

About us

This Insight Paper is part of a series looking at how services are responding to what young people are telling us is important to them. Each paper will focus on a specific issue identified through our **Bright Spots** and **New Belongings programmes**, giving examples of how services are responding and identifying resources.

We will develop our peer learning network through regular newsletters, Twitter conversations and online peer learning seminars through which young people and workers will be able to share their experiences, and discuss and share practice examples

10,000 Voices

We have gained unprecedented insights into the views of children and young people through our Bright Spots Programme (a partnership with the University of Oxford, funded by the Hadley Trust) and related work.

Over the last 5 years we have gathered over 10,000 voices through our online surveys – **'Your Life, Your Care'** (children in care aged 4-18) and **'Your Life Beyond Care'** (care leavers aged 16-25).

The surveys were co-produced with children and young people to capture how they feel about their lives and support local authorities to systematically listen to their children in care and care leavers about the things that are important to them.

The findings from our care leaver survey have informed this paper.

Responding to Coronavirus is a challenge for us all and no different in our work with children in care and care leavers. As we respond to new circumstances it is important that we plan our services not only to keep our children and young people safe and supported but to make their lives as positive as possible at this time.

Listening to the views of young people on what makes their lives good has never been more important and we should regularly remind ourselves of what they tell us.

Care leavers' well-being

Almost a quarter of care leavers had low well-being and care leavers with low well-being were more likely to report other issues that will be exacerbated by the current crisis:



- **feeling lonely** always or often,
- not **feeling safe** or **settled** where you live,
- not having a **trusted person** or a **good friend**.

We also know from the Your Life Beyond Care survey that care leavers are more likely than young people in the general population to struggle financially, lack a smartphone or access to the internet and suffer high levels of anxiety.

Importantly, at a time when we are all asked to stay at home, 37% of care leavers **do not always feel safe** where they live and a third do not feel that **where they live is right for them**.

What 'Your Life Beyond Care' tells us about the role of the leaving care worker

The majority of care leavers who have responded to our survey have told us how much they value the support of their leaving care workers.

When care leavers are asked who gives them emotional support, just under half of them said it was their leaving care worker (second only to friends).

**She's amazing!
Always goes above and beyond for you, always makes sure you're okay and lets you know she's always around.**



Relationships need to be founded on **trust** and young people want to be able to **get in touch** with their workers easily. In these unprecedented times support from leaving care workers will be even more crucial.



Positively, prior to the Corona Virus Crisis, the majority of care leavers who responded to our surveys reported that they could trust and easily get in touch with their leaving care workers at least sometimes.

[Name] is a supportive lovely woman who always helps out and is ready to listen. Always replies back to my emails and answers my calls in time. Thank you 😊

- 78% always trusted their PA, 18% sometimes did and only 4% hardly ever/never did.
- 70% reported that they could get in touch all of the time, 26% sometimes and 4% hardly ever/never.

Spotlight on North Tyneside

Personal Advisers (PAs) are expected to have contact at least every 2 weeks and often it is more frequent.

All PAs completed risk assessments of their young people considering: 'if you were self-isolating':

- What would you need to manage?
- How would you access shopping/ medication?
- Who would support you - family friends/ neighbours?
- What would you do if your PA / family were off work or sick?
- Money – what would happen if you stopped working?

The assessments were recorded on the young person's record.

All the mobile phone numbers for PAs are on the Facebook page. Office phones are redirected to work mobiles and out of hours messages link with the Facebook page.

Parents who are separated from their children have been given phones to make video calls.

PAs have credit cards so they can do online shopping or give money to young people or family members.

PAs are posting a range of online activities to young people: well-being, meditation apps, and links to panda watching sites, virtual museum tours and mental health resources. Children Commissioner's guidance on Coronavirus has been sent to all care leavers.

Art and craft materials have been ordered – colouring books and pens etc.

Spotlight on East Sussex

Personal Advisers have contact with their care leavers at the start of each week so they can assess how they are managing and to set up plans for the week. They 'RAG rate' each young person in terms of how they are managing the isolation.

Where necessary they have bought young people phones or tablets if required by their college courses. This has meant that PAs are able to undertake a lot of video calls. It has been a long-standing policy to support young people with internet access at home and ensure they have the necessary equipment.

They have recognised that different groups of young people want contact in different ways, so a range of responses have been set up

- A cookery competition – baking a chocolate brownie, photos submitted for judging.
- Netflix afternoon – where young people and staff watch a film together and chat online. The leaving care service have paid for one month's subscription if needed.
- Art competitions with the view of having a Coronavirus Capsule of what young people did when they were isolated.
- Quizzes and chess games.
- To support their Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking care leavers they worked with the Virtual School and accommodation providers to ensure they were able to access online learning programmes.

For some young people they recognise that one to one sessions are needed.

They have daily team meetings at 9.30 which support the flow of creative ideas, support staff and help solve technical and other problems

How can local authorities support care leavers?

We have been in touch with a number of local authorities and we are really pleased that our local authority partners are building on the positive experiences care leavers have reported to continue to ensure that care leavers get the support from their leaving care teams in general and their personal advisors in particular.

[Name] is a supportive lovely women who always helps out and is ready to listen. Always replies back to my emails and answers my calls in time. Thank you 😊

Really love my leaving care PA. She treats me like a normal human being and I can tell her anything without fear of judgement.

I just want to say my social worker is the best for me she helped me all the time when I needed for everything she is available for anything I need

Spotlight on North Yorkshire

North Yorkshire have 'RAG rated' all their care leavers to decide on the nature of contact. Some young people are offered face to face visits - walking outside with their worker, other video calls. This is reviewed on a weekly basis. For isolated young people they have increased the level of contact.

North Yorkshire have also checked with young people the level of contact they are receiving from their wider support network.

Top tips for Personal Advisers and Leaving Care Services

- 1. Be particularly aware of the issues that impact on care leavers' well-being** including loneliness, access to support networks (friends and trusted people), issues with access to the internet, having the equipment to connect virtually, financial struggles and feeling safe and settled at home.
- 2. Check in on young people more regularly than you normally would:**

Are they ok? Do they need anything? What have they been up to? What are their plans for the week? Check if young people would like contact by text, phone or video call and at what frequency. This is a great time to build trust and show them that you are there. Explore who else from the local authority will keep in touch and support (e.g. the Virtual School, Participation workers).
- 3. Make sure you know young people's current circumstances and needs**, including:
 - Have they been identified as extremely vulnerable and told to self-isolate?
 - Who will support them practically and keep in contact with them, especially if self-isolating?
 - How will they maintain or take up new work or studies?
 - Do they need help making or sustaining benefits claims or to apply for jobs in sectors with staff shortages?
 - Can they access the food and medication they need? If not, how will you support them?
 - Are they able to keep in touch with friends and maintain social contact?
 - What are their hobbies and what help do they need to enjoy them?
 - Do they need support with money management, cooking and shopping skills?
 - Does the young person have access to the internet where they live and can they afford it?
 - Do they need equipment such as laptops, tablets or phones to keep in touch and access support?
- 4. Ensure the young person knows where to turn if they need support**
 - Do they have written information on accessing leaving care services, including key workers, the duty service and additional online support being offered?
 - Have you shared details of support from other services, such as food banks, local charities etc.?
 - Do they have written information on entitlements from leaving care services – do they have a copy of the Local Offer and additional support being offered during the Coronavirus crisis?
- 5. Speak to the young person about how their birth family / support network can help them.**
 - Who would help them if they had to self-isolate?
 - How will the young person support their birth family?
 - Do they need support to have these conversations?
 - What help do they need to parent their own children?
- 6. Identify contingency plans** capturing what will happen if:
 - The young person is sick or needs to self-isolate.
 - Family members or other key people in their support network are unwell.
 - Their leaving care PA is off work and can't keep in touch.
- 7. Make sure the contact details for the young person and people who support them are up-to-date** on your client data base and you have recorded their preferred way for you to get in touch, in case their leaving care PA is off work.
- 8. Have systems in place for emergency financial and practical support**, e.g.:
 - Make sure you have the bank account details of the young person and they are set up on any council payment systems so urgent payments can be made.
 - Provide PAs with a credit card so they can do essential shopping if necessary for young people.
- 9. Ensure staff have the equipment needed to keep in touch and support young people remotely.** Provide PAs with have a smartphone and other IT equipment for remote working and ensure that they know how to set up group calls and video conferencing so virtual meetings can be held.
- 10. Have fun together virtually** – use participation staff or leaving care team to keep in touch and do fun things together virtually such as film clubs, games, quizzes, cooking challenges and art activities.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Always Heard

If you are working with young people who are not getting the support they need our **National Advocacy Helpline and Safety Net, Always Heard**, remains open to support children in care and care leavers to access help.

When you highlight issues through the helpline we will also be able to anonymously collate what young people and services are struggling with and ensure this is fed back nationally to the Department of Education.

Other resources

- [Government Covid-19 guidance for children's social care services](#) – Central government guidance that highlights what services should prioritise
- [Find your nearest foodbank](#) – Trussel Trust list of local provision
- [Database of Covid 19 mutual Aid groups](#)
- [Become - Corona virus advice for care experienced young people](#)

Understanding young people's experiences and sharing learning

As part of our response to the Covid-19 outbreak we are all working differently. Our Voices Improving Care team is working from home and frontline services continue to support children and young people remotely.

We will collate and share resources on how to support children in care and care leavers' well-being and making sure they get heard during this difficult time. We would love to hear about what you are doing too.

A National Voice – bringing young voices together

A National Voice, the 'National Children in Care Council', launched a virtual community through social media on Wednesday 8 April 2020, for care experienced children and young people where we will be talking about the things that are important to children in care and care leavers and encouraging debate around people's experiences with the care system, changes they would like to see and ways Coram Voice can better support them.

We will provide useful resources, activities and opportunities happening with children in care and care leavers at a local and national level. Future plans include using the platform to let young people know about events and activities we are holding, including an 'art club' for children in care and care leavers and virtual events for young people to link with others in a safe online space carefully led and moderated by our participation team.

You can find out more here <https://coramvoice.org.uk/latest/a-national-voice-launches-online-community/> or email anv@coramvoice.org.uk

Voices Improving Care Virtual Peer Learning Network

We will build a Virtual Peer Learning Network with our Bright Spots and New Belongings partners, but of course if you are not yet involved, we'd love to include you too.

- Sign up to our [newsletter](http://eepurl.com/dswz3T) <http://eepurl.com/dswz3T> for regular updates, insights and practice ideas.
- Join our **Online Peer Learning Seminars** – we will send out details on these through the newsletter mailing list, so make sure you are signed up.
- Follow @CoramVoice on **twitter** and look out for #VoicesImprovingCare and #ANationalVoice
- Get in touch via email brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk

Contact ALWAYS HEARD on

📞 Freephone helpline: 0808 800 5792
✉ Email: help@coramvoice.org.uk
💬 Text and WhatsApp: 07758 670369
🌐 www.coramvoice.org.uk/alwaysheard