

Care Leavers Engagement Project.

Interim report findings

This report is an update on the progress of the Care Leavers Project, in partnership with the Child Health and Wellbeing Network and Middlesbrough Council for the purpose of presenting as a mid-term finding report.

This report outlines the key findings of a recent questionnaire and summarises the projects' purpose, expected outcomes and next steps.

The project is managed by Adam Hart and Jo Morgan.

Within the footprint of NENC we have high numbers of cared for children and therefore our population of care leavers will also be significant. We hear within research that care leavers are more prevalent to suffer inequalities than their peers who have not been subject to the care system. Within our region we are committed to leveling up and reducing inequalities faced by vulnerable groups. Therefore, this project aims to firstly engage with our care leavers to understand what life is like for them, to gain understanding of their day-to-day experiences which may impact on their wellbeing. Then consider the services a can work together, share good practice, and engage better with our young people to improve life outcomes for them.

Using the Core 20 Plus 5 Toolkit, the population of Care Leavers were identified in Middlesbrough. Considerations of data around mental health, housing, and work/education were identified.

Project Objectives

- 1 To hear the voice of our young people.** To effectively work with our young people. Capture their opinions which could help the development of a co-produced project that is meaningful to them both qualitative and quantitative methods.
- 2 Data collection.** To understand the needs of our young people on leaving care within an area of NENC to provide a representation of our cared for population using publicly available data.
- 3 Share learning** across the NENC footprint via the creation of a report to be shared with key stakeholders.

Research:

- 3 health inequalities were identified through the core 20+5 analysis, those being Food insecurity, emotional health and accommodation. We used these to shape the professional and Young Persons Questionnaires
- A 20-question survey was sent out to all members of Middlesbrough children service staff that asked for feedback on current services, what professionals thought the key issues young people face, and how services could improve to ensure maximum efficiency.
- A 24-question survey was sent out to senior management and team managers to pass on to every young person in their service to gain feedback on young

people's views on services on how we can improve, this is still open for responses.

- 32 professionals responded to the survey.

Interim Professional Research Feedback:

The professionals survey covered three main topics, mental health, housing and cost of living, the topics were highlighted as important through our core 20 + 5 analysis and the questions were structured around this.

Initial findings highlight that the majority of professionals felt that emotional pressure has increased for young people leaving care. Some professionals believed the lack of fostering provision and putting young people in residential homes because of this also has an impact on young people's emotional health. One professional stated the one of the biggest impacts of young people's emotional health is the increases accessibility to street drugs. Professionals suggested that more awareness of VCSE services could help for young people to be identified by more specialised services as some also stated that most referrals go through to CAMHS or a GP.

Concerns about housing mostly came about capacity, with one professional describing it as a "lottery" due to what is available at the time and the location of the property. Some felt the risks in the community was a huge concern and ensuring those young people who are more susceptible to exploitation are placed in an area that doesn't have extreme known criminal and sexual exploitation. Professionals suggested more flexible and social support. A more individual need to the end of care with a step-to-step approach to independence.

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis has been reported nationally as having a great impact on the expenditure of families and individuals. Most professionals noted that one of their biggest concerns was the regular and increased use of foodbanks. Some staff noted that universal credit is also quite low at the current rate being £66.00 p/w and asked the question "why are so many care leavers on UC." Professionals would like to know how the addition to the protected characteristics will impact the offer from the local authority. Raising aspirations and increasing opportunities for care leavers is something that was a key theme across the board when asking professionals what could be done to deal with the cost-of-living crisis.

What Is Next?

Next steps include a detailed analysis of the professional's data and the analysis of young people's responses, with recommendations made from the findings for further project work to support Care Leavers in Middlesbrough. We will continue in partnership and communicate with key stakeholders on project developments.