



University of  
**Southampton**

# Moving towards independence

**Guidance co-produced with young  
people who have lived experience  
of moving towards independence  
from supported lodgings**



**CENTRE  
FOR THE  
SOUTH**

**STEP BY STEP**

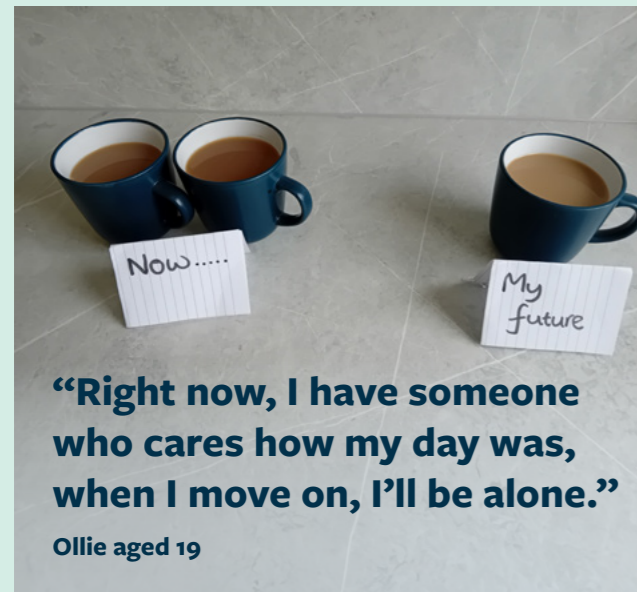
Young People. Hard Times. Bright Futures.



# About the Centre for the South

This project was funded by the Centre for the South (CftS), a policy institute founded under the University of Southampton.

The CftS uses equitable approaches to stimulate cross-sector collaboration across the Central South, mobilising knowledge and using evidence to drive more informed place-based decision making, for mutual prosperity. For more information visit [www.centreforthesouth.co.uk](http://www.centreforthesouth.co.uk).



# About the collaboration

The Centre for Homelessness Research and Practice (CHRP) is based at the University of Southampton, in the School of Psychology. The Centre's mission is to integrate research, training and practice to better serve people experiencing homelessness. The Centre involves real-world research, clinical psychology placements with third sector organisations, and a social enterprise providing psychological and peer mentoring services – all knit together by a regional homelessness community of practice.

Step by Step is a youth charity supporting young people going through hard times, including homelessness. They provide accommodation, personal development opportunities, and specialist support services to empower young people to a brighter future and prevent homelessness. Step by Step are highly skilled with 35 years' experience of moving young people successfully into independence, breaking down barriers they face in the ever-changing landscape of the UK housing sector.

Step by Step Partnership Ltd Supported Lodgings, working across six counties in England, has a youth voice group for looked after young people called Speak Out. CHRP partnered with Speak Out, providing the research expertise to upskill and empower these young people to share their experiences and needs when moving towards independence (i.e. when leaving care and living independently). This project used the internationally recognised Lundy model<sup>6</sup> of child participation to give young people voice, facilitate the sharing of their experiences, and provide an opportunity to work together to co-produce policy and practice recommendations supporting young people in care as they move towards independence.

# About the project

Young people from Speak Out shared their experiences through video calls, an online message board, in-person meetings, voice notes, and photographs. They then identified four recommendations for change in policy and practice which would improve the transition for young people as they leave care.

Care leavers are at higher risk than their peers for experiencing homelessness in adulthood. This risk is increased if the young person has experienced multiple foster care placements<sup>1</sup>. There were 82,170 looked after children and young people in England in 2022, 2% more than 2021. Around 7000 16- and 17-year-old looked after young people are living in supported accommodation<sup>2</sup>. Step by Step housed 398 young people in supported accommodation (including staffed Foyers) in 2022-2023<sup>3</sup>. Centrepoint's survey reported 40% of care leavers had experienced homelessness since leaving care and recent figures show a 33% increase in care leavers facing homelessness since 2018<sup>4</sup>.

Looked after young people describe reaching eighteen years old as being the cliff edge, identifying practical and emotional challenges moving into independent living. Practical challenges include cooking, laundry, budgeting and understanding a tenancy agreement, and emotional challenges include feeling isolated, lonely, and fear around losing a tenancy<sup>5</sup>.

Protective factors against homelessness include 'remaining in foster care until age 19, connection to a caring adult, high academic achievement and feelings of personal control'<sup>1</sup>. Resilience is specifically built through positive social relationships, engagement in education and cultivating a sense of belonging<sup>6</sup>. A sense of belonging, positive relationships with adults and an increase in self-confidence are associated with youth voice<sup>7</sup>. Youth voice describes the inclusion of young people in decision-making processes by providing opportunities for them to share their experiences, views and ideas.

At a research impact event, decision makers and frontline staff from local government, third sector organisations, health and justice services across the six local authorities in which Step by Step work, as well as with third sector organisations who work with teenagers and young adults gathered to hear and understand the young people's experiences of moving towards independence, participating in activities and group discussions to consider the recommendations for change from the young people. A follow-up report will present a response from these decision makers.

## Underprepared

- Last minute info about moving on
- No guarantor/ no credit score
- Lower benefits for under 25s – rent and food cost the same!
- Lack of skills in budgeting and managing a tenancy
- Difficulty in proving local connection without family support

## Prepared

- Support worker/ personal adviser who listens and helps to create a plan
- Kindness of hosts to gift household items
- Collecting household items over time to reduce costs
- Having some income from benefits (even if low)

# Thank you

We would like to thank the young people from the Supported Lodgings Speak Out group at Step by Step for sharing their experiences and co-creating recommendations for change. Thank you also to the staff at Step by Step for facilitating the collaboration, and the event attendees for taking the time to listen to the young people and consider their recommendations.

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“Will I be thriving or barely surviving?”

Phoenix aged 20

# Recommendations

## 1 Financial Support

Universal Credit should be provided at full amount (£393.45 if you're single and 25 or over, compared to £311.68 if you're single and under 25<sup>9</sup>) and not less for those whose age is less than 25. The costs of living, including rent, bills, groceries, kitchen utensils, cleaning products, menstruating products, etc., are the same for those who are under or above 25 years old. It is reported that having less Universal Credit is putting young people at a disadvantage for securing housing and maintaining a good quality of life.

## 2 Housing Support

Care leavers should go higher up housing lists. This will give priority for looked after young people who might not have the support network from family

or surroundings, especially when they must prove their local connection which might be dependent on family members providing evidence.

## 3 Emotional and Practical Support

Young people should not explain their stories and share their information with multiple workers many times. Instead, young people should receive consistent and reliable support from social workers and/or support workers, where trust and connection could be built and strengthened. In addition to practical support (e.g., budgeting), emotional support should be provided as young people experience different and mixed emotions like feeling anxious about meeting financial needs and at the same time feeling excited to have their own space.

## 4 Information Support

Moving on information should be provided at least 6 months before the due date to move out, so young people are not waiting until the last minute to know where and when they will be moving. Also, no information should be withheld from young people. For example, for up to two years before turning 18 years old, young people are eligible to be on the Hampshire Home Choice. Knowledge about this eligibility should be passed on and support should be given to the young people to get on Hampshire Home Choice and thus plan early on what will happen next. Another example, informing the young people that bidding happens on Wednesdays, so they do not miss opportunities to find a suitable place.

# References

<sup>1</sup>Grattan, R.E., Tryon, V.L., Lara, N., Gabrielian, S.E., Melnikow, J., & Niendam, T.A. (2022). Risk and resilience factors for youth homelessness in Western countries - A systematic review. *Psychiatric Services, 73*(4), 425-438. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.202000133>

<sup>2</sup>Ofsted. (2024). A rapid review of evidence on supported accommodation. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-accommodation-review-what-matters-most-for-children/a-rapid-review-of-evidence-on-supported-accommodation>

<sup>3</sup>Step by Step Impact Report 22-23. <https://www.stepbystep.org.uk/media/downloads/step-by-step-impact-report-2022-23.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Centrepoint. (2017). From care to where? Care leavers' access to accommodation. Centrepoint. <https://centrepoint.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/from-care-to-where-centrepoint-report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>Palmer, A., Norris, M., & Kelleher, J. (2022). Accelerated adulthood, extended adolescence and the care cliff: Supporting care leavers' transition from care to independent living. *Child & Family Social Work, 27*, 748-759. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12922>

<sup>6</sup>Palmer, A., Norris, M., & Kelleher, J. (2022). Accelerated adulthood, extended adolescence and the care cliff: Supporting care leavers' transition from care to independent living. *Child & Family Social Work, 27*, 748-759. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12922>

<sup>7</sup>Havlicek, J., Lin, C-H., & Braun, M.T. (2016). Cultivating youth voice through participation in a Foster youth advisory board: Perspectives of facilitators. *Children and Youth Services Review, 69*, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.07.018>

<sup>8</sup>Laura, Lundy (2007) "'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child". *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(6), 927-942. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033>

<sup>9</sup>Crown Copyright. (n.d.). Universal Credit. <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/what-youll-get>



**“Every penny is going to count, literally!”**

**Kerry aged 18**



**“Is this rubbish or is it all my worldly possessions ready for move on?”**

**Aleena aged 17**



## Find out more

Visit [chrphomeless.co.uk/collaborations](http://chrphomeless.co.uk/collaborations)

We would welcome the opportunity to provide you with more information about this project, its findings and its outputs through a tailored briefing session. The full research findings will be published in due course.

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## Step by Step Supported Lodgings Speak Out Group

Images and captions supplied by members of the Supported Lodgings Speak Out Group