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World Health Organization
Collaborating Centre on Investment
for Health and Well-being

Preventing homelessness in care experienced individuals

October 2022

BRIEFING NOTE

Read the full report:

Preventing homelessness in care experienced individuals: A rapid review of literature, data, and the experiences of care experienced individuals and service providers

Context and purpose

There is substantial evidence on the association between care experience and homelessness: it is estimated that more than 1 in 4 of all young homeless people are care experienced.

Preventing care leavers from becoming homeless involves improving the experience young people have both during care and the support they receive to transition out of it.

This study by Public Health Wales analysed evidence of promising practice from the UK and internationally, alongside the views of care experienced individuals and service providers in Wales, in order to support progress towards preventing homelessness among young people.

Key findings:

This study identified **seven key factors that were common among examples of promising practice** to reduce the risk of homelessness among care leavers, and that were supported by the views of care providers and care-experienced young people themselves.

Consequently, in order to take a preventative approach to homelessness among young people, especially care leavers, it is necessary to focus on:

EMPOWERMENT



"I think we perhaps as a society need to listen to them and ask them, what is it actually you want."

Valuing the experience and insight of care leavers in the design of services and policies will help those services and policies to be better focused on the needs and wants of the young people that use the service.

PREVENTATIVE INTERVENTIONS



"It's about nipping it on the bud early not waiting years down the line to fix it because, I'm going to say it, sadly for us it's a bit too late."

Leaving care is a known risk point for youth homelessness and therefore merits targeted action, such as making sure that the housing or health needs of care leavers are addressed before they reach crisis.

READINESS FOR TRANSITION



"This is quite often more emotionally, not ready to be out, independent, rather than the practical skills which they have been able to develop, but it's that sort of big leap really."

Supporting care leavers to develop life skills, from practical cooking and money management skills to emotional skills and forming supportive relationships, can help avoid homelessness.

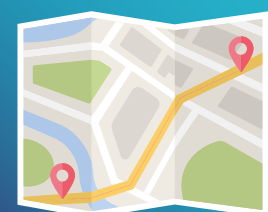
CONTINUITY OF CARE



"I've gone through, what, at least 25 social workers, so by the time I hit my fifth social worker I was like, I don't ***** care anymore."

Investing in staff recruitment, training and retention provides the care quality, continuity and trusting relationships that young people need to feel supported while they are in care and as they prepare to leave care.

LOCAL PLACEMENTS



"Moving 50 miles to another authority is really difficult for some of them, they have no support whatsoever then."

Strong relationships with friends, family or other networks are vital support mechanisms for care leavers and staying close to those people helps reduce the likelihood that they will experience homelessness.



REDUCING STIGMA

"As soon as they find out we're care experienced they start labelling us as if we're different people, like we're not human."

Young people have said that having an experience of care leaves them with an unhelpful label in the eyes of service providers and society more generally that can make it harder to access the support or help they need.



BETTER COMMUNICATION

"To put it in a simple way it's that you've got to be at breaking point for the support to be there."

Open and collaborative working relationships between leaving care services, accommodation providers, caregivers and the young person are central to a good experience and positive outcomes.

The challenge:

- Care experienced young people are significantly overrepresented in homelessness figures: **more than 1 in 4 of all young homeless people have been in care.**
- Approximately **650 children leave their care placement in Wales each year.**
- According to Welsh Government statistics, in 2021 **more than 1 in 20 of over 16s were moved to unsuitable accommodation** following their period of care.
- Leaving care has been described as a **'predictable route' into homelessness**, and consequently a priority area of action for homelessness prevention.
- However, **differences have been found** between authorities in Wales when it comes to their approach to supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including care experienced individuals.
- Care experienced individuals are more likely than those who have not been in care to have **poorer educational attainment, and worse mental and physical health.**
- Though recent and comparable data is lacking, evidence suggests that care experienced individuals in Wales are **significantly more likely to not be in education, training or employment (NEET)** than the **general population**. This increases the risk of poverty and social exclusion among care leavers, which may be detrimental to their housing security in the longer term.

Policy overview and direction:

- The Welsh Government's current responsibilities towards care experienced individuals are set out in both UK and Welsh legislation. [The Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#) and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 apply to both England and Wales and aim to **delay young people's transitions from care until they are prepared and ready**, and for **care and services to be of high quality and tailored toward needs**.
- [The Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) sets out a legal framework that brings together social services law in Wales including [Welsh local authorities' duties](#) to children in their care. The [Care Leavers \(Wales\) Regulations 2015](#), made under the Act, set out **support to be provided for young people who are no longer looked after** by a local authority, while the [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(Wales\) Regulations 2015](#) outline the responsibilities of local authorities to plan the care of care experienced children. **In 2017 the Children's Commissioner for Wales called for improvements** to support for care leavers and a year later [reported](#) on the progress that had been made across Welsh Local Authorities.
- [The Housing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) introduced new reporting arrangements for homeless people and was designed to provide a **more accurate picture of homelessness and housing need**. It also placed a new duty on local authorities to conduct regular homelessness reviews. The Act also currently prioritises housing for those aged 18–21 who have care experience or are at risk of financial and sexual exploitation – but the appropriateness of this is [currently being reviewed](#) and may change.
- The Welsh Government's 2019 [Strategy for Preventing and Ending Homelessness](#), which includes youth homelessness in its remit, focuses on **prevention and rapid rehousing**. It commits the government to ensure individuals successfully transition [from the care system into independent living](#).
- The [Programme for Government](#), published in 2021, sets out additional plans to improve support for care leavers in Wales. This included a [basic income pilot](#), which launched in June 2022. It is open to all young people leaving care when they turn 18, and means they will receive £1,600 per month for 24 months. The pilot aims to **reduce poverty and unemployment and improve health and financial well-being**.
- This study has found that strategies that have successfully prevented people from entering and returning to homelessness are often located in countries that have introduced legislation on the right to housing for all. The 2021 [Programme for Government](#) includes plans for a **White Paper on "proposals for a right to adequate housing" in Wales**.

Conclusion:

Those who have experienced the care system wish to improve things for others in the future. It will be important for organisations that provide an input to care experienced young people to reflect on how to ensure those young people are placed at the heart of decision making.

The COVID-19 pandemic put unprecedented strain on people, communities and public services. One positive legacy, however, has been to demonstrate the effectiveness and feasibility of working across organisational boundaries; and of finding agile solutions to difficult problems with the needs of the individual as the central driving force for action.

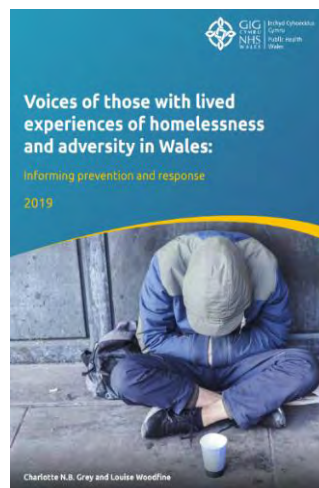
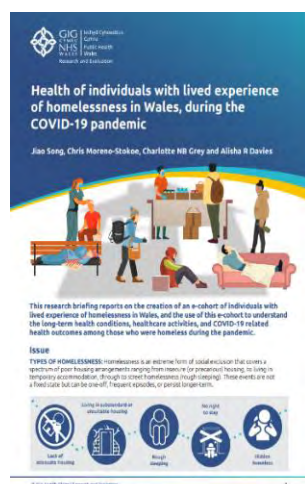
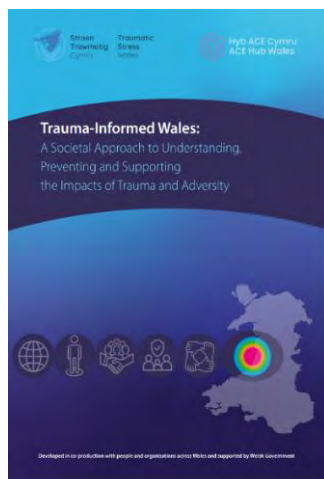
To take a preventative approach to youth homelessness and improve the experience of young people in care, it will be necessary to retain and build on this learning from the pandemic. The findings of this study by Public Health Wales provides new evidence to support the direction of travel by Welsh Government and other partners towards strengthening:

- **Care experienced young people's voice** in policy development;
- **Collaborative working** across sectors to drive better prevention;
- The frameworks for establishing, supporting and respecting the importance of care experienced young people's **relationships and social capital**; and
- Support for those with complex problems or protected characteristics which might place them at **higher risk of homelessness**.

Further reading:

Click on the thumbnails to read the full reports.

Also available at phwwhocc.co.uk/resources/



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