

University Of Essex Outreach Event 17th June 2021

Become training:

Supporting Care Experienced Young People on their HE Journey

This session aims to raise awareness of the issues faced by care experienced young people and the potential barriers they may have to accessing higher education. Alongside this, we aim to highlight good practice that supports care experienced young people into university and during their degrees and hear some top tips for professionals shared by care leavers themselves.

Training Handout:

Care Leavers in HE are more likely to



Care Leavers in HE



Leaving Care

1. In England and Wales, the leaving care age is 18, although young people can leave care from the age of 16
2. A young person's care order ends at 18 but they are entitled to support from the leaving care service in their local authority – the level of this support is based on their eligibility i.e. are they a former relevant child or qualifying
3. All statutory support from the local authority will end by age 25

I Fell Off The Care Cliff – Quote's from Care-Experienced Young People

1. "At 18 I was essentially on my own, and had recently got back into education, and was starting to push for the life I wanted. I shouldn't have had to push so hard simply to be given support and an opportunity."
2. "As a care leaver, I remember feeling scared, rejected and vulnerable. It felt like everyone just stopped caring. I had no room for error, I had to live independently and make it work."
3. "I was still in 6th form, finding myself a flat and living on benefits to support myself to finish my education. I often had less than £10 to my name and my flat had slugs and holes in the roof."

The Care Cliff

Typified by:

- a significant drop in support from professionals
- moving to new accommodation - often away from the young person's existing support network
- barriers when accessing financial support
- barriers accessing education, training or employment
- difficulty transitioning to adult mental health services

The fragmented nature of the system means that, too often, young people do not get the help they need



Potential Barriers & Challenges

1. Gaps in education owing to frequent moves and school changes resulting in missing GCSEs or lower than expected results
2. Postcode lottery on what is offered by different local authorities e.g. some just give statutory £2k over course of the degree, others may fund accommodation & part of tuition fees
3. Potential to 'lose' accommodation if they are already living independently so decision not to move area might affect choice of uni
4. Concerns over maintaining regular contact with siblings if moving far away
5. Big financial commitment

6. Summer breaks – uncertainty about where to go if not staying in halls when everyone goes home
7. Not wanting to seek help and letting people know about care experience
8. Choosing unis – going to Open Days alone
9. Applying for student finance
10. No one to bounce ideas off around about accommodation
11. Transporting gear to uni
12. No where to store furniture etc – can't leave stuff at home and can't afford storage
13. Personal Advisors don't have knowledge of supporting students to Uni and don't know about financial grants
14. Challenging to make friends because moved around a lot
15. Hard to keep in contact with siblings
16. Constant change of workers
17. Immigration status affecting eligibility for student finance and home fees

Immigration Status & HE entitlement

Taken from Refugee Support Network Factsheet: Transitions to HE for Refugee Young people in the UK

 IMMIGRATION STATUS	 TOP-LEVEL SUMMARY OF ENTITLEMENTS IN ENGLAND ²
Asylum seekers	Likely to be classified as overseas students and unable to access student finance
Limited Leave to Remain ³ Discretionary Leave to Remain ⁴	Likely to be classified as overseas students and unable to access student finance. However, a number of exceptions exist including the 'Seven year/half-life rule'
Indefinite Leave to Remain Section 67 Leave Calais Leave	Eligible for home fees and student finance but required to prove three years' ordinary residency
Refugee status Humanitarian protection ⁵	Eligible for home fees and student finance

Quote's from Care-Experienced Young People (from NNECL - MOVING ON UP: Pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education Neil Harrison November 2017)

Isolation & Low Levels of Support

1. 'I think I found the whole process difficult as I felt so alone and it became really obvious that I didn't have any family or anyone who cared about me. Everyone else had their parents there who helped them unpack, bought them food and checked in on them.'
2. I would have liked more support from my foster carer. Regular phone calls or texts to see how I was coping would have been nice.'

3. '[I had] no specialist support available and at this time I found the structure of university life very difficult having had minimal structure and boundaries in my childhood.' '[I had] unresolved issues concerning the ability to interact with others and psychological impact of being in care in earlier life.'
4. 'I find that a lot of people around me have extra support from mum and dad, and tutors have had a similar upbringing and have already gone on to be successful. I think it's harder for staff at the university to understand that I am entirely responsible for myself, without a Plan B if anything goes wrong.'

Financial

1. 'Student finance doesn't stretch to last the full year, even with no social nights.'
2. 'I didn't receive my student loan for another month [after starting], without the option of any further support until I got my loan.'
3. 'I was completely unaware how to apply for student finance as a care leaver which left me having problems getting money on time [...] no one told me.'
4. 'No one teaches you about finances and when your student loans/bursaries etc. aren't enough to cover your rent/books/basic living and you end up in an overdraft you can't afford to pay back.'

Accommodation

1. My primary difficulty was a lack of support in between term times as I did not have a place to live. If I did not have girlfriend at the time I wouldn't have known where to stay.'
2. 'The university has supported me through summer vacation housing although I had been panicking for a while about becoming homeless.'

Good Practice Examples

Support Before Uni

University:	School/College:
<p>Taster days / summer projects at universities</p> <p>Pre-application help from the university</p> <p>Dedicated webpage on university site</p> <p>Buddying with a care leaver who is at or has been through university</p>	<p>Early discussions in Personal Education Planning Meetings (PEP)</p> <p>Help with UCAS form, particularly in writing personal statement – tick the care leaver box!</p> <p>References – share with the young person to give them confidence</p> <p>Using Propel to review university support and any additional funding available</p> <p>Interview prep</p>

Local Authority:	Foster Carers/Key Workers:
<p>Funding purchase of clothes for interview</p> <p>Help with student loan applications</p> <p>Write university into the Pathway Plan, including if it's a longer term plan as a mature student</p>	<p>Open days - help plan for this, accompany them if wanted, ensure they have funds for travel etc.</p> <p>Check Local Offer in the home local authority to find out what the university package is</p> <p>Explore child care if necessary</p> <p>Help find support groups etc.</p>

Support During Uni

1. Designated member of staff for care leavers to provide practical and pastoral support
2. Year round accommodation offer
3. Finance – bursaries, grants, hardship loans, money for books & equipment
4. Paid opportunities e.g. student ambassador, internships during holidays etc
5. Former teachers, foster carers etc to keep in touch
6. Tutors mindful of potential low levels of support from family or local authority
7. Staff aware that final year not only brings academic pressure but worries over what happens next and concerns where the young person might be living and how they will support themselves
8. Opportunities for care leaver to get together – common experience can be uniting
9. Budgeting courses

Support For Finishing Uni & Beyond

1. Graduation package funding
2. Pastoral support to check in about future plans
3. Opportunities to stay in touch with university faculty/widening participation team
4. Careers support and help with job applications
5. Finance – help to apply for universal credit, increase awareness of things like council tax, water rates
6. Emotional support – help with imposter syndrome

The Propel Website



A young person can use the Propel website to:

- learn more about the support they are entitled to
- research what support is offered by different universities

- read and watch inspirational stories from other care leavers
- learn the name of a specific contact at the university who can assist with organizing a tour or provide additional advice and guidance

Dembo's HE Story



*"You have to **adapt to circumstances** but you don't have to give up on your dreams"*

1. I'm studying [maths and statistics](#) at the [Open University](#). I'm doing it part time for financial reasons, hopefully over four years. I work in a cinema to pay for it. For me, the OU is a good way for me to study as well as working. You have to be really committed - I only see my teachers once every three months. Where I come from in Guinea, after a certain age you can't go to uni. But at the OU some students are much older than me – they have families or are in their fifties and are still studying. I really admire it! It made me realise it's never too late to study.
2. The biggest challenge for me was my immigration status. I had discretionary leave to remain but in 2012 the government changed the law so I couldn't apply to Student Finance to fund my uni course. I really wanted to go to Southampton to do medicine but I couldn't go to the interview because of my immigration status. The following year I applied again and two more unis gave me offers but I couldn't accept them because my immigration status didn't change.
3. This year I decided to go to uni whatever. My local authority said they'd pay but then changed their mind, so I'm paying for myself and continuing applying for funding towards my tuition cost. I'd say to others in this situation, provided it is in your care plan or pathway plan, if your discretionary leave is active, your local authority CAN fund your education, so do whatever it takes to get their support. They may say no at first – but keep pushing and hopefully they will review it.
4. "You have to **adapt to circumstances** but you don't have to give up on your dreams"
5. I still want to be a doctor. I'm doing an undergraduate degree in maths and statistics to get a job to pay my way through training to be a doctor. You have to adapt to circumstances but you don't have to give up on your dreams.
6. I think education is seen as being primarily about numeracy and literacy. But for me it goes far beyond that. Education is the best tool any country can give to its children, because through education we can tackle issues such as poverty, crime, racism and homophobia. Education helps people look after their families and gives people independence.



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