

# Care leavers in the workplace



**Employers' views of  
care experienced  
people in Leicester,  
Leicestershire and  
Rutland**



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Leicestershire Cares is an award winning, creative, results orientated charity. We broker partnerships and create opportunities across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland that enable the business sector to understand community needs, contribute to the growth of inclusive, safe communities and to support and inspire children and young people in their transition to the workplace.

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**“We want businesses to be more aware of the issues we have faced during our lives, past and present, and that we are resilient. Hopefully this new understanding will help us work together in a more healthier way, that will benefit us and businesses.”**

**Care experienced young person**

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## Introduction



In September 2020, Leicestershire Cares ran a short research project on the views of care experienced people amongst businesses in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Employees of local businesses were asked to complete a survey exploring their views of care experienced people in the workplace, how young people's experience of the care system may affect their experience of work, and their understanding of the support care leavers may need in the workplace.

In total, 51 survey responses were received from people that work across a range of industries and sectors in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. This report presents the findings of the survey and discusses the implications of these for supporting care experienced young people into employment.

Leicestershire Cares is an award winning, creative, results orientated charity that has spent the last 15 years tackling poverty and exclusion. Our vision is an inclusive and safe Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland where nobody is left behind, and all children and young people are supported to reach their full potential.

For nearly 10 years, Leicestershire Cares has offered holistic and tailored support, combined with meaningful encounters with local business, to support care experienced young people into education, employment and training. In October 2019, we launched the Promise to Care, a pledge for local business to sign to say that they will support care experienced young people into employment.

We will use the finding of this report to inform our support for care leavers to access employment and to enable businesses to understand, support and change practices within their workplace to help care leavers thrive. We hope that other organisations will do the same.



# Background

There are approximately 1,250 looked after children and 530 care leavers aged 17-21 in Leicester and Leicestershire who are receiving support from their local authority. As many care experienced young people lose touch with their local authority, and care leavers are entitled to statutory support up to the age of 25, these figures are an underestimate of the number of care leavers in Leicester and Leicestershire, and there are many more young people with experience of the care system in need of support.

Young people become looked after for a variety of reasons, and while many looked-after young people go on to achieve positive outcomes this is often not the case. Care experienced young people have often been let down multiple times: first by their biological parents, and then by a complex and bureaucratic care system which results in looked after young people not experiencing the same opportunities as their peers.

Leicestershire Cares' children and young people team works with care experienced young people to support them to identify and overcome the barriers they face in entering education, training and employment.

## Fact check

- Care leavers aged 19-21 are **three times more likely** to not be in education, employment or training than their peers.
- **84%** of care experienced students leave school without five good GCSEs.
- Looked after children are **twice as likely** to be permanently excluded than other students.
- Only **14%** of care leavers progress to higher education, compared to half of all young people.
- **Nearly half** of all young men (21 and under) in custody have experience of the care system.
- **One third** of care leavers become homeless within the first two years of leaving care and **25%** of homeless people are care experienced.

Statistics sourced from Learning and Work Institute and Home for Good.

These experiences and lack of positive support networks mean that care experienced young people often need additional support to enter, achieve and progress in work.

# Why do attitudes towards care experienced young people in the workplace matter?

Care experienced young people often do not have the social and family networks that can open doors to the workplace. In addition, while care leavers are entitled to statutory support up to the age of 25, their workers have increasingly large workloads which requires them to triage their cases and focus on those most in need. Consequently, many care experienced young people feel that they are left to fend for themselves once they leave care at the age of 16, 27 or 18.

These young people are the children of the state, and as such there is an argument that everyone has a role to play in supporting these young people to succeed and achieve their potential. This includes local authorities, statutory services, schools and education providers, and local voluntary and community organisations. Businesses have a huge role to play in this; meaningful employment and a stable income can enable care experienced young people to overcome many of the other challenges they face in their wider lives.

Exploring attitudes towards care experienced people in the workplace is therefore important in enabling businesses to understand how they can support this group and the help they need to do this. Having an understanding of the multiple and complex issues that impact on a young person in care and how those issues may follow them throughout life could reduce the stigma surrounding care experienced people. It could also break down some of the challenges and barriers that they face in gaining employment if businesses were more aware of their situation. In turn, this will improve the support available for care experienced people to access good quality employment and enable us to start improving outcomes for young people who have been through the care system.



**There is so much stigma around the label “care leaver”. People assume that if you have been in care you are a troublemaker, that it was your fault. If you have moved around a lot from home to home, you must be a pain in the backside, but that is not the case.**

**Care experienced young person**



# Findings

## Knowing someone with care experience

Our survey found that 67% of respondents knew someone who is care experienced. Six people who took the survey were either care experienced or had a family member who had experience of the care system. A third of respondents said that they did not know someone care experienced.

These figures suggest that people are aware of care experienced people. However, they may not understand the issues they face throughout life because deep personal discussions about people's experience of care may only occur with close friends and families.

## Reasons young people might be in care

When asked about the reasons a young person may have entered the care system, neglect was the highest response with 74%. The lack of support for a family resulting in a young person going into care was 36%. The lowest was a young person's behaviour with 14%.

These results suggest that people have an understanding and compassion towards care experienced young people as they generally believe that they were put into care due to problems outside of their control and not their own behaviour.

## How being in care may affect young people

Our survey suggests that businesses generally understand that experience of the care system is likely to create challenges for young people. None of our respondents thought that being in care would provide the stability needed for young people to do well in life. Only 4% thought that being in care would make the young person optimistic for their future, and 68% thought that care experienced people would not make it to university. Only a third of respondents thought that being in care would make them resilient, while 70% believed that a young person with experience of care would suffer from poor mental health.





More positively, only a third of respondents said that care experienced young people were more likely to take part in risky behaviour than their peers. However, 50% believed that having experience of the care system increases the likelihood of a young person being involved in the criminal justice system, although this may be due to respondents being aware of the statistics around this known trend.

Crucially, the majority (73%) of respondents believed that systemic failures have left care experienced people disadvantaged, and only 4% of respondents thought that care experienced young people would have received the extra support needed to help them achieve in life. In comparison, 75% of the people who took part believed that they had a strong family support network that could support them when life got tough. This suggests that businesses are aware of the need to provide additional support to enable these young people to access positive opportunities.

## Views on care experienced people in the workplace



Overall, the views on care experienced people in the workplace were positive and sympathetic. Over half (56%) of respondents thought that being in care may have a negative impact on their working life compared to their peers, and 50% believed that care experienced people would need more support with their mental wellbeing at work than their peers. However, only 12% of respondents thought that care experienced people would lack aspirations in the workplace.



In terms of working alongside care experienced people, only 1 in 5 respondents thought that relationships may be hard to develop with care experienced people, and 8% thought care experienced people may have behavioural problems in the workplace due to their experience of care.

Finally, 52% thought that being in care made no difference to the person's work life. This is an interesting contrast to respondents' views on the challenges that care experienced people are likely to face, and perhaps reflects a lack of understanding about the long-term impacts of being in care.



## Improving the workplace for care experienced people

There was a lot of positivity and openness amongst respondents to supporting care experienced people in the workplace. 83% said that they would sign a pledge to support care experienced people into work, and 100% said they would be happy to act as a buddy or mentor of a new member of staff that was care experienced. In addition, 73% of respondents believed that businesses needed to invest in their communities, and employing care experienced people could form part of this.

However, only 34% thought that care experienced people should be able to declare their status, as is possible with disabilities, on a job application, and only 26% said they would want their colleague to tell them that they were care experienced. Both these findings may be due to respondents not wanting care experienced people to feel they have to declare their status, however, if these avenues to disclosure are not made available, it raises the question of how businesses are to provide support to care experienced people in the workplace.

In addition, only 34% of respondents viewed employing a care experienced person as an act of sustainability, which suggests there is work to be done to broaden businesses' understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals and how supporting care experienced young people can form part of their progress to achieving these.

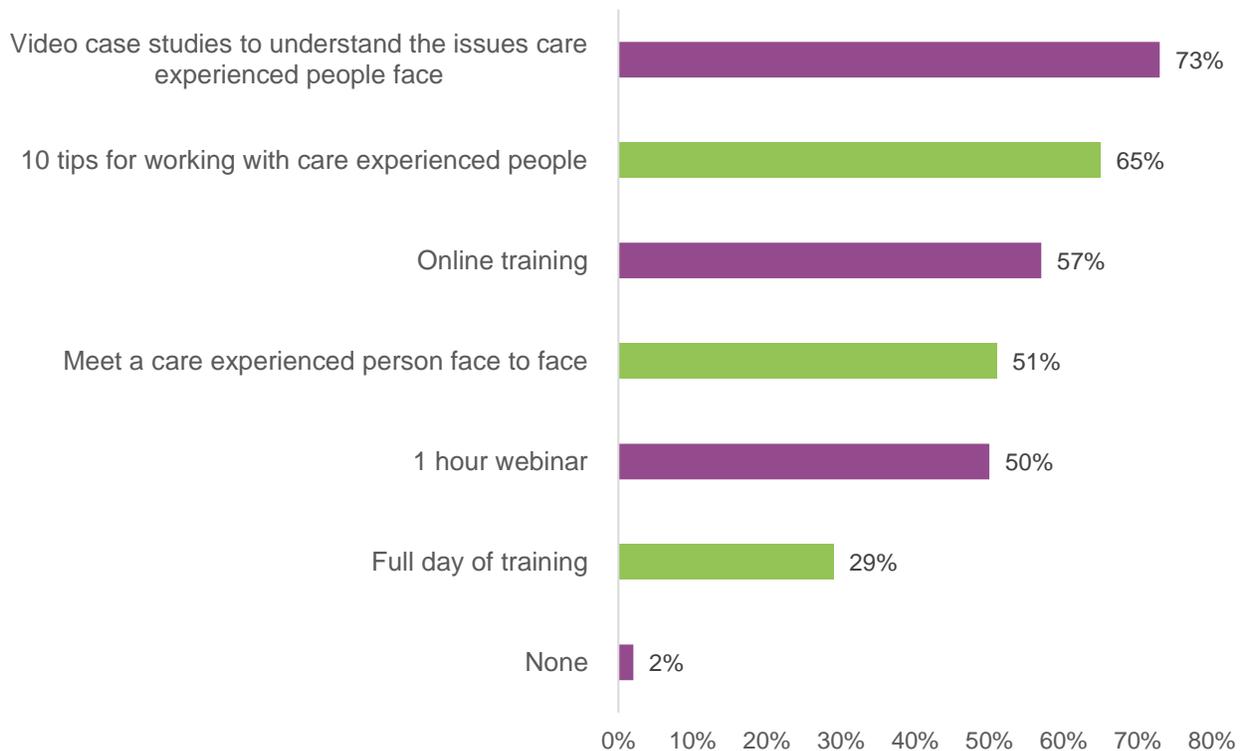
## Support businesses would like

As well as asking respondents' views of care experienced people in the workplace, we sought to identify the kinds of training and resources businesses need to improve their understanding of and support for care leavers.

The responses to this question are included in Figure 1 below. The most requested source of support for businesses was video case studies to understand the issues care experienced people face (73%). Other common requests were for 10 tips for working with care experienced people (65%), online training (57%), to meet a care experienced person face-to-face (51%) and a 1-hour webinar (50%).

The least popular option was a full day of training (29%), suggesting the businesses would find short interventions and resources that they can use within their day-to-day work most useful.

**Figure 1: Types of support requested by businesses**



# Conclusion

Our research found that the views of businesses in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland on care experienced people in the workplace were generally positive and sympathetic. There was a broad understanding that the experience of being in care creates considerable challenges for young people, and that these are the result of systemic failure, rather than the actions of looked after children and care leavers. In addition, businesses felt that being care experienced did not equate to low aspirations in the workplace.

However, the findings also suggest that there is work to be done to improve businesses' understanding of the scale of the challenges that care leavers may face, and the impact that this can have on their career prospects. For example, there was an understanding that care experienced people will likely experience poor mental wellbeing, may have low resilience and lack extra support to achieve positive outcomes, yet half of businesses felt that being in care would not impact care leavers' experience of work.

Importantly, there appears to be a strong willingness amongst local businesses to support care experienced people in the workplace. Businesses felt that supporting care experienced young people was a positive way of investing in the local community. Leicestershire Cares' Promise to Care initiative, a pledge for businesses to sign to say that they would support care experienced people into employment, was supported by a large percentage of people surveyed, and all respondents said they would be happy to mentor or buddy a new colleague who was care experienced. There was also an appetite for training to learn more about care experienced people and how businesses could better support them.

In summary, there is a clear support and willingness to understand the issues that care experienced people face in life and the workplace. There is more work needed to highlight some of the lesser known issues that care experienced people have to deal with, which could help their colleagues and workplaces understand them more and support them to settle in and do well. Businesses play a vital role in enabling their local communities to thrive and they need to take a lead in developing, investing in and supporting local people to gain meaningful work. Supporting care experienced people is a key part of this role.

## Next steps

Below are some key actions that Leicestershire Cares will take following the findings of our survey.

We will:

1. use the feedback from local businesses to **further develop our support for care leavers** looking for work, particularly around disclosing their care experience to potential employers.
2. work with our care experienced young people to **develop a set of resources and training for businesses** to improve understanding of care leavers' experiences and support needs, including:
  - a. video case studies
  - b. a short online training module on why it is important to support care experienced people in the workplace, and effective ways to do this
  - c. top tips and guides on recruiting and supporting care experienced people in work
3. **bring our businesses and care leavers together** to present a more positive view of care experienced people to employers, highlighting their skills and competencies as opposed to the challenges they typically face.
4. further **roll-out the Promise to Care** and encourage more businesses to pledge their support in enabling care leavers to access good quality and meaningful work.





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