

Homelessness



Centre for excellence
for Children's Care and Protection

and care experience

Beyond the headlines

May 2019





Introduction

CELGIS works alongside many others to improve outcomes for care experienced children and young people. This is the second in a series of briefings – Beyond the Headlines – providing further information and analysis on some commonly reported statistics relating to children and young people in care, care leavers, and care experienced people in Scotland.

Headline statistics can only ever tell us one part of a story. Young people with care experience can face homelessness far too often. This briefing explores the extent to which we understand how homelessness disproportionately affects the lives of looked after children and care leavers, and considers what more can be done to further our understanding of the factors that cause homelessness so this can be addressed. To support further discussion and debate, we also raise some key questions and talking points.

For the purposes of this briefing, the following definitions are used: ‘looked after child / children’ – a child or young person looked after in a formal arrangement with a local authority (including compulsory supervision arrangements, looked after at home, kinship care, foster care or residential care placement) – a term which is used in legislation to mandate care and protection; and ‘care leaver’ – a young person who was looked after on or after their 16th birthday and who is currently under the age of 26.



1. What are some of the headlines?



Increase in young islanders leaving care becoming homeless

(BBC Scotland News Online, January 2016)



Care system is ‘factory’ for homelessness, bosses told

(The Evening Times, 10 October 2018)



Young people and care leavers often end up experiencing hidden homelessness as they are unaware of how to access help and more commonly turn to informal living arrangements, such as sofa surfing.

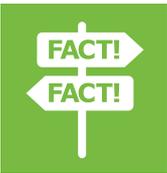
(Will Quince MP and Neil Coyle MP, Chairs of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Homelessness, The Times, 10 October 2018)



As well as what might be reported by the media,¹ as we can see, other sources of information provide a variety of facts and figures about the extent and impact of homelessness on care experienced young people. Indeed, an internet search on this issue might take us to sources which tell us there is nearly a [50/50 chance of being homeless for care experienced people](#); or that [30% of looked after children become homeless](#), and leading advocacy organisation, Who Cares? Scotland, reports that while 6% of local authority homelessness applications in 2017 were from people who have been looked after, practitioners estimate that between [30–50% of individuals who are homeless could be care experienced](#).

It cannot be the case that all of these figures are true.

¹ [Figures show that 26 per cent of young people leave care without a formal plan for what happens next and at least 21 per cent of care leavers become homeless within five years of leaving care](#) The Scotsman, 24 January 2018.



2. What do we need to know beyond the headlines?

So, is it possible to ascertain a more accurate, up-to-date picture?

There are many forms of homelessness, which include very visible forms such as rough-sleeping, and includes circumstances where people are living in temporary accommodation (such as hostels, shelters, B&Bs) and some short-term private or social housing. Homelessness also includes what is referred to as 'hidden homelessness' – where people are in informal and unstable housing arrangements, such as 'sofa-surfing'. These forms of homelessness are more likely to be hidden from services and therefore from any official recording, and it is possible that this form of homelessness may be experienced by a significant number of young people who may try to stay with friends, acquaintances and extended family members on a temporary and informal basis.

There are two official statistical publications produced annually by the Scottish Government that we can use to clarify what is known about homelessness amongst care leavers in Scotland.

1. Firstly, there are the Children's Social Work Statistics

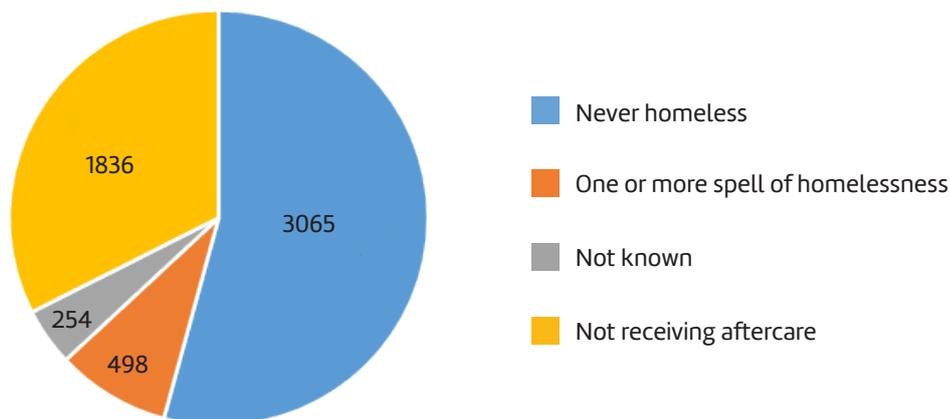


The most recently published Children's Social Work Statistics publication shows that 1,363 individuals aged 16 or over ceased to be looked after (that is they had 'left care') between 1 August 2016 and 31 July 2017. Twenty two of these care leavers immediately became homeless.²



At 31 July 2017, 5,653 young people were eligible for aftercare (care leavers aged 16 or over, and have not yet reached their 26th birthday), and 124 of these care leavers were known to be homeless (2.2%) at that time.³ 3,065 had never been homeless (54%), and 498 care leavers had been homeless once or more (9%)⁴ [Illustrated in Chart 1]

Chart 1: Young people eligible for aftercare services – episodes of homelessness since becoming eligible for aftercare services, 31 July 2017



It is not possible to say with certainty that only 9% of care leavers experience homelessness. It is known that while 1,836 care leavers eligible for aftercare were not receiving a service, information was recorded as 'not known' for the accommodation type of a further 254 care leavers.⁵ Therefore, the accommodation status of 37% of those eligible for aftercare, it simply not known.

2 Scottish Government (2018) [Children's Social Work Statistics Additional Tables](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government

3 Scottish Government (2018) Table 1.15 [Children's Social Work Statistics Additional Tables](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government

4 Scottish Government (2018) Table 1.19 [Children's Social Work Statistics Additional Tables](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government

5 Scottish Government (2018) Table 1.15 [Children's Social Work Statistics Additional Tables](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government

2. Secondly, there are the Homelessness in Scotland Statistics

The national Homelessness statistics published in June 2018 show that 34,972 homeless applications were made between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018.⁶

On application, applicants should be asked by the housing officer whether they (or any household member included in the applications) have ever been 'looked after', and if so, when.

625 applicants answered that they (or a member of their household requiring accommodation) had been looked after in the last 5 years.

722 applicants answered they (or a member of their household requiring accommodation) were looked after 5 or more years ago.

This means that 4% of these applicants concerned an individual who has been 'looked after' at some point.⁷

Most of the applications (approximately three quarters) are made by single person households, meaning the applicant themselves has been looked after at some stage. For the rest of the applications, there could be multiple people living in the household who have been looked after, or the person with a looked after background is not the main applicant, but their partner or child.



It is not possible to say with certainty that 4% is an accurate reflection of the proportion of homeless applicants with a 'looked after' background. When asked about previous experience of being 'looked after', the response of 12,832 applicants was recorded as 'not known / refused'. This represents 37% of all applicants, who may (or may not) have been looked after at some point.



These official figures only reflect those who actually make an application with their local authority. It does not include homeless young people who do not make an application who may experience a range of forms of homelessness such as 'sofa-surfing'.

3. Using these statistics

Trying to understand the picture with two sets of figures is therefore further complicated by differing interpretations of what is being measured, and the terminology used. Whilst terms like 'looked after child' and 'care leaver' have particular legal standing, these can be unpopular and, particularly for the people concerned, felt to be labelling. An alternative term in Scotland is 'care experienced' child or young person, as a more inclusive term does which not rely on the rigid definitions set out in statute of who is, and is not, considered looked after or eligible for aftercare.⁸

The information captured in the Children's Social Work Statistics relates specifically to children and young people who are currently looked after by their local authority, or who are eligible for aftercare (i.e. are under the age of 26, and ceased to be looked after on their 16th birthday). Therefore these

⁶ Scottish Government (2018) [Homelessness in Scotland: 2017-18](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government

⁷ Scottish Government (2018) [Homelessness in Scotland: 2017-18](#), Supporting files: Tables, Table 5, Edinburgh, Scottish Government

⁸ <https://www.whocaresscotland.org/what-we-do/participation/>

statistics do not capture the numbers and circumstances of care experienced children and young people who fall outside these definitions.

The Homelessness in Scotland data are based on self-declaration of applicants' history of being looked after, regardless of when they were looked after, or what age they are at the time of making a homeless application. Some people (particularly those looked after at home with one or both of their birth parents, under a compulsory supervision order) may not be aware that they were officially 'looked after' as would be identifiable under legislation, or use such terminology even if they were.

Alternatively, some people may not wish to declare their history of being looked after – this is deeply personal and sensitive information, over which many people continue to experience stigma and discrimination. And then there will be some people making a homelessness application who may declare a history of being looked after, but may be over the age of 26 at the time of making their application, or may have ceased to be looked after before their 16th birthday. Whilst they have care experience, these people are not included in the Children's Social Work Statistics.

It's important then to understand that these two official publications use different parameters to measure and record people's experiences, and therefore cannot be used together to draw precise conclusions. There simply isn't the data with which to do this.

We can only use the official statistics that there are to assess an estimate of the number of care experienced young people, who are currently eligible for aftercare and who have also made a homeless application.

In 2017–18, 960 people aged between 16–24 who made homeless applications self-declared they had been looked after at some stage in the past;⁹ and 5,653 young people were eligible for aftercare.¹⁰ That would indicate that around 17% of young people were eligible for aftercare have made a homeless application.

However, we cannot have full confidence in this figure: it is likely that some of the 960 people declaring a 'looked after' background are not eligible for aftercare, and therefore are not part of the 5,653 group.

The gaps in data and the large proportion of 'not knowns' within both the Children's Social Work Statistics (in terms of young people's accommodation status) and the Homelessness in Scotland statistics makes any estimate unreliable: the 17% could only indicate prevalence, based on the best available data. That said, if a figure in the region of 17% of those eligible for aftercare made a homeless application, care experienced young people would be significantly over-represented within the homeless sector in comparison to their (16–24) peers.



3. Going beyond the headlines

Research consistently highlights that care leavers are more likely than other young people to become homeless or experience housing instability. There are many complex, often interlinking reasons for this. Like every young person, each person who leaves care in Scotland is unique, with their own skills, strengths, and vulnerabilities. However, a number of factors and life experiences can combine which can increase the risk of some vulnerabilities that disproportionately affect care leavers, such as homelessness.

⁹ Scottish Government (2018) Homelessness in Scotland: 2017–18 additional breakdown of Table 5 (prepared by SG homelessness statistics team on request)

¹⁰ It should be noted that in the Children's Social Work Statistics, young people eligible for aftercare are individuals from age 16, up until their 26th birthday. The homeless application data are available in age brackets which do not directly correspond (16–24, 25–34, etc.).

What 'leaving home' looks like

For many young people today, leaving home for the first time is a time filled with opportunity and expectation. Moving out to pursue opportunities in education, employment or travel is exciting and sometimes overwhelming, yet knowing the safety net of home remains in place can offer reassurance.

For young people leaving care, the experience can be very different. Despite difficult early life experiences, and often multiple changes of placement during childhood, young people leaving care are often expected to leave their home at an earlier age, with less preparation, and with less support than young people without care experience. Many young people leave care before they are ready, and may have limited choice in the matter.¹¹ Decisions can be made arbitrarily, based on a person's age rather than their needs. This leads to young people who are coping with past trauma, loss, and disadvantage having to experience further change and instability, and manage the complexities of independent living long before they are ready.¹² Unlike their peers, it is very unlikely care leavers will have the option to return if things become overwhelming. For some, this can lead to homelessness, and to a mirroring of instability experienced through multiple care placements earlier in life.¹³ In order to improve post-care transitions and outcomes, care itself needs to be improved,¹⁴ and that includes addressing the inbuilt impermanence of multiple in-care transitions, as well as, in Scotland, fully implementing the [Staying Put](#) and the [Continuing Care](#) guidance.

The right place at the right time

Even when young people feel well prepared to move on, having a choice in the type of accommodation to which they move is key to making sure care leavers move on to appropriate option for them.¹⁵ Positive options can include supported lodgings, semi-independent living with 24 hours support from staff, flat-sharing, and high quality relationship-based visiting support.

“ At the time I wasn't made fully unaware of the options available to me and I know now that I certainly wasn't ready... the temporary nature of accommodation and support offered fuelled a sense of insecurity at a time when I needed stability most.¹⁶ ”

These options enable a focus on *interdependence*, building and maintaining networks of support, rather than expecting young people to manage completely independently straight away. However, these options are not available to all care leavers who need them, and young people can find themselves in housing situations which are unsuitable, unmanageable, isolating, and where they do not feel safe. Even when appropriate options exist, they can be fraught with difficulties particularly for young people who move on from care too soon:

Care leavers living in suitable accommodation feel more able to cope in life and have a more positive sense of mental wellbeing.¹⁷ For all of us, safe, secure and appropriate housing is critical to meeting our basic human needs, and people's need for safety is paramount. A lack of suitable housing can create barriers to participation in education, employment and training, and to accessing other services, such as registering with a GP. Suitable housing is fundamental to good outcomes in other areas of life, and a lack of suitable housing compounds the disadvantage care leavers often already experience.

11 [CELGIS \(2015\) Housing Options and Care Leavers: Improving Outcomes into Adulthood](#)

12 Stein, M. (2010) Increasing the number of care leavers in 'settled, safe accommodation'. London: C4EO

13 Cashmore, J. and Paxman, M. (2006) *Predicting after-care outcomes; the importance of 'felt' security*, Child and Family Social Work, 2006, 11, pp 232–241

14 Stein, M. (2012) *Young People Leaving Care*, London: Jessica Kingsley

15 Barnardo's (2014) On my own: The accommodation needs of young people leaving care in England

16 Frame, J. (2018) [Supported Accommodation: A Study](https://www.celcis.org/files/2215/4054/4272/Study_Supported_Accommodation.pdf) https://www.celcis.org/files/2215/4054/4272/Study_Supported_Accommodation.pdf

17 Baker, C (2017) [Care leavers' views on their transition to adulthood: A rapid review of the evidence](#). London: Coram Voice

Running your own home

Not many young people will have experience of running their own home – paying the bills, managing budgets, kitting out a home. For care leavers, this responsibility can come to them at an earlier stage in life than their peers, sometimes without much choice, and often with less support, including emotional support from trusted, reliable adult relationships, as well as practical and financial help.¹⁸

While this remains the case, it is even more essential that care leavers are adequately prepared, both practically and emotionally, for the transition from care to more independent living before they leave. For some care leavers, the practical difficulties of managing a home may pale to insignificance compared to the loneliness and isolation they can face, living alone, often in a new area, and with limited supportive social networks.

Affording the rent

Research on the relationship between poverty and neglect reveals that care leavers feel the impact of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage disproportionately.¹⁹ At a time when rising rents in the private sector are having an impact across the housing market, young people leaving care will be particularly affected, and at greater risk of homelessness. It is also the case that many young people with care experience can have poorer educational outcomes to their peers, and this (together with other barriers) can mean that they may find it more difficult to access and sustain employment. In turn, this can cause financial difficulties and for those holding down a tenancy, paying rent or even a mortgage, this can cause pressure and instability.

Managing change

For many care leavers, multiple changes in their lives and circumstances may occur at the same time. For example, when they young people are leaving care they are also leaving people and places they have come to know and have built relationships with, whilst they may also be taking on a new responsibility for their own accommodation, perhaps moving neighbourhoods, and starting a new job and / or continuing studies all at the same time.²⁰

This is a lot for any young person to take on. Relationships with supportive people, and having reliable emotional and practical support, are critical for care leavers when they are managing these changes and transitions.²¹ For these young people, to be able to build lasting relationships and social networks, they require the stability throughout their care experience. Having a stable place to grow up which is safe, secure, and nurturing sets young people up for success. When young people are truly ready to leave, their relationships with supportive people must be enabled and encouraged to continue, their transitions should be gradual, and their options should be suitable.

Without these foundations, care leavers in their own accommodation can quickly become overwhelmed by the enormity of managing independently, and can feel they have little option but to end their new tenancy or accommodation arrangement and face homelessness.

Regardless of the quality and range of post-care accommodation options, probably the single most important factor in improving outcomes for care leavers, is the age at which they move on from care.²² That is why fully implementing the Staying Put and the Continuing Care guidance and duties is central to improving post-care housing and accommodation outcomes.

What support is there for care leavers needing accommodation?

The challenges faced by care leavers in terms of housing and homelessness are recognised in a range of policy and legislative commitments in Scotland.

18 Stein, M. (2010) Increasing the number of care leavers in 'settled, safe accommodation'. London: C4EO

19 Bywaters, P., Bunting, L., Davidson, G., Hanratty, J., Mason, W., McCartan, C. & Steils, N. (2016) [The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review](#), York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

20 CELGIS (2015) [Housing Options and Care Leavers: Improving Outcomes into Adulthood](#)

21 [The Fostering Network \(2016\) Keeping Connected: Maintaining Relationships When Moving On](#)

22 Broad, B. (2007) *Care Leavers in Transition*, DfES Youth Strategy Review, Leicester: De Montford University.

- In 2013, the Scottish Government launched **Staying Put Scotland**, guidance which sets out a philosophy of care where young people are ‘encouraged, enabled and empowered’ to remain in care (and therefore supported accommodation) for longer, rather than expected or encouraged to leave before they are ready.
- Since 2013, Scotland has had in place **Housing Options Protocols for Care Leavers**. This practical guidance assists Community Planning Partnerships and corporate parents in implementing the principles and philosophy of Staying Put Scotland, to ensure the housing and accommodation needs of care leavers are consistently met to a high standard. These protocols clarify that no care leaver should be required to present as homeless in order to access accommodation, instead there should be a range of suitable options available.
- In April 2015, the **Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014** came into effect.

Part 9 sets out the duties and responsibilities for Scottish Ministers and public bodies as corporate parents. This includes the provision of a safe, caring and appropriate home for every looked after child and care leaver, under the age of 26.

Part 10, in relation to aftercare, increased the age of eligibility for aftercare support for care leavers from age 21 up to the age of 26 (providing a young person is deemed eligible after assessment)

Part 11 sets out **Continuing Care** provisions, enabling young people who have ceased to be looked after to remain in the same accommodation and receive the same assistance as when previously looked after. It places a duty on local authorities to support this, with the **only** reason for failing to provide Continuing Care is if to do so would significantly adversely affect the welfare of the young person.

Despite this policy and legislative context, homelessness continues to be a feature in the lives of care experienced young people.



4. Conversation points

This briefing is designed to prompt discussion, debate, and consideration of what action could be taken to improve the experiences of care experienced children, young people, and adults.

Questions to consider:

1. How can authorities support care experienced young people to access the Continuing Care they are entitled to?
2. Why are young people with care experience still being moved on from their accommodation when they have ceased being ‘looked after’, contrary to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014? And what should be done to address this?
3. The [Housing Options Protocols for Care Leavers](#) in Scotland stipulate that no care leaver should be required to present as homeless in order to access accommodation, so why are some young care leavers still presenting as homeless from / to their own corporate parents?
4. Post-care accommodation is often temporary in its design, thus replicating the impermanence of the care system felt by some young people. How can care experienced young people be helped to develop more of a sense of security when they do eventually move on to more independent living?
5. How can local and national data more accurately understand and reflect ‘hidden homelessness’ to better inform provision to meet housing needs?



5. Summary

This briefing has looked at the information often used to inform public debate and media headlines about understanding of what the picture of homelessness looks like for care experienced children and young people, and has provided some data analysis and consideration of research to look behind and beyond this.

What stands out is:

- Young people with care experience are over-represented in homelessness applications than their peers;
- There is currently a significant gap in the official data which indicates that not enough is known to ascertain the full picture of homelessness experienced by people with care experience;
- Young people with care experience face significant challenges and responsibilities often at a much earlier stage in life than their peers.

Whilst we cannot be clear of the exact degree, we do see with clarity that young people with care experience are statistically more likely to experience homelessness than young people in the general population. Numerous risk factors contribute to this, and despite a progressive and enabling policy and legislative context in Scotland, the experience of homelessness remains. Continued, concerted attention should be focused on full and effective implementation of policy and legislative initiatives – such as Staying Put Scotland and Continuing Care – on a national scale. This requires ongoing political commitment, adequate resources, and leadership at national and local levels.

In order to better understand the extent of the issue, and make improvements, the impact of homelessness on those with care experience also needs to be high on the agenda of housing providers and homelessness organisations. It is crucial that the needs and circumstances of care leavers are focused on by national initiatives, such as the Ending Homelessness Together Fund, and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group, whose recommendations will be acted on by the Scottish Government in the coming year. The report of the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee's [Inquiry into Homelessness](#), published in February 2018, included a number of recommendations focused on care experience, which are also under consideration, such as amending legislation to ensure care leavers do not experience unsuitable accommodation (such as B&Bs) for longer than 7 days, which has yet to be taken forward.

Improvements can and must be made, through recognition of the causes and risks of homelessness, collaboration, and commitment to ending homelessness for care experienced young people. It must never be the case homelessness is a likely outcome for children and young people who have been cared for.

Definitions

- i. Looked after child:** A child or young person currently looked after in a formal arrangement with a local authority, typically, but not always, involving compulsory supervision arrangements following a children's hearing. Children can be looked after while remaining in the family home, with social work support, or in a kinship, foster or residential care placement.
- ii. Care leaver:** A young person who was looked after on or after their 16th birthday and who is aged under 26.
- iii. Aftercare:** The advice, guidance and assistance which all care experienced young people who were 'looked after' on or beyond their 16th birthday are entitled to receive from their local authority, until they reach their 26th birthday.

CELCIS is a leading improvement and innovation centre in Scotland.

We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long-lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care.

CELCIS is part of the Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures, based at the University of Strathclyde.

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