

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

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[Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work](#)

Evidence from The Fostering Network Wales – AYP 18

The Fostering Network

**The National Assembly for Wales's Enterprise and Business
Committee Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work.**

November 2014

EVERY CHILD • EVERY CARER • EVERY DAY

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The National Assembly for Wales's Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work.

1. Introduction

The Fostering Network was established in 1974 and is now the UK's leading charity for everyone involved in fostering, bringing together all those who provide, plan and deliver foster care. Our UK membership includes almost all local authorities and Health and Social Services Trusts, over 57,000 foster carers, and 188 independent fostering providers.

The Fostering Network Wales, based in Cardiff, was established in 2002 and works with foster carers, fostering services and care-experienced young people across Wales. We have a strong membership base in Wales with over 5,400 foster carers, local authorities (fostering services) and the majority of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's).

All of our work is designed to improve the lives of children in foster care. We provide an extensive range of publications, training, information and advice on all fostering issues. We work with our members to implement good practice, informed by our research and experience, to ensure foster care is improved for children. We campaign to improve the support that foster carers receive and work with fostering services to address the shortage of foster carers. We also ensure that the voices of fostered children are heard at the heart of the foster care system.

Our team includes foster carers, registered social workers and other experts from across the spectrum of foster care, including those that have been fostered themselves. Together we have many years' experience and unrivalled expertise. That is why we are the voice of foster care.

The Fostering Network welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Enterprise and Business Committee, and to highlight the need to focus on looked after children and care leavers, as part of this inquiry.

Through our work with Foster families, our objective is to support children and young people to live fulfilled and independent lives, and we work alongside our statutory partners to provide bespoke training and support programmes to help achieve this.

Looked after children and Care Leavers remain one of the most vulnerable groups of children and young people, their outcomes in terms of educational achievement, independent living and stable employment remain of acute concern. They require a unique set of interventions and support in recognition of their lack of family support, and vulnerability. It is critical that statutory services working in partnership with the voluntary sector are able to prioritise and support improved employment outcomes for this vulnerable group of young people.

This consultation response sets out the view of The Fostering Network on those areas which remain a barrier to work for care leavers, and highlights the different and unique challenges they face.

2. What support is most effective and what are the main barriers that face young people trying to enter the labour market?

Care Leavers are one of the most vulnerable and unique groups in Welsh society - a group at high risk of social exclusion, poverty and unemployment. The Fostering Network believes that care leavers need to remain a priority, with a framework of support that enables a multi-agency approach, tailored around their individual needs to support their entry into employment. This support should consider both their housing and benefits needs, together with strong support to create tailored employment and training solutions to assist them into work and further/higher education.

a. Specific Barrier-Leaving care

Care leavers are expected to make the shift to adulthood much more rapidly than their peers, and at a younger age. The majority of young people leave care between the ages of 16-18, whereas the average age for a young person to leave home is 24. Many young people are leaving care too early, and their ability to access ongoing support is limited. We are further concerned around the impact of cuts to local authority budgets on support for care leavers.

Many young people not in care are able to rely on parental support throughout their life most care leavers do not have family support to fall back on. Care leavers do not normally have the essential element of stability when so many things are in a state of change – a new

job, a new place to live and leaving school. Having to cope with so many aspects of becoming 'immediately' independent, and not always with good support in place, can make it difficult for young people to gain and maintain work.

The Fostering Network believes that preparation for adult life is critical, and something which the Network has worked with partners on to deliver and to campaign for improvement. Many young people lack the life skills and support they need. Young people's transitions from care to adulthood are often 'accelerated and compressed' and for many leaving care can be 'instant adulthood'. These transitions are particularly complex for young people with asylum or immigration issues those with disabilities or mental health issues and those who have been detained in the youth justice system. As such it remains a concern that outcomes for care leavers in Wales are significantly poorer than those of other groups of young people.

Finding and maintaining a job can be difficult for care leavers. Young people from care are much more likely than their peers to experience unemployment, both when first leaving school and throughout life. Welsh Government statistics for the year 2013-14 reveal that 49% of young people aged 19, who were formerly in care, are not in education, employment or training. ([Welsh Government](#))

Case study: XXXXXX

XXXXXX is now 24. He is a very vulnerable young man with mental health difficulties, a chaotic lifestyle including drug abuse, and no qualifications. He is also HIV positive.

XXXXXX entered care when he was 12. He has had over 25 different placements in care and as a care leaver. During his time in care he was very vulnerable young person with mental health difficulties, out of education, involvement in the youth justice system, and drug misuse.

Leaving care regulations meant that when he turned 18 he needed to leave his placement. He was having problems finding a suitable home, and was eventually placed alone in a self-contained flat which he could not manage.

He remained highly vulnerable and had no qualifications and was unable to access education or training or get a job. This meant that when he turned 21, despite his considerable needs, the local authority closed his case. They had no further duty towards him as he was not in

education or training.

Despite his illness, he had started an access course and had asked the local authority for support as he wanted to complete this course and enter higher education. This had been refused. XXXXXX needed intensive on-going support and understanding in order for him to make the transition to adult life, his circumstances meant that this support needed to continue beyond the age of 21. However, the current system meant that the local authority was under no duty to provide this support.

b. Specific Barrier-Teenage Parenthood

Children and young people in care are almost two and a half times more likely to become teenage parents, compared with those children brought up with both birth parents. A quarter of young women [leaving care](#) are pregnant or already mother and nearly half become mothers by the age of 24.5. Looked-after young people are at greater risk of teenage pregnancy and are 2.5 times more likely to become pregnant than other teenagers. This further exacerbates the difficulties they face in accessing support, training or employment.

c . Specific Barrier- Health and Wellbeing

Another major barrier that care leavers face in accessing employment or training is their health. For care leavers, health issues include a lack of emotional well-being, multiple mental health issues and lack of mental health support. This is widely referenced in relevant literature and reflected in statistics. Sempik (2008) finds that 72% of children in care have behavioural or emotional problems - these are some of the most vulnerable people in our society. (Sempik, 2008) ¹. In addition, a 2004 study found that the prevalence of mental disorders for children and young people aged 5-17 years looked after by local authorities in Wales was 49 per cent. 42 per cent had clinically significant conduct disorders; 10 per cent had emotional disorders (anxiety and depression) and 12 percent were rated as hyperactive. Another recent study found that psychiatric disorders are particularly high among those living in residential care and with many changes of placement.²

Disabled children also constitute a significant group in the looked after system. Between 10-20% of looked after children are disabled. Disability may also act as a barrier to employment.

d. Specific Barrier-Lack of knowledge about the welfare system

The Fostering Network believe that any looked after child should be supported to have a seamless transition to independent living, and this would include options about living arrangements, and the support available to them, such as that through the benefit system. There is some concern that currently this is not being effective as the following quotes, taken from Welsh foster carers and care leavers speaking at a Fostering Network focus group in 2014 demonstrate.

'It's not unusual for a young person to be told they are better off on benefits rather than getting a job, there has to be better aspirations for them'

'Sometimes children who work really hard get penalised. There's no reward for working'

'Everyone has low expectations of us – to be drunk, pregnant or on drugs'

The Fostering Network believe that supporting looked after children and care leavers to have high aspirations and reach their true potential is vital, but this will only be achieved if current services demonstrate a culture change to support and enable care leavers to achieve improved life outcomes. Our recent report called ['Fostering Higher Educational success'](#)³, undertaken in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University calls for systemic cultural change to support this vision.

e. Specific- Barrier Drugs and Alcohol

Shocking statistics demonstrate that almost a third of young people misuse drugs and alcohol within a year of leaving care. One study found that over half of the individuals with a history of care had used cannabis in the past month, with 15% having used ecstasy and 10% having used cocaine⁴. The Who Cares Trust further states that, 10% reported that they had previously used heroin or crack cocaine. Drug use can be both a symptom and a cause of

social exclusion and has far reaching effects, especially for vulnerable groups such as care leavers who often struggle with depression, health issues, crime and homelessness. The Fostering Network supports the view that more specialist services are needed and the intervention needs to form part of a holistic plan addressing employment and training as well as drug issues.

f. Specific Barrier-Education

There are a number of reasons for care leavers' poor employment outcomes. Care leavers have a much lower [educational attainment](#) than their peers with the resulting lack of qualifications then impacts on their chances of employment. Between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014, 663 care leavers aged 16 or over ceased being looked after and 72 per cent of these children had at least one qualification. The proportion of care leavers aged 16 or over with 5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to G was 37 per cent in 2013-14. In 2013-14, 77 children in this cohort (12 per cent) achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to C.

Statistics suggest that Looked-after children mostly come from a very disadvantaged population and many have had disrupted schooling before they became looked after. In the past this has been used as an 'excuse' as to why looked-after children have such poor levels of attainment. Increasingly it is being recognised that the public care system may itself be contributing to these poor outcomes. Even when this is not the case, there is always more that can be done to ensure that looked-after children achieve their potential.

There are seven factors that contribute to poor outcomes for looked-after children

1. A lack of ambition
2. Placement instability
3. High rates of school exclusion and poor quality educational provision
4. A lack of remedial help
5. Leaving foster care too young
6. The low educational achievements of foster carers
7. The failure of corporate parenting.

3. What support is the most effective in assisting care leavers into employment?

a. Most effective support-improving educational attainment

No single measure or activity will transform educational outcomes for looked-after children and care leavers. To achieve this will require sustained investment in the foster care system and it will require action to improve stability and the Fostering Network are currently working with Welsh Government to develop regulations to underpin Part 6 of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014, around the promotion of placement stability. In addition the Fostering Network believes a number of measures are required that will equip and enable foster carers to deliver improved outcomes.

Foster carers are the key to ensuring that all looked-after children achieve their potential. But foster carers must be trained and equipped for this job. The Fostering Network wants to see co-ordinated efforts to increase the skills, status and authority of foster carers. These will include:

- Foster carers being registered with the Care Council Wales
- Improved training for foster carers, including joint training with residential social workers
- Guidance that further clarifies the authority of foster carers to make decisions with regard to the children they foster
- Improved partnerships between foster carers and schools
- Foster carers having access to funds to purchase supplementary activities for children in foster care
- Foster carers seen as first educators of children in foster care
- Improved access to remedial and supplementary education/coaching
- An increase in funding to support the number of 18 -21 year olds living with foster carers. Action for Children report, Chance to Stay, shows that young people who stay in foster care achieve more qualifications (55%) and are less likely to be involved in alcohol and substance misuse than those who leave by the age of 18.

The Fostering Network led the successful campaign with Action for Children to extend placements up to the age of 21, and which has now been enshrined in the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014. The Fostering Network continue to work with Welsh Government and our partners in the ADSS to support its implementation which will require a period of transition, extra resources to deliver training support for foster carers and resources to help recruit and retain additional Foster Carers.

b. Most effective support-Improving higher and further educational attainment

There is a need to focus on improving the educational attainment of children in care and entry to HE and FE, which in turn will impact on care leavers' ability to secure meaningful employment. The Fostering Network have worked in partnership with Welsh Government to inform a strategy for the educational attainment for looked after children, we strongly believe a similar piece of work should be undertaken for care leavers. In England, The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 reinforces the proposals set out in *Care Matters: Time for Change*, aiming to improve educational attainment for young people in care. It introduces a duty for local authorities to provide further assistance to young people who are in care or who have recently left care for education and training, including the requirement to carry out an assessment of their educational and training needs.

4. How effective are the range of schemes, initiatives and projects aimed at supporting young people into work, Do they provide good value for money?

a- Effective schemes- the importance of the third sector is assisting care leavers into employment

The Fostering Network believes that the third sector is uniquely placed to work in collaboration with the statutory sector, to provide a range of services and support to assist care leavers into employment. The Fostering Network is uniquely placed as the leading foster care charity in Wales, and has a strong track record and history of support and intervention. We are uniquely placed to support Foster Care with over 5,000 members in Wales and membership across the local authority and independent sectors. In partnership with a range of statutory and third sector partners, we have delivered a range of projects supporting hard to reach groups such as Care Leavers to deliver new ways of working,

models of care and training and support programmes.

Care Matters England suggests that statutory, private and voluntary sector organisations can and should work together locally to offer work experience and employment opportunities to young people from care.⁵ The Fostering Network support this view, and our experience in Wales has been that multi agency approaches are very valuable.

*'Third sector organisations have an enormous amount to contribute to our public services, both in the ways they are designed and delivered and in the ways they are improved and held to account.'*¹

In England, the Who Cares Trust managed a *Building Futures* project and worked in partnership with the business sector. In addition to lessons about how best to involve and work with young people from care on an employability scheme, there were also several wider learning outcomes. The first is that many care leavers may need more preparation and support before they are ready to engage in and gain benefit from an employment programme. This may include providing training in skills such as time-keeping, team working, initiative, answering the telephone etc. However, it is also about preparing young people emotionally for the challenge and providing the necessary support and encouragement throughout.

Young people leaving care are in a very unique circumstance; having to make the transition to adulthood more quickly, at a younger age and with less support than the majority of their peers. A targeted employment scheme could take all those issues into account and provide positive outcomes for a greater number and broader range of young people from care.

5. Recommendations

This response has provided an overview of the key issues and challenges facing care leavers, in accessing training and employment. The response sets out the value of the third sector in working in collaboration with wider public services to support and assist care leavers.

The Fostering Network believes that there needs to be a renewed focus on care leavers in Wales through forthcoming policy and legislation and that immediate work should be

¹ Source: Partnership in Public Services: An Action Plan for Third Sector Involvement, Office of the Third Sector (2006)

undertaken to consider what an extended model of support for care leavers in Wales should look like.

To inform this there is a need to undertake a detailed cost benefit analysis of an extended support model for care leavers. The analysis will detail the savings which can be made, and from which budgets, by shifting the focus from crisis intervention and ancillary costs such as health, housing or custodial provision to continued support and early intervention.

There is already a wealth of good practice in existence in Wales at a local authority level, and through the support of third sector programmes. Yet this is not consistent, and The Fostering Network calls for a renewed focus on support for Care Leavers to access employment and training which promotes good practice and consistent approaches across Wales.

Further, there needs to be a greater focus on cross-departmental support for both children and young people in the care system and care leavers. We believe that a greater focus on how the Welsh government can combine efforts around education, employment and skills is required.

Our recommendations listed here would decrease this employment inequality for care leavers and provide vital opportunities for this vulnerable group. Supporting young people from care into sustainable employment should be an important element of the government's agenda and The Fostering Network are keen to support ongoing improvement work to this vital agenda.

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