you know, you can take a tumble to yourself and actually grow up. You're 17 now, you're 18 now!', We probably say these things to young people all the time. And, you know, unconsciously. I am going to finish up now. And these are the kind of four questions I'd like us to kind of ponder in the groups if that's okay. What does it mean for care experienced young people? What is emerging adulthood? If we acknowledge and embrace that notion? What does it mean for a care experienced young people in Scotland or in your area,

and your jurisdiction and your geography? What does this mean for those who support and care for them? What does it mean for you, in your role? How do we usefully incorporate the concept into your policy and our practice? And what else would be helpful for us to think about what's missing in this?

(Linda O'Neill) Brilliant, Kenny, thank you very much for that, I always think it's such an interesting topic, to think about what it means, particularly for education. And as you're talking, I'm just thinking about the current national conversation that's happening in education, about education reform, and about what that means for the review, of qualifications and assessment. And I know that some of the events that I've been to the notion of chronological age has come up a lot in relation to what years people sit exams and the age that we're asking people to do assessments and things, I think it's a really helpful frame for us.

We will collate all the notes from all the breakout rooms and make them available as part of the resource on the web page when we put the recording out. So that people have got more of the detail of what happened in the breakout rooms. But I will come to Kenny and Michael, to ask for a wee bit of feedback from each of your groups. I don't know if you nominated someone or if you guys are going to do the feedback, so I can see Michael so I will pick on you and your group first and ask if you want to give us, I suppose, the headlines are some things that came out and your group.

(Michael Bettencourt) Yes, the group nominated me to give the feedback. I was delighted with that, as I'm sure you can imagine. I'll give a brief summary. I won't do it justice. We started by talking about independence, and asked a question about why are care leavers leaving care at 17 versus 26. The complexity of that, we wanted to unpick it. We talked about boundaried work, how the policy and legislative structure is quite boundaried and the cliff edge and language around being prepared for independence, often a deficit approach. We then launched into the complexity of the system and talking about the system as a whole and how we want to change the system and that The Promise is a platform around that. We talked about the central message of The Promise around would that be how you treat your own child. And that was the challenge - that we need change makers and agitators to make things happen. So yes, we've got a progressive policy landscape. Yes, we've got The Promise, but individuals have to do something about it in our own individual context. And then we ended talking a little bit about people voice, and how it was important and difficult to try and hear and get young people's views as a result of some of the stuff that we've talked about. Happy for my colleagues to chip in. But I think they were happy with the summary that I presented to them.

(Linda O'Neill) Thank you, and really similar themes to our group as well. Kenny.

(Kenny McGhee) Okay, I was desperately trying to bully somebody into feeding back. I didn't want to put you on the spot, Claire, but you actually were very clear in your summing up. If you're happy to do it. Fine. If not, I'll try again.

(Claire Adamson, Shetland Islands Council) I can, thank you, I didn't know that I was very coherent in my Summing up, I thought it was a bit of a waffle. We had lots of really good conversation actually about lots of different things, we spoke

kind of about the difference between a parent and a corporate parent. And that idea of things that would happen in your own home that maybe wouldn't happen - those kind of milestones like sleepovers and going out for your first drink when you turn 18. And how that would be different. Or could be different and how people might view the risk. So for example, lots of parents now would, would think it would be better to have pals along when the children are 18, and have them drinking in the house rather than out, out and about, but that's not something that's, that's really an option or something that folks feel comfortable with or feel that they should be able to do. We spoke a bit about support after leaving home and reflected on the number of times that we've maybe gone back as adults to our families and, and how that's changed even generationally. The level of support and how the climate is changed within the country, both how difficult it might be to get your first home and cost of living and all of those kinds of things where you might get a bit of help. We also reflected on the chronological and developmental age. I mean, nearly everything in education now is about looking at where children are developmentally, not chronologically, right from early years settings where they're looking at developmental overviews, and it's not looking at the child at the age that they are but where they are, and how different that is for care experienced young people if there's an expectation that they get to this magic number, and that's them set. Whereas we know that's not the case.

(Kenny McGhee) I think that is really good. The only thing that I've thought about that I would have put in there kind of mentioned the presentation was that the risks post care and into adulthood about young people that maybe have done reasonably well at college or university looking for security rather than having the ability to have gap years, which seems to be the thing, or do internships or unpaid or whatever. Care experienced young people that have qualified tend to go for the security much quicker. So elements of life experience, and that emergent exploration, get cut off to them, because they have nowhere to fall back. They can't go backpacking in Thailand, or Australia for a year and go back home. I don't know many young folks in a children's residential home, who have ever had the ability to go off and do that and come back at 22. And that's a very broad example.

(Linda O'Neill) Thank you. And thank you Claire for allowing Kenny to nominate you for further feedback as well. I'll put my hands up and say that I did a terrible job of facilitating my group and got far too excited about the discussion. So we didn't talk about feedback until probably 30 seconds before we were due to come back. So I'm going to give some brief feedback. But please feel free to check on anyone else in my group for anything I have missed. We talked a lot about the impact of loneliness and lack of human connection on children and young people. And that was the enduring impact that this can have for them and why that's so important with the difference between independence and interdependence. And people really feel like interdependence is a really important frame, when we're talking about the support we are providing to young people because as you said in your presentation, Kenny, none of us are independent, and actually we want to be? So how do we support those interdependent relationships? We also spent a wee bit of time talking about the shift that's needed and culture around staying in touch with young people that historically, perhaps there's people keeping in touch with young people, when they've left home or left care has almost been seen as a secret thing or the

wrong thing to do. And people felt that they were having to do under the radar or, you know, there was no mechanisms for support for people in place to do that. There's some people that are involved in projects that are looking at developing that, at the moment, even looking at processes and ways of making sure that we're keeping in touch with young people. And that's good quality, and that staff are supported in the recognition that that needs to be a culture shift in the way we do that though we have made progress. But we need to do that a bit more. And the fact that the safety net is just not there for children and young people, particularly financially, I think like, that's a really good example of it. The gap year thing, Kenny, about how many care experience young people do we know that can go away and do those things and they know that they've got somewhere safe and secure and loving to come back to. About the range of needs that that people have that we're talking about care experience today. but care experience often doesn't happen in isolation for people that they would often have additional support needs, they might be young carers, may be estranged from family. And that really, the system needs to be flexible enough to meet the needs of people with any additional needs at any time. Rather than being set up just to do those chronological transitions, and where are the services for people that needs relational support, we make assumptions all the time about the type of support that people need at certain ages. You know, for example, maybe if you're working regulative, 8-10 yr olds. taking them out bowling and you know, soft plays in the park is what people would think of as acceptable activities. Whereas maybe if you're working with a group of 26 year olds, people would be saying why are you taking a group of 26 yr olds bowling? But maybe they've not had the opportunity to do those things, build those relationships with people when they were 8- 10, or any other age. So it's actually about changing the perception of the types of support that we provide to people or that we offer to people and make sure that we're meeting them where they're at, rather than what the system suggests is appropriate for them at a given age. I know I won't have done justice to that. So if any of my colleagues wanted to chip in with anything that I've missed, please, please do.

(Julie Brown, Care Inspectorate) And there's just a wee extra thing Linda, when we talked about identity and the idea of the protected characteristic of care experience. And we talked about how young people transitioning to university, who are from a career background, there's a huge uptake of people accessing that additional funding, but maybe not declaring it for the support that they might get within the college. And we talked a little bit about how, although, you know, the promise, rightly highlights that care experience is with you throughout your whole life. A lot of our young, young care experienced volunteers have said, they, they wouldn't want it to be a protected characteristic, or they wouldn't want that fixed identity to be with them necessarily forever. So it's, you know, offering that flexible person-centred approach. And we talked about the safety net as well, maybe not from the gap year perspective, but the immediate concerns of having to find funding in between the funding that you're given to keep you going for the whole year, and that survival need that often changes the decisions that our young carers are having to make, because they don't have that flexibility of support. But it was a great discussion.

(Linda O'Neill) Thank you for that, Julie. And yeah, I think that that discussion that we had about some people declaring or telling colleges and universities about their care experience and other people not some people like the group

that you had worked with, some young people have said that they wouldn't want to be identified as having care experience for the rest of their life, I think just really highlights the need for that individual approach to it for someone to have a relationship where people feel comfortable enough to have those conversations and that we're not making assumptions as well. So, thank you for highlighting that. I can't believe that it is one minute past 11, actually we are overtime, but I can't believe that it is 11 – it's absolutely flown in this morning. As ever, like I said, we never have the time that we would like to speak in as much depth as we would like but I want to say a big thank you to everyone for their contributions. And Kenny, I'll just hand back to you to ask if there's anything you want to sort of wrap up saying before we finish up today?

(Kenny McGhee) Thanks, Linda. No, I mean, I think we've skated across the surface of this. I mean, there's big academic brains will joust on the theory, the sociological theory of emerging adulthood, as well as, and we never delved into the neurological journeys, you know, the bumps you get when you're in your teens and your 20s. So there's a lot of multifaceted aspects, I suppose what we wanted to do was to acknowledge the fact that it is a thing. And therefore, how do we embrace that and apply that thinking to our care experienced young people whose bureaucratic upbringing is at odds with what they actually need. Thanks for listening.

(Linda O'Neill) Thank you very much. And as I said, we will make the recording available and in the next couple of weeks alongside the breakout room notes. And so please feel free to share that with colleagues or anyone else that that may be interested. Please also feel free to get in touch with myself, Kenny, Michael about anything else that that you want to discuss in more detail. I said to my group that I'll also make the open offer to everyone else that if there's things that you're involved with that, that are some solutions to this or projects that you're involved with, with young people, where you are seeing positive changes, please keep in touch with us. We're always looking for things to profile on our website, ways of sharing good innovative practice, ways that we can involve children, young people and families in our work and make their voices heard as well. So it's a genuine offer, please keep in touch with us if there was anything that you'd like us to put out to people or showcase in some way. And finally, just a big thank you to Kenny for coming along and helping us to think about this. And to all of you for choosing to spend your morning with us. We know that people are really busy. And so we appreciate you taking the time.