

Into the mainstream

Into the mainstream

Care leavers entering work, education and training

Maggie Allen

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Executive summary

Research has shown that young people leaving care are less likely to be involved in education, training or employment and are more vulnerable to poor life chances and social exclusion in later life. This study sought to examine care leavers' transitions to independent living and to identify the factors that help and hinder their economic engagement.

The research involved semi-structured interviews with a small group of young people shortly after leaving care and one year later. The interviews explored their current and previous economic circumstances and activities, their support networks and the factors that affected their involvement in post-16 career options, such as housing needs, substance abuse and debt. Data from their social services records were also included in the analysis. A number of themes emerged.

Care history

Young people who enjoyed a relatively stable looked after experience were more likely to be settled post-16. Important factors that affected their care experience included the age they entered care, the reasons that brought them there, and the number and type of placements they experienced. Care history affected young people's ability to build and maintain significant relationships, their schooling, and their attitudes and self-esteem.

Educational achievement

The young person's care experience had an impact on their educational achievement. Because of their disrupted childhood, a number of young people were already struggling with their schoolwork when they entered care. Schooling was further affected by moves to new placements that on occasions, also required a change of school. On these occasions, young people struggled because schools were following different curricula. Getting behind in their work undermined young people's

motivation and self-confidence and had a bearing on their educational achievement. Most young people left school with few or no qualifications.

Financial worries

Young people were deterred from continuing with their education or undertaking training because of concerns about how they would support themselves during that time. Training and benefit allowances reflect an expectation that a young person will be living in the parental home, without the costs associated with independent living. Although young people could find part-time work to supplement their income they were discouraged from doing so because of the complicated rules on housing benefit. The interviews also revealed that a number of young people were ill-informed about care leaver benefits.

Informal and professional support

Professional and informal support were crucial in enabling young people to overcome the difficulties arising out of their childhood experiences and current circumstances in order to enter and remain engaged in employment, training or education. Young people benefited from help in finding out about their career options, developing plans and accessing opportunities. Professionals were best placed to provide this type of support, notably those professionals such as Lifeskills mentors and New Deal advisers who had long-term, consistent engagement with the young person. Help was also obtained from careers advisers, teachers and others close to the young person.

Young people who could access emotional support fared better. This type of support included encouragement to apply for jobs or training, exhortation to stick at what they were doing, and someone who was available when so much else in their lives was changing. Young people who had a history of being moved on were most in need of

this type of support because they were most likely to drop out when life became challenging. In general, emotional support was provided by family or substitute family members, but some young people found this type of help from ‘befriending’ professionals, such as sessional workers.

Young people also benefited from help in easing them across the transition from being ‘cared for’ to caring for themselves, e.g. managing their budgets and ‘keeping house’. Family or substitute family members often provided the practical assistance young people needed, such as an evening meal or help with the laundry, although in some cases a landlady or significant other provided the bridge into young adulthood. Ex-foster carers were also an important source of support, often some time after the young person had left home and even where the young person had little initial contact with the foster carer.

When professionals helped

Professionals were rated by young people when they had a long-term or well-established relationship with the care leaver; when the professional provided informal or befriending support or support that reflected the care leaver’s new, young adult status; and when the help the young person needed was flexible and tailored to their circumstances.

Life circumstances

The circumstances surrounding the care leaver’s transition to independence played a significant part in influencing his or her success. Settled post-16 circumstances, such as accommodation, relationships and health, were associated with engagement with post-16 economic options. Young people in secure accommodation – ideally living with family members, in a substitute family structure, or in supported housing – were more likely to enter and remain engaged in their chosen activity. Young people who had to cope with

difficult issues and a significant amount of change after care struggled to stay in work or continue with a course of study. Factors that affected them included substance abuse; poor health; the breakdown of a relationship and loss of other friendships / relationships; bereavement; and frequent house moves. Young people were more likely to be able to ride out these difficulties when they had the support of a significant other – professional or informal helper – available to them.

Parenthood

Young mothers in the group struggled with the same issues as the rest of the sample, but in some cases their worries were greater. For example, mothers were particularly concerned about their financial responsibilities and the effect of work on their benefit entitlements. They also faced additional challenges. Mothers were deterred from obtaining work or developing their skills and education because of difficulties obtaining childcare and problems of travelling out of rural areas to take up employment and training opportunities. Their concerns about being a good mother and looking after their children also encouraged young mothers to delay continuing with their education or pursuing career goals until the child was older. Despite these issues the young mothers tended to show greater maturity than their peers and were moving more rapidly towards an ‘independent’ adult status.

Problems associated with a rural area

The size and sparsely populated nature of the study area created a number of problems. As was the case for the mothers, opportunities in rural areas were limited. Taking up opportunities could involve moving away from vital support networks. When the young people were in care, subsequent placements were often some distance from a home area and young people found it difficult to

maintain contact with friends and family. It also made it difficult to ensure young people continued at the same school when placements broke down.

Attitudes and motivation

Care leavers' self-reliance and attitudes were important factors in helping them to achieve a successful young adulthood. Attitudes to education were also important and underwent a shift after leaving care when young people were exposed to the difficulties of obtaining reasonably paid work with few qualifications. Many of the care leavers expressed regret that they had not fared better at school and, in some cases, a desire to continue with their education in order to improve their future prospects.

Success in the face of adversity

In view of the adverse circumstances of their childhood and, in some cases, the looked after experience, many of the young people showed remarkable resilience in the transition to young adulthood. Faced with many more obstacles than their peers from stable backgrounds, they overcame financial difficulties, substance abuse, relationship breakdown and ill health at the same time as they sought to find and hold on to settled housing, establish themselves in a new work or educational environment and 'keep house' for the first time.

Implications for policy and practice

The study revealed a number of areas in which policy and practice could be changed in order to improve young people's chances of success on leaving care. Chances could be enhanced by:

- improving the professional support available to young people, e.g. by making it more

appropriate to the care leaver's new, young adult status; by making it flexible and tailored to the young person's needs; and by ensuring that it is provided by a few professionals who are a consistent presence in the young person's life

- ensuring employment and careers services meet the particular needs of care leavers, such as support in dealing with the demands of independent living compared with peers who continue to live in the family home
- facilitating the development of young people's informal support networks
- tackling the numerous financial barriers to training and education, including barriers to resuming their basic education in later life
- helping young people to be informed about and to access the range of benefits and support available to them on leaving care
- minimising disruption to the young person's education while in care and maximising their involvement while at school by ensuring schools follow the same curriculum; by helping a new pupil catch up with classmates; and by exploring new initiatives such as learning mentors
- developing strategies to address financial and practical issues arising out of living in a sparsely populated, rural area, including young people's difficulties in keeping in touch with people when moved to new placements, lack of local opportunities and poor transport links
- developing support that tackles young people's emotional and behavioural problems before they become entrenched and enabling young people to build on the considerable resilience and self-determination they demonstrate both during and after care.

1 Introduction

Background to the study

Care leavers' vulnerability to unemployment and poorer educational achievement is well documented (Biehal *et al.*, 1995; Stein, 1997; Stein and Wade, 2000). Between 2000 and 2002 only 37 per cent of care leavers within England achieved at least one GCSE or GNVQ compared with 94 per cent of 16-year-olds in the general population. In the academic year 2000/1, just 6 per cent of care leavers in the large rural shire county where this study took place obtained five A–C GCSEs compared with 59 per cent of young people leaving school in the county who achieved five or more A–C GCSEs (Department of Health, 2002) and a national average of 52 per cent.

Care leavers' post-16 prospects are equally disadvantaged (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). For example, a survey involving 2,905 care leavers found that 11 per cent were working full-time, 4 per cent were in part-time work, 28 per cent were involved in youth training, further and higher education and 51 per cent were unemployed (Broad, 1998). Locally, in 1999/2000 half of the care leavers in the county in which the study took place were not involved in any economic activity compared with just 3–4 per cent of other Year 11 young people (Guidance Enterprises Group Ltd).

Supporting care leavers

A number of studies have documented the link between employment support for care leavers and their chances of remaining economically engaged (Lakey *et al.*, 2001). Lakey *et al.* found that frequent moves between schools meant care leavers were more likely to drop out of school before taking exams. These young people were also more likely to require extra support when starting work because of emotional difficulties and low self-esteem. However, care leavers were less likely to have family support that might help them through their adjustment to work or further education and training. Furthermore, the economic pressures of

living independently meant that many care leavers remained out of work because concerns about the risk to their housing benefit prevented them from accepting low-paid jobs.

In 1999, the Department of Health launched the Quality Protects Programme (QPP), which aimed to enhance the life chances of young people leaving care by improving the support they receive during the transition to economic independence (see Appendix 1 for information on local authority responsibilities to care leavers). This research was conducted in order to examine how young people's chances could be improved and the targets of the QPP met. Legislative changes since the start of the project mean that care is now delivered according to the standards set by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. It is hoped that the findings from the research will inform and enhance the service offered to care leavers as part of this new legislative framework.

The research project

Aims

The study aimed to understand the factors that affected the care leaver's ability to engage in education, training and employment from the young person's perspective. The project addressed the following questions:

- How did frequent changes in schooling and care placements affect the young person's ability to negotiate the transition to economic independence?
- What support networks were available to young people and how did they impact on care leavers' current and future involvement in education, training and employment activities?
- How did care leavers' personal circumstances, such as their accommodation and relationships, affect their economic involvement?

Approach

The study involved semi-structured interviews with a sample of care leavers conducted by practitioners working in the looked after system. The research aimed to unravel the process of entering the world of work, training or education by interviewing young people shortly after leaving care and one year later.

Outline of the report

Chapter 2 outlines the study method. The circumstances of the young people shortly after leaving care are presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reports on the factors young people believed affected their economic choices and decisions on leaving care. The young people's work, training and education activities a year after care are presented in Chapter 5. The factors that promoted and prevented young people's social and economic engagement a year after leaving care are reported in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 summarises the key findings and explores their implications for policy and practice.

2 Method

The sample

The study involved 36 young people who had been cared for under the auspices of the Children Act 1989, Section 31 or 20, and who had left care before the implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 in October 2001. The majority of interviewees had left care less than a year before the interview, although 6 per cent had been out of care for more than a year. Young people were included in the study if they had been looked after for three months or more and had continued to be accommodated by the local authority at some point after their sixteenth birthday. Eight of the group were looked after under a Section 31 care order, as opposed to the more common 'voluntary' looked after accommodation status (Children Act 1989, Section 20). A court grants a care order where it is satisfied that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm as a result of the care it is under, or if the child is beyond parental control. Although technically still in the care of the local authority (LA) by virtue of the care order, these young people were living within the community and not with foster carers or in a residential children's centre. In these cases, the LA continued to be responsible for their financial maintenance and accommodation costs, but in any other respects the young people were similar to those who had already left care.

Sample design and recruitment

The sample was designed to represent a range of care experiences and young people were recruited according to factors such as the length of time since leaving care, their looked after experience, gender and any special needs.

Young people were recruited from the caseload of a number of social work teams from two areas of the local authority. A social worker introduced the project to the young person. If the care leaver expressed an interest in taking part they were sent further information about the study. Finally, one of four sessional workers who conducted the

interviews contacted the young person to arrange the interview.

Sessional workers are involved in social work teams on an ad hoc basis and offer befriending support to young people. The original research design ensured that no sessional worker would interview someone already known to them. However, the design was revised once it became apparent that young people known to sessional workers were more readily engaged in the research and more open during the interviews. To ensure that young people felt able to opt out of the study they were given information about the project separately from the sessional worker's invitation to take part. Only once the young person had agreed to participate did the interviewer approach them to arrange the interview. Sessional workers endeavoured to keep the interview process separate from any work they were doing with the young person in cases where a relationship existed before the interview.

In some cases the researcher knew a young person in her capacity as the local authority's Development Worker for Leaving Care. Although she was not a 'case holder' for any of the interviewees, the researcher had a role in overseeing some of their care plans. To avoid including information in the analysis that was not obtained through the interviews all transcripts were anonymised. The meetings of the research advisory group and academic adviser also provided an independent check for the data collection.

Thirty-six young people agreed to be interviewed in the first stage. Four first-stage interviews were excluded from the final analysis because of missing data, although details of the young person's activities were included in the aggregate analysis. Young people were given £20 for their time at the start of the interview. In order to encourage care leavers to remain involved in and informed about the research, they were sent a thank-you note following the interview and a card and brief update on the research at Christmas.

Twenty-one out of the original sample of 36 were interviewed one year later. Out of the 15 young people lost to the sample at the second stage, nine appeared to have preferred not to continue with the research because they did not respond to a first or subsequent follow-up letter; three could not be traced; two could not be interviewed because of work or life commitments; and another withdrew on the day of the interview. It was suggested that some interviewees declined to take part in the second stage because the first interview had been cathartic: an opportunity for the young people to 'tell their story' and vent their frustrations with the care system.

Information about the circumstances of five of the young people who did not take part in the second stage was obtained from the local authority and incorporated in Figure 5 in Chapter 5.

The interview process

Figure 1 outlines the recruitment and interview process.

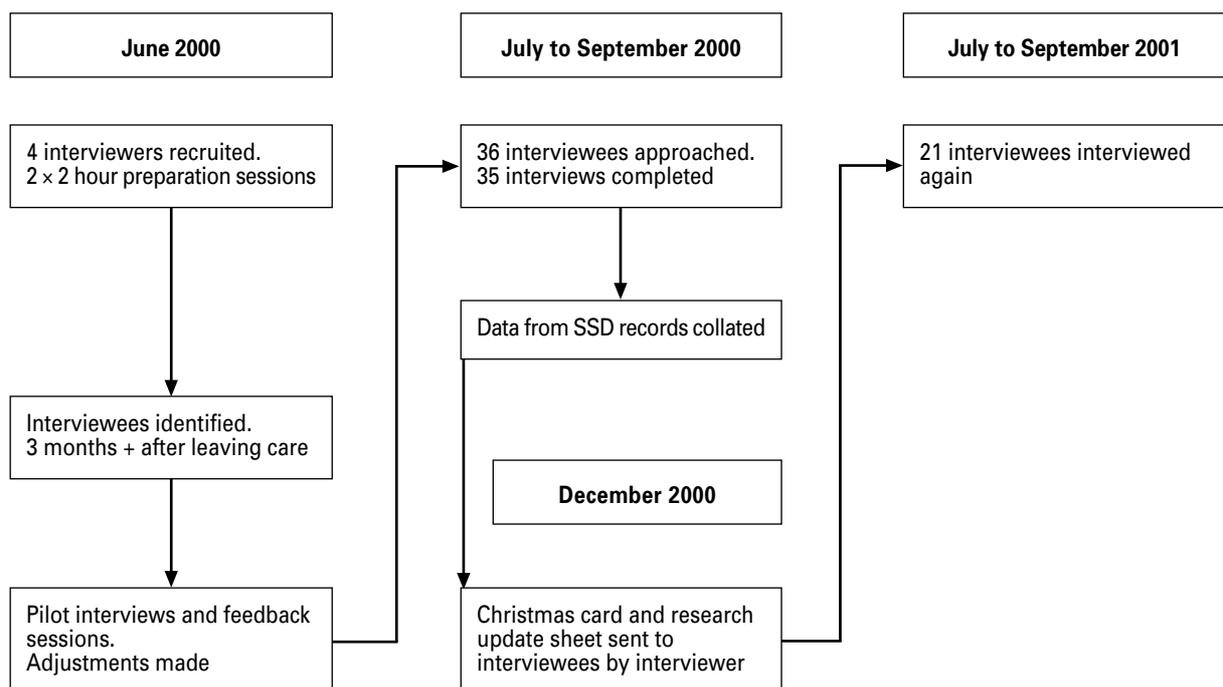
The interviews

The interviews were conducted over the summer period. Interviews were tape-recorded and interviewers also completed an interview feedback form. Using a semi-structured approach, the interviews explored the education, training and employment history of the interviewee, support networks available during this time and details about the interviewee's situation, such as their accommodation and financial circumstances (see Appendices 2 and 3 for detailed interview schedules).

The interview schedule covered four areas:

- 1 the construction of a sociogram detailing the interviewee's support network and significant relationships
- 2 structured questions about the content of the sociogram
- 3 profile sheets for each period of education, training and employment
- 4 profile sheets for each person in the support network or gaps in support.

Figure 1 The interview process



Stage two interview schedule

The follow-up interview provided an opportunity to find out about the young person's progress during the preceding year and examine, in more depth, issues raised in the first interview. The second interview (see Appendix 3) also involved completing a timeline that recorded the timing of significant events or circumstances, such as health needs or a change in accommodation and their impact on the young person's career progress.

Confidentiality

Interviewees were assured that information would not be seen by anyone outside the research team, unless there were concerns about child protection or safety.

Background data

Where agreement was obtained, information held on interviewees' social services files was used to provide a more detailed history of the interviewee's earlier life, such as the age of becoming looked after. This did not involve using information from case recording, but from the computer-held records giving information on the number of placements they had experienced and the statutory basis for the original involvement with that young person. The computer records did not contain information on issues such as school attendance.

3 The young people

About the young people

The sample comprised 21 young women and 15 young men aged between 16 and 21 years old at the first interview. Details about the age of becoming looked after and types of placement are reported in Appendix 4. Figure 2 summarises the age at which the young people entered and left care.

As is common for care leavers nationally (Biehal *et al.*, 1995), the majority of the sample ($n=14$) entered care aged 14. Six young people entered care at 13. The age at which young people left care

Figure 2 Age interviewees became looked after by age of leaving care

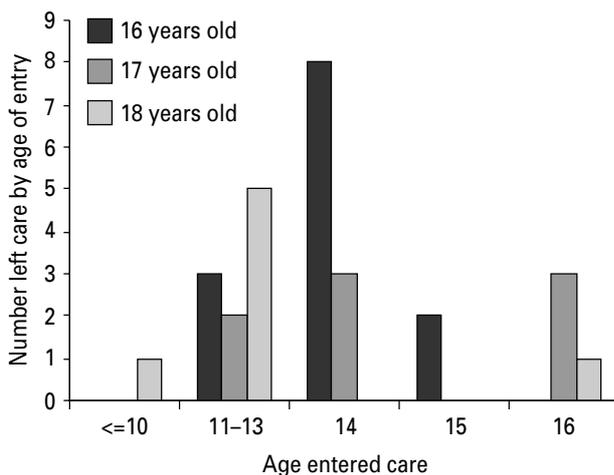
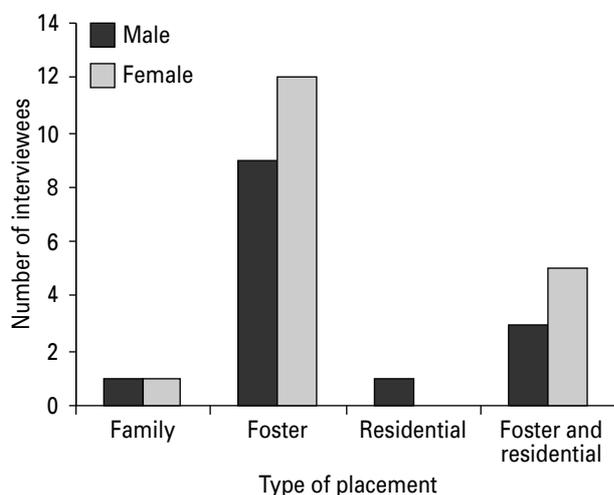


Figure 3 Type of placements in last episode prior to leaving care, by gender



reflected national trends. Half the group left care or went to live in the community on a care order at the age of 16; nine left when they were 17 and seven when they were 18.

Figure 3 details the final care placement of the interviewees. The majority of young people lived in a foster placement.

Activity at first interview

Figure 4 summarises the young people's economic situations at the time of the first interview. Just under a third of the young people were unemployed at this stage ($n=12$), 25 per cent ($n=9$) were employed, with a further 17 per cent ($n=6$) employed and involved in some type of career training or work-based learning. The remainder were involved in full-time education (14 per cent, $n=5$) or full-time carers (11 per cent, $n=4$). Two young people engaged in full-time education were also engaged in part-time work, but this is not shown on the pie chart because it was not their primary activity.

Employment and work-based learning

Interviewees were involved in a range of jobs such as building, hairdressing, catering, retail, car repair and sales. Table 1 provides a snapshot of interviewees' work, accommodation situations and care experiences. All names have been changed to preserve the interviewees' anonymity.

Figure 4 Economic activity at the first interview

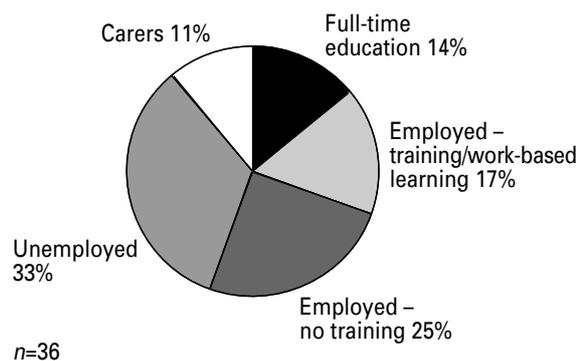


Table 1 Employment and work-based learning situations at the first interview

Young person	Employment	Terms and conditions	Accommodation	Age at first interview	Age entered care and type of placement
Ben	Builder	1 day per week NVQ day release	Officially left care but living with relatives placed with at age 12	18	12, foster care with family; care order
Jeff	Hairdresser	NVQ day release	Supported accommodation	17	14, foster care
Mike	Mechanic	NVQ day release	Living with mother	16	13, foster care
Frank	Seasonal work at leisure park	Short-term contract	Homeless, staying with friends	21	14, foster care
Mandy	Shop assistant in a supermarket	Full-time	Supported lodgings	18	13, foster and residential care
Alison	Office worker	NVQ day release	Supported accommodation	17	14
Karen	Waitress	Seasonal	Living with boyfriend's family	19	11, foster care
Derek	Apprentice mechanic	Not recorded	Supported accommodation	20	12, foster care; care order
Jemima	Packing shelves at a supermarket	Full-time, no career development	Council accommodation	19	13, placed with family
Nancy	Agency work	Casual	Housing association flat	17	14, foster care
Isaac	Bricklaying	Full-time	Girlfriend's family	17	15, foster care
Tanya	Care assistant	Full-time	Friends and family	17	15, foster and residential care; care order
Ellis	Seasonal straw treater and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance	Cash in hand	Supported accommodation but unhappy sharing with drug users	Not recorded	Not recorded
Linda	Shop assistant	Part-time	Living with husband in independent accommodation	Not recorded	Not recorded
Carl	Catering	NVQ	No details	19	6 weeks, foster care

Short-term employment

Four of the group were employed in seasonal or short-term work. For example, Ellis was working as a farm labourer. Some of them were making plans for further employment. Ellis was hoping to combine work with part-time education and Frank was looking for a job paying ‘decent money’:

I will not be doing any education or training since I am too old for that. I would like a proper job earning decent money. I am going to get in touch with the job centre about a job at ... the meat factory. Hopefully I might be able to start when the season finishes ... I don't think I will enjoy it as much ... but it's a job.
(Frank)

Long-term employment

Eleven of the young people were in more permanent employment. As would be expected for people of this age, the wages were generally low. In particular, the majority of young women were in low-paid and low-skilled jobs, such as care assistant and shop work. Young men seemed to have more opportunities to combine employment with day release. Five young people were involved with NVQ training schemes but only one of these was a woman.

Education

Five young people were involved in full-time education (Table 2). Three of them were at college – Wendy and Rachel were pursuing a basic skills course and Olivia was taking a GNVQ. Ron and Lance were at school – Lance repeating a final year in his school sixth form. Lance and Olivia were entitled to income support as they were under 19, in non-advanced further education and estranged from their parents. Olivia was claiming this benefit after supporting herself through part-time work in the previous year. Lance was working part-time and earning more than he could claim through income support, although he was eligible for other support such as housing benefit. Rachel was supported through a care order.

Parenthood

Three of the care leavers were full-time mothers and one, Sandy, was pregnant at the time of the first interview (Table 3).

Unemployment

Twelve care leavers were not involved in any education, training or employment. Three of these young people had been looked after under a care order, as opposed to the more common ‘voluntary’ looked after status (Table 4).

Table 2 Young people’s educational involvement at the first interview

Name	Situation	Accommodation	Age at first interview	Care history
Lance	Retaking final year at school	Living with ex-foster carer	18	16, foster care
Olivia	About to start a two-year college course – left after a month because could not cope with the work	Supported accommodation	16	13, foster and residential care
Rachel	Basic skills course at college	Supported housing	17	12, foster and residential care; care order
Wendy	Basic skills course at college	Living with grandmother	17	16, foster care with grandmother
Ron	Finishing school education	No details	18	14, foster care

Degree of change since leaving care and plans for the future

The young people's situations as recorded in the tables belie the degree of change they experienced both preceding and following the first interview. Only two of the young people – Ben and Carl – had

remained in the same situation since they left care. Twelve out of the 36 young people for which there were data had experienced five or more changes since leaving care. For example, Mandy had worked in a number of short-term chambermaid and cleaning jobs and was working in a

Table 3 Circumstances of young mothers at the first interview

Name	Situation	Accommodation	Age at first interview	Care history
Sandy	Expectant mother	Supported housing – awaiting rehousing in temporary LA accommodation	16	14, foster and residential care; care order
Fay	Full-time carer with one child	Independent housing with partner	17	Not available
Elizabeth	Full-time carer on income support	LA housing	19	13, foster care
Isobel	Full-time carer on income support	House rented through housing association	19	14, not available

Table 4 Situations of young people unemployed at the first interview

Name	Accommodation	Age at first interview	Care history
Penny	Supported accommodation	18	14, foster care; care order
Graham	Housing association flat	17	14, foster and residential care
Gillian	Housing association flat	18	11, foster care; care order
Beatrice	Living at home but staying with boyfriend most of time. No income support or Jobseeker's Allowance	18	16, foster care
Debbie	Student accommodation (about to start college)	18	16, foster care
Helen	No details	16	14, foster care
Carol	Housing association flat	19	14, foster care; care order
Harry	No details	17	16, foster and residential care
Amy	No details	16	16, foster and residential care
Neil	Supported hostel accommodation	21	13, foster care
Anthony	Living with family	17	14, residential care
Ken	Involved in Learning Gateway training initiative. Living in supported accommodation out of LA area	17	12, foster and residential care

supermarket at the time of the first interview. It could be argued that the period of flux and change that many of the young people went through mirrors the experiences of young people from stable backgrounds. Other research has shown that young people can experience a number of jobs or courses before they settle on a more stable career path (Dolton *et al.*, 1999). However, the number of changes suggests the young people in the study experienced a particularly turbulent time. In particular, changes were often for the worse, such as a move out of work and into unemployment, and change was often precipitated by personal difficulties, such as problems with accommodation or the ending of a significant relationship.

In many cases, the degree of instability reflected the absence of a clear plan of action and signified a period of drift. The number of young people who were going through their transition to adulthood with no firm vocational/employment plan was significant and concerning in terms of their likely ability 'to engage socially and economically' (Department of Health, 1999, p. 19, para. 5.1). Approximately half the sample had no plan for the future. For example, only Carl was involved in a

long-term course of study although it would be expected that a high proportion of young people aged 17–19 would be completing academic or vocational courses at this point in their lives.

Even when young people did have plans, the interviews a year later demonstrated that plans were often thwarted. For example, talking about his hopes at the first interview, Jeff, a hairdressing apprentice with day release at college, commented:

I'll do this for a while, but not necessarily for the whole of my career.

By the second interview Jeff had left his job because of problems in his personal life precipitated by the breakdown of the relationship with his girlfriend. Similarly, Mandy was working at a supermarket and felt that she would like to continue working there for the next year at least, with a possible caveat: 'but who knows?' A year later she was unemployed.

The next chapter explores some of the factors that influenced how people came to be in their respective work, training or education situations and whether they remained in them.

4 Into the mainstream – what factors influenced the young people’s economic engagement?

The interviews with young people shortly after they left care revealed a number of factors in their care history and circumstances that affected their economic engagement. These included the impact of care on their schooling, educational achievement and their ability to establish and maintain relationships; the nature of the support networks available to them; financial circumstances and other commitments in their lives. The chapter explores these factors in greater detail.

The nature of the looked after experience

Some of the factors that influenced young people’s economic engagement on leaving care had their roots in the young person’s childhood and looked after experience.

Number and type of placements

Because of the small sample size it is difficult to draw conclusions concerning the impact of the number and nature of care placements on the young people’s transition to independence, but there appears to be a link between a disrupted care history – involving multiple moves – and later instability. Young people, such as Ben and Jemima, who enjoyed long-term foster placements, in particular with family members, were more settled in their work or training options after care. This is likely to be related to the minimum disruption to their schooling prior to and entering care and the support they continued to receive from their foster carers once they had officially left care. On the other hand, out of the eight young people who experienced both residential and foster care, only one, Rachel, demonstrated any post-care stability. Moreover, Rachel was cared for in a special residential unit because of her disabilities.

The age at which the young person entered care,

combined with the stability of the placement, also appeared to influence stability in young adulthood. Previous research has shown that young people who enter care at an earlier age have a greater likelihood of achieving post-care stability (Biehal *et al.*, 1992; Stein, 1997). The majority of interviewees entered care when they were 14 years old. Because young people entered care relatively late they had already experienced significant disruption both at home and at school as a result of their family circumstances. As a consequence, young people were often struggling to deal with emotional and behavioural difficulties arising out of their home life, and struggling to keep up with their schoolwork. The size of the sample in this study makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions about the influence of age at entering care, but there appear to be some links. For example, nine of the young people unemployed at the first interview entered care when they were 14 years of age or older. Another one entered care at a younger age but had experienced a disrupted care history involving both residential and foster care placements.

Care orders

The circumstances under which the young person entered care were associated with their post-care situations. Eight young people were on care orders and three of them were unemployed at the time of the first interview. It is likely that factors in the young person’s childhood that necessitated being placed under a care order continued to influence their later life chances and economic and social integration. As Chapter 5 illustrates, it is also the case that, unlike their peers, young people on care orders are not required to register for careers help when under 18 in order to claim benefits. This left them out of the reach of work opportunities arising from contact with employment services.

Distance from home/friends

Because of the rural and sparsely populated nature of the local authority, many of the young people spent time in placements some distance from their home area. The LA's three residential units for children of this age were also located in different parts of the county. Placements away from home areas affected care leavers' ability to maintain contact with their support networks. Young people living in isolated communities were dependent on others to provide transport for them to visit friends or family in nearby towns or villages. Care leavers did not have immediate access to someone to talk to when they were having a difficult time. For example, Beatrice experienced difficulties during Year 9 of her schooling. She had wanted help with her schoolwork and someone to talk to as soon as there was a problem. However, placed away from family and friends and with no out-of-hours social services support beyond emergency help, she had no one to talk to when things were difficult at home or after school.

Schooling and educational achievement

This section examines the way that the care experience affected young people's education, including its impact on their relationship building, self-esteem and motivation, and on the number of qualifications they obtained.

Qualifications

The original research was designed to obtain data on young people's qualifications from social services records. Unfortunately, many of the records were incomplete and the information obtained from the interviewees was also patchy. However, comments made during the interviews suggest that many of the care leavers obtained either few or no qualifications and a number of the young people talked about how their lack of qualifications limited them to low-paid jobs. In retrospect, many of them recognised the

importance of education and expressed regret that they had not made the most of their schooling, or been encouraged to do so by carers. Young mothers in the group were particularly conscious of their lost opportunities. One reason for the poor attainment levels of the group was the timing of entering care. As the charts in the previous chapter show, over half the sample entered care aged 13 or 14. This is an important point in young people's education as they prepare to commence their GCSE courses. For many of the group, however, it also signified a time when the accumulated difficulties arising out of their home life made it difficult to engage with their schooling. Moreover, many young people were already lagging behind their peers and had no opportunity to catch up.

Placement moves

Because of the size and rural nature of the local authority, disrupted schooling was a particular feature of these interviewees' experiences. A number of interviewees commented on how frequent moves affected their education. Because of differences in schools' curricula or the timing of when subjects were studied, young people moving schools had to catch up with their peers or miss out parts of their education. For example, Sandy experienced three school moves. Following one move, she found herself a year behind in French because the new school taught the subject a year earlier than her previous school, but she was not given any extra help to catch up; as she said, 'You just had to get on with it'. Another interviewee, Harry, moved schools in the final month of his education because he left a foster home for a residential placement sixty miles away. He blamed his failure to complete his education on the move.

Although a number of interviewees mentioned the detrimental impact of their disrupted education, it was difficult to draw clear conclusions about the extent and nature of the disruption. Social services records did not contain much information on young people's schooling. The

young people themselves were often unable to recall details about school attendance and the first interview did not ask questions in sufficient detail.

The impact of residential and foster care placements

In some cases, there was an association between the type of care placement and educational experience. A number of young people felt that the move into residential care had a negative influence on their education. For some care leavers this was because their peer group were negative about school. For example, Tanya felt that although staff were supportive, her involvement with a peer group in the unit ‘who didn’t care’ meant she did not complete her GCSEs. Other interviewees believed that residential staff were too lax and had low expectations of the young people. For example, Elizabeth explained that she played truant because staff in her residential unit let her get ‘away with murder’. Overall, a number of the young people felt that there was too little support generally with education when in care. For example, Olivia commented that:

Children in care should be encouraged to keep up their education.

On the other hand, a number of young people believed that going into foster care had a positive effect on their education. Young people who experienced the death of a foster carer felt this particularly keenly and were aware of the negative effect losing their foster carer had on their education. For example, Sandy felt that ‘if only’ her foster carer had lived then she believed she would have succeeded in her education and her life would have been different. Similarly, Lance felt that he changed his course of study because his foster carer died.

Attitudes to self and school

Attitudes to schooling were a recurrent theme in the project. Interviewees who were moved frequently found it difficult to maintain their

motivation to work at their studies and keep building relationships with staff and pupils. For example, Sandy felt that she gave up at school around Year 8:

What was the point in trying to please people, because you would just get moved on again?

Mike also talked about losing interest and motivation because he ‘could not keep up with the work so gave up’. He attributed this loss of interest to lack of support from teachers.

Don’t think they were bothered. If I skived, they could not do much about it.

Alison attributed not doing as well as expected in her GCSEs to a move in her final year of school when she ‘lost interest in school and education’.

Others mentioned concerns that teachers had preconceived ideas about them because of their care history. Isaac believed that teachers did not push him enough or provide enough guidance. He felt his potential was not recognised and this, in turn, undermined his self-confidence. Young people who did not reach their potential at school because of frequent moves and the disruption they entailed also developed low self-esteem and lacked confidence: additional obstacles to succeeding after school.

Frequent moves also sent mixed messages to the young people. For example, Mandy commented on the tension between prioritising education and arranging placements. She felt that the low priority that education took when placements necessitated a change of school was at odds with the expectation that young people would take their education and training seriously in later life.

The importance of other events

In some instances, the reasons interviewees were brought into care acted as a diversion from their education. Young people talked about the difficult task of working at their education while other events dominated their lives. For example, Isobel

described how her family circumstances muted her interest in school:

I changed totally when I was in care. I lost interest in schoolwork and just wanted to be with my friends. This was no one's fault, but the build-up of circumstances in my family life, and how I perceived the situation with my stepdad.

Benefits of care

Although the majority of the sample felt that their care experience had a detrimental impact on their schooling, some of the young people were more positive. For example, Mike changed schools as a result of a move into foster care. Compared with the lack of support he received at his previous school, he felt that his new teachers were interested and supportive. He described the positive impact of this new environment on his ability to complete his work and on his general self-confidence. He attributed the fact that he finished school and embarked on work with a day release scheme to these changes.

Careers support and advice

The research attempted to understand the role careers advice played in helping the young people develop and pursue a career path. Young people were eligible to have one careers interview while at school. After school, careers advisers were supposed to contact young people once a year and were available to the care leavers should they desire help. Care leavers claiming benefits but not on care orders had to see careers advisers in order to access their benefits. Young people with special needs had specialist support, via a specialist careers adviser.

Careers help at school

Just over half the interview group had contact with someone they described as 'careers' prior to leaving school. Careers advisers and co-ordinators were mentioned most frequently as sources of advice,

although it was not always clear, even to the young people, whether the person was a careers co-ordinator at the school or a careers adviser from the local Careers Service. Unfortunately, the design of the interview schedule makes it difficult to differentiate sources of advice because it included a stand-alone question asking about careers advice at school, whereas advice from other professional groups and family members was included within a general question.

Other professionals were also important sources of careers guidance. Social services staff, including social workers, sessional workers, staff at residential centres and foster carers were mentioned by eight care leavers as people who had provided careers advice.

Some care leavers mentioned the careers help they received from teachers and head teachers, although not everyone liked receiving advice from a teacher. For example, Helen suggested that an independent adviser based at the school might be in a better position to enable a young person to make a fresh start than a teacher who might have preconceived ideas about a young person within the care system. Isaac commented that it would be helpful for careers advice to be available throughout one's schooling because it would encourage young people to continue with their education.

In general, few young people mentioned family members as important sources of advice on education, training and employment plans.

Careers advice after school

A number of care leavers were positive about the support they received after school and even listed careers advisers in their support networks. But the interviewees found it difficult to articulate how careers advisers were helpful. In general, they talked about help with obtaining information, accessing Jobseeker's Allowance and making contact with employers. For Anthony, the Careers Service was described as most helpful in assisting

him to make decisions about the future and the Jobcentre as least helpful. However, he suggested that ‘If you’re inclined to work you will regardless’.

Some care leavers were more negative about careers advice. For example, Carol commented on the need for careers staff to listen and not have ‘a better than you attitude’. Young people under 18 were obliged to seek careers advice in order to claim benefits. Some found the contact unhelpful and described themselves as feeling ‘confused’ by it, found it ‘too intense’ (Graham), or felt pressured because the adviser ‘forces you to do things you don’t want to do’ (Carol).

Although some young people were unhappy at having to go to the careers centre in order to claim their benefits, the interviews one year later show that two young people found work through this contact. In contrast, unemployed young people under care orders do not have to seek careers advice to claim. Three of the 12 young people unemployed at the first interview were on care orders. This may be because they missed out on the opportunities that arise as a result of careers and Jobcentre contact, although it could also be argued that the circumstances that necessitated them being put under a care order created additional issues to resolve in their lives in comparison to other care leavers.

Two out of the three young people in the interview group who attended special schools due to disabilities or a statement of special educational needs had a specialist transition worker and specialist careers adviser. In contrast to other care leavers, these young people had developed clear post-education career plans and one of them had remained on the same course for almost three years.

Financial concerns

Financial concerns were a significant factor in influencing the young people’s plans. Interviewees talked about the need to earn ‘proper’ money as

opposed to training wages or being dependent on benefits. A number of young people mentioned the difficulties of funding themselves should they wish to continue with their studies or access a low-paid training scheme. For example, Nancy did well in her GCSEs and had originally planned to study after completing Year 11 schooling, but finally decided to find employment because of financial worries. She described how care leavers feel compelled to seek work rather than continue with their education because of the difficulties of surviving on benefits while they study:

Care leavers have to find work to continue with their education. You need money to live.

Benefit levels are calculated on the assumption that young people under 25 continue to live at home and interviewees were very aware of the extra costs they incurred in living independently. However, the interviews also revealed care leavers’ limited knowledge about their benefit entitlements, such as the LA’s discretion to top up care leaver benefits for the purposes of education, employment or training. Ignorance of their entitlement reflects poorly on the LA’s success in and commitment to ensuring young people receive all the support to which they are entitled.

Despite financial pressures, some interviewees described how being able to live independently provided them with the motivation they required to keep working. For example, Helen felt that being able to afford her own flat motivated her to stick at her job – something she had struggled with previously.

Parenthood

Four of the young people in the study were full-time mothers or expectant mothers at the time of the first interview. One reason for their absence from the labour market or lack of involvement in education or training was the desire to act as primary carers for their children, but they also

mentioned other issues. The group lacked the qualifications needed to access jobs that paid enough to cover childcare costs and other commitments. They reported feeling caught in a benefits trap because of a, sometimes misguided, belief that a move into badly paid employment would leave them worse off. Isobel talked about this:

They go on about single parents taking money from the government, but they do not help at all. The way they say they are helping does not help at all. I don't know the system. I would get £4.00 more by working. They make it a lot more difficult for us, you have to get a job that will pay for the housing, rates, etc. everything before you can even think what you are going to live on. Without qualifications you just cannot do it.

These young mothers recognised that they needed to improve their education in order to access better jobs. They planned to return to education once the child was able to attend a nursery. For example, Isobel talked about her plans:

I'd train in childcare and I know it would take a few years and first I need to get some GCSEs. Then I would like to be a reception teacher – I did that for my work experience and I enjoyed it and get on really well with children.

Conclusions

Factors in the young people's childhoods and care experiences affected their education, social development and social integration. Their educational experiences also affected the qualifications they obtained, their self-esteem and motivation. Careers advice was variable and around half the sample would not go to careers specialists for guidance; they preferred to talk to people in their own network or to rely on themselves. The need to support themselves, and poor awareness of the LA support to which they were entitled, deterred many young people from continuing their education or becoming involved in training. Young parents were particularly concerned about money. Social and professional support, other than careers advice, is also an important influence on young people's transition to independence. The type of support young people obtained is discussed in Chapter 6, which combines data on support from the first and second interviews.

5 Where are they now? A year after care

Young people's situations a year after leaving care

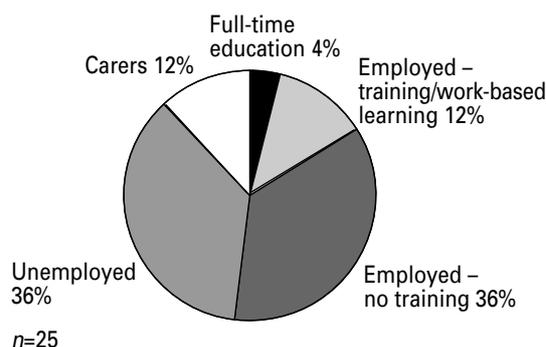
Data on the situations of the care leavers at the second interview were obtained for 26 out of the original 36 young people. In five cases information was obtained from the local authority and not directly from the young people.

Figure 5 summarises the economic activity of the sample at the second interview. Only two of the young people out of the remaining 26 were in the same education, training and employment situation as in the previous year. Of the remaining sample at the second interview 38 per cent had experienced two or more changes during that year. Some of the young people experienced particularly turbulent years. For example, Olivia left care at 16 and within a two-year period had ten changes of education and employment, some of which were periods of unemployment. Although some young people remained in jobs for six months or more, the majority of previous employment appeared quite short-term.

Employment and work-based learning

The interviewees were engaged in similar types of work as at the first interview with a predominance of low-paid, low-skilled jobs such as shop and restaurant/bar work (Table 5). Ben and Jemima were the only two young people who were in the same jobs at the second interview as they had been at the first. Ben was the only young person to have continued with his day release programme.

Figure 5 Activity at the second interview



Education

Only Wendy had remained on her college course (Table 6). During the year she moved from her grandmother's house to supported housing. She planned to continue her studies next year. Lance, who was retaking his final year at school at the time of the first interview, was working full-time in the job he did part-time during his schooling. Olivia dropped out of college because she could not cope with the work and was training as a commis chef.

Full-time carers

Three of the young people were acting as full-time carers for their children and had done so since the first interview (Table 7). Isobel, who had been a full-time carer at the first interview, obtained work as a barmaid and waitress during the year.

Unemployed

Nine of the group were unemployed at the time of the second interview (Table 8). Six of them – Anthony, Carol, Ken, Amy, Gillian and Penny – had been unemployed at the first interview.

Number of changes through the year

A number of the young people experienced a significant amount of change during the year. Sixteen members of the sample had changed accommodation and 16 had experienced changes in economic status. Of these eight had experienced three or more moves in and out of work, training, education and unemployment. For example, Ken was unemployed for a month, spent the next month in training, then claimed Jobseeker's Allowance while on a training scheme and then spent a further seven months unemployed. The next chapter looks at the factors that influenced the young people's ability to experience a stable transition into young adulthood.

Into the mainstream

Table 5 Employment and life circumstances a year after leaving care

Name	Employment	Previous economic activity	Circumstances
Mike	Blacksmith	5 months' unemployment preceded by full-time employment with day release	Living with mum
Lance	Moved from part-time to full-time shop work	Full-time education	Moving to council bedsit; took overdose in the summer
Olivia	Trainee commis chef	7 months' unemployment preceded by 2 months' full-time education	Accommodation attached to employment; period of drug use and disrupted housing
Jemima	Full-time supermarket assistant	Employed throughout the year	Same LA accommodation since first interview
Graham	Sales for tea company	1 month unemployed preceded by 7 months' full-time employment	Same housing association flat
Frank	General assistant in catering firm, 6 days per week	Employed for the duration of the year	Looking for LA accommodation; got engaged in the year to 16-year-old girlfriend of 5 months
Ellis	Stacking shelves at supermarket; 25 hours per week @ £4.12p/h, permanent contract	Periods of casual work, work experience and unemployment	Supported accommodation
Beatrice	Bar/hotel work; £4.50–£5.00 per hour, full-time	3 months' unemployment	Bedsit acquired through boss
Isobel	Waitress/bar worker	6 months unemployed/mother	In same housing association house; began relationship with older man
Ben	Apprentice builder	Full-time employment with day release for the duration of the year	Living with original foster placement rent free; same employment situation as at interview 1
Rachel	Catering work	Work-based training programme	No details
Harry	Erecting exhibition stands	Unemployed	No details – could not be interviewed

Table 6 Circumstances of young people in education

Name	Course	Accommodation
Wendy	Continuing basic skills course at college	Supported housing

Table 7 Situation of primary carers at second interview

Name	No. of children and relationship situation	Accommodation	Other issues
Elizabeth	1 – ended long-term relationship with boyfriend	LA accommodation	Anti-depressants since baby's birth
Fay	2 – engaged	Housing association flat	
Sandy	1	Now in permanent accommodation	

Table 8 Situation of unemployed young people a year after leaving care

Name	Time out of work	Previous activity	Circumstances
Ken	7 months	4 months' work experience while claiming Jobseeker's Allowance and a month of full-time training	Recently moved into a hostel; ongoing alcohol problem; about to start college to study GCSEs
Jeff	1 month	Previously in full-time employment with day release	Supported housing; training ended when lost job, probably triggered by ending of relationship with girlfriend
Anthony	4 months	2 months' ill health preceded by full-time employment with day release	Council flat; drug use, but cutting down
Gillian	12 months	Ongoing unemployment	Pregnant; ongoing drug problem
Isaac	5 months	Full-time employment	Supported accommodation; about to start 3-year college course as part of New Deal
Penny	Found placement in the year but off due to ill health	Period of unemployment	Moved out of supported housing into council flat
Mandy	Data from LA	Supermarket work	No details
Amy	Data from LA	Unemployed	No details
Ron	Data from LA	College	Living with dad

6 Staying involved: what factors promoted or prevented the young people’s ongoing economic engagement?

The interviews a year after the first demonstrate the interviewees’ resilience to the demands they faced during the year. Several young people revealed a remarkable ability to juggle major changes in their lives while living independently, surviving on a low income and continuing with their work, training or educational commitments. The factors that affected their ongoing involvement included emotional and practical support; financial concerns; life circumstances such as accommodation and substance abuse; parenthood; and attitudes and motivation.

Support

Previous research has shown that social networks provide an important source of work for disadvantaged young men and that the practical, financial and emotional support that families supply contribute to young men’s success in the labour market (Meadows, 2001). The interviewees were asked a series of questions about their support networks, such as the nature and frequency of contact, the type of help provided by a person and how important it was to them. Data from the first and second interviews are reported together because similar issues arose on each occasion.

The size and composition of the support networks

Table 9 presents a summary of the young people’s support networks at each interview. Just after leaving care, the mean network size was 6.2. A year later the average network size had shrunk to 5.1. These very basic statistics give an indication of the declining availability of support to the young people.

The table also shows the extent to which young people’s networks changed over the course of the year. At the first interview, professionals made up the largest portion of the young people’s networks (42 per cent), with the remaining half largely made up of family (24 per cent) and friends (26 per cent). By the end of the year, friends were the largest proportion of the network (44 per cent) and professionals comprised only 23 per cent of the network, with family (25 per cent) and foster carers (8 per cent) remaining about the same.

The shift in the network away from professionals towards friends raises a number of issues. For many of the young people, leaving care and setting up home independently signified a new phase of life and a putting behind them of some of the difficult childhood years. The move away from professionals and the growing importance of friendships could be seen as a positive sign of the young person’s independence and increasing self-reliance. In some instances this was the case. Young

Table 9 Size and composition of the young people’s support networks

Time of interview	Mean network size	No. of foster carers	No. of professionals	No. of family members	No. of friends
Interview 1 (n=33)	6.2 Range 1–11	16 (8%)	87 (42%)	50 (24%)	53 (26%)
Interview 2 (n=20)	5.1 Range 1–9	8 (8%)	23 (23%)	26 (25%)	45 (44%)

people such as Graham and Beatrice met new people through work and had less need of support provided by professionals. However, where young people were struggling to establish themselves the loss of professional support and increased reliance on friends were not necessarily positive. As the next section indicates, young people needed support to succeed in their transition to independence.

The interviews also revealed the transient nature of many relationships. The interviewees had known only 64 per cent ($n=121$) of the network for a year or more. One young person, Ken, had not known anyone in his network for more than a year. Only eight young people had known all the people in their support network for more than a year, and in some cases the network was very small. For example, Debbie listed only one person in her network – an ex-foster carer – and this was also the only person she had known for more than a year.

Building and maintaining relationships

Respondents talked candidly about the impact of care on their ability to establish and maintain relationships. In the first interviews, a number of the care leavers spoke about the detrimental impact that frequent moves, often to placements some distance from their previous home, had on their ability to make new relationships and sustain those already in place. For example, Mandy, who spent time in both residential and foster care, articulated these difficulties:

You don't get the chance to form real relationships when you move a lot. They think you are talkative, but you only say what they want to hear about. It's not normal, which makes it hard to form new friendships. I'm eighteen now and I still do things to please other people, not because I want to.

Young people also talked about feeling different and the stigma of being in care: both factors that affected their relationship building. Difficulties in

making relationships are reflected in the imbalanced social networks of some of the young people. For example, Nancy noted that her sociogram showed a lack of males, something she attributed to earlier life experiences. Olivia, aged 16, recognised the age differential in her circle of friends:

I don't hang out with people my own age ... always older 28+.

Problems in relationship building were threefold. Young people who have had difficulties making new friendships are likely to feel less confident when they start something new, e.g. the first day at work. Young people who are used to moving on are also less likely to be willing or able to tackle the inevitable ups and downs of relationships. Because problems have always been resolved by moving on, especially in the case of those young people who experienced a number of moves because placements broke down, the care leavers are likely to repeat the 'leaving pattern' in young adulthood. For example, Graham, who experienced a number of placement changes, had a dispute with a colleague that led to him leaving his job. Moving on can affect engagement in work, training or education and it can also mean that young people keep moving home when things become difficult.

A number of the young people had very small support networks. One reason for this is poor relationship-building skills, but it is also the case that problems were exacerbated by the number of placement moves. Moves to different areas made it difficult for young people to remain connected with important people in their lives.

Sources of support

Young people obtained support from a range of people whom they knew in both a personal and professional capacity.

Informal sources of support

Family members

At both interviews, family members made up approximately a quarter of the young people's social networks. The majority of contact was with one or both parents ($n=24$); followed by siblings ($n=21$); grandparents ($n=5$); aunts and uncles ($n=3$) and cousins ($n=2$). Young people who had been taken into care for their own protection under care orders were particularly unlikely to be in contact with their family. Overall, 21 per cent ($n=7$) of the young people at the first interview and 25 per cent ($n=5$) at the second interview did not name any family member in their support network. Care leavers who do not have the advantages of family support must face the realities of adult life much earlier than their peers, as Lance described:

We grow up a lot earlier. It's all jolly for kids not in care. They are in a bubble. We know the harshness of life.

What became apparent in the interviews was not the different type of help that family or substitute family members provided, but the impact that the absence of family had on the young people. Care leavers who maintained ongoing contact with their family or substitute family figures, and particularly those who benefited from placements with family members, were more likely to experience a stable transition out of care. For example, the only two young people who continued in the same work they were in when first interviewed had enjoyed stable placements in their childhood with extended family members. Moreover, the young people maintained these family links after leaving care. Ben continued to live with the same family members under a different legal basis. Jemima lived independently but within walking distance of family members who continued to provide support. Ben commented on his uneventful year:

I have had no major changes – still live at the same place and no changes in relationships that matter.

Re-establishing family relationships was also significant for young people. For example, in the course of the year Graham discovered the identity of his birth father and subsequently met him. This had a positive impact on his outlook for life:

More than happy, just to say I've got a dad. The lost part of the puzzle.

Foster carers

Foster carers provided a substitute family structure for some of the young people. Ninety per cent of the sample had been in foster care at some point in their lives. At the first interview 33 per cent ($n=11$) of care leavers described foster carers as part of their support network and 35 per cent ($n=7$) at the second interview.

The interviewees identified some months after leaving care, previous foster carers that in the first interview had not been mentioned, as being important in their support network. This seemed to reflect the young people's increased awareness, having spent time living independently, of the value of being able to drop in on their foster carers, and receive help with their laundry, the occasional meal, or encouragement in what they were doing.

Foster carers appeared less important to those young people who had been in both residential and foster care. Just under a third of those who had been in foster care had also experienced a residential placement but only one of these young people, Graham, named an ex-foster carer in his support network. This is probably because the foster care placements broke down, necessitating a residential care placement.

Friends and partners

Friends made up approximately a quarter of the sample's network at the first interview and just under half (44 per cent) at the second. Although friends were named, there was little discussion about the extent or nature of support care leavers

received from their friends. There was slightly more detail about the help received from partners, or boyfriends and girlfriends. For example, Lance valued talking to his girlfriend about the changes he wanted to make in his life. Isobel talked about the importance of the support she received from her new partner, who was fifteen years her senior. A few young people, such as Karen and Isaac, lived with their partner's families.

While partners offered support to some young people, they could be knocked back when relationships broke down. For example, Jeff appeared settled in all aspects of his life at the first interview. By the second interview, however, his social network had changed significantly, his relationship with his girlfriend had ended and he was unemployed. He talked about the negative impact of the break-up on his mental health. Understandably, in general, young people found it difficult to maintain a grip on their work, study or training when other aspects of their lives were unsettled. As discussed in the next section, support, particularly of significant professionals, was crucial in helping them keep things together at a time of instability.

Professional support

Professionals, predominantly social workers, comprised almost half (42 per cent) of the young people's support network at the first interview. Fewer professionals were mentioned at the second interview (they made up approximately 23 per cent of the network) but past professionals, particularly previous long-term social workers, were often mentioned as people missing from the young person's support network. For example, Gillian missed two previous social workers that she had known for a number of years.

Professionals, and social workers in particular when young people were leaving care, were valued for the practical support they provided, such as help in finding accommodation, dealing with benefits, and discussing plans for education,

training and employment. Not all social workers were rated, however – only those that lived up to the promises they made, as Alison commented:

They are good if you ask for help and something gets done about it. Many social workers say they will do things but don't come up with the goods.

By the second interview, young people named a range of professionals in their support networks, including a Lifeskills mentor, sessional workers, a Lone Parent Adviser and careers advisers. Although they were attached to different programmes and had different roles, young people named them because they provided a more relationship-based type of support – a befriending or advocate relationship, similar to the advisory role proposed as part of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Connexions service.

What type of support is useful?

It is possible to identify key features of the support the young people found beneficial in their transition to independence.

Practical help

Support networks were an important source of practical help with career planning and with managing life independently.

Developing and pursuing careers

The clearest examples of help in both developing and implementing career plans came from support provided by professionals, usually attached to particular programmes or initiatives. Six of the 11 young people in work at the second interview had significant professional support in their lives. Isaac described the help he received from a Lifeskills mentor who had been assigned to him through his involvement in the Learning Gateway's Lifeskills programme. At the first interview he had talked about his ambition to join the army, but had been unsuccessful because of his medical history. The

Lifeskills mentor helped him to develop a well-worked-out plan for the future and enrol on a three-year engineering course as part of the New Deal initiative. During the intervening year he had also resolved his accommodation difficulties and moved to a new home close to his new college course.

During the previous year Isobel obtained work as a barmaid and waitress with the assistance of a New Deal Lone Parent Adviser. Although Isobel had been motivated to find work in order to rebut criticisms from her family that she was not a good mother, the Lone Parent Adviser facilitated her job search.

Went to the job centre every week. She helped me find a job. I went for interview and the next day I started work. Also she helped with child minders. Really sensible – no silly suggestions.

As the quote suggests, the adviser was instrumental in addressing other issues in Isobel's life. She helped Isobel to complete childminding forms and to sort out a complicated financial situation with the Child Support Agency. Overall, Isobel felt that the Lone Parent Adviser was the most helpful person involved in her transition out of care.

Young people who did not have ongoing contact with professionals were less likely to be working or developing their education or skills. This is illustrated by the cases of those young people on care orders until they were 18. These young people lacked careers advice after leaving school because, unlike their peers, they did not have to register with the careers service in order to qualify for benefits. It was also noticeable that amongst this group no young person was on the Lifeskills course that, in the geographical area, was common amongst their peers who needed additional help to be job ready.

Non-professionals were also valuable sources of practical help to young people in their pursuit of employment, education or training. For example,

Fay spoke of the support her ex-foster carers gave her:

Foster parents gave me encouragement and took me to college interview. They have been supportive since with all aspects of my life.

In general, family members were less likely to provide this type of support than professionals. On the other hand, as illustrated in the next section, members of a family or substitute family were more likely to provide help with everyday life issues.

Life skills/coping

All young people who leave school have to cope with the move into the adult world of work, training or further education. But young people leaving care must also cope with the strains of managing their own budget, sorting out and keeping their accommodation, and caring for themselves. A sense emerged from the interviews that this was often too much. Young people fared better when they received practical help with day-to-day tasks of living. All the young people in work at the time of the second interview listed a member of their family or an ex-foster carer in their support network. Care leavers who retained some contact with their family or foster carers could turn to them for basic support, e.g. an evening meal, help with a phone call or filling in forms, a chat after a bad day at work. Supported housing also offered a halfway house for some of these young people. For example, Ellis listed people at his supported housing project among those he would talk to for advice about making future life changes.

Some young people received the type of help that might be provided by a family from other relationships. For example, Frank, lodging with a friend of a friend, enjoyed practical and emotional support from his landlady. This was an informal arrangement in a small market town where there were no supported housing projects. He described the relationship:

[Landlady] pays all my bills; she cooks my tea and generally looks after me.

At the first interview he was in seasonal temporary work. Following encouragement from his landlady to apply to the local catering firm, he was offered a job that he had been doing for over a year. Although he wanted to find more independent accommodation, the benefit of having bills and food included in the rent reduced the risk of him falling into debt while he was establishing himself in the world of work. Talking about the previous year he described himself as:

Happy – I have never been happier than this in a long time.

Professionals provided a different type of practical help. For example, young people such as Penny, Graham, and Olivia benefited from help in organising their wages and bills, bouncing ideas about what they wanted in work or college and minimising social isolation.

Practical support, often from family or substitute family members, but also from people such as landladies and professionals, seemed to determine whether the young person was able to maintain their involvement in education, training and employment. This may be because the support enables the young person to tackle the transition to adulthood by taking responsibility for a number of things slowly. In the case of the landlady, Frank paid rent but he did not have to pay for all his bills. A year on some interviewees had struggled when they felt too much had happened at once.

Consistent, long-term relationships

Care leavers who coped with the challenges of young adulthood tended to have one or more people in their lives who were consistently available to provide emotional support such as encouragement, accountability, or even persistent nagging. Support could come from a professional or from a family member or ex-foster carer. For

example, all but two of the young people in work at the second interview had contact with a person from social services. The remaining two had contact with family members. As Mandy said, talking about careers advice, she would listen to her foster carers most 'because they were at you 24 hours a day'.

When care leavers talked about professional support they described an informal relationship where the young person felt 'known' by the professional. The in-depth and long-term nature of the relationship with professionals on special programmes such as the New Deal seemed to be of particular help to care leavers. For example, Rachel received support from the specialist careers adviser assigned to her because of her disabilities as part of the Transitions Programme – a support programme for young people with disabilities. She described her careers worker as 'helpful and funny and remembers things about my life', and felt confident this was someone she could turn to when she needed help. The fact that the careers adviser knew and remembered Rachel contrasted with some of the young people's concerns about the lack of relationship with their workers.

The lack of continuity in relationships seemed to be linked to greater instability and disruption during the year. In contrast to those such as Ben and Jemima who enjoyed stability at work and in their relationships, all of the young people unemployed at the time of the interview appeared to belong to fragile support networks. The networks included few family members, professionals or foster carers. However, unemployed care leavers with plans at the second interview, such as Isaac, had received help from a key professional. Overall, having someone consistently available – a family or substitute family member or professional – seemed to provide the young person with the stability they required to ride out difficulties, stay engaged in their economic activity or develop plans for the future.

Specialist organisations

Some of the young people with minor disabilities benefited from the help of specialist organisations. For example, Ellis had experienced a rocky period involving problems in his shared accommodation and a series of short-term jobs. However, he gained work as a result of a work experience placement arranged by an organisation that specialised in placing people with disabilities in work. His accommodation problem was solved when he moved house within the supported housing provider.

What was missing from professional support?

Continuity

Although a number of young people rated the help they received from their social workers, young people were concerned by the high turnover of social workers and other staff involved in their lives. For example, Fay voiced issues raised by a number of young people:

Social services need more organisation when it comes to allocating people. Cases are just passed around. They come to see me then go. I have spoken to my social worker once and now it has changed. She is due to see me in the near future.

Interviewees described annoyance at having to retell their story to new social workers. In some cases, young people could not be bothered to recite their stories again, as Isobel explained:

Social workers are sometimes very judgemental and do not realise how scared, vulnerable and nervous it feels to be in care. Why should I let some one else know my feelings and thought? And subsequently the reaction comes out the wrong way – anger, bad behaviour ...

Befriending

As well as continuity of relationship, a number of interviewees mentioned the need for more informal and personal care:

I think social workers need to care and be open; a friend rather than a professional. It is not always the advice that is required, do this, do that, but the help to do it yourself ... someone willing to go with you.

Young people talked about professionals getting to know them better, for example by finding out about their interests and by offering some out-of-office hours, as Sandy commented:

Social workers should take more time to get to know you, have social visits, like come down for a coffee when nothing is wrong.

Tanya, with particular issues around pregnancy, felt she needed someone to talk to 'like a Mum'. Mandy had lots of contact from both social services and from supported housing providers. However she still wanted 'someone to listen to you more personal'.

Support from sessional workers was more akin to the support young people were seeking. Interviewees particularly valued the long-term support provided by these workers, in contrast to the, sometimes, transient relationship formed with social workers. For example, Sandy commented:

You need sessional worker support because social workers change so often.

Tailored, flexible assistance

Young people also mentioned a lack of advice and information on education, training and employment options and the need for more support to find work, sort out accommodation and access 'leaving care' grants. As Fay mentioned,

I would rather receive help when I need it, for example, accurate information on leaving care grants and the grants to be made available when they are required – this could be planned before leaving care.

Fay's desire for help 'when needed' was echoed by other young people. Indeed, an ongoing concern was that the type and timing of support should be appropriate to the individual's circumstances. For

example, Olivia felt it was important to have at least weekly visits from a social worker or support worker when leaving care to ensure that schoolwork did not suffer. On the other hand, Graham was involved with the Youth Offending Team because of a previous offending history. He found professionals' focus on education, training and work options too much when he was preoccupied with sorting out his new flat and settling into it.

Staff would tell me what to do without asking me first.

He would have valued more involvement from professionals and a greater emphasis on education when he was still in residential care.

Financial concerns

Inevitably, many of the young people's moves into work or education were shaped by their financial circumstances. They did not have the opportunity of easing themselves into adulthood by working, studying, or both, while living in the family home. Interviewees talked about the complications of the benefit system where income is taken into account when calculating housing benefit. The perceived complications deterred some interviewees from attempting to combine part-time work and study the way that many of their peers did. Instead, some interviewees felt that their financial circumstances obliged them to abandon any thoughts of continuing their education and concentrate on finding work. For example, Beatrice, aged 18 at the time of the interview, found work because she believed she could not afford to live independently and fund herself through education. Peers living with parents would not have these issues to contend with and may find part-time work an attractive feature of the transition to young adulthood.

In two cases, difficulties in accessing benefits acted as a spur for finding work. Graham found

work, although he left after nine months, through an advert he saw at the careers centre which he had to attend in order to claim his benefits. Beatrice's home situation motivated her to find work so that she could move into her own accommodation. She had been living at home but received no financial support from her parents because of problems in the relationship and she was not entitled to benefits because she was under 18 and still in the parental home. She found work as a waitress via her local Jobcentre and then moved into the private rented sector through her manager at work. Asked if this was what Beatrice thought she would be doing a year ago she said:

Maybe – it was one of the things I was willing to do. It was not my main choice but it's okay. I have thought of leaving a few times but it's the money. I would like the weekends off but the wages are good for a 19-year-old.

Personal circumstances

A recurring theme in the second interviews was the significance of life circumstances. Care leavers had to deal with a range of issues that affected their economic engagement, including housing, relationships, debt, health and substance use. For example, in the course of the year, Anthony saw his benefits cut to £50 per fortnight, he lost his job and the associated NVQ training because he hurt his arm, fell out with his mother and was struggling with a drink problem for which he finally sought help.

In a small study of this kind it was not possible to unravel the extent to which an unstable personal life created difficulties in economic engagement or was symptomatic of young people least able to pursue work and educational options. Whether cause, symptom or both, a significant proportion of the young people who had made little progress along a career path had experienced a difficult and unsettled year in their personal lives. Ken,

unemployed and living in a hostel, remembered the first year after having left care as being a particularly difficult time.

The one before [year] was the worse of my entire life.

Sudden changes in the young person's circumstances were often the cause of disruption but the support of a professional at that point helped to ensure the young person stayed connected with career choices. For example, during the year Olivia dropped out of college and spent some time unemployed. The involvement of her social worker gave her some stability during that time and helped her get back into work as a trainee chef.

Accommodation

Whether or not the young person lived in settled accommodation seemed to have a bearing on their ability to remain engaged in their work, training or educational situation. For example, during the previous year Ellis had been unhappy in the supported, shared accommodation in which he was living and had worked in a series of short-term jobs. A move to new accommodation with different flatmates, again in supported housing, coincided with a move into a permanent job.

Having a stable home life appeared to be a particularly important factor in differentiating outcomes for young people who had an unsettled care history. Young people with unsettled care histories who moved frequently after care were less likely to be able to remain engaged with their economic activity. Olivia, who had both residential and foster placements in the three years she was in care, experienced ten changes over the course of two years after care. In the space of five months during the year between the interviews she left her supported accommodation, moved into a hostel, returned to supported housing, and then left when she found a job with accommodation attached. While these changes were happening her best friend was sent to prison, her mother disowned her and she was involved with drugs.

Health issues and drug and alcohol abuse

A number of young people mentioned the negative impact of drug and alcohol use on their lives. Substance abuse was often one part of a broader picture of instability. For example, Gillian was pregnant and had been unemployed for the duration of the year. Drug use, and its impact on motivation and memory, compounded other difficulties, as illustrated in Gillian's comments on careers support:

I have had [careers] appointments, but couldn't be bothered to attend. I think the last careers interview was two years ago but smoking dope you get memory lapses.

Anthony and Ken also experienced unsettled years prior to the interview. In contrast to Gillian, however, both were aiming to address their substance misuse issues. Anthony was having counselling for his alcohol problem. Ken felt he had already managed to reduce his cannabis use to a less disruptive level. He was planning to return to college to do GCSEs, which he had not completed during his time in the looked after system.

Parenthood

By the second interview, four of the young people were primary carers. They struggled with some of the difficulties of accessing work, education or training that other young people described. The young parents also faced additional problems, such as organising childcare.

Financial concerns

Young parents were particularly aware of the limited and poorly paid job opportunities available to them because of a lack of qualifications. They talked about feeling caught in a benefits trap, unable to earn enough to compensate for the lost benefits. For example, Fay, a mother of two living with her partner, who was also unemployed, talked about her plans for the future. As she said, 'I would

eventually like to find a job and get some training. I would prefer training within the job rather than college', but she felt enmeshed in her financial circumstances:

We are managing on benefits, but if [partner] got a job we would have to pay full housing, which would mean we were worse off.

These beliefs about a 'benefits trap' were not always accurate, but they point to the need for professionals to educate young people about their welfare rights and assist them to access what is available.

Transport limitations and work options

The rural nature of the study area created additional barriers to finding work or accessing training and education for the whole sample. Local opportunities were limited and young people needed to travel or relocate in order to pursue work or appropriate training. This was particularly problematic for care leavers with children. The limited public transport infrastructure made travelling without a car highly problematic and costly, while funding a car was not an option. For example, Elizabeth was not working at the time of the interview and had recently broken up with her partner. She lived in a small market town and needed to work locally.

Childcare

Finding appropriate childcare was also an issue. Elizabeth had to turn down an interview because she could not secure a place for her child in the local nursery:

I went down to the job centre and completed [the] application form. As and when they have a job they ring me up. I was offered an interview at [local leisure club]. But couldn't go because I couldn't get [her child] into nursery.

Priorities and attitudes

The responsibilities of parenthood had a distinct impact on the attitudes and motivation of the young mothers. Isobel had been motivated to seek work partly because she wanted to prove to her family that she was a good mother. She found work through the help of a New Deal Lone Parent Adviser. On the other hand, Sandy's priority was to focus on bringing up her child and she did not plan to undertake any work or training until her child was at school:

I've realised everything boils down to [her child] now.

Although parenthood affected the young people's motivation to find work differently, they were similar in that becoming parents helped them to develop a more independent and mature status in comparison with their peers. For example, as a result of becoming a mother Sandy had developed new friendships and so become more confident in continuing friendships not based on the common factor of children. The research echoed the findings of other studies that have identified the positive impact of motherhood on care leavers' development of an adult 'non-care' status (Hutson, 1997).

Attitudes and self-motivation

In many cases, the young person's motivation to work or undertake further education or training was the main impetus for change. For example, when asked who would be important in making any future changes Isaac replied, 'I'm the only one'. Others, such as Ken and Jeff, were equally convinced that the outcome of their future lay with them. For example, looking at the year ahead, Jeff felt:

Things will get better. It's what you make it.

Similarly, some young people were dismissive of careers advice and believed that the best option was to rely on themselves. For example, Ken replied to questions about careers advice that:

I would never go to careers – I'll sort myself out myself. They only make things more difficult.

The determination and energy shown by some of the young people contrasted with the sense of helplessness, inertia or lack of motivation shown by others. For example, Gillian, unemployed and expecting a baby, seemed trapped in her circumstances:

Might go to careers – but unlikely cos I'm pregnant and I'm one of those who live off the state.

Changing attitudes to education

Many of the young people experienced difficulties finding reasonably paid work because of few or no qualifications. While this had been a difficult experience their exclusion from the labour market also helped them to value education and training as a means to better opportunities. For example, after a difficult year, Ken recognised the need to make up for lost time. He planned to return to college to take his GCSEs, which he had not completed whilst he had been in the looked after system. He now realised the difficulty of accessing better work without these qualifications but was optimistic that he could achieve his goals: 'I feel I can do it'.

7 Conclusions and implications

Care leavers' accounts of the year after care provide a keen insight into the factors that helped and hindered their transition to young adulthood. The report does not include the perspectives of other people involved in the young people's lives at the same time. The single-perspective approach has strengths and weaknesses. We do not have a 'professional' perspective on the young people's difficulties and the help they received. On the other hand, we have a keener understanding of what young people found particularly difficult, what they expected from the care they received, and what they felt helped.

One consideration in assessing the findings is the number of young people lost to the study at the second interview. We do not know the reasons why nine young people declined to participate in the second phase. One explanation is that they were particularly disengaged from social and economic life. This may be especially true of those who could be not traced. The picture painted of care leavers' economic engagement a year later may have looked different had the study been able to include these young people.

The accounts reveal a number of factors that combined to influence the care leaver's transition to young adulthood. The disadvantage the young people experienced before being looked after and the nature of the care experience, including the age of entering care, affected their educational achievement, relationship-building skills and support networks. In most cases young people were already lagging behind their peers at school, but their educational achievement was further marred by frequent moves to new schools and a lack of encouragement and motivation to pursue their studies. Financial concerns deterred young people from continuing with or revisiting their education. In some cases, financial worries were unfounded and based on a lack of information about benefit entitlements.

Professional and informal support was crucial to the young person's success. The care leavers

benefited from help, usually from professionals, with developing and pursuing career options. Emotional encouragement, often from family and substitute family members, helped young people to stay engaged in what they were doing. Professionals in a befriending role, such as sessional workers, were also helpful in this respect. Young people also required support with practical aspects of independent living. Where young people did not receive this support, the issues they had to contend with, such as substance abuse, relationship breakdown and moving home, could tip the balance against them remaining in their work, training or educational situations.

Young mothers faced distinct barriers. These included lack of childcare, transport difficulties and financial concerns about earning enough to cover childcare costs and lost benefits. Particular issues were associated with the rural nature of the study area, including the dispersion of the young people's support networks and transport and financial barriers to accessing them. The area also yielded very limited training and employment opportunities.

Care leavers' motivation and belief in their ability to succeed went a long way in helping them to overcome the barriers they faced. The sample exhibited considerable reliance and skill in juggling the demands of finding and maintaining independent accommodation, establishing themselves in a new work or education environment, 'keeping house' for the first time and coping with a range of difficulties, such as substance abuse, relationship breakdown, housing problems and ill health.

Implications for policy and practice

While some young people succeeded, others struggled under the challenges and responsibilities they faced on leaving care. The findings point to a number of areas where developments in policy and practice may enhance care leavers' likelihood of a

successful transition to young adulthood. The implications are outlined below.

Enhancing professional support

- Support needs to be flexible, targeted and geared to the pace at which the young person is able to engage with their future employment, education and training options.
- Young people's endeavours to continue with their chosen work or study options were often hindered by having to deal with considerable adversity in other aspects of their lives. Care leavers are more likely to stay in their jobs or training and educational roles if they have help with the other pressing issues they face, such as stable housing and financial security.
- Professional support is likely to be most effective where there is continuity of key workers. In order to maximise continuity of support the LA and other agencies should ensure there is sufficient flexibility within staff roles and across professional boundaries to ensure that ongoing support is available to care leavers.
- Young people demonstrated considerable resilience and self-reliance after care and professionals could help young people build on these skills in order to improve access to future opportunities.
- Professionals in new roles such as Connexions Personal Advisers and Leaving Care Personal Advisers are well placed to address care leavers' needs for long-term, holistic support – a support that was infrequently available to the care leavers in this study.
- The Employment Service should ensure that their practitioners are informed about and responsive to the issues affecting care leavers, such as housing needs and their ability to engage with and remain in employment while living independently.

- Within the new system of financial support for young people under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 the LA and Careers/Connexions Service should work together to ensure those young people dependent on the LA for financial support do not lose out on the careers advice other young people receive as part of the route to welfare benefits, or as part of their school or Connexions support.
- Schemes to encourage people into work or training should recognise the additional factors in care leavers' lives that affect attendance. Systems should be put in place to ensure individual work plans link into individual pathway plans to help address these issues.

Addressing issues early

- Young people need support in resolving issues arising out of the loss and bereavement associated with a move into care before problems become entrenched.
- Developing strategies to enhance young people's resilience and coping skills before they leave care should assist young people to cope more successfully with life after care.
- Informal support played a significant role in helping care leavers in their transition to young adulthood. Professionals are in a position to assist young people to maximise the informal support available to them by helping to identify key people in the support network at an early stage.

Promoting informal support

- Young people experienced some difficulties building and maintaining relationships. Professionals are well placed to encourage and help young people to develop their support networks. The rural nature of the LA posed particular barriers to keeping in touch with people. Practitioners should ensure that issues

around distance are recognised, costed and incorporated into pathway planning.

- Ex-foster carers provided considerable support to care leavers some years after caring for them. Professionals should recognise and support the role ex-foster carers play.

Supporting new parents

- Parents face additional barriers to economic engagement. They need to be able to access appropriate childcare in order to take up work, training or educational opportunities. They would also benefit from help in reviewing and accessing their benefit entitlements.

Tackling financial barriers

- Young people were deterred from continuing with their education or accessing training because of financial concerns. Professionals could help by ensuring that young people are properly informed about the support they are entitled to after care and that benefit entitlements are regularly reviewed.
- Young people need financial support to enable them to resume their basic education in later life. Support should be equivalent to that which they would have received when they were in the education system.
- Welfare benefits and training allowances should reflect the additional costs associated with living independently compared with a young person living in the home environment. Care leavers require additional financial support from their local authority to enable them to pursue training options, even when the young person is over 18 and no longer the sole responsibility of the LA.
- The government's Standard Spending Assessments should recognise the additional costs rural authorities face in supporting care leavers effectively.

Protecting and promoting education

- Care placements frequently involved a change of school. Practitioners should strive to ensure that placements avoid a change of school unless it would benefit the young person's education.
- Young people who moved schools often found themselves behind or out of kilter with the new curriculum. Systems need to be in place to ensure that either different schools are following the same curriculum or the young person is given help to catch up.
- Care leavers living independently need practical and emotional support to continue with their education. Schools and colleges could assist young care leavers by ensuring that systems are in place to address their particular needs. Peers or mentors in educational establishments might encourage young people to remain committed to their education while in the looked after system or after care.
- Local authorities should exploit the opportunities given within the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 to ensure that young people leaving care are not disadvantaged from going on to further and higher education due to a lack of financial support.

Issues for future research

This was a modest piece of research. The relatively small sample size and the attrition it faced at the second interview make it difficult to draw conclusions about cause and effect mechanisms in determining outcomes for young people. The difficulties are exacerbated by the complexity of factors that had a bearing on these young people's lives. As well as pointing to the need to understand more about the mechanisms that shape outcomes in young adulthood, the research findings provoke a number of questions for future research. These include:

- What are the most appropriate roles for the professionals involved with the young people? How can professionals best establish an appropriate relationship with the care leaver that recognises both their adult, independent status and the ongoing statutory basis of the worker's involvement?
- What is the importance of the care leaver's self-reliance and how can their self-determination best be harnessed to assist them in pursuit of their education, training and employment opportunities?
- What are the economic circumstances of young people who have been out of care for five or more years and how do these circumstances vary according to the social networks and sources of support at their disposal?

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Appendix 1

Local authority responsibilities towards care leavers

Under the Children Act 1989 the local authority is required to:

... advise and befriend young people under 21 who were cared for away from home after the age of 16.

(Section 24(2))

... provide assistance in kind or, in exceptional circumstances, in cash, to any young person who qualifies for advice.

(Section 23(6))

... provide financial assistance connected with the young person's further education, employment or training. This power enables the local authority to contribute to expenses and the costs of accommodation so that a young person can live near a place where he or she is employed, seeking employment or receiving education or training.

(Section 24(8))

Note: The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 has given local authorities additional duties to care leavers.

Appendix 2

The first interview

The interview schedule covered four areas, outlined below.

Part One – Current support network

Support network questions were used to build up the sociogram with the young person. A 'Member of support network profile' was completed for each person identified.

Member of support network profile

Name:

Known for how long?

Relationship? Friend / family / professional (specify)

Contact in past month? Yes / No

How often in past month?

Nature of contact? Face to face / telephone / letter / other

Who took initiative? Mostly young person / 50/50 / Mostly other person

Satisfied with level of contact? Yes / No

If no, preferred level of contact for past month.

This person could be relied on for help with:

Finance / housing / personal life / education, training and employment.

Overall level of importance (e.g. 2/12)

Gap in support network profile

Name:

Known for how long?

Relationship? Friend / family / professional (specify)

Preferred level of contact in 2-week period?

Preferred nature of contact?

Face to face / telephone / letter / other

Preferred purpose of contact?

Finance / housing / personal life / education, training and employment

Preferred initiative?

Mostly young person / 50/50 / mostly other person

Preferred order of importance (e.g. 2/12)

Into the mainstream

Part Two – Current education, training and employment

Two different sections – one for those involved in some work, training or education and one for those who were not.

Part Three – History of education, training and employment

A flow chart was constructed using a 'History of education, training and employment' form.

History of education, training and employment

Name of young person:

Description of e/t/e:

Date started:

Date finished:

How did you come to be doing this?

Who did you discuss this with?

(prompt for family, friends, careers service, social workers, others)

Who was most useful:

Who was least useful:

Order of form:

Part Four – The wider context

Other issues prominent for young person, e.g. accommodation. Anything else young person wishes to add.

Appendix 3

The second interview

The second interview covered four areas.

Part One – Current support network

Summary of purpose of second interview and update from previous interview. Completion of ‘Member of support network profile’, as for first interview.

Part Two – History of education, training and employment over the past year

Completion of ‘History of education, training and employment’ form.

Part Three – Current education, training and employment

Two alternative sections for those occupied and those not occupied.

Part Four – The wider context

Particular prompts for finance, accommodation, relationships, significant health and other issues linked to timeline outlined below.

Table A3.1 Timeline of significant changes

	July 2000	Aug. 2000	Sept. 2000	Nov. 2000	Dec. 2000	Jan. 2001	Feb. 2001	Mar. 2001	Apr. 2001	May 2001	July 2001	Aug. 2001	Sept. 2001
Debt													
Housing													
E/T/E													
Relationships													
Health													
Other													

Appendix 4

Profile of interviewees

Table A4.1 Profile of interviewees

Interviewee	Age at 1st interview	Age at last episode into care	Age left care	Placement experience	Looked-after status*
Alison	17	14	17	Foster care	Section 31**
Beatrice	18	16	17	Foster care	Section 20
Karen	19	11	18	Foster care	Section 20
Debbie	18	16	17	Foster care	Section 20
Anthony	17	14	16	RCC	Section 20
Elizabeth	19	13	18	Foster care	Section 20
Ben	18	12	18	With family	Section 31
Carl	19	6 wks	18	Foster care	Section 20
Derek	20	12	18	Foster care	Section 31
Ellis	N/a				
Fay	17	15			Section 20
Gillian	18	11	17	Foster care	Section 31
Isobel	19	14			
Helen	16	14	16	Foster care	Section 20
Frank	21	14		Foster care	Section 20
Graham	17	14	16	Foster care and RCC	Section 20
Jemima	19	13	16	RCC	Section 20
Linda	N/a				Section 20
Carol	19	14	17	Foster care	Section 31
Mandy	18	13	18	Foster care and RCC	Section 20
Nancy	17	14	16	Foster care	Section 20
Harry	17	14	16	Foster care and RCC	Section 20
Isaac	17	15	16	Foster care	Section 20
Jeff	17	14	16	Foster care	Section 20
Olivia	16	13	16	Foster care and RCC	Section 20
Penny	18	14	17	Foster care	Section 31
Ken	17	12	17	Foster care and RCC	Section 20
Lance	18	16	18	Foster care	Section 20
Rachel	17	12	17	Foster care and RCC	Section 31
Sandy	16	14	16	Foster care	Section 31
Tanya	17	15	16	Foster care and RCC	Section 31
Mike	16	13	16	Foster care	Section 20
Amy	16	14	16	Foster care and RCC	Section 20
Wendy	17	16	17	Foster care	Section 20
Neil	21	13		Foster care	Section 20
Ron	18	14	17	Foster care	Section 20

* Children Act 1989.

** Section 31 = care order.

RCC = Residential children's centre.