



LEAVING CARE LEAVING WELL

in partnership with:



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PURPOSE

The Leaving Well initiative, launched by Social Finance in 2014, aims to improve the life outcomes for young people leaving care. It benefits from the experience and insights of the care leaver community, the academic sector and frontline research. Based on the findings from the research, Leaving Well and the Social Finance Digital Labs team are working with partner local authorities to develop a digital tool for young people leaving care. It will give young people ownership over their plan to independence and enable local authorities to support young people to achieve positive outcomes.

The report is based on findings from a period of analysis into frontline practice in three partner local authorities: Leeds City Council, the London Borough of Havering and Southampton City Council. The research revealed areas of practice that must change to better support young people leaving care.

Leaving Well has also published the Leaving Well Outcomes Framework.¹ Created in partnership with Dr Mark Kerr from the University of Kent, the evidence-based framework sets out a hierarchy of needs required for healthy, happy lives. It is available for use in local authority practices across the country.

¹ Social Finance and Dr Mark Kerr. (2017). *Leaving Well, An Outcomes Framework to Promote Successful Transitions for Care Leavers*. http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/leavingwell_152x228_final-1.pdf



“AT THE
MOMENT IT IS
THOSE WHO
SHOUT THE
LOUDEST WHO
GET THE MOST
SUPPORT”

(PERSONAL
ADVISER)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year 11,000 young people leave care in England. Many face significant challenges as young adults. One study found a 23% increase in the number of young people experiencing mental health conditions after leaving care.² 40% of 19–21 year old care leavers are not in education, employment or training.³

The stability and length of their care experiences, and success in school all contribute to the likelihood of a successful transition to adulthood. But alongside these factors is the support being offered by local authorities to care leavers. Despite successive pieces of legislation from 2000, and greater obligations on local authorities to support young people as they leave care, outcomes have not improved significantly.

This report is based on a detailed assessment of leaving care services in Leeds City Council, the London Borough of Havering, and Southampton City Council. It aims to uncover and understand the experiences of those leaving care, and the teams that support them.

Overall, the assessment found that the **current system does not adequately support leaving care teams** to help young people in their transition to adulthood despite the best efforts of committed

² Barnardos. (2017). *Neglected Minds. A report on mental health services for young people leaving care.*

³ Department for Education, (2016). *Children Looked After in England (2015/16).*

participants. The report makes five critical observations and a set of recommendations.

1 Personal advisers' time could be used more effectively.

Young people revealed that they do not spend as much time as they would like with their personal adviser from the local authority. Personal advisers are often the main source of support and point of contact for the young person. However, research by Leaving Well found that personal advisers spend a large amount of their time supporting young people in crisis (c.30%),⁴ and are required to spend around a quarter of their time on administrative work. Personal advisers described their frustrations; the administrative processes that they must undertake take their time away from being with young people.

This report recommends that the administrative burden on personal advisers should be eased.

2 Management does not have sufficient tools to analyse and identify areas for improvement within services.

Current management information dashboards focus on a limited number of metrics. At the same time, valuable information is currently collected in a free text format which is difficult to analyse. Information on young people's care history could be used to guide support to those who need it most. Data should be collected on the cause of the different crises that young people face and the efficacy of crisis management, to enable staff to prevent crises from happening in the first place.

This report recommends that local authorities collect more management information to improve their support for young people. The Leaving Well Outcomes Framework⁵

⁴ Social Finance. (2017). Personal adviser time survey analysis. (Unpublished).

⁵ Social Finance and Dr Mark Kerr. (2017). Leaving Well, An Outcomes Framework to Promote Successful Transitions for Care Leavers. http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/leavingwell_152x228_final-1.pdf

can be used in practice, to support transparency and standardisation in the way that outcomes of young people are tracked.

- 3 Whilst the pathway plan could be at the centre of the young persons' transition to independence, it is currently falling short.** The pathway plan, agreed with their personal adviser, should articulate the support the young person needs to reach their goals. However, it often gets forgotten: analysis showed that only 5% of personal adviser time is spent on the pathway plan.⁶ Young people reported that they would like more ownership over their plan to independence – only 16% of the pathway plans analysed by Leaving Well recorded that the young person had a copy of their plan.⁷ Young people told us that action-focused pathway planning would be useful for them. Currently 70% of the text in the plans reviewed was a description of past events.⁸

This report recommends that pathway plans should be used more effectively to support young people to transition to independence. Young people should be given ownership over their pathway plan and should be frequently consulted.

- 4 Young people could be better supported to take realistic steps towards aspirational goals.** Around half of leaving care teams felt there were no learning opportunities for their young people.⁹ This means that those who are further from education, employment or training are not always getting the support that they need to develop their skills. Structured interviews with young people revealed that they do not always

⁶ Social Finance. (2017). Personal adviser time survey analysis. (Unpublished).

⁷ Social Finance. (2017). Pathway plan analysis. (Unpublished).

⁸ Social Finance. (2017). Pathway plan analysis. (Unpublished).

⁹ Social Finance. (2017). Baker and Dixon self-assessment framework analysis. (Unpublished).

feel like their successes are celebrated. Personal advisers should be encouraged to celebrate the achievements of care leavers.

- 5 Leaving care is isolating and there is little support to help young people build relationships.** 74% of young people felt isolated when they left care.¹⁰ In the first year of leaving care, only 33% of care leavers reconnected with their family and friends.¹¹ According to the same survey, 19% of care leavers felt they had no one they can turn to for help.

This report recommends that local authorities support young people to build strong relationships. Local authorities should invest in mentoring schemes, and make them available to all young people leaving care. Personal advisers should support young people to access or participate in clubs and sports activities, and local authorities should sponsor or host more social activities.

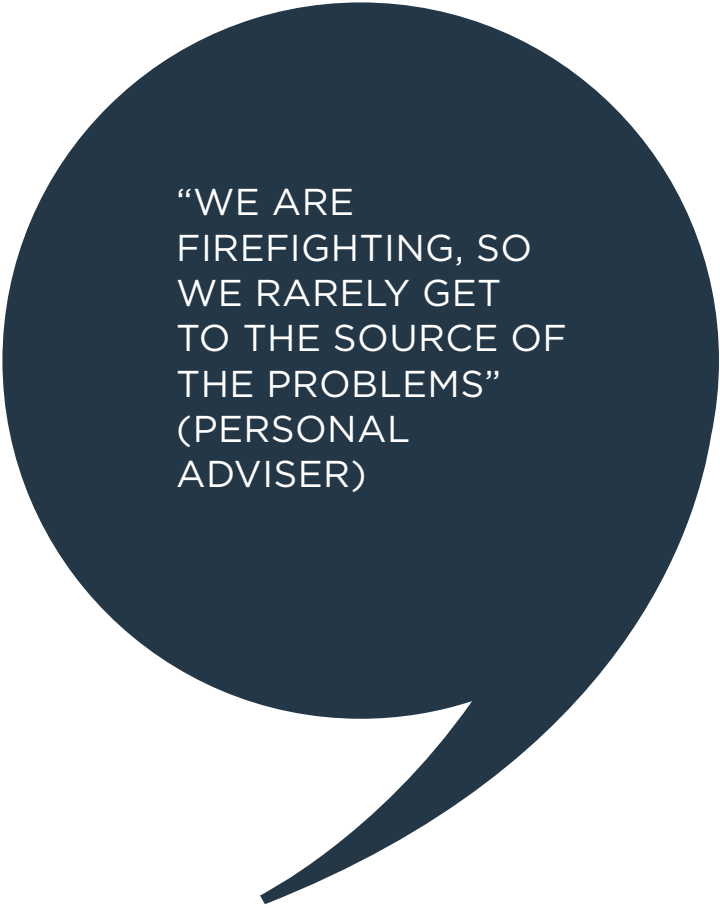
The research carried out by Leaving Well strengthens the argument that real change is needed in the leaving care sector. The support currently given to young people is not good enough. We need to help young people to independence, by supporting leaving care teams to direct their work to where it can have the most impact.

This is why Leaving Well is developing a digital tool which gives young people ownership over their plan to independence and supports collaboration with their personal adviser in the local authority. Using the tool, young people will be able to access and edit their plan online, as and when they wish. The digital tool will free up personal adviser time from administrative tasks, so that this time can be spent with young people.

¹⁰ The Care Leavers' Association. (2017). *CLA Health Report*.

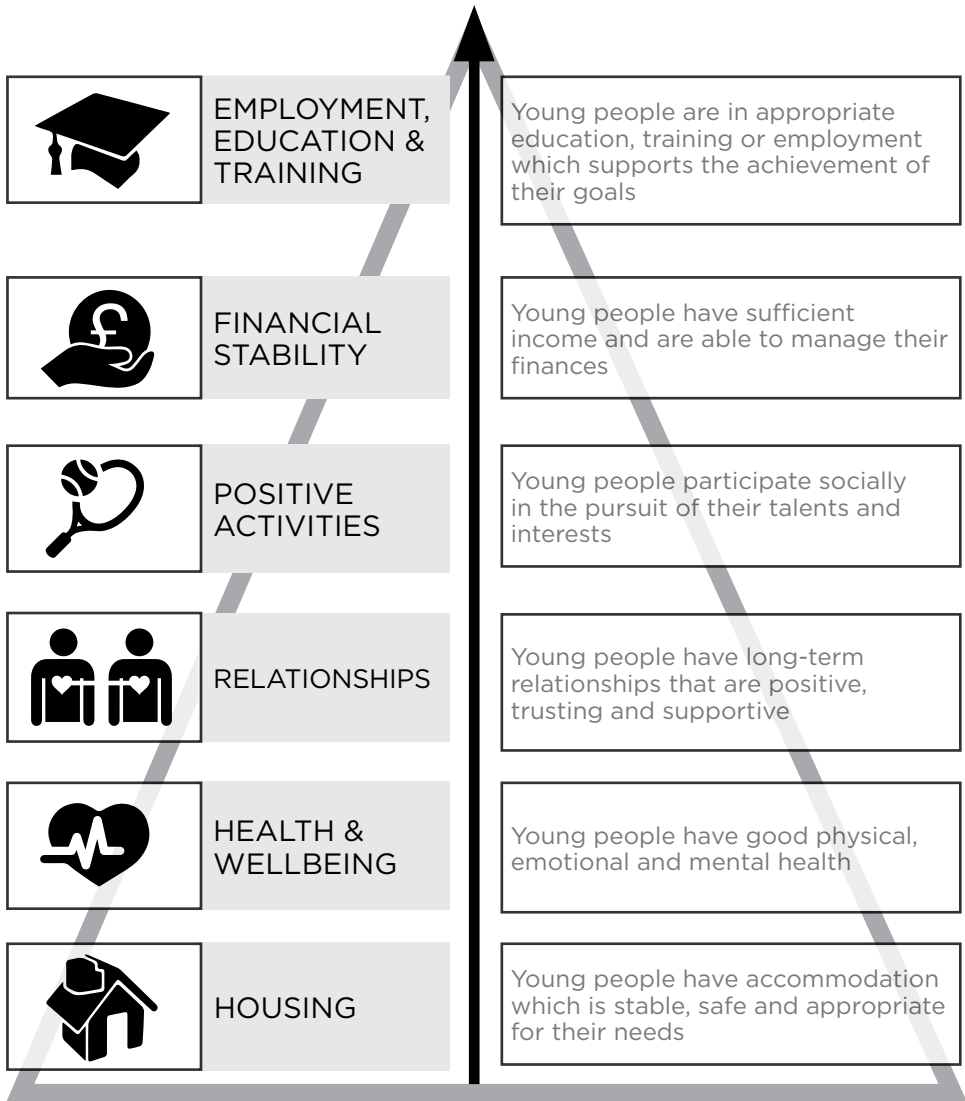
¹¹ Centrepont. (2017). *From Care to Where? Care leavers' access to accommodation*

Better support post-care will not be enough to improve young people's life chances. Young people must also be supported at school, in their care placements, and when they transition to independence. However, the support post-care is an important contributor to the success of young people as they move into adulthood.



“WE ARE
FIREFIGHTING, SO
WE RARELY GET
TO THE SOURCE OF
THE PROBLEMS”
(PERSONAL
ADVISER)

FIGURE 1: HIERARCHY OF OUTCOMES





“I AM A CARE
LEAVER, NOT A
REAL PERSON”

(YOUNG
PERSON)

BACKGROUND

Every year 11,000 young people in state care turn 18 in England, and start the transition to adulthood. For many, this is a challenging time. Care leavers often experience a 'cliff edge' of support when they leave care. Additionally, because of traumatic experiences in early life and care that can be turbulent, some young people making the transition from care to independence have a great deal to cope with. Specifically, there are four protective factors which influence the ability of young people to lead good lives when they leave care:¹²

1. Experiencing a stable care journey
2. Doing well at school
3. Leaving care later
4. Being well supported into adulthood

In 2000 the Leaving Care Act put in place a framework to legislate and outline the support into adulthood that care leavers should receive, for the first time. The act aimed to strengthen the assessment, preparation, and planning for each young person leaving care.

Each local authority must:

- **Be a good Corporate Parent to every young person leaving care**
The local authority must have the same aspirations for a child in care as a good parent would have for their own child. They

¹² Stein, M. (2012). *Young People Leaving Care: Supporting Pathways to Adulthood*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

must support young people to gain the skills and confidence to live independent lives, while helping young people to learn from their mistakes by being there when things do not go to plan.

- **Appoint a personal adviser to each young person**

This is a named case worker who ensures that the young person is provided with the correct level of support from their local authority. The personal adviser is responsible for making sure that the young person's pathway plan is up to date.

- **Develop a pathway plan for every young person**

This is a care plan which details and articulates the services and support needed by the young person in order to reach their aspirations.

In practice local authorities have struggled to support young people adequately, and the government has tried to address this through a series of reforms. In 2008 the Centre for Social Justice¹³ argued that the government was failing at its duty to be a Corporate Parent. Children in and leaving care were being badly served by existing policy and practice, and experienced poor outcomes. The government recognised the need for care leavers to receive tailored support when accessing services, and responded with a cross-departmental strategy in 2013.¹⁴ The 'Staying Put' duty was introduced to require local authorities to support young people who wish to remain with their former foster carers to age 21, allowing for a more gradual transition to adulthood.¹⁵ In 2016, a similar 'Staying Close' programme was introduced as a pilot programme to support young people more gradually transition from residential

¹³ Centre for Social Justice. (2008). *Couldn't Care Less*.

¹⁴ HM Government. (2013). *Care Leaver Strategy*.

¹⁵ HM Government. (2013). *Staying Put. Arrangements for care leavers aged 18 and above to stay on with their former foster carers*.

care. In the summer of 2016, the DfE launched its strategy *Keep on Caring: supporting young people from care to independence*. The main recommendations were: care leavers should be supported to live independently, access to education, employment and training should be improved, care leavers should feel safe and secure through improved stability, care leavers should receive improved health support and should be supported to achieve financial stability.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 aims to further improve support for care leavers and promote their welfare. Under the Act all local authorities are required to pledge a 'Local Offer' for care leavers to age 25. The Local Offer must outline the services available to meet the needs of care leavers. The principles of Corporate Parenting have been strengthened to ensure that local authorities provide all young people with the stability and support they need to make progress.

Despite significant policy initiatives to support young people when they leave care, care leavers' outcomes continue to be poor in comparison to their peers in the general population and from equivalent comparison groups.¹⁶ Whilst many care leavers who have experienced a combination of stability in care, success at school, a later move from care, or greater support into adulthood have good experiences, others face challenges across many areas of their lives.

A considerable number of young people who have left care find themselves not in education, employment or training (NEET). Statistics estimate that **40% of 19–21 year olds who have left care are NEET**,¹⁷ but it is thought that numbers may be higher than this when young people who are 'not in touch' are included in measurement.

¹⁶ Social Finance and Dr Mark Kerr. (2017). *Leaving Well, An Outcomes Framework to Promote Successful Transitions for Care Leavers*. http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/leavingwell_152x228_final-1.pdf

¹⁷ Department for Education, (2016). *Children Looked After in England (2015/16)*.

Care leavers are more likely than their peers to rely on the benefits system, and experience difficulties managing their money. **Young people who have left care are three times more likely than the general population to have experienced a benefit sanction at some point** in their life.¹⁸ 39% of the care leavers claiming housing benefit say that it is not enough to cover their rent.¹⁹

Leaving care teams tend not to prioritise the participation of young people in positive activities, which act as a protective factor for care leavers. In one study it was found that **73% of councils did not collate aggregate data on the involvement of looked after children in physical exercise**,²⁰ and the Leaving Well analysis of pathway plans found that the majority of plans do not contain a designated space for positive activities to be discussed.²¹

Care leavers experience transient or difficult relationships, and find it difficult to build relationships and trust others. **19% of care leavers have no one they can turn to for help**.²² Whilst many care leavers connect with their family when they leave care this can be frustrating as well as positive.²³ The Staying Put scheme supports young people to stay with their foster carers until they reach the age of 21, but many young people cease contact with their foster carers on leaving care.

¹⁸ The Children's Society. (2016). *The cost of being care free: The impact of poor financial education and removal of support on care leavers*.

¹⁹ Centrepont. (2017). *From Care to Where? Care leavers' access to accommodation*.

²⁰ Murray, C. (2012). Sport in Care: Using Freedom of Information Requests to Elicit Data About Looked After Children's Involvement in Physical Activity. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43 (7), 1347-1363. Cited in Kerr, M. (2017). *Leaving Well Analytics Hub Evidence Review*.

²¹ Social Finance. (2017). Pathway plan analysis. (Unpublished).

²² Centrepont. (2017). *From Care to Where? Care leavers' access to accommodation*.

²³ Kerr, M. (2017). *Leaving Well Analytics Hub Evidence Review*.

There is a high prevalence of mental health problems amongst care leavers. Studies evidence an increase in mental health conditions as young people move to independence, with one indicating **an increase of 23% in mental health conditions on leaving care.**²⁴ 65% of young people who have a mental health need are not currently receiving any statutory service support.²⁵

Young people leaving care face housing insecurity. One study found that within the first year of leaving care, 35% of care leavers moved house at least once.²⁶ Approximately a third of looked after children experience homelessness when they leave care, putting their risk of becoming homeless 25% higher than the general population.²⁷ Many care leavers do not feel ready to live independently, and leave supported accommodation much earlier than their peers would. Furthermore, many care leavers find themselves living in unsuitable property which does not meet their needs. A nationally representative study found that 70% of looked after children and care leavers live in high crime areas.²⁸

²⁴ Dixon, J. (2008). Young People Leaving Care: Health, Well-being and Outcomes. *Child & Family Social Work*, 13 (1), 207-217. Cited in Kerr, M. (2017). *Leaving Well Analytics Hub Evidence Review*.

²⁵ Barnardos. (2017). *Neglected Minds. A report on mental health services for young people leaving care.*

²⁶ Centrepoin. (2017). *Op. Cit.*

²⁷ The Care Leavers' Association. (2018). *45 Care Leaver Friendly Ways.*

²⁸ Pritchard, C. Williams, R. (2009). Does Social Work Make a Difference? A Controlled Study of Former 'Looked-After-Children' and 'Excluded-From-School' Adolescents Now Men Aged 16-24 Subsequent Offences, Being Victims of Crime and Suicide. *British Journal of Social Work*, 9 (3), 285-307. Cited in Kerr, M. (2017). *Leaving Well Analytics Hub Evidence Review*.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings in this report are based on a detailed assessment of leaving care services carried out in three partner local authorities: Leeds City Council, the London Borough of Havering, and Southampton City Council. The Leaving Well analysis was carried out between May 2017 and October 2017. The analysis was designed to understand the interaction between young people, their personal adviser, and the other services that support them. Research was made up of interviews, workshops and focus groups, as well as analysis of staff responses to the Baker and Dixon self-assessment survey²⁹ and a study of personal advisers' time. The Leaving Well project also analysed pathway plans and Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England Data Returns (SSDA903).

The research revealed that, despite the best efforts of committed participants, the current leaving care system is failing to achieve its original aims. Personal advisers interviewed felt that their teams spent too much time reacting to crises, and consequently they felt that young people don't receive the support that they need. Those interviewed argued that the pathway planning process is not as useful as it could be, and lacks engagement with the young people it was designed for. The management information in the three local authorities does not provide managers with useful oversight over their services and successful service provision.

²⁹ Dixon, J. Baker, C. (2016). *Baker and Dixon self-assessment framework. A guide to the New Belongings approach and methodology.*
<https://secure.toolkitfiles.co.uk/clients/23786/sitedata/files/A-Guide-to-the-New-Belongings-Approach.pdf>.

1. Personal advisers' time could be used more effectively

Personal advisers spend a large amount of their time supporting young people in crisis

In the three local authorities analysed, personal advisers spend a large amount of time supporting a small number of their young people who are experiencing crises. 'Crisis' is defined by young people themselves and personal advisers will respond to this distress. In general a crisis situation is one where the young person feels that they can't go on without substantial support from their personal adviser. It is common for crisis to be caused by housing, mental health, or financial issues.

Whilst personal advisers in three local authorities report that approximately half of their caseload are in a 'fragile state' at any one time (Figure 2), they spend approximately 30% of their time crisis working with the 20% of their caseload who need urgent help (Figure 3). Personal advisers interviewed described how this frustratingly prevents them from offering proactive and preventative support to the rest of their young people. More than half of all leaving care teams feel that there is little support to help young people build their resilience.³⁰ There is little preventative work to stop the pattern of young people circling into crisis.

The processes which are currently in place in the three local authorities researched do not allow crisis to be managed as well as it could be. Most leaving care teams have a 'duty' process whereby a designated staff member is on call to support young people who report in crisis. This aims to enable young people to access timely support whilst reducing disruption to the personal adviser's scheduled work with other young people and professionals.

³⁰ Social Finance. (2017). Baker and Dixon self-assessment framework analysis. (Unpublished).

FIGURE 2: ESTIMATE OF THE PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN CRISIS, BASED ON INTERVIEWS



- Young people in a stable state
- Young people in a fragile state
- Young people in crisis

FIGURE 3: TIME SPENT BY PERSONAL ADVISER TAKEN FROM A STUDY OF HOW PERSONAL ADVISERS SPEND THEIR TIME (N=7) AND INTERVIEWS



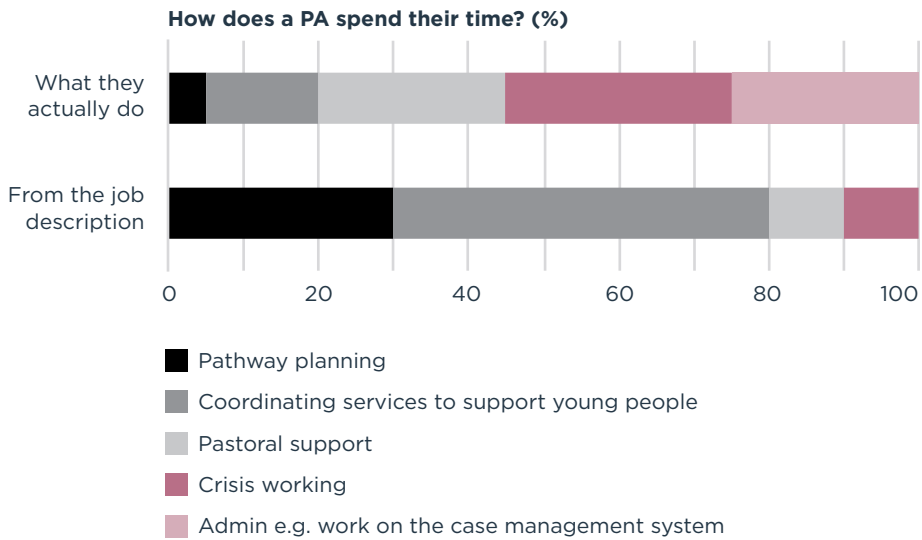
- Pathway Planning
- Coordinating services to support young people
- Pastoral Support
- Crisis Working
- Admin (e.g. work on case management system)

However, research revealed that this is not always effective; in practice young people often get passed straight from the duty worker to their personal adviser.

Personal advisers are required to spend a sizeable proportion of their time on administrative work

Completing administrative work is a large part of the personal adviser's daily practice. Leaving Well analysis of three local authorities revealed that approximately a quarter of personal adviser time (Figure 3) is spent on administrative work. Leaving Well analysis revealed that the administrative tasks which personal

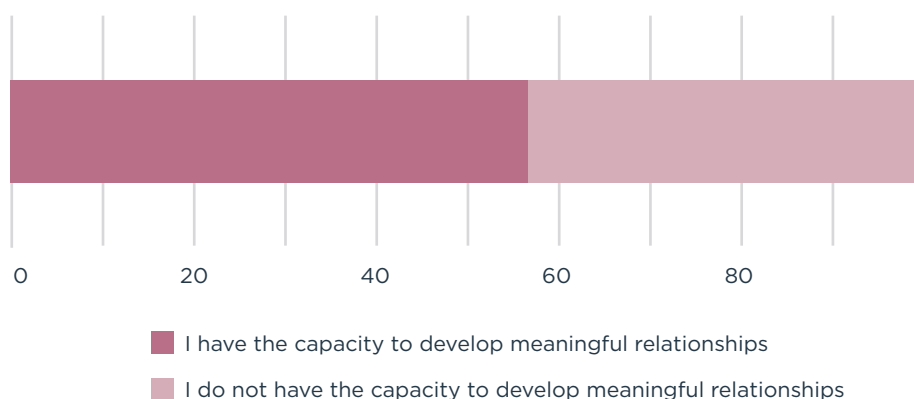
FIGURE 4: TIME SPENT BY PERSONAL ADVISER TAKEN FROM A STUDY OF HOW PERSONAL ADVISERS SPEND THEIR TIME (N=7) AND INTERVIEWS



advisers spend most time on include updating the case management system, communicating internally with other team members and services about specific cases, and chasing up external services. Personal advisers and managers in three local authorities discussed how case management systems can be difficult to navigate, which makes the process of updating cases slow and difficult. Furthermore, different reporting requirements can require the personal advisers to manually replicate information across different parts of the young persons' case file. A lack of joined-up working between services compounds this issue. Personal advisers told Leaving Well that they are often unclear about the amount of support that other services can provide, and other services are not always aware of the support that care leavers need. Figure 4 shows the difference between the job description of a personal adviser, and what the job entails in practice. Personal advisers interviewed by Leaving Well talked of being left with a frustrating tension between what the job requires them to do and what young people need.

FIGURE 5: BAKER AND DIXON SELF-ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (N=14)

Case loads are monitored to ensure staff have capacity to develop meaningful relationships with young people (% of staff)

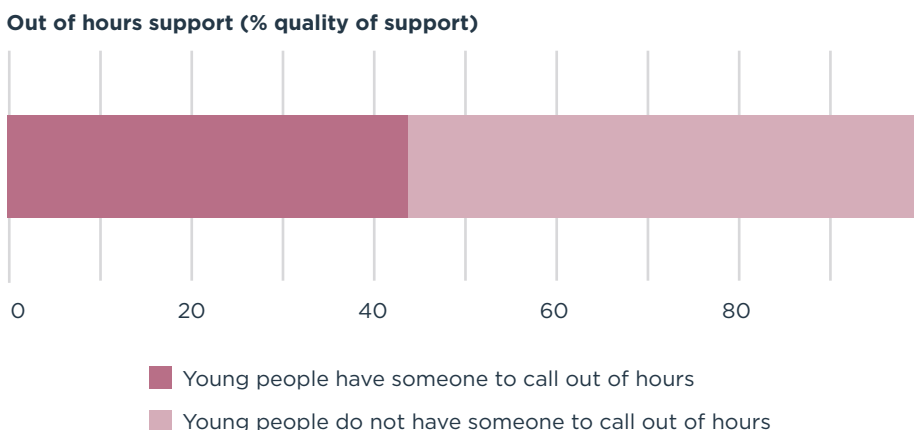


Personal advisers are not always as accessible as young people would like

Personal advisers interviewed by Leaving Well felt that they do not have time to offer young people the type of support that they require. Young people told Leaving Well that they do not always feel that they can approach their personal adviser because they know that they are busy. Just under half of leaving care staff who responded to the Baker and Dixon survey from across the three local authorities felt that their case load was monitored to enable them to have the capacity to develop strong relationships with the young people they work with (Figure 5).³¹ The leaving care team members who were interviewed by Leaving Well described how they find it hard to meet care leavers for informal coffees and catch-ups as their budgets have been cut. Only 27% of respondents to the Baker and Dixon survey felt that care leavers were encouraged to drop in to their offices. This contributes to the creation of more formal, transactional relationships between personal advisers and young people, against the wishes of both. Furthermore, young people do not always have someone to call out

³¹ Social Finance. (2017). Baker and Dixon self-assessment framework analysis. (Unpublished).

FIGURE 6: BAKER AND DIXON SELF-ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (N= 14)



of hours, with more than half of leaving care team members who responded to the Baker and Dixon survey reporting that an out of hours service was not available in their local authority (Figure 6).

2. Management does not have sufficient tools to analyse and identify areas for improvement within services

Current management information dashboards focus more on activities and less on outcomes

Structured interviews in three local authorities revealed that it is hard for managers to track the causes of the circumstances that young people find themselves in. This is because management information dashboards are typically focused on statutory return outputs:

- If personal advisers and social workers have been in touch with young people over the past six weeks
- If pathway plans have been completed on time
- If young people are in suitable accommodation
- If a young person is in education, employment or training.

Leaving Well found that in the three local authorities analysed there is limited data collected to enable managers to track the reasons and causes for these outcomes. If provided, this would enable team managers to pinpoint the aspects of professionals' work that have the greatest impact on young people, and provide a business case for further support services.

Valuable information is currently collected in a format which is difficult to analyse

Pathway plans keep detailed records of how well the young person is doing across the different areas of their life, but in the three local authorities analysed they are not used to provide management information. Pathway plans are free text forms: it is difficult to extract and aggregate data from them. Leaving Well reviewed 43 pathway plans from its three partner authorities using the Outcomes Framework questions.³² Analysis revealed that there was sufficient information in pathway plans to assess the young persons' needs in relation to the framework, and draw conclusions about where young people needed more support. The results of this analysis can be seen in Figure 7. However, this analysis was time consuming and largely subjective which would make it problematic for a local authority to replicate with pathway plans in their current format.

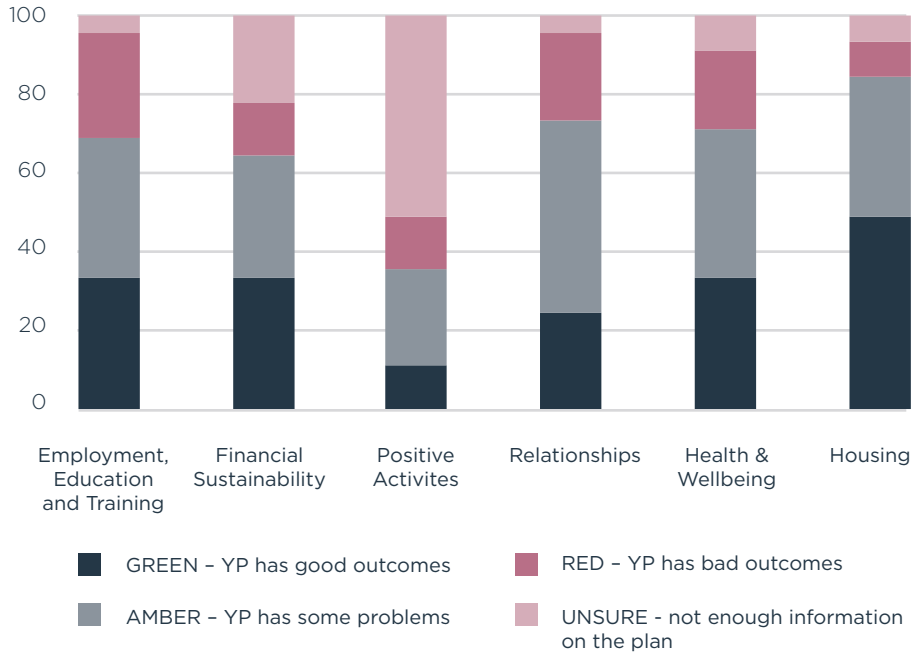
Care history data is not currently being used to guide support to the young people who might need it most

Furthermore, young people's care history can be used to make predictions about their outcomes on leaving care. Young people who experience placement instability during their time in care are more likely to experience poor outcomes than those who have stable placements. Furthermore, young people who enter care late in their life are likely to have poorer outcomes than those

³² Social Finance. Kerr, M. (2017). *Leaving Well, An Outcomes Framework to Promote Successful Transitions for Care Leavers*. http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/leavingwell_152x228_final-1.pdf.

FIGURE 7: PATHWAY PLAN ANALYSIS (N=43)

Outcomes of young people across domains (%)



who entered care earlier. The more risk factors experienced by the young person in care, the worse their housing and education outcomes are post care.

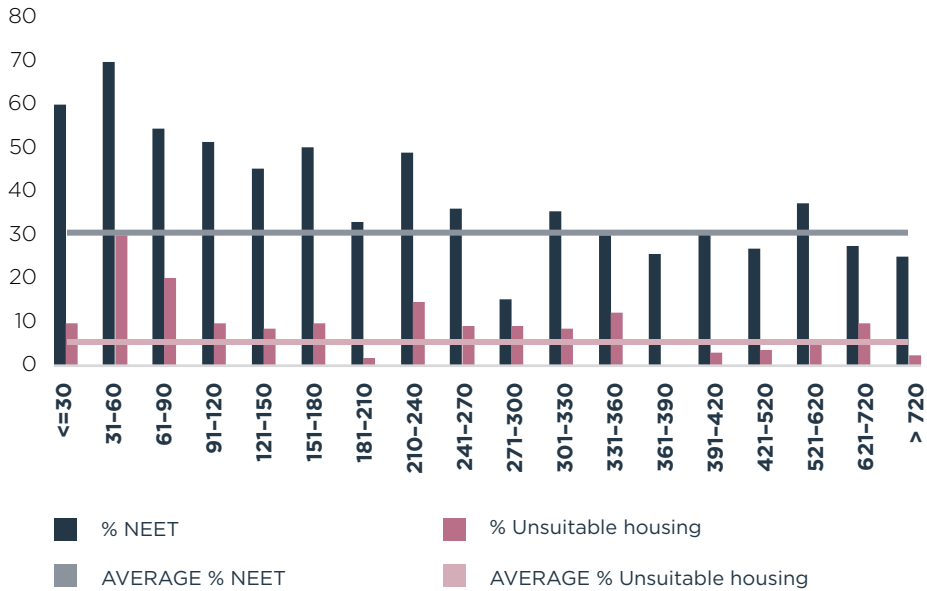
Research suggests that 68% of young people who had been in care and also committed a crime had experienced placement instability, compared to 32% of young people who had been in care and had not committed a crime.³³ Those that have had unstable placements during their care stay are more likely to move to independent living at a younger age. Young people who have experienced unstable placements are more likely to suffer

³³ Schofield, G. Biggart, L. Ward, E. Larsson, B. (2015). Looked After Children and Offending: An Exploration of Risk, Resilience and the Role of Social Cognition. Children and Youth Services Review, 51 (1), 125-133. Cited in Kerr, M. (2017). *Leaving Well Analytics Hub Evidence Review*. (Unpublished).

FIGURE 8: SSDA 903 RETURNS (N=1956)

The impact of placement length on outcomes

(% young people with poor outcomes)



from mental health problems.³⁴ Those with longer placements are more likely to have better educational outcomes. There is a negative correlation between the number of placement moves a young person experiences, and the level of qualifications that they achieve.³⁵

Leaving Well carried out analysis which found that in general the shorter the average placement length a young person experienced, the greater their risk of being NEET at 19. Analysis of SSDA903 returns from two local authorities showed that young people

³⁴ Barn, R. Tan, J. (2015). Foster Youth and Drug Use: Exploring Risk and Protective Factors. Children and Youth Services Review, 56 (1), 107-115. Cited in Kerr, M. (2017). *Leaving Well Analytics Hub Evidence Review*. (Unpublished).

³⁵ Dixon, J. Stein, M. (2005). *Leaving Care: Throughcare and Aftercare in Scotland*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Cited in Kerr, M. (2017). *Leaving Well Analytics Hub Evidence Review*. (Unpublished).

who had placement lengths shorter than 270 days had an above average (>31%) chance of being NEET. In contrast, those with longer placements were more likely to have better educational outcomes. Furthermore, Leaving Well found that young people who entered care at a later age were more likely to have poor educational outcomes than those who entered earlier, with the lowest risk of being NEET found amongst young people who entered care aged four.³⁶

Leaving Well found that the more risk factors experienced by the young person in care, the worse their housing and education outcomes are post care. Leaving Well assessed the following 'risk factors': late care entry, placement instability, SDQ score (emotional and behavioural development), and age of leaving care. Young people who experienced two or more risk factors in care were two times more likely to experience poor education outcomes than those who experienced no risk factors. Young people who experienced three or more risk factors were three times more likely to experience poor housing outcomes than those who experienced no risk factors (Figure 10).

In general, the risk of poor housing outcomes was much lower for all young people. On average, five percent of young people had poor housing outcomes. The analysis carried out by Leaving Well showed no significant link between average care placement length and risk of poor housing outcomes. Young people who enter care at a later age are more likely to be better prepared for independent living. The analysis showed that poor housing outcomes were not linked to age of care entry.

³⁶ Social Finance. (2017). Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England Data Returns (SSDA903) data analysis. (Unpublished).

FIGURE 9: SSDA903 RETURNS (N=2321)

The impact of late care entry on EET outcomes

(% young people NEET)

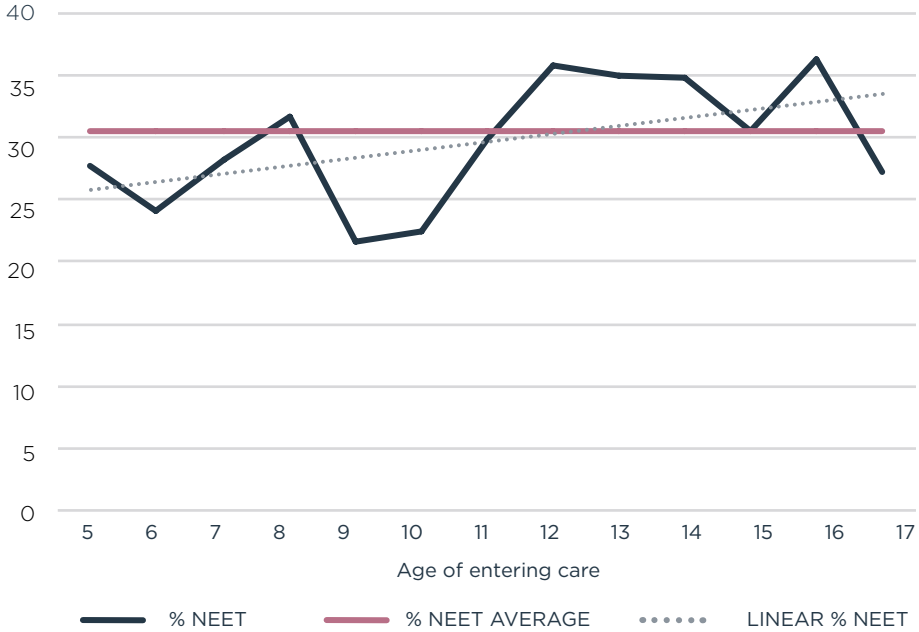


FIGURE 10: SSDA903 RETURNS (N=472)

Impact of risk factors on EET and housing outcomes

(% young people with poor outcomes)



3. Whilst the pathway plan has the potential to be at the centre of the young person's transition to independence, it is currently falling short

The pathway plan can get left behind in personal advisers' ongoing work to support young people

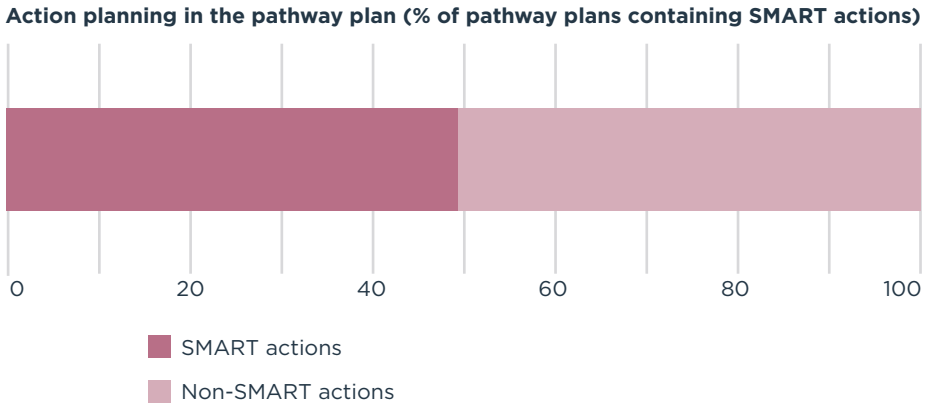
Leaving Well analysis found that the pathway plan is not updated frequently enough to meet the needs of the young person. This means that it can get left behind in personal advisers' ongoing work with young people. It is a statutory requirement for this to be updated once every six months, which is slower than the pace at which young people's lives change. Analysis found that all the planning and activity that a personal adviser does to support the young person does not always get captured in the pathway plan. Figure 4 shows that whilst pathway planning is meant to take up around 30% of the personal adviser's time, in reality those sampled in three partner authorities only spent around five percent of their time on the pathway plan. Leaving Well heard that the small amount of time spent on the pathway plan is often administrative time spent on the case management system rather than time spent with young people.

Young people would like more ownership over their plan to independence

In structured interviews with Leaving Well young people described how they do not feel like they own their pathway plan. Analysis in three local authorities found that only 35% of pathway plans contain a substantial comment (more than three sentences) written by the young person, and only 16% of plans reference the fact that the young person had a copy of the plan.³⁷ The pathway plan is long and not young-person friendly; not all personal advisers think that it is a good use of their time to complete it with the young person. Personal advisers find it difficult to engage their young person to

³⁷ Social Finance. (2017). Pathway plan analysis. (Unpublished).

FIGURE 11- PATHWAY PLAN ANALYSIS (N=43)



complete the form, and often type it up without the young person.³⁸ Consequently, young people and personal advisers who were interviewed reported that young people do not know what their pathway plan is, and do not understand how it can guide the support that they receive.

Action focused pathway planning would be useful for young people

Pathway plans should be designed in a way which supports and encourages action planning. The pathway plans used in the three partner local authorities are not considered to be useful tools for live planning; they are difficult for young people to engage with. Leaving Well carried out an analysis of 43 pathway plans from the three local authorities. This analysis revealed that pathway plans contained large tracts of free text about what has happened in the young person's life since the last review. Figure 12 shows that approximately 70% of the plan was used for recording past events or the current situation, leaving less than a third of the plan for planning for the future. Action boxes were left incomplete, and as Figure 11 shows, over half of actions were not SMART (specific,

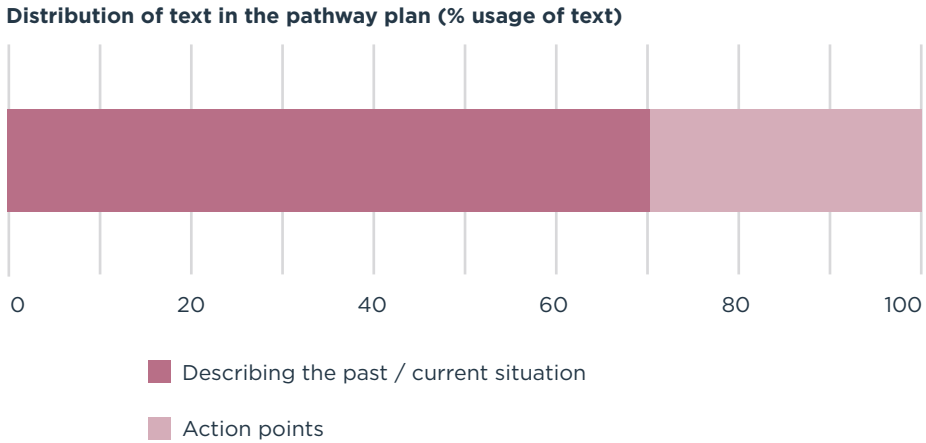
³⁸ Social Finance. (2017). Interviews with personal advisers. (Unpublished).

A black and white photograph of a person in a dark suit sitting at a desk in a cluttered office. The person is holding a pen and writing on a document. The desk is covered with stacks of papers, folders, and a printer. The background shows more office equipment and papers, creating a sense of a busy, administrative environment.

"YOU DON'T SEE
A HUMAN BEING,
JUST A CASE FILE"

(PERSONAL
ADVISER)

FIGURE 12: PATHWAY PLAN ANALYSIS (N=43)



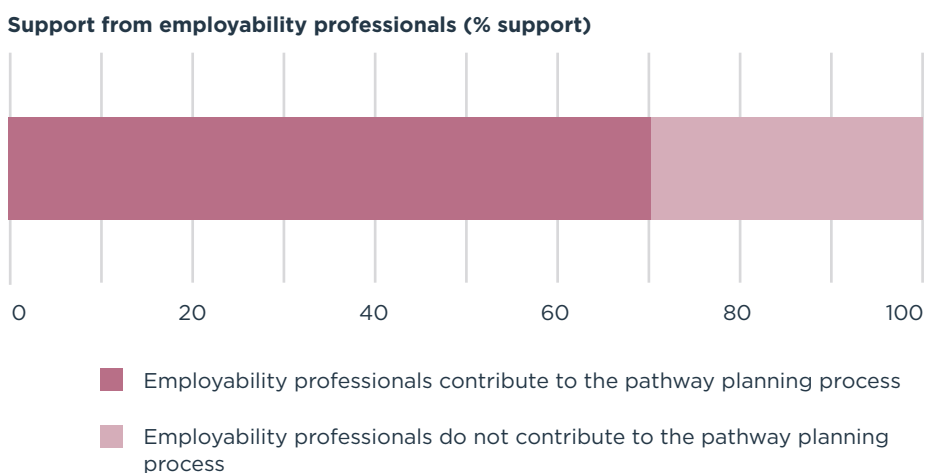
measurable, achievable, realistic and time limited). Young people reported to Leaving Well that they do not find these aspirational.

4. Young people could be better supported to take realistic steps towards aspirational goals

Young people reported that they would like more aspirational support towards reaching their short term and long term targets. Personal advisers and other professionals could work better to guide young people to set challenging but attainable goals. Whilst just under half of all leaving care teams reported in the Baker and Dixon survey that there were no learning opportunities for care leavers to advance their skills,³⁹ employability professionals do not always support the pathway planning process (Figure 13). This means that young people do not always get expert careers advice, and personal advisers in three local authorities reported that for those further from education, employment or training (EET) this can be really valuable. The Leaving Well review of pathway plans revealed that contingency planning boxes were often left incomplete in pathway

³⁹ Social Finance. (2017). Baker and Dixon self-assessment framework analysis. (Unpublished).

FIGURE 13: BAKER AND DIXON SELF-ASSESSMENT SURVEY (N=25)



plans. In some pathway plans there was a discrepancy between the action planning and the recorded aspirations of the young person.⁴⁰

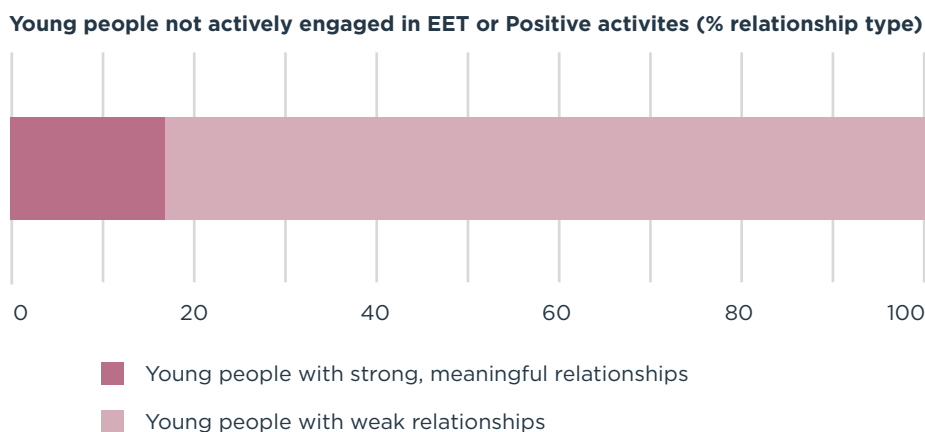
5. Leaving care is isolating and there is little support to help young people build relationships

The leaving care system could better support young people to build other relationships to compliment the support which is given by the personal adviser. One study found that 74% of care leavers felt isolated when they left care.⁴¹ Leaving care is a time of relationship change; young people may move on from foster care, and reconnect with their family. This can bring uncertainty and disappointment. Leaving Well research found that when young people move to independent living they can become disconnected from support networks, and experience loneliness. The review of pathway plans carried out by Leaving Well suggests that young people who are

⁴⁰ Social Finance. (2017). Pathway plan analysis. (Unpublished).

⁴¹ The Care Leavers' Association. (2017). *CLA Health Report*.

FIGURE 14: PATHWAY PLAN ANALYSIS (N=43)




engaged in EET and positive activities have opportunities to build new relationships, but for those who are not this can be a difficult process. 84% of those not engaged in EET or positive activities had weak relationships (Figure 14). In the three local authorities analysed Leaving Well heard that it is rare for young people to be offered support from mentoring and independent visitor schemes, despite the evidence of their success.⁴² On a scale from one to ten, local authority staff rated the services that they have to offer young people for emotional support as a six,⁴³ and 65% of leaving care team staff did not think that they had support systems in place to help young people develop emotional wellbeing.⁴⁴ Creating drop in spaces for care leavers can overcome feelings of isolation and neglect, by providing accessible ways for care leavers to meet peers and staff in an environment which is less 'intimidating'.⁴⁵

⁴² Lewing, B. Doubell, L. Beevers, T. Acquah. D. Early Intervention Foundation. (2018). *Building Trusted Relationships for Vulnerable Children and Young People with Public Services*.

⁴³ Social Finance. (2017). Baker and Dixon self-assessment framework analysis. (Unpublished).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ New Belongings. (2016). *A guide to the New Belongings approach and methodology*.



“SOMETIMES IT’S LIKE
WE’VE STOPPED LOVING
JUST TO TRY AND COVER
OUR BACKS... WE HIDE
BEHIND POLICIES AND
PROCEDURES A LOT AND
YOUNG PEOPLE GET LOST
BEHIND THAT”

(PERSONAL
ADVISER)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research and analysis undertaken by Leaving Well highlighted aspects of leaving care practice which should be reformed in order to start to make a difference to the quality of life of care leavers, their experiences of transitioning out of care, and their outcomes.

1. Personal advisers' time could be used more effectively

Research revealed that personal advisers do not spend as much time as they would like with young people, but instead spend time on administrative work and crisis management with a small number of young people. To improve this Leaving Well suggest that:

- i.** The administrative burden on personal advisers should be eased, to free up personal adviser time to spend with young people. There are inefficiencies within case management systems and reporting requirements which add to this burden and could be addressed.
- ii.** Data should be collected on the cause of crisis and the efficacy of crisis management, so that leaving care teams can direct their support where it can have the most impact on young people.
- iii.** Team processes should be reviewed to better support young people in crisis and remove the pressure on personal advisers. The 'duty' function could be improved to enable young people to get the support they need, whilst reducing disruption to personal advisers' scheduled work with other young people. Strengthening multi-agency working could reduce the pressure on the personal adviser, by making other services accountable for the support that they can provide young people. Other services should be informed of the constraints on personal advisers and the challenges that young people face.

- iv. Tools should be developed to facilitate better communication between personal advisers and their young people, making the interaction more personal and timely. The Leaving Well digital tool will support this process.

2. Local authorities should collect more management information to improve the support that they give young people

Research revealed that management information is not currently used to provide oversight on how well services are meeting the needs of young people. The information does not enable users to identify areas where young people need more support. To improve this Leaving Well suggest that:

- i. The Leaving Well Outcomes Framework should be adopted in practice to provide greater transparency and standardisation in the way we track and understand care leavers' outcomes. This will enable the sector to begin to develop an evidence base on what works (see Appendix 1).
- ii. Local authorities should use available SSDA903 data to identify the risk and protective factors of young people. This information can be used to ensure that young people are correctly supported. Local authorities should begin to address the issues earlier in the young person's care journey.

3. The pathway plan should be used more effectively to support young people in transitioning to independence

Research revealed that the pathway plan is not currently useful for young people or their personal advisers, but that there is potential for it to provide structured support for young people to achieve their goals. To improve this Leaving Well suggest that:

- i.** Young people should be given ownership over their pathway plan and frequently consulted on their plan to co-develop it with their personal adviser. A cultural shift must occur so that the pathway plan is seen to be the young person's document, which they can view and edit as regularly as they need.
- ii.** The pathway plan should be made action focused, and easier for the young person to engage with. This can be achieved by reducing the amount of free text and increasing the number of attainable action points in the plan. The interface of the plan should be clear and it should be free of jargon.
- iii.** Young people should be able to see a live 'state of play' of their progress towards their goals. This will enable them to take responsibility for their actions, understand their journey and hold their personal adviser to account for the support which they are receiving. The Leaving Well digital tool will enable this to happen.

4. Local authorities should encourage young people to reach their goals

Research revealed that young people would like more support from their local authority to reach their goals, and to celebrate their success. To improve the support that young people receive, Leaving Well suggest that:

- i.** Personal advisers should be trained in a variety of techniques so that they have the tools to guide and support young people. This could include motivational interviewing, career guidance, and setting SMART targets.
- ii.** Personal advisers be encouraged to celebrate the achievements of care leavers. Positive reinforcement should be made an important and routine part of practice.

Case study: The Cocoon Romford

The Cocoon is a welcoming and safe drop-in social space located on Romford high street.

Complete with a kitchen, TV and computers, young people can drop in to the space and relax, as well as attend activities, training, and appointments with their key workers.

Staff have told us that the accessibility of the space is helping to improve the relationships they build with young people:

“Young people have a sense of ownership over the space, so when meetings are held with their workers in The Cocoon young people feel more like they are working together with them, rather than having things ‘done’ to them.”

“People may not pick up the phone to say there has been a problem but they will pop in to The Cocoon to say that something has come up, so we can pick up problems earlier and deal with them before they become too difficult.”

5. Local authorities should support young people to build strong relationships

Research revealed that young people often feel lonely, and do not receive enough support towards building relationships. To improve this Leaving Well suggest that:

- i. Local authorities should invest in best practice mentoring schemes, and make them available to all young people leaving

care. There is evidence that schemes such as the Pure Insight mentoring scheme⁴⁶ improve outcomes for care leavers, and support young people to build resilience which can take pressure off their personal adviser.

- ii. Personal advisers should support young people to access or participate in positive activities, and local authorities should sponsor or host more social activities. Such activities give young people the opportunity to develop interpersonal skills and support networks. Providing a social drop-in space for young people to meet others, relax, and have informal conversations with staff can support this to happen. An example of this is The Cocoon in Romford (London Borough of Havering).

⁴⁶ Pure Insight <https://www.pure-insight.org.uk/>

CONCLUSION

The research carried out by Leaving Well strengthens the argument that real change is needed in the leaving care sector. The support currently given to young people is not good enough. Young people continue to face problems as they transition to adulthood, and personal advisers face many frustrations as they try to give young people support on a day to day basis. Whilst young people want more support from their personal adviser, personal advisers spend more time than they would like on administrative and internal processes. The pathway planning process is meant to support young people to independence, but this process has become an administrative burden which is not always helpful for young people. There is currently a limited amount of management information available to enable managers to target support to young people.

The sector must work together to guarantee the best support for young people leaving care. The Leaving Well digital tool will support young people to independence, and help leaving care teams to direct support where it is needed. Whilst Leaving Well recommends ways that leaving care practice should be reformed, these recommendations are just one route to progress. Without further support for young people to succeed at school, have stable care placements, and stay in care until a later age, young people leaving care will not succeed as well as they should in adulthood. By working together, we can improve the outcomes of all care leavers.

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APPENDIX. THE LEAVING WELL OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

1. What is the Outcomes Framework?

It is known that outcomes are poor for care leavers, but there is limited data nationally and locally which can be used to understand why this is the case. There is no reliable information that monitors the lives of care leavers over time.⁴⁷

As a step towards achieving more transparency Leaving Well produced a comprehensive Outcomes Framework.⁴⁸ This evidence-based framework enables users to get a more complete understanding of outcomes for each young person. It sets out a hierarchy of needs required for healthy, happy lives, beginning with housing, mental health and wellbeing and relationships, and finishing with employment, education and training.

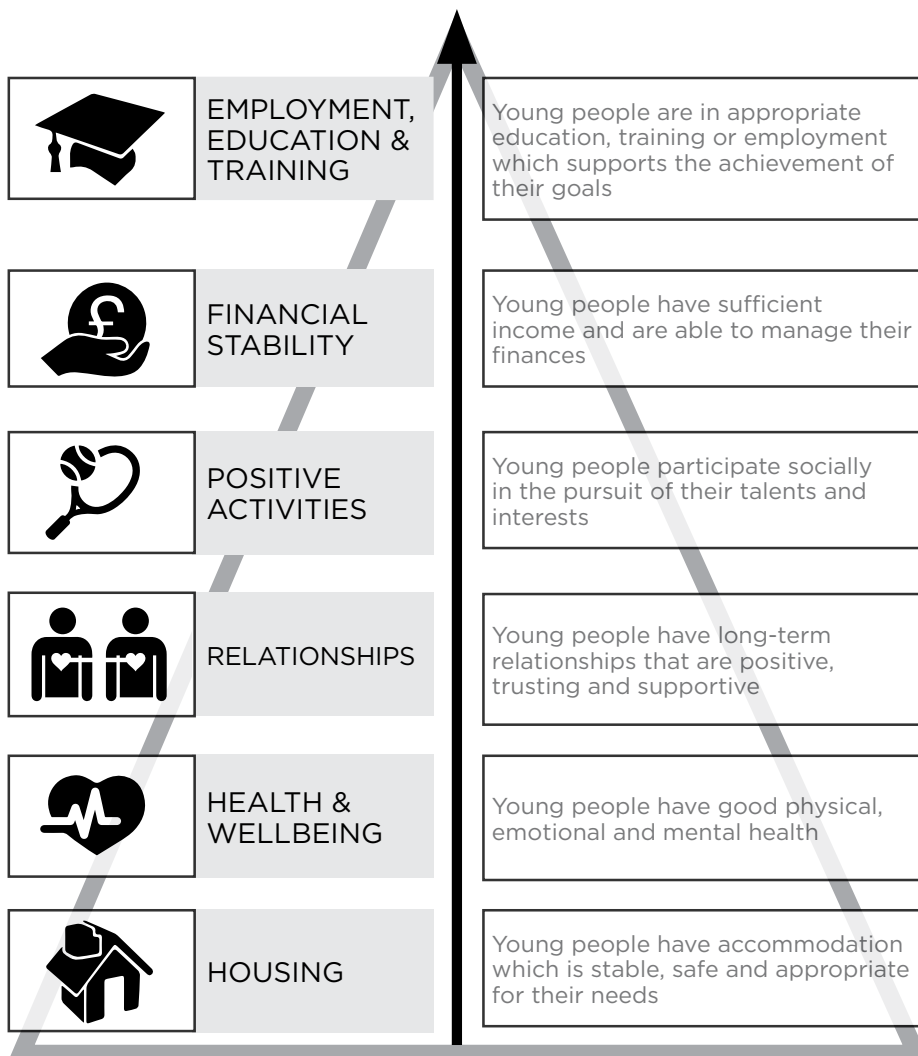
The framework is based on an extensive review of the evidence of the most prevalent issues experienced by care leavers and follows the logic of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The indicators in the framework have been aligned with statutory guidance, including the new requirements in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. In addition, the framework's strengths based approach supports a focus on young people's progress and achievements rather than on identifying problems. Leaving Well's ambition is for this framework to be used as widely as possible by all organisations that work with young people leaving care in the UK and beyond.

2. Who is the Outcomes Framework intended for?

This framework can be used by anyone with an interest in monitoring and improving the outcomes experienced by young people leaving care. Leaving Well wrote the framework with the assumption that

⁴⁷ NAO, (2015). *Care Leavers' Transition to Adulthood*

⁴⁸ In partnership with Dr Mark Kerr, University of Kent. http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/leavingwell_152x228_final-1.pdf



the primary users of the framework will be personal advisers or others in similar roles, who can use the framework with their young people.

3. How does the Outcomes Framework work?

The hierarchy of the domains presented in the Outcomes Framework is evidence-based and offers a guide as to which outcomes it may

be more important to focus on first. However, this hierarchy is not prescriptive and needs to be weighed in balance with individual circumstances. The Outcomes Framework contains a number of core indicators which are essential for recording. These are the minimum indicators needed to improve the understanding of care leavers' outcomes across the board, but Leaving Well would encourage the use of as many indicators as possible to provide a comprehensive view of the outcomes. Leaving Well envision that the framework could be completed with young people as part of their pathway plan.

4. How does the scoring in the Outcomes Framework work?

The strengths-based scoring approach used in the Outcomes Framework promotes positive responses. It is intended to give an overall picture of young people's outcomes and progress. Specific scoring information is presented for each indicator, and all domain blocks are scored individually to contribute towards a final score. Not all metrics will be applicable to all young people, and the scoring system enables you to skip indicators that are not applicable without negatively impacting their overall score.

Further information on the Outcomes Framework can be found at <https://www.socialfinance.org.uk/resources/publications/leaving-well-outcomes-framework-promote-successful-transitions-care-leavers>

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CONTRIBUTORS

Robin Cartwright, Social Finance

Hannah Jump, Social Finance

Andy Smith, Social Finance

Alisa Helbitz, Social Finance

Nicky Brzostowski, Social Finance

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Social Finance Ltd

131–151 Great Titchfield Street
London, W1W 5BB

T +44 (0)20 7667 6370
info@socialfinance.org.uk
www.socialfinance.org.uk

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