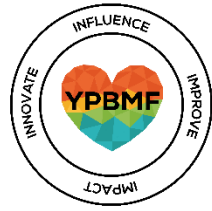


**catch
22**



National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, Catch22 Children's Wellbeing & Schools Bill Briefing, Jan 2025

Key Asks for care leavers to address barriers to opportunity they face:

- **Extension of corporate parenting duties to other government departments & public bodies**
- **National offer for care leavers**
- **Entitlement for care leavers for Lifelong Links support**
- **Dedicated care experience aware mental health support for care leavers**
- **Staying Close Extension: Extend entitlement beyond LA assessment**

Extension of Corporate Parenting Duties to Government Departments & public bodies.

We are extremely concerned that the proposed extension to corporate parenting duties included in the government's whitepaper 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive,' is not included in the bill. Local authorities and care experienced young people tell us many of the barriers they face to effective support are outside of the remit of their local authority and the Department of Education.

Eg. Poor financial wellbeing is a significant barrier to opportunity to staying connected, engaging with education & employment and wellbeing & is outside of the remit of Local Authorities & the DfE:

77% care experienced individuals struggle to buy food at least some of the time, 75% said Cost-of-Living crisis had affected mental health – [In Their Own Words survey of 200 care experienced individuals](#), May 2024, NLCBF.

"We've reviewed just under 300 young people's plans this quarter – Cost of living is a barrier in everyone's planning." Leaving care Manager, Manchester, Jan 2025

National Offer for Care Leavers – Supporting Barnardo's Amendment Paper NC40

We welcome the strengthening of the local offer in the Bill. The [Local Offer website](#) demonstrates the 'postcode lottery' or 'territorial injustice' ([Professor Mike Stein](#)), that care leavers experience. To address this, we are calling for a national offer for care leavers that replicates elements of parental support including free transport, WiFi,

prescriptions, exemption from council tax and the over 25 rate of Universal Credit for 18-25 year old care leavers. A national offer would address barriers care leavers face to stay connected with friends/family; engage with education and employment and afford daily living costs. We support Barnardos' Amendment paper NC40 which is to this effect.

Entitlement for care leavers for Lifelong Links support – Supporting Family Rights Group call for all children in care & care leavers to be offered Lifelong Links.

The Bill's focus on promoting family relationships through family group conferencing and kinship care is commendable. However, this focus must continue for care leavers. Only 52% of young people feel somewhat or very connected to their community, with older age groups feeling less connected ([NLCBF, 2024](#)).

'Research shows Lifelong Links improves children's sense of identity, the stability of their living arrangements, their emotional health & wellbeing, & reduces homelessness. It also saves local authorities money.' ([Family Rights Group](#))

Dedicated, timely, care experience aware mental health support for care leavers

62% care experienced individuals found it difficult to get the mental health support they needed ([NLCBF, 2024](#))

In NLCBF's survey of over 200 care experienced individuals, mental health concerns and difficulties accessing appropriate support was identified across all five topic areas of the reports ([NLCBF, 2024](#)). Care experienced individuals asked for dedicated, timely and care experience aware mental health support. Leaving care professionals tell us mental health is a significant barrier to young people they support across engagement with education, training & employment; staying connected and managing their lives.

In the absence of corporate parenting duties extending to health bodies, we need provision of dedicated support. [Operation Courage](#) available to armed forces veterans is a model that would provide this support and address many of the barriers faced.

Staying Close Extension - Staying Close Extension: Extend entitlement beyond LA assessment – Support for Become's proposed amendments

We welcome the national roll out of Staying Close and the extension in age eligibility. We share Become's concerns about potential rationing of the support due to the current financial climate if the wording stays as 'where an authority assesses such support is required.' We support Become's proposed amendments to this section. (waiting for [Link](#))

[National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum](#), part of the Charity [Catch22](#) is a forum of 133 local authority leaving care teams in England working together to share good practice to improve services and support for young people leaving care. The Young People's Benchmarking Forum is made up of care experienced young people and is at the heart of our work.