

SUBMISSION FROM CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND.

We welcome the opportunity to submit written evidence to the inquiry: Having and keeping a Home: steps to preventing homelessness among young people. We remain highly concerned about the unacceptably high numbers of young people who have been looked after by local authorities who experience homelessness in Scotland. We have focused our response on the particular issues facing care leavers.

About CELCIS

CELCIS is the Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland. Together with partners, we are working to improve the lives of all looked after children in Scotland. Established in 2011, CELCIS has been committed to further improving the outcomes and opportunities for looked after children through a collaborative and facilitative approach that is focused on having the maximum positive impact on their lives.

Key statistics¹

- In 2009/2010, 1 450 young people beyond minimum school leaving age ceased to be looked after by a local authority in Scotland
- Around half (51%) had a pathways plan; 69% had a pathways coordinator
- 3 918 young people were eligible for an aftercare service; 37% of these young people were in education, training or employment
- It is not known how many careleavers are homeless.

Having and keeping a home: steps to preventing homelessness among young people

The Scottish Government, under the Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003, is to meet the legislative requirement that every unintentionally homeless person is provided with settled accommodation by the end of 2012. Historically young people who have been looked after by a local authority have been identified as a priority group.² We are keen that the needs of young people who have been looked after by local authorities are fully addressed in preventing any form of homelessness.

¹ Scottish Government (2011) Statistics Publication Notice: Health and Care Series: Children Looked after Statistics 2009-2010

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/02/18105352/1> (Accessed 02.02.12).

² It is our understanding that in providing a legislative requirement for all there will no longer be a need to identify priority groups by 2012.

We already know that young people with a care history are disproportionately represented in homeless populations. In 2010/2011, 2,332 homeless applicants aged under 25 had a household member who had been formerly looked after by the local authority.³ Although a sizeable number, these figures will only reflect those who actually apply for housing and omit a significant proportion of young people who may experience many different forms of homelessness. Furthermore, it has been well recognised that young people who have been looked after should not have to present as 'homeless' to be provided with accommodation.

Key issues for care leavers

- **Emotional support** – Forty careleavers participating in The Debate Project spoke about the need for emotional support when leaving care as their key concern.⁴ Feeling alone, depressed, worried and anxious about the future were commonly reported. They spoke about the 'small things' that can matter most – having someone who will listen and access to support 'out of hours' when they are mostly likely to need it. In addition, access to appropriate mental health services is vital to supporting emotional well-being.
- **Positive transitions** to supported or independent living. This is an incredibly challenging time for any young person. Being fully involved in pathways planning, having opportunities to make carefully planned, staged transitions to new living arrangements that will holistically meet their needs is essential and needs to involve all partners e.g. social work, housing and health.
- **Developing skills** – Budgeting, cooking, cleaning are all skills to be supported and developed. Pathway planning should cover the support for young people to develop these skills. Practical difficulties in maintaining tenancies can lead to homelessness.
- **Financial support** – Accessing timely financial support is imperative. There can be confusion about the eligibility to aftercare services due to strict criteria (see below). As highlighted in Barnardo's Scotland evidence to the inquiry, financial stress and strain for careleavers can quickly escalate to create a multitude of problems. Practical help to ensure access to all available financial support is vital.
- **Opportunities to return and make mistakes** – Many young people highlighted the wish to visit former carers (residential and foster care) and missed the practical and emotional support when this was not a possibility.

³ Scottish Government (2011) A National Statistics publication for Scotland: Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: 2010-2011

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/356601/0120522.pdf> (Accessed 02.02.12).

⁴ The Debate Project (2009) 'Life after care': Young people's views on leaving care

http://www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk/docs/managefiles/Debate_Project_Life_After_Care_Conference_2009_Report.pdf

Many young people have family to support them when things 'go wrong'. For some care leavers this is not a possibility and this can leave them highly vulnerable. There are examples of some good practice e.g. North Lanarkshire's 'Living Close By'.

- **Having and keeping a home** – Ongoing support is needed to ensure that young people can successfully maintain living arrangements. Accommodation needs to be of good quality with sufficient furnishings. Fundamentally, careleavers need to feel safe and secure and access to 24 hours support may be necessary.

A question of age and support

Whilst the average age of leaving home for young people in the UK has risen to the mid-twenties, looked after young people may still be expected to 'leave care' at the age of sixteen. The report of the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People's office, *Sweet 16? The age of leaving care in Scotland*, highlighted the extent of the challenges experienced by young people where a culture existed of 'leaving care' at sixteen years old.⁵ One of the particular challenges highlighted is the threshold for receiving aftercare services.⁶ A follow up report highlighted that although some progress has been made, there was still a considerable amount of work to do.⁷ This report specifically highlighted concerns about the economic downturn resulting in services for careleavers being affected.

The role of corporate parent

In 2008, the Scottish Government published *These are our bairns: A guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent*. The report specifically highlighted concerns about the high rates of homelessness amongst careleavers and the need of targeted approaches to avert the risk of homelessness. The importance of supporting positive transitions for young people is highlighted,

'Moving into independence is about more than simply finding a roof. Corporate parents will want to satisfy themselves that young people leaving care have the necessary life skills and confidence to cope with independent living and the supports they need to sustain the move must be in place. Some young people will need more support than others and a range of services may need to be available' (Scottish Government, 2008:49).

The role of the housing services has been identified as central to ensuring the needs of careleavers are met and we would support their active involvement in the community planning process (see Appendix one).

⁵ SCCYP (2008) *Sweet 16? The age of leaving care in Scotland*, Edinburgh:SCCYP.

⁶ A care leaver is only entitled to aftercare support if they are looked after by a local authority on or after reaching school leaving age (SCCYP, 2008).

⁷ SCCYP (2009) *Sweet 16? One year on - Is life any sweeter? The age of leaving care in Scotland*, Edinburgh:SCCYP.

The quality of accommodation that is being offered to careleavers has been raised as a specific concern. As a corporate parent, every local authority should be asking themselves a key question: Would this be 'good enough' for my child? It is important that young people can feel safe and secure.

Conclusion

We have established that homelessness should not be a reality for careleavers. We need to improve services to ensure that all careleavers receive the practical and emotional support needed to make a positive transition to adulthood. The innovative involvement of young careleavers (IRISS) in the design of services to meet their needs is highly welcomed.⁸

Housing services should:

- Make sure that children's needs are at the centre of decisions made around housing and any housing support offered to families.
- Make sure you work closely with housing associations and registered social landlords to raise their awareness of corporate parenting and our responsibilities to Looked After young people and care leavers.
- Make sure that staff working in housing services understand their additional responsibilities to Looked After children and young people, and care leavers.
- Make sure that staff working in allocations, arrears recovery and estate management receive appropriate training to better understand the particular needs of care leavers.
- Make sure that you work closely with colleagues in throughcare and aftercare services to develop realistic and sustainable pathways plans.
- Make sure that your housing allocation policy is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of care leavers without resorting to the use of homelessness legislation.
- Always consider the following basic questions:
- Does the accommodation meet any identified health or disability needs?
- Is the landlord or provider suitable?
- Does the accommodation meet the young person's needs in respect of education, training or employment, for example access to public transport?
- Think about all possible options, including starter flats, peer support arrangements and other creative options to offer young care leavers.
- Consider the community within which the young person will be living and the supports it offers, the positive friendships and relationships which need to be maintained.
- With colleagues across the council, support young people who are in full-time further or higher education, for example if they require

⁸ Redesigning support for care leavers. An IRISS partnership project working with the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, Argyll and Bute Council, Snook, practitioners and careleavers. <http://www.iriss.org.uk/project/re-designing-support-care-leavers>

vacation accommodation or through the provision of financial support to meet rent costs.

- Put in place effective joint working arrangements with clear procedures and effective resolution mechanisms.
- Consider providing supported accommodation, supported lodgings or supported carers schemes, supported flats or communal living opportunities. You may also wish to consider putting in place specialist housing and/or other support services where practical and emotional support is provided by dedicated staff, perhaps in partnership with the independent sector.
- Work with social work at the earliest opportunity to identify young people who are at risk of becoming homeless and arrange suitable accommodation for them, backed up by multi-agency support to help them to sustain the tenancy or other arrangement.
- Make sure that your joint protocols recognise that where a young care leaver becomes involved in anti-social behaviour, all services should take into account their care leaver status and the corporate parenting responsibilities that you have for that individual.
- When addressing a family's anti-social behaviour, be aware of whether there are children or young people living in the family home who are on supervision orders.
- Make sure that support for independent living includes an awareness amongst young people of their responsibilities to the community within which they live, and the potential consequences of their actions.

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