



Leicestershire **Cares**  
Together we **Can**

# MY CARE JOURNEY

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*IN TRUTH CARE  
EXPERIENCED YOUNG  
PEOPLE, ARE LIKE ANY  
OTHER CHILDREN, THEY  
NEED LOVE, CONSISTENCY  
AND UNDERSTANDING.*

## Introduction

There is a saying that labels are only useful for jars. This resonates strongly with many care experienced young people, who often find the 'label', care experienced is perceived by many as indicating a 'problem'. Hopefully, when you read this book, you will come away realising what a diverse group of young people the 'care experience label' covers, and the many strengths and attributes the young people have developed in having to deal with and overcome the challenges they face. These are often exacerbated by poorly funded or inappropriate support.

At Leicestershire Cares, we strongly believe the voices and lived experiences of care experienced young people should drive the care agenda. We also believe that systems and policies which seek to embrace and encourage the contribution that the business, community and public sector can make through working in creative and agile partnerships with care experienced young people are likely to be the most successful.

In truth, care experienced young people are like any other children - they need love, consistency and understanding. If we can work together without 'ego, silo or logo' across professional, organisational and community boundaries, where we seek to proactively engage and listen to these children, we can start to improve how we offer that support.

So, enjoy the book and become part of the change.

**Kieran Breen**

Chief Executive Officer  
Leicestershire Cares



# What is it like being a care leaver?

Is it all Tracey Beaker, the 10-year-old bossy but likeable rebel who is living in the 'Dumping Ground'? Or do you think of the tragic cases that hit the news headlines when their deaths become the subject of

Serious Case Reviews, which conclude that agencies should recognise and address neglect, communicate better with each other and listen to the 'voice of the child'.

# What do we know about care leavers?

- Care leavers are young people aged over 16 leaving local authority care.
- When a young person leaves care, a local authority must appoint a Personal Adviser (PA) to help them plan for their futures, up to the age of 25.
- Local authorities must publish a 'local offer for care leavers' of their legal entitlements, and any discretionary support they provide.
- The government's care leaver strategy in 2013 identified education, employment, finance, health, housing and the justice system as likely areas of ongoing support needs for care leavers.
- The Care Leaver Covenant for England in 2018 allows public, private and voluntary sector organisations to pledge support, through work experience, apprenticeships and free or discounted goods and services.
- The independent review 2022 recommended that the government make care experience a protected characteristic in equalities legislation. The government plans to expand the Staying Close programme.
- The current Labour government plan a Children's Wellbeing Bill which will include support for care leavers.



On 31 March 2024, there were

**83,630 children**

in the care of local authorities in England.

Children looked after in England including adoptions (Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK)

**36%**

looked-after children aged under 10 years

**39%**

were aged 10-15 years

**67%**

in foster care

**10%**

residential care

**7%**

Semi-independent accommodation

**6%**

Someone with parental responsibility

**10%**

other placement

**Nearly 50%**

of under 21-year-olds in contact with the criminal justice system have spent time in care: A 2023 study revealed that 33% of care experienced children received a youth justice caution or conviction between the ages of 10 and 17, compared to 4% of those without care experience. (The Guardian 2023)

**38%**

of care leavers aged 19-21 are not in education, employment or training (NEET), (March 2022 GOV.UK 2022, compared to 13% in the rest of the population).

**19% of Looked After Children**

have Attainment 8 measures (the average achievement of pupils in up to eight qualifications at GCSE) compared to 45% of the general population.

Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England (Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK)

**9% of care leavers**

enter higher education by their 19th birthday, compared to 47% of the wider population. (Civitas 2023)

**25%**

of the adult prison population have previously been in care. (Department for Education 2024)



17-year-old care leavers:

**7% are in  
accommodation  
considered  
unsuitable**

18-year-old care leavers:

**3% are in  
accommodation  
considered  
unsuitable**

Care leavers aged 19-21:

**6% are in  
unsuitable  
accommodation**

17-21-year-old care leavers by whether  
their accommodation is suitable -  
national data set from Children  
looked after in England including  
adoptions - Explore education  
statistics - GOV.UK

**Care Leavers  
constitute 25%**  
of the Adult Homeless Population  
(BBC NEWS 2024)

**Black children  
constituted 7%**  
of the looked-after children population  
but are only 5% of the under-18 population.  
2% of Black children in care were adopted.  
Adopted and looked-after children - GOV.  
UK Ethnicity facts and figures

Care leavers have now been exempted from having to demonstrate their local connection to be supported in social housing. (Care leavers exempted from local connection requirement to access social housing - Community Care). This was the subject of a JUJI Parliamentary visit in December 2024.

This is the wider picture, filled with statistics and poorer outcomes than the non-care experienced population. Yet what is it **like** being a care leaver? Or being a care experienced adult.<sup>3</sup>



# What do care experienced young people say?

This booklet describes the care journeys of 11 care experienced young adults. These are their stories of what life has been like for them, what has made a difference and the change they want to see.

They want to avoid this being a 'boring booklet' (!) by adding some great places to explore, some fun things to do and some 'top tips' for care experienced young people.

They are young adults who have worked with Leicestershire Cares as part of the Joining Up Joining in (JUJI) project, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Blagrove Trust. This funding has given young people a voice in policy by giving them skills in peer research and in expressing their opinions in film and publications. They don't want to be defined by the stats; they want you to 'Change The Script'. Will you?

## **Krishna Kothari**

Youth Project Development Officer, Leicestershire Cares

## **Paul Whalley**

Youth Voice Coordinator, Leicestershire Cares







# Daveena, 22, she/her

Reflecting on my journey in the care system, it can have a positive side. In the moment, you won't see it or feel it. You will feel confused, lost and alone. It is scary and at times it can feel like it's never-ending. However, you will find your people. Whether that is through your foster family, the friends you meet along the way or the support system you create.

I think if I didn't end up in care, my life wouldn't be what it has become. I doubt I would have got the qualifications I have, I wouldn't be in university and I probably wouldn't have found my purpose in life. I believe that life gives us trials and tribulations for a reason, and it's what we do with them that is important.

I personally do not think everyone in care is treated equally; I think it depends on the young person's case. And there are a lot of young people in the system. I think it can be hard for social workers to do their job and whilst I am not excusing their difficulty, I believe if you have something important to say, speak up about it. They aren't mind readers and they can only ask questions. If you feel like something can be done for you, then ask. It can be scary to speak up, but it is as scary to stay silent and to deal with whatever you're dealing with on your own. There are organisations and charities available, if you feel like you need extra support, it's just about finding who they are.

Ironically, growing up before being in care, I loved to read books. I loved all of Jacqueline Wilson's books, especially Tracey Beaker. I loved watching Tracey Beaker; Tracey Beaker Returns and then the show The Dumping Ground.

I think being in care heavily impacts our future, especially if you don't know what you want to do in the future. It's okay if you don't know what you want to do; my mind is always changing on what my future looks like. I think it's important to get your grades whether you like school or not, you will end up leaving. Whether you leave with grades or not is down to you and you can always resit. I had to resit my maths twice.

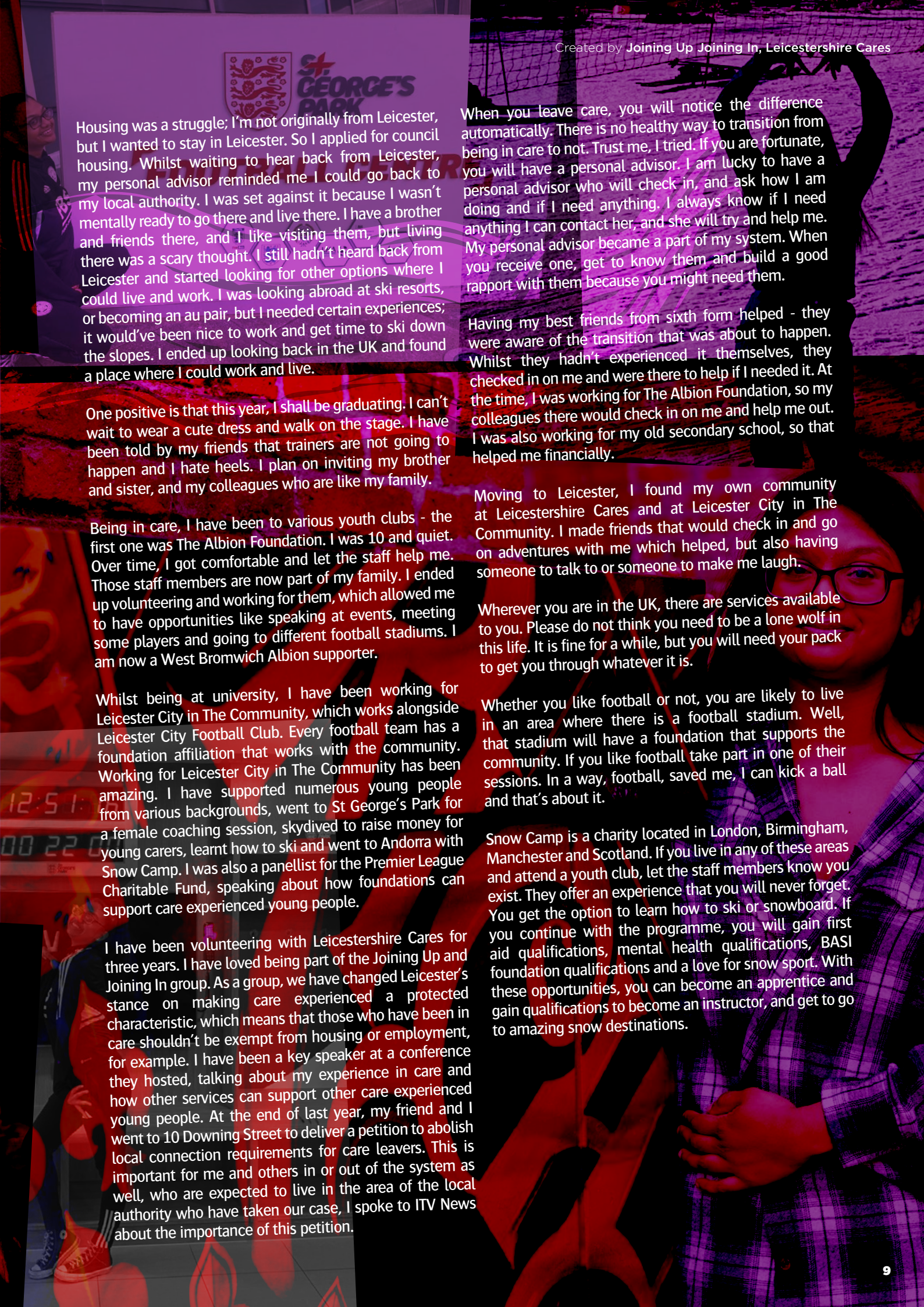
I feel like being in care has made me different. I don't celebrate Mother's or Father's Day because I don't have that relationship with them. Holidays like Easter and Christmas can be tricky - at university we have time to go home and I don't get that luxury. I also know that I am independent compared to my friends who aren't in care because of what I have gone through. That being said, I have had to learn to seek and ask for help when I am struggling.

Being in care, socialising is difficult. For me, I didn't see the point of making connections or friends because who are they to stay? From when my own parents left, anyone can leave. It is hard to get out of that mentality, but what helped was knowing I don't have to be a lone wolf.

I have made two best friends in the sixth form. They reassured me they weren't going anywhere and they haven't. Going to university was scary because my two best friends weren't with me and I wasn't sure anyone was going to like me. But I made another best friend, she lived across from me. I struggled with my first year and she was there every time I cried, had a panic attack or couldn't sleep. All three of my best friends are aware of my background and I think that helps, because I don't need them to have answers, but I need them to hear my thoughts and feelings, and to hug me and tell me everything is going to be alright.

I struggled with my mental health. I realised when I was a teenager and I got help for it. And then I came to university and the loneliness hit. I was so used to being in a busy house that being by myself was nice until I realised, I was alone. Making friends, having my best friend come down and see me was nice, my personal advisor kept checking in. I ended up making friends with some of my colleagues and they would invite me out, which took my mind off life.





Housing was a struggle; I'm not originally from Leicester, but I wanted to stay in Leicester. So I applied for council housing. Whilst waiting to hear back from Leicester, my personal advisor reminded me I could go back to my local authority. I was set against it because I wasn't mentally ready to go there and live there. I have a brother and friends there, and I like visiting them, but living there was a scary thought. I still hadn't heard back from Leicester and started looking for other options where I could live and work. I was looking abroad at ski resorts, or becoming an au pair, but I needed certain experiences; it would've been nice to work and get time to ski down the slopes. I ended up looking back in the UK and found a place where I could work and live.

One positive is that this year, I shall be graduating. I can't wait to wear a cute dress and walk on the stage. I have been told by my friends that trainers are not going to happen and I hate heels. I plan on inviting my brother and sister, and my colleagues who are like my family.

Being in care, I have been to various youth clubs - the first one was The Albion Foundation. I was 10 and quiet. Over time, I got comfortable and let the staff help me. Those staff members are now part of my family. I ended up volunteering and working for them, which allowed me to have opportunities like speaking at events, meeting some players and going to different football stadiums. I am now a West Bromwich Albion supporter.

Whilst being at university, I have been working for Leicester City in The Community, which works alongside Leicester City Football Club. Every football team has a foundation affiliation that works with the community. Working for Leicester City in The Community has been amazing. I have supported numerous young people from various backgrounds, went to St George's Park for a female coaching session, skydived to raise money for young carers, learnt how to ski and went to Andorra with Snow Camp. I was also a panellist for the Premier League Charitable Fund, speaking about how foundations can support care experienced young people.

I have been volunteering with Leicestershire Cares for three years. I have loved being part of the Joining Up and Joining In group. As a group, we have changed Leicester's stance on making care experienced a protected characteristic, which means that those who have been in care shouldn't be exempt from housing or employment, for example. I have been a key speaker at a conference they hosted, talking about my experience in care and how other services can support other care experienced young people. At the end of last year, my friend and I went to 10 Downing Street to deliver a petition to abolish local connection requirements for care leavers. This is important for me and others in or out of the system as well, who are expected to live in the area of the local authority who have taken our case, I spoke to ITV News about the importance of this petition.

When you leave care, you will notice the difference automatically. There is no healthy way to transition from being in care to not. Trust me, I tried. If you are fortunate, you will have a personal advisor. I am lucky to have a personal advisor who will check in, and ask how I am doing and if I need anything. I always know if I need anything I can contact her, and she will try and help me. My personal advisor became a part of my system. When you receive one, get to know them and build a good rapport with them because you might need them.

Having my best friends from sixth form helped - they were aware of the transition that was about to happen. Whilst they hadn't experienced it themselves, they checked in on me and were there to help if I needed it. At the time, I was working for The Albion Foundation, so my colleagues there would check in on me and help me out. I was also working for my old secondary school, so that helped me financially.

Moving to Leicester, I found my own community at Leicestershire Cares and at Leicester City in The Community. I made friends that would check in and go on adventures with me which helped, but also having someone to talk to or someone to make me laugh.

Wherever you are in the UK, there are services available to you. Please do not think you need to be a lone wolf in this life. It is fine for a while, but you will need your pack to get you through whatever it is.

Whether you like football or not, you are likely to live in an area where there is a football stadium. Well, that stadium will have a foundation that supports the community. If you like football take part in one of their sessions. In a way, football, saved me, I can kick a ball and that's about it.

Snow Camp is a charity located in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Scotland. If you live in any of these areas and attend a youth club, let the staff members know you exist. They offer an experience that you will never forget. You get the option to learn how to ski or snowboard. If you continue with the programme, you will gain first aid qualifications, mental health qualifications, BASI foundation qualifications and a love for snow sport. With these opportunities, you can become an apprentice and gain qualifications to become an instructor, and get to go to amazing snow destinations.



1

## Does being in care have a positive side?

Depends on who you are and who you are placed with. Taking into consideration the reason for placement.  
(Jordan, 25)

Yes, I believe being in care can have a positive side for me. This was through meeting new people who have similar experiences. Being in care has given me the opportunity to become independent. Being in care provided me a safer place to stay.  
(Lucy, 25, she/her)

Yes, being in care has a positive side because you have many people around you that are willing to listen to you and guide you through what is going on in your mind.  
(Soli, 18, she/her)

Being in care has a positive side because social services support and look after us.  
(Raina, 23, she/her)

Being in care can have a positive side, such as meeting people who you can relate to, a chance to have a safer environment, and a potentially better life and future. However, this is not spoken about often, due to the negative side of life in care outweighing the positives.  
(Tashauna, 22, she/her)

2

## Is everyone in care treated equally?

No! From my experience, another foster child who was placed in the same family was treated differently, not only by the family but also by other friends and associates of the foster family.  
(Jordan, 25)

I don't think everyone is treated equally because I am an asylum seeker and my funds were different to my foster sister, who is English.  
(Soli, 18)

I had different needs, like different hair products and skin products, but I have been told more than once that I spend too much money on my hair products whilst I have been in foster care.  
(Soli, 18)

Everyone in care is not treated equally because of race and ethnicity issues. Some ethnicities are prioritised over others.  
(Raina, 23)

I personally don't believe everyone in care is treated equally. From an outside perspective, I have seen the effects of discrimination and neglect, as well as the impact it has on young people during their prime developing years.  
(Tashauna, 22)



**3**

## **Does being in care affect your future?**

It can, statistics show this. Certain young people are more likely to enter certain institutions and become involved in negative habits.  
(Jordan, 25)

Yes, being in care has affected my future in positive and negative ways. It has affected my future relationships with my siblings as we were separated when put into the care system. Being care experienced has allowed me to gain stability and structure in my life. Being a part of the Joining Up Joining In group, I was able to take part in peer research which will help me in my future. As part of the peer research, I was able to take part in trauma informed training. This training helped me with being able to understand not only my situation, but others as well.  
(Lucy, 25)

Yes, but it depends on what you have been through for the impact either to be positive or negative.  
(Soli, 18)

Being in care affects your future because you have a different pathway to other young children. That is to say, you could live in a foster care house, in a children's home or others, and all this could lead to emotional damage.  
(Raina, 23)

Being in care most definitely affects the future of young people. The fact that care leaver/experienced has only recently become a protected characteristic is proof in itself how young people's futures are hindered by the discrimination and stigma around being in care.  
(Tashauna, 22)

**4**

## **Does being in care make you different?**

Yes, it can ostracise you - LABELS! It can also lead to bullying. Quote from bully at school "Go dig a hole and shoot yourself in it!". I didn't care for his comment, as he didn't mean much to me. If it was a friend saying it, it would have been more hurtful.  
(Jordan, 25)

Being in care makes you feel different from your peers which can lead to a feeling of stigmatisation and judgement. I vaguely remember having to leave class for meetings which often left me feeling embarrassed and confused. I would often hide being care experienced to protect myself, due to feeling different.  
(Lucy, 25)

Definitely, because it's a label that will stick with you for the rest of your life and will also just make everyone around you make assumptions about you from what they already know.  
(Soli, 18)

Yes, being in care makes you different because you live with people other than your parents, and often you could feel lonely. Also, the foster carer or foster family might not be as welcoming and lovely.  
(Raina, 23)

Being in care doesn't make you different, to put it simply, being in care just shows that you've experienced life that's a little bit different compared to others. You still experience the same education, life skills and mature the same as everyone else, your story just has a few more pages than other people.  
(Tashauna, 22)

5

## Does being in care make socialising difficult?

For me, socialising was already difficult, it just made my anti-social tendencies worse! I would get out of the house but wouldn't interact with others. The place I would be taken with my foster carers was usually the pub where she worked and it wasn't really an ideal place I wanted to socialise. The pub wasn't the ideal environment for me as a young person. The atmosphere wasn't what I was used to when I was living with my mother.

When I was placed into care, the only goal I had was to be back with my mother, the only family I actually had. This, therefore made me just put up with the environment for the sake of it. I didn't want to be moved to another placement, so I basically just said yes and agreed, as I was hearing other young people's experiences with being moved. A lot of distrust occurred when I was a teenager, and I felt I was treated more and more like a criminal.  
(Jordan, 25)

Yes, being in care has made socialising difficult for me. It has made socialising difficult due to trust being hindered. It takes me a long time to trust people and be comfortable with others to open up to them, whether it be regarding care or in general. Being a part of the peer research team has allowed me to gain confidence and be able to openly talk about care as a whole.  
(Lucy, 25)

Depends on the experience you had while being in care as for me, I was insecure and ashamed at first, then I realised that it doesn't really matter what someone's background is at the end of the day.  
(Soli, 18)

It depends on the person that you are. Socialising, in my opinion, is not impacted by being in care even though some young people are not comfortable saying that they are in care.  
(Raina, 23)

I think being in care can make socialising difficult, especially during high school, as kids that age can be very ignorant and insensitive towards other people and their experiences.  
(Tashauna, 22)



## 6

## What challenges and barriers have you faced?

The emotional and physical challenges that I faced were that I didn't socialise and go out much, and I used food as a coping mechanism, and I still do. Emotional challenges and anger are more manageable now I am back with my mother. However, I was less stable when I got back to my mother's for the first time and the anger was more directed to women, down to the fact I did not like my foster carer and being placed with her. I did discuss this with my PA at the time, who did advise therapy which I refused. I felt more comfortable to discuss with someone I loved and who cared about me, my mother.  
(Jordan, 25)

Attending sessions like Joining Up Joining In has allowed me to interact with more people of the opposite sex without any negative thoughts or preconceptions. I have learned to separate those thoughts and feelings from that one particular person who made me feel those negative thoughts.  
(Jordan, 25)

Being in care has had social and emotional challenges, as there are certain situations that can be triggering due to trauma. If I was to receive counselling for my mental health when younger, it may have helped with emotions and socialising aspects in my life. I did have access to CAHMS, however, as I was 17 years old when referred, I was only able to receive the help/support for a year before I was no longer supported.  
(Lucy, 25)

I was 17 when I entered the care system because I came to the UK without my family. I didn't know anything, I had no idea how expensive things were and I was a quiet kid so I never asked for a lot. Once I turned 18, I had to finance my stuff and I regretted not getting as much stuff as I could while I had funding.  
(Soli, 18)

In my opinion, funding should be greater once you are 18 and not the other way around, because we will need it to survive.  
(Soli, 18)

Challenges and barriers faced: socially, it might be difficult to respond to the questions of our peers and all the painful situations we have been through. Financially, we don't get enough money for a living, and the support stops when we are 25; however, we are still supported through our time in education since we get a bursary. Emotionally, it is difficult to cope with loneliness and isolation. Physically, our weak emotional state can impact our physical, making us sick.  
(Raina, 23)

There are various challenges and barriers faced, such as transitioning into independent living and adulthood, due to the lack of skills like basic domestic, cooking and budgeting. This makes it more difficult for young people to smoothly adjust to living as a young adult, which is commonly due to the lack of support from PAs and the care system as a whole.  
(Tashauna, 22)



## Positives - housing, education, opportunities, employment

I honestly didn't see much of a positive when I was in care. The leaving care grant is beneficial as it helps with making a house a home, with required furniture including beds, cooker, tumble dryer, which was helpful. I don't feel there was a great deal of opportunities put forward to me, as well the help from my PA was limited, and support was also limited unless I was to request this. In 2020, I reached out to the SYPAC group I attended (supporting young people after care) for help from my PA to which I was told I don't have one any more (although I was only 20 years old). I was then made to get a new PA, by which point the issues I was facing I had dealt with myself. (Jordan, 25)

One of the positives of being in care is the opportunity to socialise with others with similar experiences to understand I am not alone in this situation. Attending Joining Up Joining In has allowed me to speak on care experience and how we can campaign for a better service to support those in care. Being able to meet with councillors and to be a part of passing the motion of care experience as a protected characteristic was a great positive aspect as it shows the work we are doing is being recognised. (Lucy, 25)

I was supported greatly to pursue my education by the virtual school and I am very thankful. They did their best, so I got some English and maths qualifications while I was a newcomer, then I was able to start college at a higher level than people who came from overseas, and I managed to take my GCSEs. (Soli, 18)

Finding a house as a care leaver was easier for me than for those who aren't in care because we are a priority, which is a positive thing. (Raina, 23)

Positives that come along with being in care are the new opportunities that are available solely for care leavers/experienced young people such as employment, scholarships for higher education as well as bursaries. With care leaver/experienced now being a protected characteristic, this allows young people to have an equal opportunity and rights to benefit their futures and careers. (Tashauna, 22)







## **Impact after care - relationships, community, friendships, survival without the system?**

Friendships have survived but these were friends I made once I was in care and I now still have connections with them. However, the friendship I had with my foster carers is more strained - I had a great relationship with my male foster carer (more of a father figure than my own dad was) but the relationship with my female foster carer wasn't as great. It was a bit difficult as I would want to still keep a relationship with the male, however, the female would always want to come along with him so it made it difficult and then he passed away.

With the community I have been a part of at Leicestershire Cares the last year, this has been a positive experience being a part of it. I was able to gain skills such as becoming a peer researcher.  
(Jordan, 25)

It is easier to survive in the system when you are in education because you are supported until the age of 25.  
(Raina, 23)

I think one of the impacts that young people experience is that they feel they will constantly have to prove themselves to others that the stereotypes and stigma around being in care are untrue. Living independently as a young adult is extremely difficult for many, as they lack the support and preparation necessary to survive.  
(Tashauna, 22)



## **Services available to young people and experience for them**

Leicestershire Cares. Positive experience; SYPAC - I stopped attending when I started Leicestershire Cares but still have connections. I also felt that I was quite out of place as I was the only male amongst a group of care experienced mums. After Care Council - take a long time to make changes but changes take time to implement.  
(Jordan, 25)

There are bursaries available and emotional support such as counselling and therapy.  
(Raina, 23)

There are various services and organisations that help and advocate for young people, whether it's support to build their CV or learning basic skills such as cooking and budgeting. Leicestershire Cares works with several organisations to provide support and help for young people in all aspects.  
(Tashauna, 22)



Being care experienced does have its benefits like no council tax until 25, access to an independent visitor if you have carers that can't drive, and the achievement events which help boost young people's mental health and support their dreams.

The system is in place to maintain equality between LA ('local authority') children, compared to parented children, however, each placement is developed to the child/young person so some may have more support than others. However if the young person feels like they have too little support then it should be boosted upon a conversation with their social worker, personal advisor or foster carer.

Being in care doesn't necessarily affect your future but the mindset and opportunities that LAC ('looked after child') receive can influence it highly, even a 'gifted' LAC can still struggle to make their education and jobs a positive experience and can end up masking it so much that even the professionals won't notice that they are struggling so much.

I feel that being in care definitely changes your way of thinking about life, the two major ways being to control and mask how you are feeling to get by, and lashing out/being more disruptive than the average child. These are both in response to a cry for attention or a desire to feel 'normal' as being a LAC can feel very lonely, even with the support systems in place due to it being so inherently different from a traditional childhood.

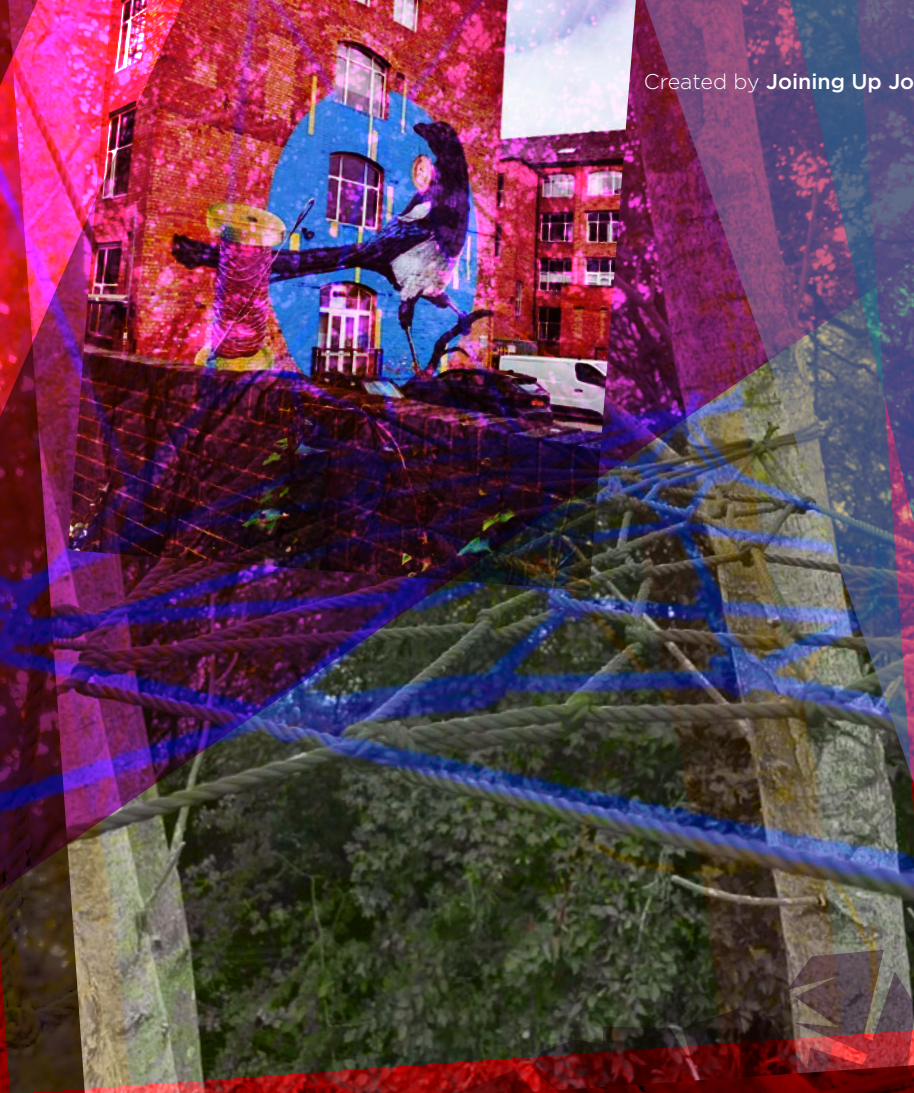
Socialising is a hard one to answer. If a child is placed in care early (from the ages of 0-3/4 years), then they can still have the normal functions of a healthy, happy child. From the ages of 5 to 13, it is more of a struggle as they have to deal with moving schools, leaving potential friends behind when moving from home to placement and can go through this multiple times whilst searching for the right long term placement. 13 plus, however, is a 50/50 due to their previous experiences with life. They may have really good social skills and the move helps them to become who they want to, or they could 'crash' and end up with skill regression, with enough support they can get back to where they are, but if the carers don't know the difference between the young person's 'normal' before they arrive, then they can see the now quiet and shy young person as 'normal' and feel like they shouldn't pressure them to make connections.

There is such a large list of barriers here that I couldn't name them all if I wanted, but I'll give an example of each. Social barriers include distancing from your peers and exclusion from activities at school or after school from other children if judgement for being in care is there (around a 60/40 chance at the moment and people are becoming more receptive to LAC), this can continue into employment. Financially, sorting PA payments and eventually UC is the usual road for a young person and pocket money can also be very different; there are big connotations around universal credit of which some young people really struggle to deal with and once on, can struggle to get on their feet and find a stable enough job to get off benefits. Emotionally, I think one of the largest challenges is making the young person truly feel like they are 'normal' in their own view of themselves and society. A lot of self-depreciation and negative beliefs stem from dealing with this challenge from a very young age which do tend to carry onto adulthood, based on the conversations I've had with LAC I know personally. Physically, a lot of young people do struggle with body confidence and tend to try to find hobbies to keep them fit and active during their time in the service - access to the time2spend fund has been used in previous years for multitudes of gym memberships, purchasing of a bike\repairs for it, and equipment for other sports such as horse riding and rock climbing. Recently, the time2spend fund has been reduced and less young people and workers know of its existence, making getting into these hobbies and ways of keeping fit and healthy quite difficult for a large range of LAC.

# Kirby, 21, they /them







Young people get higher priority on the council housing list, 2k support fund for furniture, discounts like the warm home discount and vouchers for fuel\food on occasions. Personal Advisors can help to locate food banks and provide food vouchers if necessary. LAC are given pupil premium plus to help with costs towards school trips, books and other educational costs (I believe there is some sort of fund for getting clothing as well), and get offered residential trips to universities and open days so that they can experience a larger range of stuff before heading into their GCSEs. There are different teams within social services that can help young people find jobs, access housing, sort physical and mental health (including private therapy which is funded), and help pay for driving lessons and tests.

Without the system, a large amount of young people struggle to find their feet in society on their own, a lot start families in their early 20s and settle with a routine. Some go on to achieve amazing things such as being famous models, builders/carpenters and also mechanics, and quite a few end up working for the social systems themselves as they want to help change the next child's life that comes into the system. This is based on the feeling that after living through it, they could provide for a young person better than they were provided for by their old carers. Friendships seem to be quite sparse, however, the friendships that are there are quite strong, due to having moved through a majority of problems together throughout their experiences.

The services that have helped me are Children in Care council, Duke of Edinburgh awards, access to schools for children with special needs, help supporting you with court cases or police, if involved.







# Tanya, 18, she/her.



I entered care from birth because my biological parents were deemed unfit to take care of me. My first foster family had good intentions but weren't SEN-prepared, and though trying as well as they could, their lack of understanding made it toxic. I do think this underlines that just because a family is willing and keen to welcome foster children into their home, not all foster families are actually prepared for anything that comes their way.

School life was another struggle. Being 'different' made it hard to fit in, and I often felt isolated and misunderstood. Socialising was difficult and I lacked the confidence to connect with my peers. Moving from a mainstream school to a special needs school changed everything; for the first time, I was in an environment where my needs were understood and I felt supported. This gave me a sense of belonging and helped me grow in ways I never thought possible.

Only when I was 17 was I sent to another foster family, where finally, stability and care became available that I had lacked for so long. Since this placement happened a bit later in my life, it did show me it is never too late to recover. Their support gave the possibility to heal emotionally and choose the path to a brighter future, and a loving and understanding home really makes a difference - whenever.

Now 18, I have moved on to the Shared Lives system, where I am in the same host family that helps me build my independence. It's a different kind of care, but it helps me learn how to live and gain confidence through life as I make my way into adulthood. This new chapter reassures me that even outside of foster care, there are systems in place that help young people like me thrive.

Care has its challenges, which are social, emotional, and financial, but it also provided me with opportunities in education and housing. Though the journey has been hard, it taught me to be resilient and that being in care doesn't have to define your future. With the right support, it's possible to thrive. My story is proof that even late changes can lead to a brighter path.







# Georgie, 22, she/her

My care journey has been a rollercoaster, filled with a lot of ups and downs. It didn't start off very well. I got moved around, had a lot of social workers but now I've got a full-time job, I've moved out as it's a live-in position. Being in care isn't always great. It can affect your life if you let it. There can be things that trigger memories. I've had a lot of challenges, especially financially. I still struggle with saving, but it just takes time. I wouldn't say everyone in care is treated equally but everyone has different experiences, some will have better and some will have worse. No two care leavers and foster children have the same experiences. That's what we have to remember, there's always others that have it worse. I've had some emotional difficulties because of it. I've struggled with my eating because of it.

I've had some positives due to my last foster carers/ stay put hosts. They're the ones who helped me be ready for moving out and getting a full-time job. If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be where I am now. I had to learn a lot in just four years. My care leaver PA helped a lot as well and having my foster mam there during my life story work helped as well. They both helped when I was struggling during it, especially when I was thinking about my baby brother.

It has impacted me a bit. I get very emotional sometimes, but my boyfriend and his family help me through it now that I'm living a few hours from my birth family and my foster family. Knowing I've still got my foster sister there for me is comforting, just like I'm there for her if she ever needs me as well. I'm now in contact with my paternal sister as well now, which is all down to my PA and my foster family, and I met them for the first time a couple of years ago. If it wasn't for my last social worker before I turned 18, I would still be with some horrible foster carers who just had me for the money. She's the one who actually looked at everything and realised things weren't adding up.

I didn't really find socialising difficult once I started high school but that's mostly because my best friend was also in the same situation, so I had her to help which I was so grateful for. Although if anyone mentions anything triggering, I just kind of zone out and try not to listen. What I would like other young people to know is that you can put anything you put your mind to, no matter what hardships have come your way.



# Mjay, 26, he/him

You have to learn to do a lot by yourself from a young age, you are growing up in an adult life and don't really have a childhood. Care taught me better skills than homelife would have – like hygiene and using a washing machine.

In the Care Home, no one visited us and where others had family members visiting, the staff always treated them better – I think that's because the staff would be held accountable to the family. I used to run away a lot back to mum in London – I was moved around to 15 homes including Peterborough, Gateshead and Boston – they were always just moving me around as a way of managing me.

Being in care put me on a dark path and my brother wasn't the best influence. All I have known is selling drugs since I was 14. I struggle to form positive relationships as you don't have the trust/ emotional side of relationships. Me and my missus have been through hell but we are still together – but you don't trust people because of the attitude and mindset from being in care.

My attitude to life is different

You do a lot to try and impress people e.g. smoking weed, but you don't learn the social skills, you don't go to school. When there are so many different staff, you find it hard to form relationships.

Money – you end up turning to crime and many kids I grew up in care with are now in prison. Was my path determined for me when I went into care – absolutely. I recall being supported from 18-25 and will say they never saw me homeless. When there was a problem, my social worker would show up, have a go but it would get sorted. Were there any opportunities? No, and maybe that was because of my behaviour. I feel written off nowadays – social workers and PAs used to visit me in prison but that tailed off and I don't think that's right.

I'm 26 now so just out of the care leaver sphere. It has definitely had an impact on relationships – paranoia, controlling behaviour in terms of my life, arguments and drama. I'm still in contact with my best friend and his mum – they provide a stable and caring presence, even though they have faced similar challenges as me. When I rejoin my local community, I will have been out of trouble for five years and I want to start my own tanning business, but I need to feel motivated.

I recall some supportive youth offending and probation officers. The YMCA were a massive help to me as they gave me support for everything I needed. Was there participation and youth voice groups when I was in care? No – we were not listened to. But to me, care was still the better outcome of the two.

"What would you want for the next care experienced child?"

The age range of care homes needs regulating, as I was 6/7 and in a home with older young people who easily led me astray – it creates the risk of bad paths. I would like them to see their social worker more and not just to be told off, but to form better relationships. Not to tell the story over and over.





# Caterina, 24, she/her

'Am I care experienced? No'.

My story comes from the background of being alone, isolated and independent, otherwise known as estranged. The challenges I have faced and overcome derive from the concept that I did not qualify for state care such as the care system, yet I had no one else. I was not worthy of help, support or guardianship; therefore, I had to build my life by myself from the age of 16. I worked 3 to 4 jobs at a time, attended education and faced homelessness multiple times. I battled through this, often finding the biggest challenges in the weirdest of places. For example, not affording sanitary products, being judged when I could not put down an emergency contact or showing up to college with only a bag of spinach to eat. One of the abstract elements of all the difficulties that present themselves is the shame, guilt and fear that strangers would work out the horrors of my life. The lack of conformity to society - I didn't have a box to fit in, no socially acceptable reason for the reality of my life to be what it is. The only message that was ever presented was it was MY fault I was alone, isolated and struggling. I was simply a rebellious teenager, not someone who was fighting to keep their simple human rights such as liberty, education and not to be at risk of harm.

There is no place for estrangement in today's world. It is simply a weak legal definition combined with no social support. A recipe for disaster in the making, there is no charity, support fund, or a box to tick on forms to help explain why certain things are just simply not possible, such as family details or emergency contacts, or even someone to co-sign a document. It was only by chance I met someone who came from a similar world to me, who truly understood what it is like, how every day there is a challenge in some form due to circumstances of estranged life. The social isolation is something I never truly thought about until I realised what I was missing, a community. One of the simplest challenges of estrangement is isolation - we often have to work all hours to try to afford to live, we don't have the luxury of time and money to spend on even simple social activities like getting a coffee or going to an event. We are trying to hold a life together all on our own.



The whole system needs to change, however realistically, let's focus on a few things that would greatly improve the life of an estranged individual.

1) a box to tick, on housing applications, health care forms, education or job applications etc because there is none - no box to identify our life-changing challenges.

2) support money, such as a monthly allowance or bill deduction such as council tax, like people from a care background get to help support us in affording basics and relieve the financial pressure that is present every day for the rest of our lives. We constantly worry if we can afford the bill, going to be homeless or not have enough food to get us through the month. This would also allow there to be a small budget to engage in social activities and reduce isolation.

3) support organisations, a foundation of awareness of the ins and outs of truly being estranged.

Organisations that can act as guarantors or support us with applications because we have no family to help us fill out the complicated documents that invaded everyday life.

Three changes that would create a better world for estranged young people, improving their mental health and quality of life because we all know the self-harm and suicide rates for care experienced, when they have no support. What do you think the rate is for those without support? Those who are alone, isolated and independent, otherwise known as estranged?



"If you're a young person being placed in Leicester, Leicestershire or Rutland, then here are some great places to go!"

1. KING RICHARD III VISITOR CENTRE

2. LEICESTER CATHEDRAL

3. BOSWORTH BATTLEFIELD

4. BELVOIR CASTLE

5. GUILDHALL



# Top ten historical places

6. NATIONAL SPACE CENTRE

7. BELGRAVE ROAD/GOLDEN MILE

8. ABBEY PUMPING STATION

9. NEW WALK MUSEUM

10. DONINGTON LE HEATH MANOR HOUSE



1. BRADGATE PARK

2. RUTLAND WATER

3. FOXTON LOCKS

4. TWYCROSS ZOO

5. THORTON RESERVOIR

# Top ten nature places

6. WATERMEAD PARK

7. UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER BOTANIC GARDENS, OADBY

8. SWITHLAND WOODS

9. AYLESTONE MEADOWS

10. BEAUMANOR HALL





1. TREETOP GOLF

2. OUTDOOR PURSUIT CENTRE

3. TROPICAL BIRDLAND, DESFORD

4. DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL, DONINGTON

5. ATTENBOROUGH ARTS CENTRE

# Top ten activities

6. GAME OF THROWING

7. WISTOW MAZE

8. CURVE THEATRE

9. PHOENIX ARTS CENTRE

10. ROLLER SKATING, ENDERBY LEISURE CENTRE



# MY CARE JOURNEY – TOP TIPS FOR CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE



## Speak out...

- don't be afraid to speak up about your issues
- always ask questions if you want to know something
- if you are being bullied, don't be afraid to speak



## Seek help...

- or support if you need it
- ask and keep on asking
- if you know you have a problem, seek help



## Look after yourself...

- accept support; seek therapy if needed, take any support you can
- look after yourself, give yourself time and space
- if you don't want to live with someone, say it
- find and stick with groups or to a hobby you love, give you a sense of purpose
- don't listen to what others think, only do what you love
- don't blame yourself for everything



## Have hope for the future...

- consider your opportunities
- be kind to others and consider peoples circumstances and feelings
- stay in education, because it will pay off at the end of it all, and you won't need to depend on people anymore
- no matter what, don't lose hope because there will always be someone who will listen
- pain is temporary, ask for help; your life is not stagnant it is transformation

# Wordsearch

## 'My Care Journey'

M	N	H	Y	D	W	C	Z	L	Y	S	R	A	F	I	E	S	Q	U	Q	R	M	S	U	P	P	O	R	T	G
W	X	Q	C	N	F	F	B	N	H	R	Z	A	N	C	U	S	O	C	I	A	L	W	O	R	K	E	R	I	B
P	F	V	P	W	R	O	Z	L	R	O	F	Q	B	A	O	P	X	F	Z	T	C	Z	P	E	F	O	M	L	H
P	R	K	W	O	R	X	R	I	E	I	F	O	N	C	D	N	V	I	Q	U	A	O	O	K	D	Y	Z	D	X
H	G	O	C	L	L	G	D	P	S	A	B	Y	S	M	S	V	N	I	N	D	O	H	M	F	V	B	B	K	E
I	I	O	T	E	U	M	P	C	Z	Z	V	T	J	T	V	K	E	E	C	D	K	Q	K	M	M	O	M	B	Y
Y	J	B	K	E	X	R	K	G	W	F	B	I	X	X	E	F	S	N	C	A	E	C	N	N	U	Q	D	E	V
H	B	D	G	W	C	M	K	R	B	H	B	B	N	B	H	R	B	I	T	T	P	P	C	N	E	N	G	N	F
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E	O	N	O	S	F	G	C	O	O	O	V	U	I	B	Y	O	N	A	D	F	I	P	P	C	K	O	F	L	K

Leicestershire Cares  
Safeguarding  
Empowerment  
Education  
Advocacy  
Purpose  
Empathy  
Family

Independence  
Connection  
Adventure  
Protection  
Courage  
Network

Social worker  
Leaving care  
Placement  
Community  
Therapy  
Support  
Foster



# ‘My Care Journey’

Walked in her jeans; holding on her memories.  
A dress that serves as a ghostly reminder of who I could’ve almost been.  
I kept my mum’s bracelet which I wear on her birthday to feel a sense of belonging.  
I’ve retained my music for it keeps me close to my roots.  
I kept Angel, a teddy bear from Lilo and Stitch. In the movie she fell in love with Stitch who learnt that Ohana means family regardless of connections.  
I have kept a coin from my dad because it keeps him near me and I touch it to give me comfort.  
An empty shell, left with all that I could carry. Odd parts from a life that I knew was not mine.  
I collected all that I could to build a life that never materialised. I have everything yet nothing.  
A blanket with cupcakes, given to me when I was born, the only present from my birth parents.

I lost trust in the people who were supposed to care.  
I lost time, time with my mother and the potential memories that could have been created.  
Chances of having a childhood. Chances of being a teenager.  
I lost my childhood by being a princess, choosing to protect her loved ones from the danger and the four walls.  
I lost myself as a result of having no control over my life and had my future planned for me.  
This made me lose fear.  
I lost society’s permission to express the pain I endured, hidden by a smile.  
I count myself as one of the lucky ones.  
I lost my ability to learn what healthy love is.

My daughter’s love is the only love I’ve allowed myself to receive.  
I found hope through my siblings Butterfly and Koala.  
They are a constant reminder of what we have gone through and what we can achieve.  
Forcing me to claim my courage, in order to move on.  
I found God when I had no support and was at my lowest with no faith for a brighter future.  
I found a passion for art through drawing.  
One day I found a speck of hope, discovered over Tampax. A sense of community grew... so did my voice.  
I’ve obtained clarity from honest self-reflection to prepare for the future battles to come.  
I found my passion in music to get me through my hard times.

# Endorsements



These are inspiring and moving stories from 11 young people who have lived through the failings, as well as some of the humanity of our current care system. Listening to those with direct experience is a starting point for changing things.

**Josh MacAlister**  
**OBE MP Whitehaven and Workington**  
**Chair Independent Review of Children's**  
**Social Care 2022**



I recently stood alongside the JUJI group at Downing Street and Parliament to challenge the unjust Local Connection housing rules. These policies allow local authorities to deny care experienced young people a home in the area where they've built their lives - simply because it's not where they first entered care. My Care Journey amplifies their voices, sharing powerful stories of resilience, struggle and hope for the future. As a writer, I believe in the transformative power of personal narratives to challenge injustice and shift mindsets.

**Chris Wild**  
**Author/Campaigner**  
**Public Speaker**  
**Damaged & The State of It**  
**The Care Leavers Project**  
**[www.chriswild.com](http://www.chriswild.com)**



My own journey through the care system was far from easy. All I ever wanted was to go back home to my mum. That pain taught me resilience, but the things I've learned is that when we have stability, love, belonging and a real say in our lives, we do well and are more likely to give back. Through this project, care experienced young people are creating their own narrative and being their authentic selves which will inspire others coming through the care system and that is music to my ears.

**Terry Galloway**  
**Care Leaver Advocate and Director**  
**at Norman Galloway Homes**



I loved the way they collaborated to make sure the poem was equitable, and representative of all of their shared and individual experiences. As a poet, I know how revealing the writing process can be; the JUJI group should be commended for putting so much of themselves into their words.

**Ty'rone Haughton**  
**Poet, Author and Care Leaver. Artistic**  
**director at Literati Arts**  
**[ABOUT](#) | [Mysite](#)**





In a recent blog I asked - “Where in our services for our Looked After and adopted children are we offering healing from inter-generational trauma for our children and our communities?”. These inspiring young people are helping us to do just that by bravely sharing their real stories so we can focus our energies on what would make a difference for them and their future generations.

**Dr. Lynn Snow**  
**Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland**  
**Designated and Named Doctor for Looked After Children**



I want every young person who is care experienced to be able to achieve all their ambitions. People who have interacted with the care system have often had the hardest start in life, so it is up to all of us in positions of responsibility to ensure that nothing holds them back. These stories of My Care Journey tell of the past, but also of hopes for the future. They deserve to be read, heard and heeded by us all.

**Deborah Taylor**  
**County Councillor and former acting lead of Leicestershire County Council and Lead Member for Children and Families**



Thank you for sharing your journey and giving us a no holding back expression of the realities of living in the care system. These words of truth are spoken from the heart, written down for us, the reader and the corporate parent to digest, but not just to consider but words that require action and our full attention.

**Cllr Elaine Pantling**  
**Assistant Mayor - Children Young People, Education and SEND Leicester City Council**



What an absolute privilege it is to be given the opportunity to have an insight into the lives of these young people. Hearing first-hand about their care experience and the challenges they face, as well as some of the positive outcomes of being in care is both emotive and inspiring. The recommendations put forward by them to help improve the system for other children and young people are things that must be considered by professionals and influence change for the better.

This is great piece of work by Leicestershire Cares, the Joining Up Joining in (JUJI) group and of course all of the young people, so a huge well done to everyone involved. I'm sure it will have the desired impact and it has certainly given me inspiration!

**Sam Merry**  
**Service Manager**  
**Rights and Participation**  
**Leicester City Council Prevention Service**  
**Social Care, Early Help and Prevention Division**



# MY CARE JOURNEY

Leicestershire Cares is committed to continue partnering with care experienced young people, staff and organisations who support or want to support them, to bring about positive change. If you would like to know more, please get in touch at [info@leicestershirecares.co.uk](mailto:info@leicestershirecares.co.uk)



**Blagrave**  
investing in  
young people

**ef** Esmée  
Fairbairn  
FOUNDATION

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