

# PREPARE FOR LEAVING CARE

PRACTICE GUIDANCE



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES

CELCIS



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# **PREPARE FOR LEAVING CARE**

## Practice Guidance

# IMPRESSUM

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## FOREWORD

CELCIS and SOS Children's Villages International share a mutual commitment alongside many others to ensure that children and young people without parental care, or at risk of losing it, can enjoy their rights and receive the support, care and attention they deserve.

We are pleased to have worked closely together to produce this *Prepare for Leaving Care Practice Guidance*, informed by the UNCRC and based on the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Importantly, the four principles underpinning the content of the *Practice Guidance* – building sustained relationships with the care leaver based on care and respect, high levels of participation, promoting and protection of all human rights of children and young people, and the need for an inter-sectoral approach - have driven this project.

Caring well for, and realising the rights of young people in transition from the care system, are our collective and essential responsibilities. For most young people today, moving toward independent living and into their own accommodation, finding fulfilling employment or training, undertaking further education, staying healthy and achieving a positive sense of well-being, are important steps on their pathway to adulthood. It is usually a time of hope and expectation.

We know there are young people who leave alternative care and go on to lead fulfilling and extremely successful lives. However, we have also listened to care experienced children and young people in the five countries participating in this European Commission co-funded project, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Spain, who spoke not only of eager anticipation for the next stage of their life but also the challenges they face and their feelings of loneliness, anxiety and, sometimes, fear. These messages are deeply important for professionals to hear and act upon: care leavers spoke of their protection concerns, inadequate levels of support from all service providers and, most importantly for them, the unsatisfactory and sometimes uncaring manner in which support is offered. Many feel they are not listened to and their needs and wishes are not fully met by those responsible for supporting them through the care leaving process.

We do recognise that efforts are being made every day, around the world, toward improving support for care leavers. That said, we are painfully aware of the serious need to continually improve our efforts in working effectively together to ensure care leavers receive the best possible preparation and after care support as they transition out of the care system and after care. The *Prepare for Leaving Care Practice Guidance* has therefore been developed to inform and equip all those with a role to support young people moving from

care to adulthood and independence, as well as to foster a youth centred approach to this important role. The *Practice Guidance* is also relevant for decision-makers and policy-makers, as well as those advocating for change. We hope this *Practice Guidance* contributes in a significant way to developing the enabling contexts to achieve the real and lasting changes that are clearly required and to which care leavers have an absolute right.

Empowering children and young people to contribute to positive changes in the way the care system cares for them has been core to this project and their ongoing participation in our collective learning will be fundamental to securing the change we all strive to see. And so, we cannot thank enough the 68 care leavers who participated in a Scoping exercise across the 5 participating countries; they shared their powerful experiences with us, and provided invaluable information for which we are deeply grateful. We would also like to thank all those within the participating 35 regional and local organisations who helped inform this publication.

CELCIS and SOS Children's Villages International will continue to advocate in order to ensure that professionals working with children and young people in alternative care receive the necessary training and support to enable them to care for care leavers in the best possible way and guarantee their positive transition to an independent life. Undoubtedly, States as well as regional and local authorities need to lead their systems and services to proactively invest in strengthening and maintaining the skills, knowledge and abilities of all professionals and carers to a level that allows them to fully support care leavers.

Finally, we would also like to thank the consistent and progressive efforts of the Directorate General for Justice of the European Commission for pursuing the realisation of the rights of children and young people, and for placing a special emphasis on those now taking some of the most important steps towards successful and fulfilling futures.



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Executive Director, CELCIS



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## FOREWORD OF THE INTERNATIONAL YOUNG EXPERTS' GROUP

"I am the owner of my life and the options I choose. I am free to do what I love and to decide how I want to do it. I have skills to live independently and to deal with emotional problems. When I feel weak and vulnerable I know: It is ok to feel like that. I am not afraid to seek help, and I can rely on relationships based on trust and sincerity with care persons, social workers and with other people. I am not ashamed of the fact that I have lived in alternative care. I feel comfortable dealing with my daily life and I am able to dream. I have finished my studies successfully and found a job in which I realize myself. I have my life in my hands."

We created this vision during our International Young Experts' Group meeting in Granada in November 2017. Will all of us achieve it? We do not know yet. In the Granada meeting we have jointly collected what we need to come closer to this vision. Many factors will play a role, some lie with us and some lie with the people and institutions that cared for us and accompanied us on our way to adulthood and independence. We invite you to have a look at these points and think about how alternative care providers and the people who work there can contribute to make this happen.

### **Support us in our journey and make us even stronger!**

We all have our strong sides, but in order to develop them and become even stronger we need emotional support, academic and professional orientation and support in areas such as health and social matters. We need someone who stands by us during the important turns of our life: when moving to the youth facility, choosing a profession, finding an apartment. We also need someone to turn to during other challenges we face, such as starting university, practicing cooking skills, organizing free time and controlling emotions such as loneliness and despair – even when we are older than 18.

This support can come from caregivers, teachers, social workers, family and friends. But there can also be other resources important to us, such as colleagues, psychologists, psychotherapists, other students, pets, hobbies, scholarships to solve money problems, to have time for ourselves.

### **Let's stay in touch!**

A successful leaving care process is based on good relationships with caregivers and social workers. We want that professionals take our cases individually and listen to us. Strong relationships help us develop the trust to also talk about difficult things. It is vital to us to know that there is someone who cares about us, someone who does not judge us and that even when we made wrong steps there is somebody who helps us.

### **Take our opinion into account!**

Including young people's opinions in the process of care leaving is most important. Sometimes others think they know what is good for us but we want to explain what is working for us.

We hope that our input will contribute to improving alternative care. Because we want that the next generation of children and young people in alternative care will have the optimum conditions for growing up, developing themselves and living a happy life.

*The International Young Experts' Group*

## BACKGROUND

Leaving the formal alternative care system is an important phase both for young people and the service providers responsible for their care and development. It should represent the effectiveness of investment in State and non-State services as well as care professionals abilities to empower and enable young people leaving care to transition into independent living successfully and become active members of their communities. However, while the data available about young people leaving care are uneven and relatively meagre in numerous countries, what exists makes systematically depressing reading. Although some care leavers go on to lead successful and fulfilling lives, many struggle for years. Very few young people remain in care placements beyond 18, and a majority leave at just 16 or 17 years of age. In short they have compressed and accelerated transitions to adulthood which contributes directly to their vulnerability and to their marginalisation from education, the labour market and other spheres of life in society.

**The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children** provide a valuable framework for the development of quality child care services. Within the Guidelines are clear recommendations to States to develop a range of policies and services for children and young people who must leave their care placement when they reach the legal age this becomes necessary – when they age out of care. The Guidelines also call for support to care leavers that allows them to ‘assume self-reliance and to integrate fully in the community, notably through the acquisition of social and life skills’<sup>1</sup>.

Creating a child care system that includes support for care leavers in a manner which promotes, respects and upholds their rights requires ongoing investment in legislation, strategic planning, structures and those responsible for implementation, including professionals and carers. Supporting the rights of children and young people who have been in the care system is a priority for the UN, EU and Council of Europe. This includes a call on countries to develop a strong inter-sectoral workforce capable of applying a rights-based approach to their work. **The Council of Europe** Children’s Rights Division has demonstrated ongoing commitment to this topic, firstly through its 2005 **Recommendation on the rights of children living in residential institutions**<sup>2</sup>, and then its 2011 **Recommendation on children’s rights and social services friendly to children and families**<sup>3</sup>. Specifically, the training of care professionals working with children in alternative care is underlined as a key priority in its current **Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)**.

**Prepare for Leaving Care – A Child Protection System that Works for Professionals and Young People**, is a two year project co-funded by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Justice and led by SOS Children’s Villages and CELCIS. The overall objective of the project is to embed a child rights based culture amongst care professionals to improve outcomes for children and young people, in particular in the preparation for leaving alternative care. The project is being implemented in five EU countries, involving 35 national partners including ministries, public

authorities, ombudspersons, child and youth focused organisations, as well as over 50 young people.

This *Practice Guidance* has been developed with the aim of meeting international objectives by contributing to the knowledge and skills of the professionals, carers and other stakeholders responsible for supporting children and young people leaving care.

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SECTION

1

INTRODUCTION  
TO THE *PRACTICE*  
*GUIDANCE*

# INTRODUCTION TO THE *PRACTICE GUIDANCE*

## 1. WHY IS THIS *PRACTICE GUIDANCE* NEEDED?

- When young people in an alternative care placement reach a certain age, the State no longer has legal responsibility for ensuring that care, and they have to leave the care setting. This age may differ from country to country. In practice, leaving care is a major life event involving a process of transitioning from childhood dependence in an out-of-home care setting and professional support to self-sufficiency.

Every young person needs continuing help to make a smooth transition to adulthood. Any good parent continues to offer love and support to their children well beyond 18, giving them the greatest head start in life that they can. We should demand no less for young people in care. (Mendes, 2009)

There is much evidence, however, that shows the issue of leaving care has been neglected or under-prioritised, resulting in the poor social and development outcomes that care leavers experience<sup>4</sup>.

A recent study conducted by SOS Children's Villages International in twelve countries of Central Europe revealed how preparation for leaving care is often jeopardised by 'debilitating shortcomings'<sup>5</sup>. This study highlighted such concerns as inadequate planning and support prior to leaving care, disproportionate difficulties in accessing accommodation, education and employment, insufficient financial allowances, and poor social and emotional support in the follow-up period.

Each care leaver is unique; each has a different life trajectory and different options, opportunities and choices. Some may do very well in life. However, taken as a group, care leavers have some of the poorest outcomes in society. International research confirms that young people leaving care are one of the most vulnerable groups in society, and highly disadvantaged in comparison to their peers.

### Care leavers are more likely to experience:

- higher levels of unemployment
- poorer educational qualifications and less access to continuing education or training
- financial and material poverty
- homelessness
- much higher rates of early death
- poorer mental health and physical wellbeing
- higher rates of teenage pregnancy
- an increased likelihood of involvement in, or exposure to, criminal activity

Care leavers may also suffer from stigma and discrimination, and experience unusually frequent or severe periods of instability, fear and loneliness. Many of these differences seem to persist regardless of the length of time since actually leaving care, and disadvantage even may be life-long for some young people.

A 'Scoping' exercise undertaken in the five countries participating in this project – Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Spain – also highlighted challenges and significant gaps in the care leaving process. These findings have been particularly important in informing the content of this *Practice Guidance* and are reviewed in more detail below.

Everyone involved in the care leaving process should clearly be working together to ensure that care leavers are offered the highest quality support possible that best suits their individual needs, wishes and circumstances.

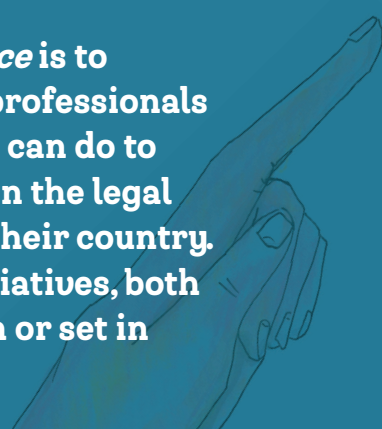
**This *Practice Guidance* therefore covers the areas of support and guidance that should be available during the whole leaving care process: while preparing to leave care, through transition or semi-independent living, and 'after-care' during adjustment to independent living.**

## 2. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF *THIS PRACTICE GUIDANCE*?

- **This *Practice Guidance* seeks to promote improvements in practice that should have a positive impact for young people during and after the leaving care process.**
- **It is grounded first and foremost in the realities of the national and local contexts in which leaving care is currently carried out.**

The approach therefore assumes that there will be no significant change, initially at least, in legislation, policy, regulation and the human and material resources actually available. This is because it will invariably take a considerable time – however necessary and urgent changes may seem to be – to secure positive readjustments in any or all of these areas.

**Thus, the first aim of the *Practice Guidance* is to stimulate reflection on what the various professionals concerned, carers and other stakeholders can do to improve outcomes for young people within the legal and regulatory framework pertaining in their country. This involves looking at what positive initiatives, both individual and cooperative, could be taken or set in motion within the current context.**



At the same time, the *Practice Guidance* sets out to provide material that can inform initiatives to bring about desirable changes in that contextual framework. It therefore places considerable emphasis on the need for consultation and cooperation among the various actors concerned – as well as, of course, with young people in care or with care experience. The effective advocacy this should generate will be a vital factor for securing the more fundamental changes needed to bring about systemic and significant improvements in outcomes for young people leaving care.

### 3. WHO IS THIS *PRACTICE GUIDANCE* FOR?

- This *Practice Guidance* has been developed mainly
- to inform and equip those who hold responsibility
- for supporting and guiding young people moving
- from care to adulthood and independence. First and
- foremost, this means those working directly with the
- care leavers on a day-to-day basis, notably carers and
- designated key workers. However, it also includes
- all those in such professions as health, education,
- housing, employment services, law and the judiciary.
- This *Practice Guidance* is also relevant for decision-
- makers and policy-makers in these different fields, as
- well as for advocates for reform.

In the same way that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’, no single agency can hope to cover all the needs that young people may have, or provide all the supports necessary. That is why it is important to take a broad and holistic view of young people’s needs and the services required to fulfil them. It is also important that key agencies plan and work together in a more collaborative manner to ensure that access to relevant supports and services is available. It follows that carers, social work staff and other professionals should have a shared understanding of care leavers’ complex needs, concerns, and of course, individual strengths, and of the roles they can each play to support this group of young people.

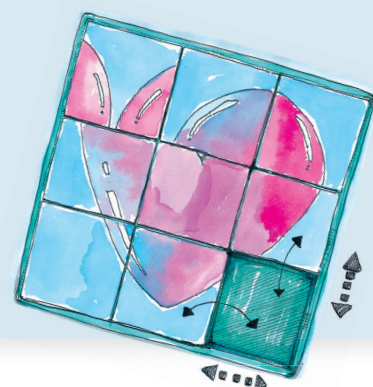
In addition, this *Practice Guidance* should constitute a useful means for informing and advising policy makers, decision makers and legislators as to the requirements of children and young people at all stages of the leaving care process.

#### 4. WHAT TOPICS DOES THIS *PRACTICE GUIDANCE* ADDRESS?

- This *Practice Guidance* first looks at the experiences of care leaving in the project's five participating countries that have informed the main content of the document. It goes on to outline the fundamental guiding principles that must underpin all aspects of preparing to leave care, transitioning and after care. It then takes us through a journey of how we might best facilitate, support and guide young people through these important steps in their lives: through Pathway Planning. It concludes with a section to inform advocacy to help bring about changes that will guarantee positive outcomes for care leavers.

#### TO THIS END, THE *PRACTICE GUIDANCE* IS FORMULATED IN 13 SECTIONS:

- Section 1:** Introduction to the *Practice Guidance*
- Section 2:** Definitions
- Section 3:** Young people's voices: leaving care experience in Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Spain
- Section 4:** Guiding principles
- Section 5:** Supporting young people leaving care: who should be involved
- Section 6:** Leaving care as a continuous process
- Section 7:** Introduction to a Pathways Approach
- Section 8:** Pathways Plans and the planning process
- Section 9:** Developing a Pathway Plan: tasks for key workers
- Section 10:** Developing a Pathway Plan: the importance of full and meaningful participation of care leavers in determining their own futures
- Section 11:** The content of a Pathway Plan
- Section 12:** After-care and independence
- Section 13:** Advocating for change: taking things forward

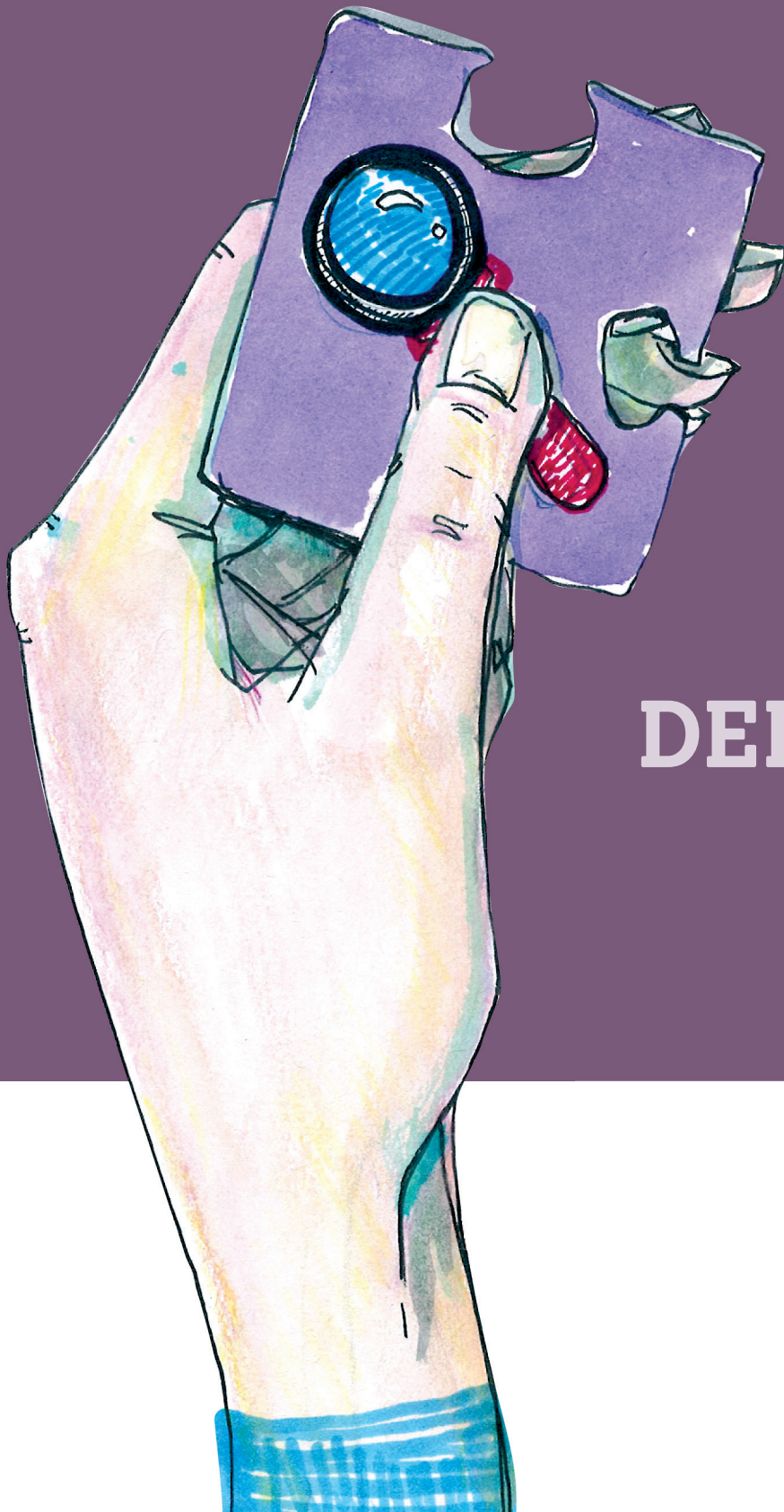




## 5. HOW TO USE THE *PRACTICE GUIDANCE*

- **This *Practice Guidance* has been designed to meet two**
  - **clear functions:**
1. **A continuing support and reference document** for staff working with young care leavers. It is designed to be user-friendly and has clearly delineated sections dealing with the many aspects of care leaving, enabling quick reference to specific points for refreshing your knowledge on key matters. It also serves as an effective prompt for discussion when working together with carers and staff from other agencies, helping them to understand some of the areas which need to be addressed for young people to make a successful transition to independence
  2. **Part of a wider training and development programme** to prepare those working with and, caring for, young people who are leaving care. Those who use this guide to help young people to move on from care will also have attended a training course. The training course complements the *Practice Guidance* and helps make its contents relevant to each country. **The *Practice Guidance* must be accompanied by the training developed specifically for this project.** The training course is delivered by Master Trainers who are very familiar with the *Practice Guidance* and its aims. The training that accompanies this *Practice Guidance* makes reference to the material in it and provides opportunities to develop additional tools which are relevant and appropriate to local situations.





SECTION

2

DEFINITIONS

## DEFINITIONS

- **Terminology relating to alternative care can vary**
- **widely from country to country. The following are the**
- **meanings of terms as used in this *Practice Guidance*,**
- **without implying that these terms or meanings should**
- **be universally adopted.**

**After-care:** the period following a young person's departure from a formal care setting and during which they should be in receipt of, or eligible for, ongoing guidance and support.

**Care leaver:** someone who is moving out of a formal care placement when they attain the legal age at which this is mandatory.

**Carers:** those who have direct, day-to-day responsibility for the young person during the care placement, such as a foster carer or residential care worker.

**Child:** every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier (UNCRC Article 1).

**Formal (alternative) care:** all care provided in a family environment which has been ordered by a competent administrative body or judicial authority, and all care provided in a residential environment, including in private facilities, whether or not as a result of administrative or judicial measures (UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, 2009).

**Independent living:** when a young person is no longer living in a formal alternative care placement.

**Key worker:** the person – ideally a professional social worker – with overall direct responsibility for ensuring a given young person's successful transition from the care setting to a settled situation in independent living. It is recognised this may vary from country to country.

**Leaving care:** the process launched when a child or young person living in formal alternative care reaches an age at which they are no longer legally entitled to live in a care placement. Leaving care includes preparation for the move, the process of moving toward independent living (transition and semi-independence), and the period following that move.

**Transition:** a period or process of change as young people move from formal alternative care settings to being an independent adult. (An example: in SOS Children's Villages the term 'transition' is often used for the move from an SOS Children's Village to a youth home and from the youth home to the semi-independent living programme before becoming fully independent).

**Young person:** The UN defines youth (young people) as those between the ages of 15 and 24 years old (UN General Assembly 2001, 56<sup>th</sup> Session).





SECTION

3

# YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES:


THE LEAVING CARE EXPERIENCE  
IN CROATIA, ITALY, LATVIA, LITHUANIA AND SPAIN



## YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES: THE LEAVING CARE EXPERIENCE IN CROATIA, ITALY, LATVIA, LITHUANIA AND SPAIN

- **The contents of this *Practice Guidance* are in good**
- **part informed by a detailed Scoping exercise that was**
- **carried out in each of the five countries participating in**
- **this project: Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Spain.**

This exercise included 68 peer-to-peer interviews conducted by and with young care leavers. In consultation with members of the National Young Expert Groups from each country, the following three key questions were agreed upon and asked during the interviews:

- **What worked for you during the process of leaving care?**
  - **Are there things that should remain the same in the process of leaving care and are there things that should change?**
  - **What skills, knowledge and experience should people who work with care leavers have?**
- 

The Scoping also included a mapping of the national care leaving system and a questionnaire. These were completed by members of the National Steering Group comprised of key professional stakeholders in each country. The aim of the questionnaire was to gain an understanding of the principal challenges in the journey of care leavers and recommendations for change.

The findings tell us that care leavers experience a range of emotions when leaving their place of care: a mix of happiness and expectations of freedom and independence along with feelings of loneliness, anxiety and, sometimes, fear. Care leavers have concerns about their protection, inadequate levels of support, the unsatisfactory manner in which support is offered, lack of access to services, and insufficient participation in decision making. They feel their needs and wishes are not being fully met by those responsible for supporting them through the care leaving process.



FROM THE  
SCOPING  
EXERCISE



The findings clearly show a need to improve all aspects of the leaving care process and the support children and young people receive as they prepare for leaving care, transition from care to independence, and continue in the after-care phase.

The table below contains a summary of the principal findings from the Scoping exercise.

**Table of findings from the Scoping exercise in Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Spain**

SUBJECT	FINDINGS
Being cared for	Care leavers said that trust and respect and feeling genuinely cared for are the most important aspects of a relationship between themselves and those that support them - with the bond with key workers being particularly essential. They stressed how important it is that such support is offered in a caring manner. They also seek the possibility of emotionally bonding with those entrusted with their care and making decisions that will affect their lives.
Participation	Care leavers spoke of how important it was to them to have full and meaningful participation in making decisions that affect their own lives. They want the opportunity to express their views, influence decision-making and map out the way they want to achieve change in their lives. Care leavers do not want to be talked at – they want someone to listen to what they have to say and engage in a genuine dialogue with them.
Individuality	Care leavers said they want recognition that they are all different and have different needs, circumstances and wishes. They want support that is tailored to their own particular situation and aspirations.

<b>Age of leaving care</b>	Scoping results highlighted the fact that leaving care should not just be age dependent but should take into account other factors such as maturity, ability, circumstances and wishes. This means the age at which it is a legal requirement to leave care in different countries is not always consistent with individual needs, circumstances and wishes of care leavers.
<b>Preparation and support for transition and after care</b>	Some care leavers recommended that the preparation process should start the day a child enters care, while others proposed it begin at least one to two years before they reach the age they must leave their care setting. In addition, they felt the period of time support is available after leaving care should be based on individual requirements. The implication is that support will need to be available for much longer than is the usual current practice.
<b>A transition period</b>	In a number of participating countries, care leavers have been provided with the opportunity to live in 'transition' accommodation (for example a 'youth house'). Most care leavers with this experience said it had provided them an opportunity to gradually gain independence and be better prepared. Some felt restrictions such as curfews and other rules did not fit with their moving towards being young adults and independence.
<b>Consistency of the leaving care process</b>	Results show how the leaving care process is not consistent, with variations within a country as well as from country to country. This means care leavers are not receiving equal care and support or the same access to rights and entitlements.
<b>Independent living</b>	Care leavers said it is very important for them to be given the opportunity to develop the sort of practical skills they will need for independent living. For example, they want to learn how to cook and clean, how to use money and look after their own health. They want advice about entitlements and help moving into suitable accommodation, as well as information about educational opportunities and how to find work.

<b>Maintaining relationships</b>	The importance of maintaining relationships between children and their families while they are in care has been highlighted. Some young people and professionals stress the need for participation of family in the leaving care process. Likewise, care leavers want to stay in contact with their carers, i.e. foster carers and residential care workers, as well as keeping the friends they had while in care.
<b>An inter-sectoral approach</b>	Care leavers need access to a full range of support and basic services that can be provided through an inter-sectoral network of professionals. The need to improve inter-sectoral working across such sectors as health, education, accommodation and employment, the judiciary and legal professionals and, other essential professionals has been noted.
<b>An enabling environment</b>	Professionals, carers and others need an enabling environment that allows them to undertake their responsibilities. In this respect, there is a need identified to improve legislation, policy, regulations, quality standards and guidelines. Furthermore, there is a need for better data collection and analysis to inform more accurate and effective planning.
<b>Capacity building</b>	Scoping results identified the need for much more investment in the skills, knowledge and abilities of all professionals and carers with responsibility to support care leavers.
<b>Promoting positive change</b>	Concerns were raised relating to stigma and discrimination against children in care and care leavers, and the need to address this through more advocacy work.

Knowledge of all the above-mentioned findings has been instrumental in informing the content and development of this *Practice Guidance* aimed at improving the experience of care leavers across all participating project countries.

During the Scoping exercise, care leavers spoke about their ideas and experiences: these can be found throughout this *Practice Guidance* in **speech bubbles**. Additional feedback from the Scoping exercise can be found throughout the document in the **purple boxes**.





SECTION

4

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **The thinking and approach that underpin this *Practice Guidance* are grounded in four key principles. These principles are structured within an overarching child- and youth-centred approach that recognises care-leavers as diverse and autonomous rights holders.**

A child- and youth-centred approach to leaving care places care leavers at the centre of all care processes and ensures that duty bearers, at all levels, meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil these rights. This approach recognises the importance of children and young people being meaningfully engaged and included by those professionals who work for, and with, them in all practices and decision-making processes that impact directly on their pathway from care to independence. Finally, it develops the capacity of children and young people to claim and exercise their rights and advocate for the recognition of these rights. (Please also refer to ‘Securing Children’s Rights’<sup>6</sup> and ‘Children and young people in care: Discover your rights!’<sup>7</sup> and Annexes 1, 2 and 3.)

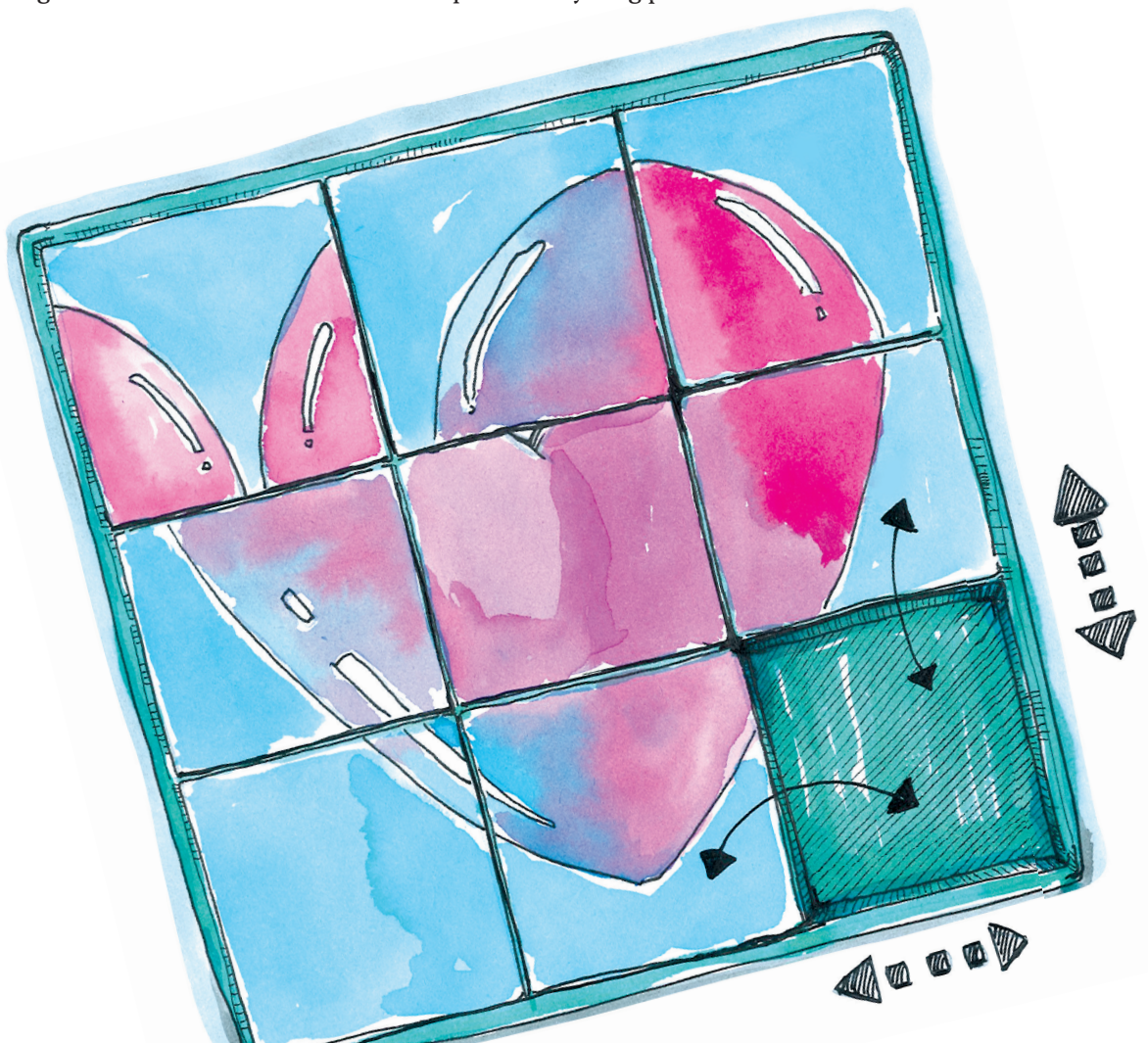
This section brings together in one place these four cross-cutting principles, setting out the basic reasoning behind them and their implications for practice. These principles constitute ‘threads’ throughout the document and are recalled, explicitly or implicitly, at various points in the *Practice Guidance* when they are particularly pertinent to specific points being discussed. However, they should be kept very much in mind in relation to all themes and at all stages of the care leaving process.



## PRINCIPLE I: Building sustained relationships of care and respect

• The *Practice Guidance* systematically takes the position that the way in which guidance and support are provided to young people leaving care is no less important than the substance of what is provided. The need to feel cared for, valued and respected is something that young people with experience of care emphasise strongly (see ‘Understanding the needs of care leavers’ in Section 7).

The relationship-based approach recognises that designing and carrying out preparations for leaving care cannot be a bureaucratic exercise but one requiring mutual trust and respect between the professionals and the young person concerned. Similarly, support during the after-care period needs to be provided with empathy, including when boundaries may need to be reaffirmed, and with the genuine concern to motivate and empower the young person.



## PRINCIPLE II: Aiming for high levels of participation

- **The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which applies to everyone under the age of 18, stipulates the obligation to elicit and take due account of children’s views on all matters affecting them (Article 12). The CRC also establishes the right of the child to receive ‘appropriate direction and guidance’ in exercising other rights set out in the treaty, taking account of his/her ‘evolving capacities’ (Article 5).**

It follows that the views of those preparing to leave a care setting, and their role as actors in the process, must clearly be a key element in shaping individual pathways for transitioning and after-care. In line with the findings of the Scoping exercise (see ‘Participation’ in Section 10), the *Practice Guidance* highlights the importance of participation throughout.

The implications of such ‘child participation’ in decision-making are numerous.

**First** among them is that children – individually and as a group – must be offered, or be able to request and obtain, all information relevant to their present and future options if they are to have an informed voice – in other words, if their ‘participation’ is to be meaningful. (Indeed, access to such information stems from another right set out in the CRC).

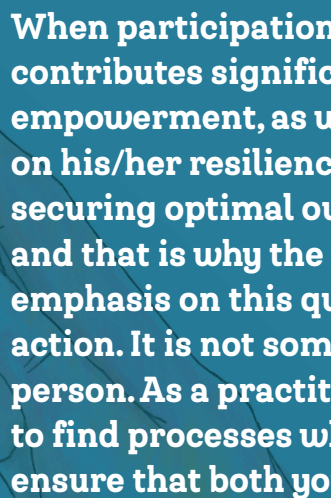
**Second**, this information must be realistic in terms of their prospects and of the opportunities and support that can truly be available, and must be provided in a way that they can readily understand.

**Third**, the views of the child/young person must be solicited in a manner and in a context which enable him/her to express those views freely. They should neither feel pressured nor constrained when giving an opinion.

**Fourth**, the child/young person must be informed from the start that it may not be possible to act fully in accordance with his/her requests and desires. The child/young person should also be fully informed as to the reasons why subsequent decisions are made, whether or not they correspond to his/her expressed wishes. Whatever the outcome, this should lay the foundations for devising a plan that the young person helps to develop and understands.



Responding appropriately to the principle of 'participation' therefore does not come down simply to 'consultation'. It has to ensure the young person's far deeper involvement – and thus the commitment of professionals concerned to promoting and ensuring this.



**When participation takes place on this level, it contributes significantly to the young person's empowerment, as well as enhancing and building on his/her resilience. These factors can be capital in securing optimal outcomes of the leaving care process, and that is why the *Practice Guidance* places so much emphasis on this question. Participation involves action. It is not something that is done to the young person. As a practitioner, this means that you have to find processes which are realistic, legal and which ensure that both you and other adults listen.**

Finally, and of no less importance, young people who have participated in this way in the decision-making process are particularly well-positioned to contribute their views to efforts to improve the overall provision of services and support, as well as to procedures that can further enhance the meaningful participation of other young people who will subsequently be leaving care.

### PRINCIPLE III: Promoting and protecting all human rights of children and young people

- The panoply of human rights to which all children and
- young people are entitled clearly also have to inform
- responses to those leaving care. In all aspects of its
- approach, the *Practice Guidance* is firmly grounded
- in the respect for, and fulfilment of, these rights,
- responding to the findings of the Scoping exercise (see
- ‘Advocating for Change’ in Section 13).

Intimately linked with the right to participation (see Principle II above) is the requirement that decisions be made ‘in the best interests of the child’ (CRC Article 3.1.). This link is two-way. On the one hand, it means that the views and wishes of the child must constitute an important element for determining what action will be in the child’s best interests. On the other, it means that decision-making may have to go partly or wholly against the child’s views and wishes, precisely because other factors lead to the conclusion that following them would not be in the child’s best interests. This can be a delicate balance to achieve, and underscores once more the importance of providing and discussing all relevant information and potential options with the child in a context of transparency and support, as set out under Principle II above.

Of course, the range of rights to be taken into account – not just those of children but also those of all human beings – is very wide. Among the most immediately relevant to young people leaving care in general may be rights relating to access to basic services – such as health care and education (CRC Articles 24 and 28) – and to social security (CRC Article 26) and an adequate standard of living, with notable regard to food, clothing and housing (CRC Article 27). Similarly, the right to protection from all forms of exploitation (CRC Articles 32-36) requires particular attention where young care leavers may find themselves in vulnerable positions. Young people with disabilities also have the right to receive special assistance that will ‘promote their self-reliance’ and ‘facilitate [their] active participation in the community’ (CRC Article 23).

In many country or local contexts, it will also be necessary to pay special attention to respect for the young person’s culture and the special rights that pertain to cultural identity (CRC Article 30), as well as to protecting them from discrimination (CRC Article 2).

**The *Practice Guidance* therefore takes a holistic rights-based approach to the arrangement and provision of support for leaving care.**




## **PRINCIPLE IV:**

### **The need for an inter-sectoral approach**

- **The wide range of issues to be addressed and the holistic rights-based approach in which this needs to be done (as set out in Principle III) require a high level of inter-sectoral engagement and coordination. Under no circumstances can the key worker be left, in policy or practice, with sole responsibility for responding directly in all these spheres. This was emphasised in the findings of the Scoping exercise (see ‘An inter-sectoral approach’ in Section 8).**

While systems and resource allocation vary from one country to another, with more or less reliance on non-State actors, it is clear that some form of mechanism must be in place to ensure and facilitate necessary inputs on the part of all appropriate agencies and bodies from the different sectors that should be involved.

One important role of the key worker will thus be to initiate this engagement and, potentially, to coordinate its provision for the young person concerned. However, it would be an uphill task and an inefficient way to operate if the key worker had to start from zero for each young person in his or her charge. It follows that responsible persons in the agencies and bodies should be made fully aware of the part they may validly be called upon to play in this context, and that a coordination mechanism be foreseen and established by the State body in charge of out-of-home care.



**The importance of envisaging interventions and assistance from diverse specialist bodies in this way – not to mention their human rights obligations to respond accordingly – will be evident at many points throughout this *Practice Guidance*.**





SECTION

5

# SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE:

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

# SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE: WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

- In this section we look at the different people who might play a role in supporting young people leaving care.

**The ‘key worker’:** this would ideally be a professional social worker with responsibility for ensuring the young person’s successful transition from the care setting to a settled situation in independent living. Such a role may not currently exist in the child protection and care systems of all countries, in which case the formal or informal designation of another such responsible person should be foreseen.

Ideally, the key worker will have built up the trust of the care leaver during the placement and will accompany them throughout the care leaving process to independent living and for the time necessary thereafter. If such continuity is impossible, there should at least be a considerable period in which a ‘handover’ process occurs between the key worker supporting the care leaver while preparing for leaving care and the one who will provide support after care.

The quality of the relationship that the key worker develops with the young person will be as important as the actual support offered. The key worker will, on the one hand, befriend and work directly with the care leaver and, on the other, initiate and coordinate interventions and services by others (individuals and agencies) that need to be planned for and provided in the light of each care leaver’s needs and situation. The key worker is thus central in terms of support provided but cannot be expected to deliver all aspects of that support alone. This will be discussed in more detail later in the *Practice Guidance*.

**The carers:** whether a foster family or residential care workers, for example, those who have direct responsibility for the young person during the care placement should not only play a vital role in preparing them for leaving care but should also remain available, to the extent possible, during the after-care period.

In this way they can help to maintain the essential bridge between life in care and independent living – meaning that care leavers do not have to simply draw a line under their care experience but can keep up relationships with

trusted carers. This can be of major importance in reassuring the young person who has embarked on the journey to independent living.

**Specialised services:** State agencies and non-State bodies and associations may need to be called upon to provide specialist support and assistance, both on-going and one-off. The fields involved include notably all aspects of social services as well as health, education, housing, employment services, judges, lawyers and cultural organisations. We will speak more about the coordinated inter-sectoral role of different professions later in this *Practice Guidance*.

**Young people with experience of care:** peer mentoring can contribute greatly to a successful care-leaving process. Selected volunteer mentors whose experience of leaving care has been globally successful may be able to create particularly trusted relationships with the care leaver and be in a position to respond to questions and anxieties in a way that complements professional support. Key workers for those who have left care should discuss among themselves which care leavers might be appropriately approached to play such a role. We will explore further the use of peer mentoring later in this *Practice Guidance*.

**Family:** involving family members in the care-leaving process should be considered wherever possible, unless the young person rejects this approach. At the same time, family members themselves may need to be counselled and supported as to how to play a constructive role, especially if contact has been sporadic and/or relations have been conflictual during the young person's care placement.

It is important to encourage and facilitate involvement of family members but not to be seen as forcing it: considerable time may be needed for creating the bases for positive involvement on their part.

**Other persons of significance:** the young person should be asked if there are friends or other trusted persons they would like to see involved in some way in their care leaving process.







SECTION

6

# LEAVING CARE AS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

# LEAVING CARE AS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

- Those of you with responsibility for providing support to a young person leaving care will play a role in a process that should provide the best possible care leaving experience. This section will help explain why that process of ‘leaving care’ means much more than the moment of the young person’s physical departure from the care setting and how that process should be envisioned and carried out.

## 1. A CONTINUUM OF CARE

‘Leaving care’ comprises a number of **interconnected phases**.

- The first is preparation for leaving care while the young person is **still in their care setting**.
- The second will be the **final day of full-time care** in that setting and, thus, the first day of ‘moving on’. This may have been planned as a **transition period** involving, for example, semi-independent living rather than a fully independent situation from the start.
- The third will be the provision of support at levels and of kinds corresponding to the needs of each young person during the ‘**after-care**’ period, ideally for whatever time it takes for the young person to adjust.

Indeed, a core component of improving support and outcomes for young people moving on from care is recognition by those working with care leavers that ‘leaving care’ is a process and not an event.



**‘First of all, gaining independence should be treated as a process where you could see how things are going. And whether that person is ready. And if she or he isn’t ready, they should at least have someone on their side, so that they don’t just automatically stumble and fall.’**

It is also important to bear in mind that:

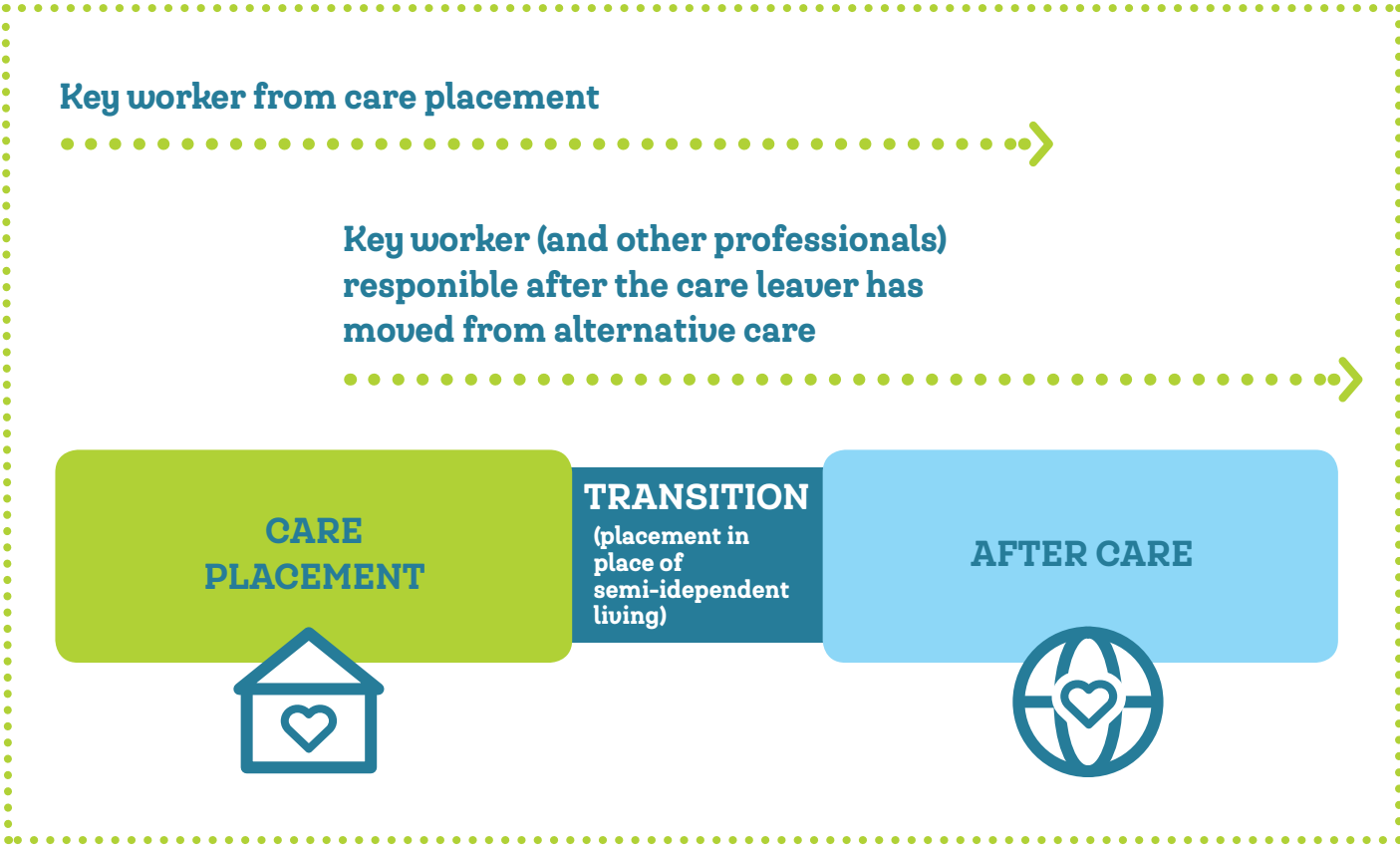
- in systems where there can be some **flexibility over the actual moment of leaving care**, young people should also be helped to choose the time that would be most appropriate for them to leave care
- **young people need a lengthy period of preparation**, and there is a strong argument for beginning the process with early discussions as soon as the young person comes into care. It is also recognised, however, this may not always be feasible and/or desirable and in individual cases it may be better to delay initiating that discussion
- **careful and timely planning for leaving care is important** so that resources can be sought at appropriate times and actions taken to meet the young person’s needs, circumstances and wishes, as well as assigning responsibilities and seeking the cooperation of other important agencies

## 2. SHARING RESPONSIBILITY DURING THE PROCESS

The departure of a care leaver from their alternative care setting cannot be looked on as the moment when all responsibilities are just handed over from one set of professionals to another. The leaving care process requires a joined-up series of actions by a variety of people, forming a continuum of support prior to, during, and following departure from care.

One way of contributing to a seamless leaving care process – and thus making the young person’s transition from care to independent living as smooth as possible – will be by **working with others to create a bridge between the care setting and after care.**

As illustrated in the following diagram, there should be co-ordination and an inter-dependent role between those caring for and supporting the care leavers while they are still in care – and/or living in a transition placement if this has been an option – and those who will hold responsibility in the after-care period.



To achieve this may require a rethinking of the current roles and responsibilities of different professionals and others in your country who are involved prior to and following the young person's departure from the care setting, and **excellent coordination** between them.

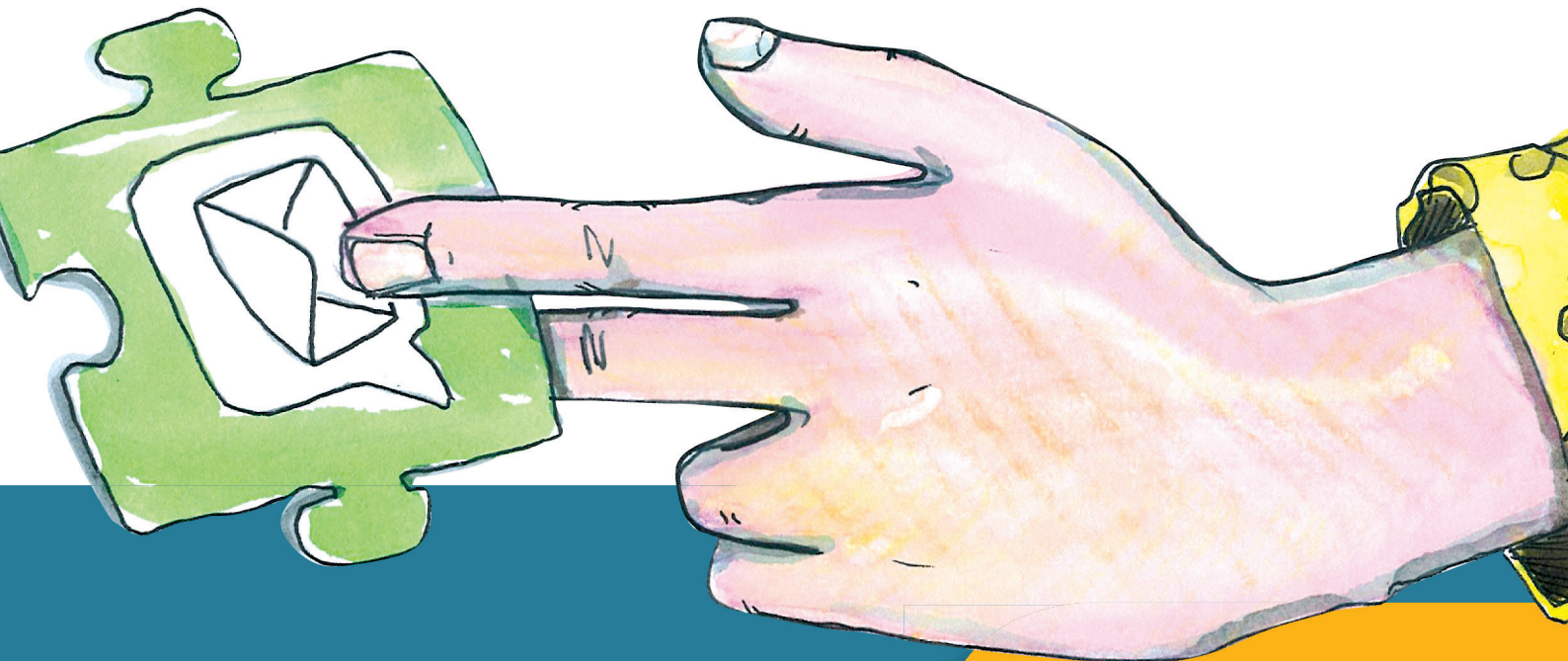
Again we emphasise that supporting young people to make a **gradual transition**, with support over an extended period of time, is at the heart of good practice. For example it is important to remember that when a young person moves on from residential care:



**‘They leave a relatively controlled and structured environment. They need to cope with new responsibilities and a higher level of freedom. The timing of the move from the residential unit may not have been their choice. This can therefore be a time of turmoil, adaptation and loss’<sup>8</sup> (McGhee et al (2014)).**







SECTION

7

# UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF CARE LEAVERS

# UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF CARE LEAVERS

• This section looks at some of the complex needs and main challenges that young people leaving care may have to contend with, and that you should therefore take into account when preparing and accompanying their journey from care to independent living. Much of this section centres on the difficulties that many young people leaving care experience. However, we know that **some care leavers have been able to develop highly constructive skills and abilities** as a result of the positive inputs they have had either before or during their time in care, and they are able to look forward to leaving care and adulthood confidently, positively and competently. It is therefore essential that key workers pay attention to the **specific** needs of individual care leavers and tailor their support to those needs.

## RECOGNISING THE CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE

While supporting care leavers through the leaving care process, it is important to recognise the complex nature of growing up and moving into adulthood. Young people who have been in care are likely to face additional complexities due to their childhood experiences. This can impact significantly on the manner in which a young person might engage in the leaving care process and may well affect their ability to cope once they have moved into independent living. Highlighted in this section are topics that deserve special consideration:

- A. Understanding the emotional dynamics of leaving care
- B. Promoting stability during change
- C. The importance of relationship-based practice
- D. Building resilience
- E. Meeting complex needs
- F. Taking a flexible approach



## Action Point

### Consider how:

- the developmental stage of adolescence can be a confusing and conflicting time for all young people
- young people need opportunities to 'test out' new experiences and make sense of their developing adulthood
- aim to provide a balance of providing reassurance, setting boundaries and creating challenges
- realise and help your colleagues and other partners to understand that there is no such thing as 'instant adulthood' and every young person develops at their own pace

**'And... honestly, these care workers the ones who have affected me the most because I have left here, and even though I've left, I still talk to them and they continue to support me, telling me to go ahead and they've been like... They've made me feel that finally someone, despite the problems, everything that's happened to me, I'm important to them, and it motivates me to go ahead, do everything I have to do and say...'**

**'They need to understand that we are people. They need to understand us more. They have to talk to us.'**

**‘Basically, care professionals must put their heart into their work, doing more than 8 working hours, if necessary. For example, if a kid has a problem, they should stay and listen to him, even if their work shift is ended. I know it’s a job for them, but they work with our lives.’**

**‘There’s a big difference between “hear” and “listen”; when you talk, you need someone who listens to you because he cares about you and not because he has to report everything on a sheet that everyone will read at the end.’**

FROM THE SCOPING  
EXERCISE

### Care leavers



- realise they do not have the same emotional and practical network of support that children who have remained in their own families have, while recognising professional boundaries
- would like a relationship with their key workers that is similar to that of a supportive parent
- actively seek the possibility of emotionally bonding with those entrusted with their care and making decisions about their lives
- want continuity especially with the people they build close relationships with before and during the leaving care process
- do not want to be talked at – they want someone to listen to what they have to say and engage in a genuine dialogue with them
- find confidentiality important – they want to be assured they can trust the person with whom they are sharing their feelings and ideas

## A. UNDERSTANDING THE EMOTIONAL DYNAMICS OF LEAVING CARE

As we highlighted earlier, this *Practice Guidance* systematically takes the position that the manner in which guidance and support is provided to care leavers is just as important as the quality of the guidance and support given.

This calls on you to consider how you will utilise relationship-based practice that enables:

- the care leaver to continuously feel valued and cared for
- mutual trust and respect to be built up between the key worker, all other professionals, and the young person
- mutual trust and respect to be established among the professionals working around the care leaver



### Action Point

To better understand and connect with the emotional dynamic of moving from home to independence and adulthood, take a moment to reflect on your thoughts and answers on the following:

- At what age did you 'leave home'?
- What was it like and how did you feel?
- What helped?
- What hindered?
- Did you have a choice?
- Do you think you were ready?
- How does the journey for care leavers differ from that of the wider population?

You may wish to undertake this with colleagues in your own or another agency.

## B. PROMOTING STABILITY DURING CHANGE

### FROM THE SCOPING EXERCISE



Care leavers spoke about the importance of keeping contact with carers – such as foster families and residential care workers – once they had left care. The importance of maintaining relationships with family members was also recognised, while taking into consideration the wishes of the care leaver and ensuring that such connections would be in their best interest. Likewise, care leavers want to maintain the friendships they made before and during their care experience, as well as to have the opportunity to build new ones once they have left care. Friends and other peers are recognised as being able to offer valuable support mechanisms for some young people once they have left care.

Children and young people in care seek above all – and, like any other child, are entitled to – **stability, support and security**. Leaving care involves moments of quite substantial change, and there is a high risk that young people will not feel that these requirements are being met during the process. While you are working through the Pathway Planning process it is therefore important to help create the conditions and knowledge that will assist the young person to experience ‘**stability**’ **through continuity**.

Once again, we cannot overstate the importance of helping to develop and support:

- social networks
- on-going engagement enabling young people to maintain and, where possible, enhance established family, friends and other significant relationships and links (including with the places they lived)
- continuation of positive carer/worker/peer relationships from their care placement

Often forged in a period of significant stress and anxiety – as children and young people come into a placement or prepare for moving out of one – these relationships can not only hold things together as the young person moves into a new and challenging period of their lives<sup>9</sup>, but also provide an invaluable basis for further development once their situation has stabilised.

**Family relationships** can too often be overlooked or not appropriately considered or managed into Pathways Plans, leaving young people vulnerable to re-visiting earlier trauma and rejection, and it should be a key consideration for those of you working with care leavers and supporting their development and implementation of pathways plans<sup>10</sup>.



**When preparing to leave care, young people often reconsider their family relationships, sometimes wondering if this is a good time to be thinking of reconnecting with them. For some this may be a real and positive option, for others it may reawaken painful feelings about their early history with its trauma and rejection. It is important that those responsible for their care are alert to these possibilities, and make this area a key consideration in supporting their development and implementation of Pathway Plans.**

## **C. FAVOURING RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICE**

As a key worker or someone else with responsibility for supporting care leavers, it is important to make sure priority is given to a relationship-based practice that is based on:

- understanding
- empathy
- respect
- perseverance

Some of the ways you might do this include:

- behaving in a way which demonstrates respect for young people, valuing their thoughts and concerns, and working with their hopes and aspirations at their pace
- understanding and accepting the frustration and pain caused by their previous experiences of trauma and distress
- supporting young people to maintain positive relationships and attachments with previous carers and professionals throughout their care experience and beyond
- encouraging carers and young people to keep in contact, for example through regular visits for meals, involvement in social occasions and celebrations and acting as an intermediary to support this if necessary
- minimising staffing changes and promoting consistency in the workers supporting a child or young person



- making sure services are based on individual need rather than age defined
- advocating for staff time and / or resources to undertake this essential work

## D. BUILDING RESILIENCE

Resilience is an individual's capacity to successfully confront and overcome difficult or adverse situations.

The degree to which children and young people develop resilience varies greatly. While life experience clearly impacts on the achievement of resilience, the capabilities that underlie resilience can be strengthened at any age. This section looks at why developing resilience has to be a key goal for all involved in the leaving care process, and how it can be fostered.

### Why is resilience important

We all need resilience to help confront the setbacks and challenges that occur in our lives. Resilience helps us:

- get through adversities
- bounce back from adversities
- move forward towards a positive future

Developing resilience is especially important for young people in care and leaving care because they:

- have often had particularly painful and difficult events and situations to deal with
- may be leaving the places where they grew up earlier than most of their peers
- may have less family support than other young people
- may face situations of discrimination and stigma as result of having been in care

### Ways to address low resilience

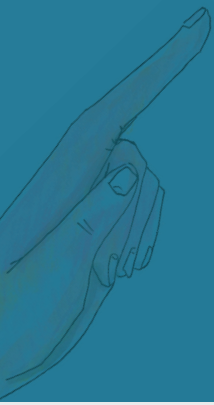
Resilience can to some extent be taught and be learned.

Resilience is a complex interaction between elements of a child's external and internal worlds. Support to care-experienced children and young people secures the best outcomes possible when attention is given to both external and internal supports for resilience. What do we mean by this?

### External factors

External factors of low resilience are potentially numerous and diverse. They can include, for example:

- poverty, neglect and abuse
- abrupt removal from the family
- multiple care placements
- irregular schooling because of frequent moves
- changes in staff/carers
- impact of unresolved childhood trauma



**Although they can be difficult to reverse, it is often possible to mitigate their longer-term effects to some extent. Establishing a relationship of trust which helps the young person to discuss and understand better the reasons for their coming into care and their care experience, will in many cases contribute significantly to building their resilience.**

To appropriately address a child or young person's consequent feelings of distress, anger and rejection, however, those who have not been specifically prepared to deal with the management of such reactions may find it necessary to **rely on specialised colleagues**.

### Internal causes

Internal causes of low resilience can usually be modified more easily. Children and young people who have had difficult starts in life often have negative beliefs about themselves, their abilities and their futures which undermine their potential resilience.

To address these concerns, those of you working alongside children and young people in care should give special attention throughout their placement and leaving care process to analysing and constructively challenging these negative beliefs. **Aim to build on and increase the young person's feeling of self-worth so they can gradually acquire more confidence in their ability to control their lives.** It is also important to support children and young people in building strong connections with others, and their being able to call on those connections in tough times.

**Other activities** that help young people to confront and change their low resilience can be undertaken as a part of daily living. For example, a significant contributing factor can be arranging for young people to be granted – and to accept – more responsibility for various facets of their lives, including:

- clothing
- entertainment
- bed-time
- spending money
- risk-taking
- solving their own problems on a gradually increasing basis

Care leavers will also benefit if, towards the time when they are due to leave care, some of the boundaries usually in place in their placement – especially if they have been in a residential care setting – can be relaxed a little. Where necessary and appropriate, being more flexible on subjects such as contact with others and use of social media will both reflect care leavers' growing maturity and help to prepare them for the imminent reality of greater freedoms.



### Action Point

Think about:

- how you can support the individual developmental needs of young people in care settings – within a supportive and learning context as young people would normally do within family settings – and ensure as far as possible that they have the same opportunities to develop:
  - autonomy
  - decision-making
  - ways of taking measured risks
  - appropriate levels of responsibility
  - healthy ways of coping with adverse situations
- how do you create learning opportunities for young people to develop age-appropriate knowledge, skills and confidence?
- what questions do you think this raises for staff teams and what support do you think they will need to practice in this way?

## E. MEETING THE COMPLEX NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

It is important for you to consider the characteristics of the care leavers you are working with and recognise contradictory messages can be conveyed both to them and by them. For example, it is common for young people to develop what is known as a 'survivor' mentality<sup>11</sup> and to express a desire to leave care at the earliest opportunity, in order to be free of the stigma of social work and the care system<sup>12</sup>.

Stein<sup>13</sup> identifies three categories, or 'identities', that care leavers can assume when moving from care to independence:

1. those that successfully **move on**
2. those he terms **survivors**
3. those he describes as **strugglers**

Different aspects related to these three different identities are illustrated in the following graphic (adapted from Stein, 2012).



The ***moving on*** group are more likely to have experienced less disruption and instability during their time in care, to have been able to have some sense of psychological reconciliation with family enabling them to move on, and to have achieved some degree of educational success.

***Survivors*** generally leave care abruptly at an earlier age than the movers on. Low educational achievement, transience and irregular low-paid employment may be included in some of the challenges for young people in this group<sup>14</sup>. Among the survivors are usually some young people who find accepting help with planning for and arranging leaving care difficult. It is possible they may reject it completely, or be inconsistent in what they want or need, or behave in an otherwise resistant way.

The group described as ***strugglers*** may find themselves the most disadvantaged and with greater post-care instability and poorer outcomes. Such experience as unresolved childhood trauma, or damaging family relationships might contribute to this. This is the group that are also more likely to find themselves homeless and experience poor mental health.

In addition, for some young people who have been through early childhood trauma, their emotional stage of development is out of sync with their chronological age<sup>15</sup>. Thus, an 18-year old may display behaviour you may normally expect from a 12 to 14-year old. Young people can also be fearful about the future or angry over what they may perceive as yet another rejection, and this can manifest in how they behave and communicate with others.

**These identities or categories however, are not 'fixed', and young people can fluctuate between them depending on changing internal (personal) or external (social) factors. It should be noted that despite early trauma and adverse childhood experiences many care leavers do overcome these and achieve positive outcomes. Having high aspirations for young people transitioning from care is important, and helping them develop a sense of resilience and self-belief is a key task. However, the additional barriers and obstacles that they face will usually require ongoing practical and emotional support.**



As someone with responsibility for working with children in care and/or care leavers, you may be familiar with working with young people who behave like this and will be experienced in finding how to work successfully with those young people. It is important that workers are able to cope with the challenging behaviour, **and that it does not cause them to give up.**



### Action Point

At the end of a Pathway Planning session with a care leaver you might say something like:

- ‘we don’t seem to be making much progress today, so we’ll stop for now and arrange another time to talk’

OR

- ‘I will come back tomorrow/next week to see if I can find another way to help. Perhaps you could have a think about what you would find helpful’

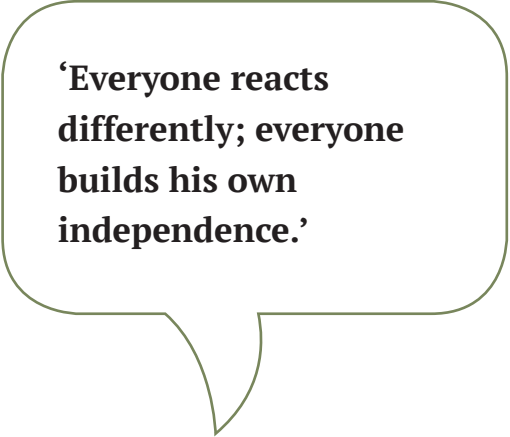
There is clearly no single way that will suit every young person and every worker, but the main principle is to demonstrate to the young person that her or his feelings and frustrations are understood and accepted.



### Action Point

Think about Stein’s categories and how they relate to the young person you are working with.

## F. TAKING A FLEXIBLE APPROACH



**‘Everyone reacts differently; everyone builds his own independence.’**

Most young people’s journeys to adulthood and independence involve deviations, false starts, and obstacles to overcome. In addition, young people moving from care can have ongoing difficulties to deal with such as, the stigma of care, fragile support networks and a lack of material resources and social capital.

It is important therefore:

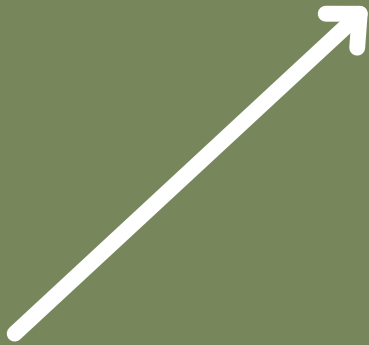
- not to expect a care leaver’s journey to follow a predetermined bureaucratic plan: **lives and plans tend not to follow a neat linear trajectory**
- to remember that the road to ‘success’ - whatever that means to each person - is seldom straightforward or without obstacles or deviations
- to recognize that support and services offered to each care leaver must **adapt to their changing circumstances and needs**

The following diagram helps us remind ourselves that our own journeys to ‘adulthood’ and ‘success’ are usually far from straightforward - we usually encounter obstacles and false starts along the way. It reminds us that linear bureaucratic processes and procedures need to take account of the human dimension.



Journeys to independence  
and adulthood are rarely  
straightforward...

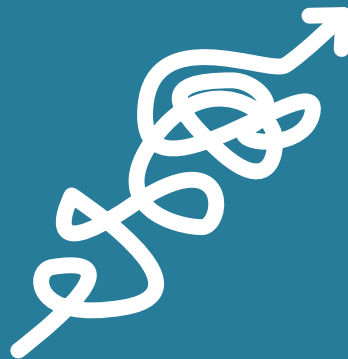
**SUCCESS ... ?**



What we think it looks like

Support needs to be flexible  
and responsive to meet  
young people needs...

**SUCCESS ... !**



What it really looks like



SECTION

8

# PATHWAY PLANS AND THE PLANNING PROCESS



# PATHWAY PLANS AND THE PLANNING PROCESS

- This section explains how to use a **Pathways Approach to planning** each young person's leaving care process.
- It will also cover some ideas and concepts for you to explore and understand when developing a Pathway Plan with the care leaver.

A Pathways Approach to leaving care is the initiation and implementation of a process that encompasses all necessary considerations and actions to meet the needs, circumstances and wishes of a young person when planning for and supporting the different stages of their leaving care process - preparing to leave care, transition or semi-independent living and, the move after care to independent living (adapted from Pathways Handbook and Pathways Materials, Scottish Executive, 2004).

Taking a Pathways Approach to the leaving care process will help you:

- ensure that a young person's experience during and after leaving care is **one continuous journey** - moving from Care Plans to Pathway Plans
- create a meaningful partnership with each young person so that **their voice, their wishes and their views** are central to informing their plan for their future
- **work alongside the care leaver**, to consider all the key issues that are important to them as together you prepare a Pathway Plan for their move from care through to independent living

Before going further, let us first recall what this *Practice Guidance* as a whole emphasises:

- **the leaving care process should be tailored to the specific circumstances, characteristics, needs and wishes** of each young person, so as to help them feel prepared for moving on and reassured about doing so
- in systems where there can be some flexibility over the actual moment of leaving care, **young people should be helped to choose the time that would be most appropriate for them to leave care**

- individualised and potentially flexible planning and implementation of the leaving care process and for after-care must be foreseen over a significant period, **with the full and meaningful participation of the care leaver**

## 1. AN INTRODUCTION TO PATHWAY PLANS

### FROM THE SCOPING EXERCISE



Preparation for leaving care should be part of approved “National Guidelines on residential care” applicable to all geographical administrative units in a country, including a stipulation that preparation for leaving should commence the first day a child arrives in alternative care.

There should be legal obligations to develop Leaving Care Plans for all care leavers.

### A Pathway Plan

- **is a tool to identify, plan for and monitor** the undertaking of all necessary actions and provision of resources in support of a young persons’ move from care and in after-care. It is vital the Pathway Plan takes into full consideration the care leaver’s individual circumstances and their strengths, needs, goals and aspirations. A Pathway Plan must be individualised and tailored to each care leaver.
- **sets out the specific actions that should be taken** to meet the care leavers assessed needs for realising their circumstances, needs, goals and aspirations, for assigning precise responsibilities, and defining an ‘ideal’ timeframe. The Plan should also extend for a required period of time following each young person’s physical departure from care and set interim goals that, like the Pathway Plan itself, can be adjusted if difficulties arise or circumstances change.
- **should be drawn up as a collaborative exercise with the care leaver.** The Plan should take a holistic view of the young persons’ own needs, wishes and circumstances and should therefore also involve and draw on support from a range of services and individuals – including carers – as appropriate.

The Pathway Plan should be a written document that addresses the following requirements:

- ensuring that **no young person leaves care without the preparation and skills necessary** for success, and includes actions to be taken to prepare them for leaving care, any period of semi-independence and after care
- identifying the most appropriate support, including **actions, services, advice and resources to be provided** that meet the care leaver's identified circumstances, needs, goals and aspirations
- determining **when and how services are to be provided**, including the date the support/service will commence
- **designating persons responsible** for providing/facilitating support and services
- specifying how goals and actions identified in the Pathway Plan will be **regularly monitored and reviewed**, necessary changes made, and by whom

Further information will be provided on the suggested topics to be included in a Pathway Plan in Section 11 of this *Practice Guidance*.





## 2. DEVELOPING A PATHWAY PLAN: TASKS FOR KEYWORKERS

### FROM THE SCOPING EXERCISE



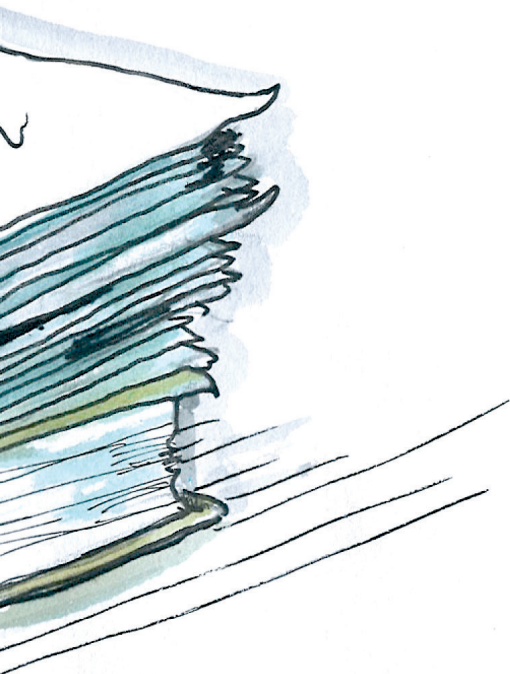
To be meaningful, Pathway Planning should be:

- **a process of planning and preparing** for transitions to independence and adulthood using positive caring relationships and day-to-day opportunities to develop skills and abilities, and to build confidence
- **a needs-led process** that also builds on the strengths and abilities of the care leaver
- **a dynamic evolving process**, and not simply a bureaucratic form filling exercise

### When should the Pathway Planning process start?

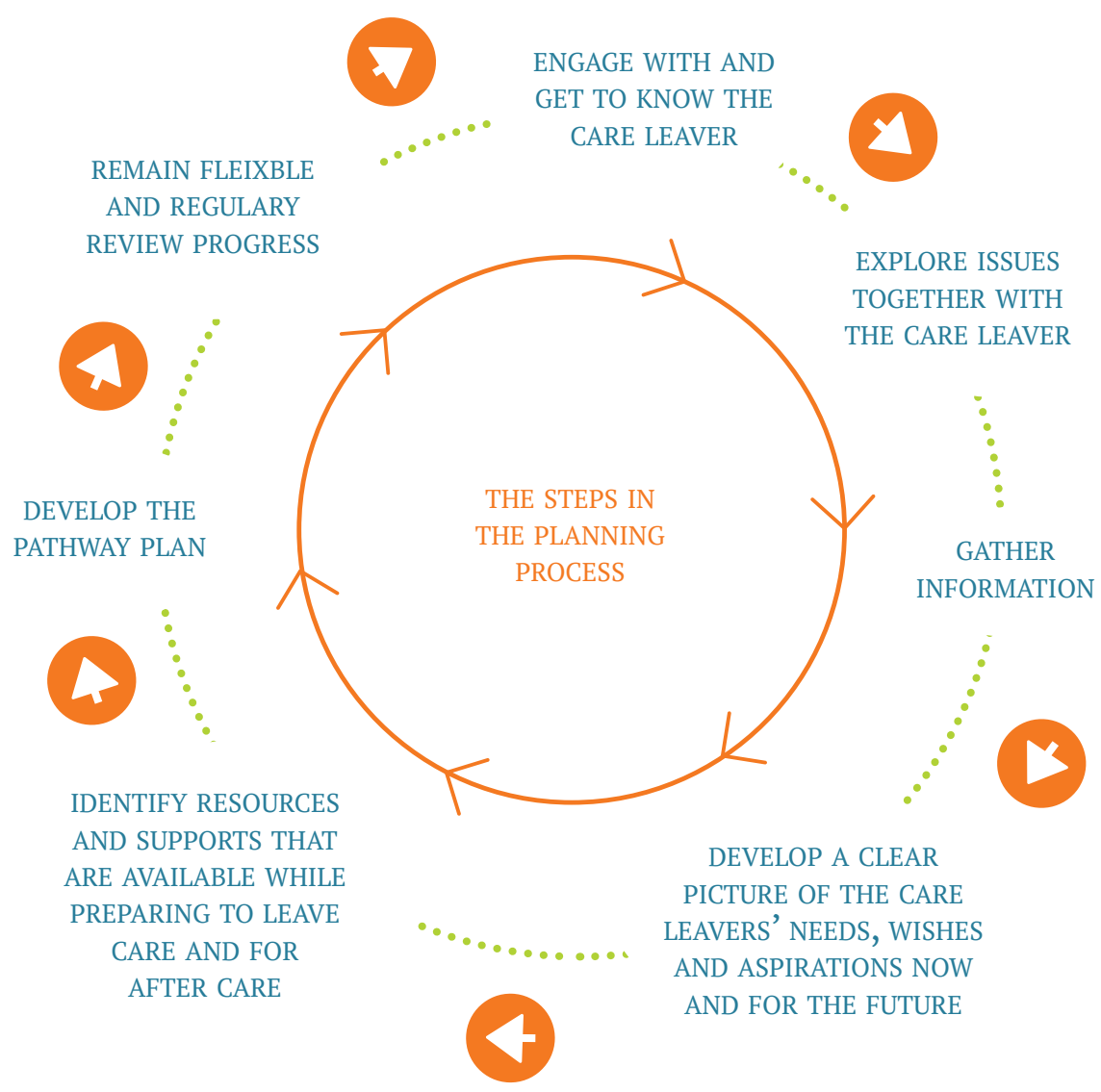
The preparation of a Pathway Plan and the process of moving to independence and adulthood **should begin during the care placement** - well before the planned departure date. It should continue as seamlessly as possible through the moment of departure with the provision of appropriate support for the time required after leaving the care placement.

It is important to work on developing the Pathway Plan **at a pace that is suitable for each young person**, bearing in mind their age and level of understanding. As part of the exercise, care leavers must be told about what decisions they are able to make and what decisions will need to be made by others, and they should be clear about what is realistic for them.



What is involved in the Pathway Planning process?

The following graphic illustrates the steps in the planning process:





### 3. INTER-SECTORAL WORKING: THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS AND AGENCIES IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING PATHWAY PLANS

Joint planning and multi-agency and partnership working is at the heart of all good child and youth care practice. Pathway Plans should **include the designated roles and responsibilities of agencies and partners in meeting the young person's needs and wishes through a phased transition into adulthood.**

Pathway Planning therefore involves identifying and working with other agencies and players who have a role to play (e.g. housing and accommodation providers, colleges, employers, etc.) and ensuring that young people are able to build relationships with them too. **The role of the key worker will thus be important in making all the necessary connections as well as acting as an advocate with service providers on behalf of the care leaver.**

It is vital that **referrals to aftercare teams/workers take place well in advance of any move from care** to allow time for preparation and to establish positive relationships. Where such teams or workers vested with aftercare responsibilities are not formally foreseen or operational, initiatives should be taken to identify appropriate persons in agencies and/or associations to fulfil the corresponding roles.





SECTION

9

# DEVELOPING A PATHWAY PLAN: TASKS FOR KEY WORKERS

## DEVELOPING A PATHWAY PLAN: TASKS FOR KEY WORKERS

- In this section, those of you with key responsibility
- for preparing the Pathway Planning process with the
- care leaver will be invited to consider a set of ‘tasks’.
- These ‘tasks’ are designed to inform and complement
- the approach to be taken in helping the young person
- develop their Pathway Plan, and should inspire and
- guide the way in which you will support them into
- after-care. The ‘tasks’ should help you cultivate and
- demonstrate **a genuine, caring, trusting relationship**
- **with the young person who is leaving care.**

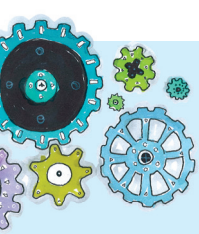
Please note, however, that the ‘tasks’ in this section are not an exhaustive list and therefore should not be regarded simply as a ‘to-do’ ‘checklist’.



## 1. ENGAGING WITH AND GETTING TO KNOW THE INDIVIDUAL CARE LEAVER

It is important to really get to know the care leaver you are working with and view the whole care journey of that young person from a developmentally informed perspective. The impact of early childhood experiences and adversity can have had a significant impact on the emotional and physiological development of young people. What this means is **when you start to work on plans for leaving care, it is important to understand any individual experiences the young person has had that may impact their leaving care process**, and to take this into account when working with them.

It is particularly important to engage with the young person in a manner that lets them know **their future is valued and they are cared about**.



### TASK

**Engage with the young person in a manner that lets them know their future is valued and they are cared about**

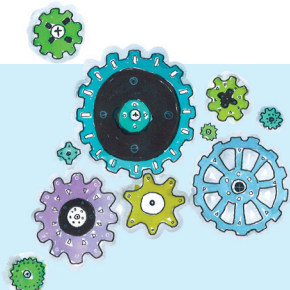
Spending significant time with the young person will help build a trusting relationship:

- include regular planned contact during which to undertake a balance of focussed support and planning along with informal social activities
- agree with the young person how often, where and when you should meet
- be flexible and responsive in your arrangements as a young person's needs and circumstances may change

It is important that your interaction with the care leaver helps you understand their childhood experiences. This will include positive experiences. However, negative experiences such as those of neglect, rejection and abuse might also have occurred during their childhood. You need to be aware that the consequences of such experiences can manifest themselves in young people in different ways, such as:

- developmental and educational delays
- inability to form close attachments
- ongoing instability and insecurity

Remember, these consequences may also mean the care leaver is not always able to make best use of the ongoing advice, guidance and support that you and other colleagues are offering.



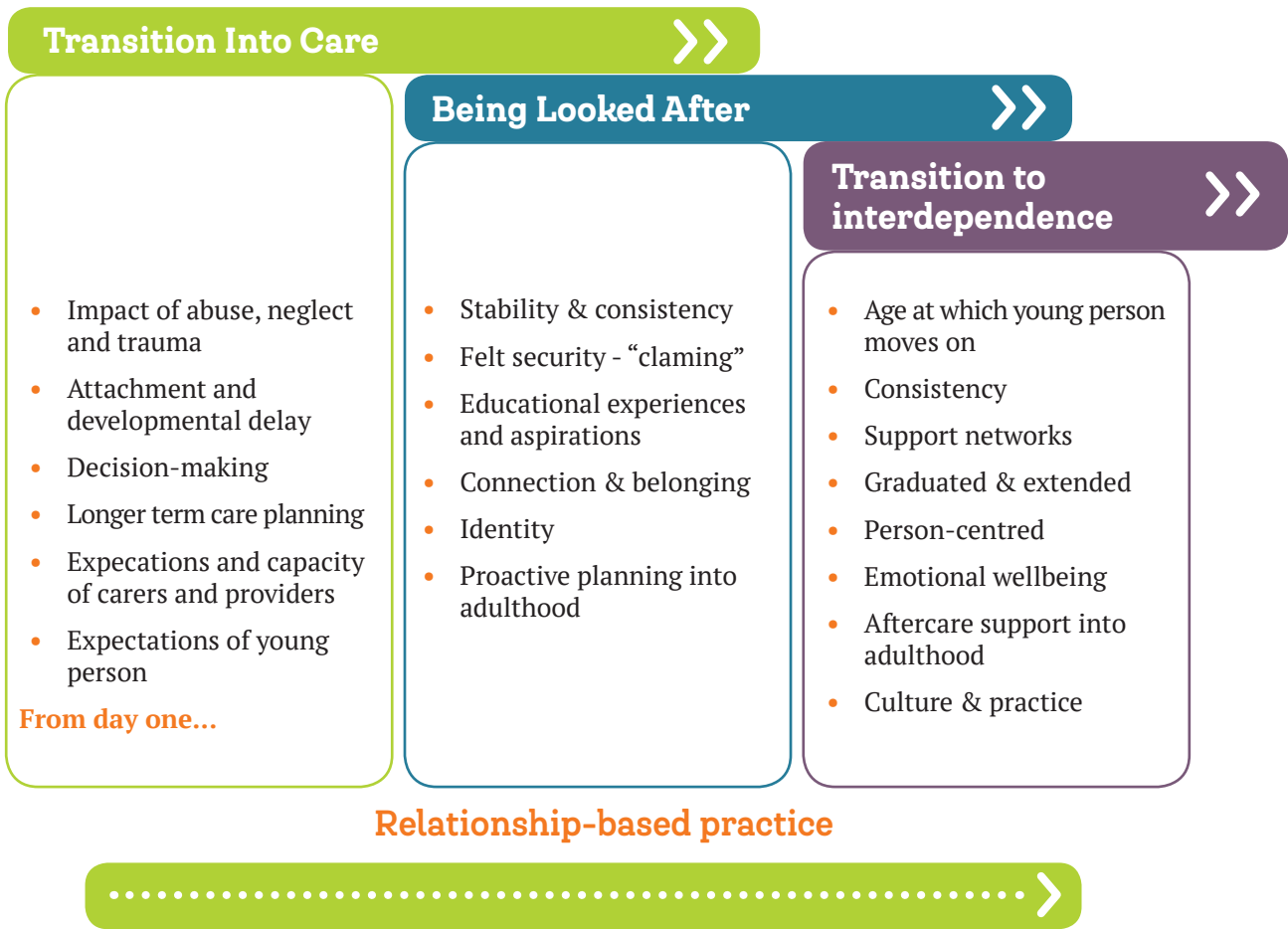
## TASK

### Work with the young person on understanding their experience in care

- Get to know the young person and begin to understand how they have made sense of their experience and family background.
- Find out how the young person has perceived their care experience.
- Understand if they feel able to build attachments and relationships with others.
- What sort of care have they had and how has this helped or hindered their development?
- Talk to those who have been responsible for their care i.e. care staff, foster carers, etc.
- Do you know what sense the young person has of why they were cared for away from their parental home?
- Find out what might be missing for the young person – are there gaps in their narrative?
- Think about how you can help them access information to fill in gaps in their understanding.
- Identify any effects of harmful experiences, separation from family and other important relationships – discover and explore with the young person ‘what has happened to them’ and ‘what is the potential impact on their emotional and psychological development.’ How has this affected their ability?
- Think about developing an understanding of their life story through such tool as Lifestory work<sup>16</sup>.

The following table illustrates factors that are therefore to be considered when supporting a care leaver. Remember, these factors are inter-related and can have an accumulative impact on young people.

ONE LIFE: ONE CARE JOURNEY



Clearly, the concerns discussed in this section can add significantly to the complexities and challenges that all young people face when leaving care. And again, this is why recognising children and young people’s experience before, during and beyond care as one continuous journey is important.



Some of the work that will need to be done is helping provide information that **helps care leavers develop a better understanding of their own histories** by reflecting on the actions of others at the point of entering care: by their family, social care staff, foster carers, etc.

To do this you may need to help the care leaver **access records and reports** that will help them gain a better picture of how things were at that time. They will almost certainly need emotional support while they are doing this. This may also help them to **consider their own reactions and behaviour**, and to begin to reflect on what will help them come to terms with their feelings including those of possible loss and rejection both now and in the future.

In this way, in your role supporting a care leaver, it is important to consider the longer term impact previous experiences may have on their life and development, so these are fully taken into account when supporting them to plan and prepare for adulthood.

Ways to address these concerns might include:

- building stability and predictability in their lives
- providing positive educational experience
- supporting their aspirations and ambitions for the future
- making sure they have a sense of connection and belonging
- ensuring they feel secure
- making sure they have access to consistent, and sustained positive relationships throughout their care experience

## 2. GATHERING INFORMATION

The information required to inform the leaving care process should be identified through a detailed **needs assessment** that will form the basis of a Pathway Plan.

A care leaver's key worker should, in principle, hold basic responsibility for gathering all the necessary information upon which an assessment for developing the Pathway Plan is undertaken with the care leaver. But this **must also involve all the appropriate agencies and individuals** – including, where appropriate, family members, other carers, and mentors – whose involvement may be required or desirable prior to and/or after departure from the care setting.

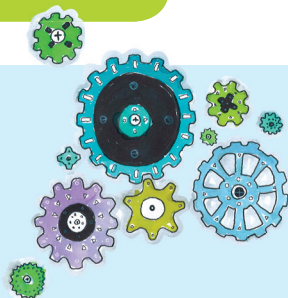
Before embarking on assessments in relation to preparing for leaving care with a young person, any existing Care Plans and care planning materials and records should be checked to see if they have been completed for the young person. This will avoid any duplication of effort for both the care leaver and those working to support the process of leaving care. **Current Care Plans** should contain information about how the identified needs of the young person are being met now.

Ideally, an agency's record of the period when the young person was in care will already contain essential factual information about the young person and an account of the assessments and care planning already completed before starting on Pathways Planning. If they have been completed, they should contain relevant information, including:

Essential background record: factual information about the child or young person including:

- family background
- a chronological history of their care placements
- legal status
- health information
- education information

Remember to not pre-judge the young person based on what is written about them.



## TASK

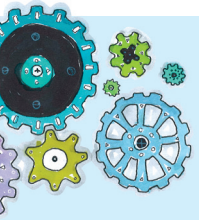
### Gather information

- Make sure you access all relevant background reports and case records.
- Consider such aspects as educational records and the care leaver's response to education, their achievements, their likes and dislikes.
- Consider whether there are any health concerns – both physical and mental.
- Situate the young person in their broad family context to determine its importance (or the importance of certain of its components) for them. Take account of the strengths and weaknesses in that potential support system, and how its prior or subsequent contribution to 'after-care' might be enhanced.

## 3. DEVELOPING A CLEAR PICTURE OF THE CARE LEAVERS' NEEDS, GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS: NOW AND FOR THE FUTURE

Think about how important it is that 'leaving care' is not simply a bureaucratic event with care planning being simply a box-ticking exercise. And of course, it is essential to not only address the very practical aspects of support and services that young people require, but also to recognise that **care leavers must be able to have hopes, aspirations and a vision for their future** in the same way as other young people.

As support staff and carers, **you are uniquely placed to nurture these hopes and aspirations**. And although **building a trusting and caring relationship** with care leavers can take time, **investing this time in** a young person can really help engage them more meaningfully in developing their Pathway Plan incorporating their hopes and plans for the future.



## TASK

### Nurture hopes and aspirations

#### Aim to:

- focus on what the young person is most looking forward to about the future
- identify any worries that the young person may have around trying to achieve their goals
- support young people to approach problem-solving and risk-taking in a constructive manner
- be a positive role model – model the behaviour, attributes and values you would wish to see the care leaver develop
- be open and realistic about how aspirations might be achieved

One way you might engage with care leavers in a meaningful manner that will support them with their hopes and plans for the future is by exploring and using a **person-centred planning**<sup>17</sup>(PCP) approach.

This approach can better enable the care leaver to be genuinely at the centre of their own Pathway Plan. It acknowledges the leaving care assessment and plan as a **‘dynamic’ process** and requires a genuine partnership between those individuals and agencies supporting the process and care leavers.

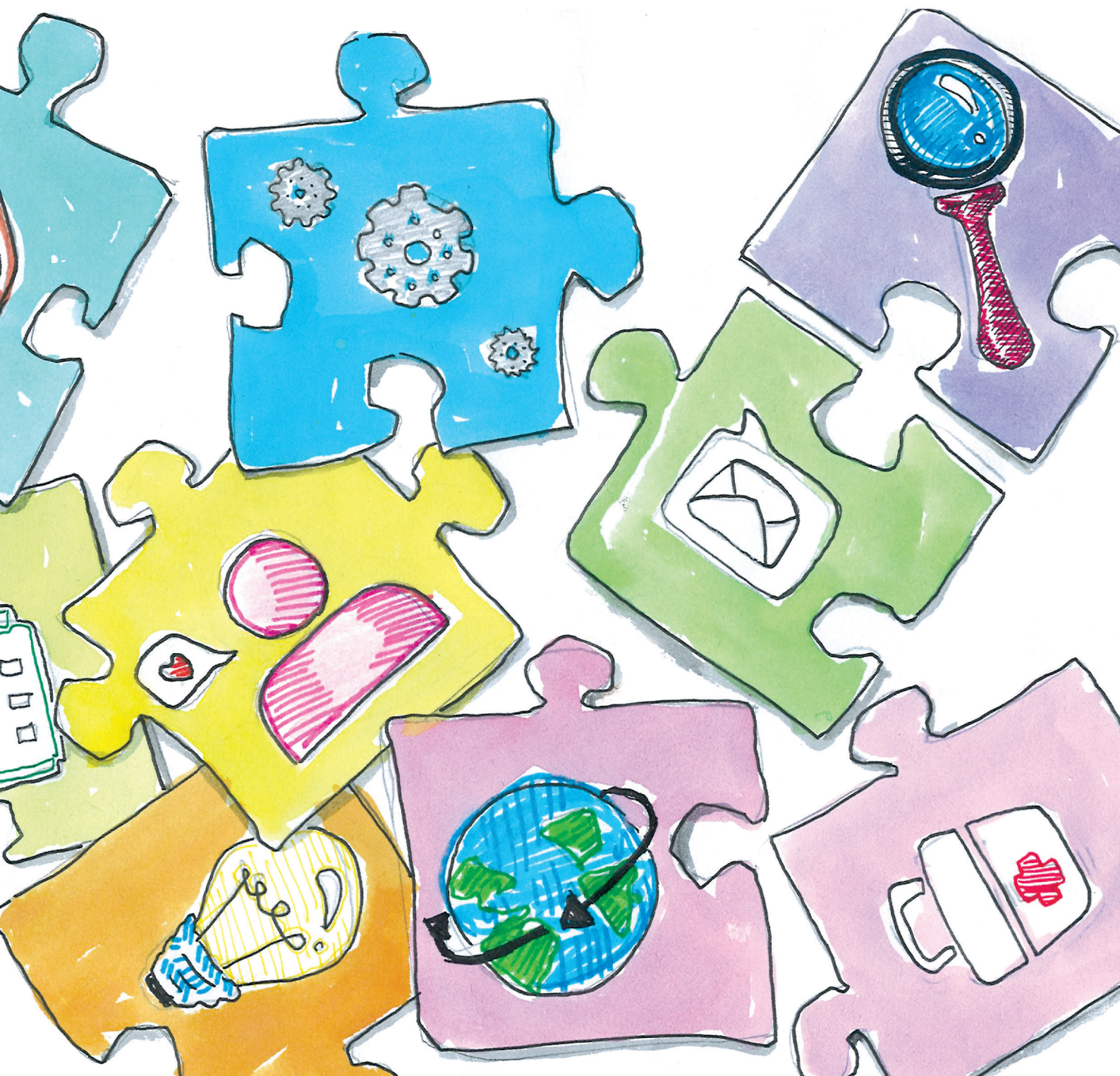
Developing a map or path for the future is a skilled task but can be much more engaging and meaningful for the young person. The picture below is an example of what a young person’s plan/map may look like.

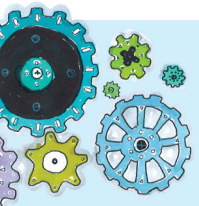




Care leavers **have a right to be provided with all the information** relevant to their present and future options so that they can make **informed choices about their own lives** and their leaving care pathway.

This information must be realistic in terms of both the opportunities and prospects open to them and the support that could be made available to them. Furthermore, this information must be provided in a way that they can readily understand.





## TASK

### Give information to the young people you work with about things that are likely to be important to them

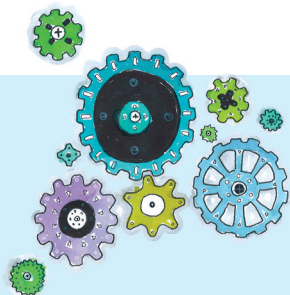
- Begin to introduce a Pathways Planning Approach which engages the young person in thinking about their future.
- Find out what is important to them, then begin to introduce other pieces of information that may be useful in thinking about the future.
- Introduce the young person to other people in other agencies who may be able to help them in their plans e.g. college tutors, potential employers.
- Help young people acquire information and support their access to, and understanding of, relevant information about their rights and access to supports and services. Discuss within your agency or organisation how you can develop a planning process which is much more engaging and dynamic, one which is co-produced and which helps young people develop a greater sense of ownership of their plan.

## 4. IDENTIFYING SOURCES OF SUPPORT TO MEET INDIVIDUAL NEEDS, WISHES AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE CARE LEAVER

In Section 8 we explored the importance of inter-sectoral working. Remember, **joint planning and multi-agency and partnership working is at the heart of all good child and youth care practice**. Pathway Plans should include all those with designated roles and responsibilities - both agencies and individuals - in meeting the young person's needs through a phased process into adulthood.

**Pathway Planning therefore involves identifying and working with other agencies and players who have a role to play** (e.g. providers of housing and other accommodation, education establishments, judges and lawyers, health workers, employers, etc.) and ensuring that young people are able to build relationships with them too. The role of the key worker will thus be important in making all the necessary connections as well as acting as an advocate with service providers on behalf of the care leaver.

In Section 6 we explored the importance of a leaving care as a continuous process. It is vital that referrals to after-care teams/workers take place well in advance of any move from care to allow time for preparation and to establish positive relationships. Where such teams or workers vested with after-care responsibilities are not formally foreseen or operational, initiatives should be taken to identify appropriate persons in agencies and/or associations to fulfil the corresponding roles.



### TASK

#### Develop your own knowledge and professional networks

- Build your knowledge of services, rights and entitlements for care leavers.
- Develop positive working relationships with professionals in other sectors and find out what each agency can (and is mandated to) offer care leavers.
- Use team-work skills to maximise contribution from other workers/agencies.
- Arrange joint planning meetings with key agencies to discuss individual Pathway Plan and the development of general working protocols and practices.
- Help other relevant agencies understand the needs of care leavers, and help them understand the role that you play.
- Become acquainted with your local laws and policies.



## 5. PEER MENTORING

Another form of support for care leavers during preparations for leaving care and after care is peer mentoring. In this section of the *Practice Guidance*, we are referring specifically to peer mentoring as the **matching of a care leaver with another young person** with similar experiences.

A peer mentor can play an important role in empowering a care leaver by supporting them through the process of transitioning from care to independent living. One of the strengths of peer mentoring is how care leavers can benefit from sharing and learning from their mentor's own experiences of leaving care - both good and bad. They can use their experience to play an important role in supporting the care leaver to make positive choices, and can offer advice and support in a way that meets the practical, social and emotional needs of care leavers.

### Peer mentors can offer:

- their time and attention
- a reliable positive role model
- shared experience
- a listening ear
- help in identifying goals
- encouragement for planning
- strengthened problem-solving
- support for integration into the community
- introductions to new social networks



### Peer mentors do not:

- make decisions for those they are mentoring  
– but they might be able to suggest options and help them to think through the consequences of actions
- replace professional workers or services



## MATCHING AND SUPPORT FROM KEY WORKERS

Care leavers will differ in their expectations and needs, and peer mentors will vary in what knowledge and experience they have to offer. An important aspect of the relationship is that the mentors who play this important role are reliable, both in giving their time and attention, and in doing what they say they will do.

Key workers will have a role to play in **assessing the match** between the care leaver and their prospective mentor so that there is a good fit between them in terms of their personalities, interests and experiences. Particular attention needs to be paid to the ability of peer mentors to offer continuity of involvement, reliability and safe behaviour.

It is vital that discussion takes place about what the care leaver is looking for in a mentor and, what the prospective peer mentor is able and willing to offer, so **that roles are clarified and boundaries agreed**.

**The role of the key worker is to:**

- **show the care leaver what a mentor can do**
- **help the care leaver identify her/his expectations of a mentor**
- **identify a potential mentor**
- **check the mentor's credentials and suitability**
- **prepare the peer mentor for the role**
- **facilitate an agreement on the role and responsibilities of the peer mentor**
- **offer ongoing support for the peer mentor**
- **monitor the peer mentoring arrangement**




It is possible that peer mentoring relationships **arise naturally from within the care leaver's own social network or family**, and these relationships are less likely to feel contrived or specially constructed. Peer mentors may be found in the care leaver's own school, neighbourhood, sports, youth or activity organisation. Alternatively, peer mentors may be especially recruited into peer mentoring schemes by advertising to the local public.

Assessing the reasons why a peer mentor would like to take up the role will be a significant task for care agencies. It is vital, however, to check the motivation and credentials of potential peer mentors in a responsible way but without recourse to selection procedures so rigid and thorough that they might put off potentially valuable mentors.

## CHALLENGES

There are some challenges in the peer mentoring relationship, and the informed input of a professional at these times may be critical. These challenges might include:

- managing the expectations and demands of the care leaver
- keeping the boundaries between the care leaver and the mentor
- times when the care leaver's behaviour is difficult to manage
- disappointment and frustration of the care leaver if the mentor does not follow through on what has been agreed



**Research has shown that peer mentors experience rewards themselves when they have mentored others. For instance, they may like helping people and seeing other care leavers make successful transitions. Peer mentoring may also give mentors an opportunity to review their own care leaving experience.**

## AN EXAMPLE OF MENTORING IN ITALY

Below is information about mentoring provided by members of an SOS Children's Villages supported Young Expert Group (YEG) in Italy. Members of this group are also part of a national Care Leavers Network led by an organisation named Agevolando<sup>18</sup>. They wrote:

1. What helped us in terms of peer-to-peer support was the role played by 'pioneer' care leavers who realized we need help and support in this transition and understood our emotional and practical needs like no others. This made it possible for us to benefit from positive examples and learn from their experiences.

One YEG member reports how she was invited to a conference to talk about her pathway throughout care. She told her story of how she found her calling, succeeded in school and graduated from university while also working to build support networks for other care leavers. At the end of the conference, a girl who was there to listen came to talk to her and said, *'Thank you because now I know that if you made it, I can.'*

With this in mind, the recommendation of the YEG is that residential (and other) care providers and professionals should create more opportunities for young people in care and care leavers to meet each other. This would allow those with care leaving experience to offer peer support and understanding with those leaving care, and to integrate this support and capacity building with that received from their carers.

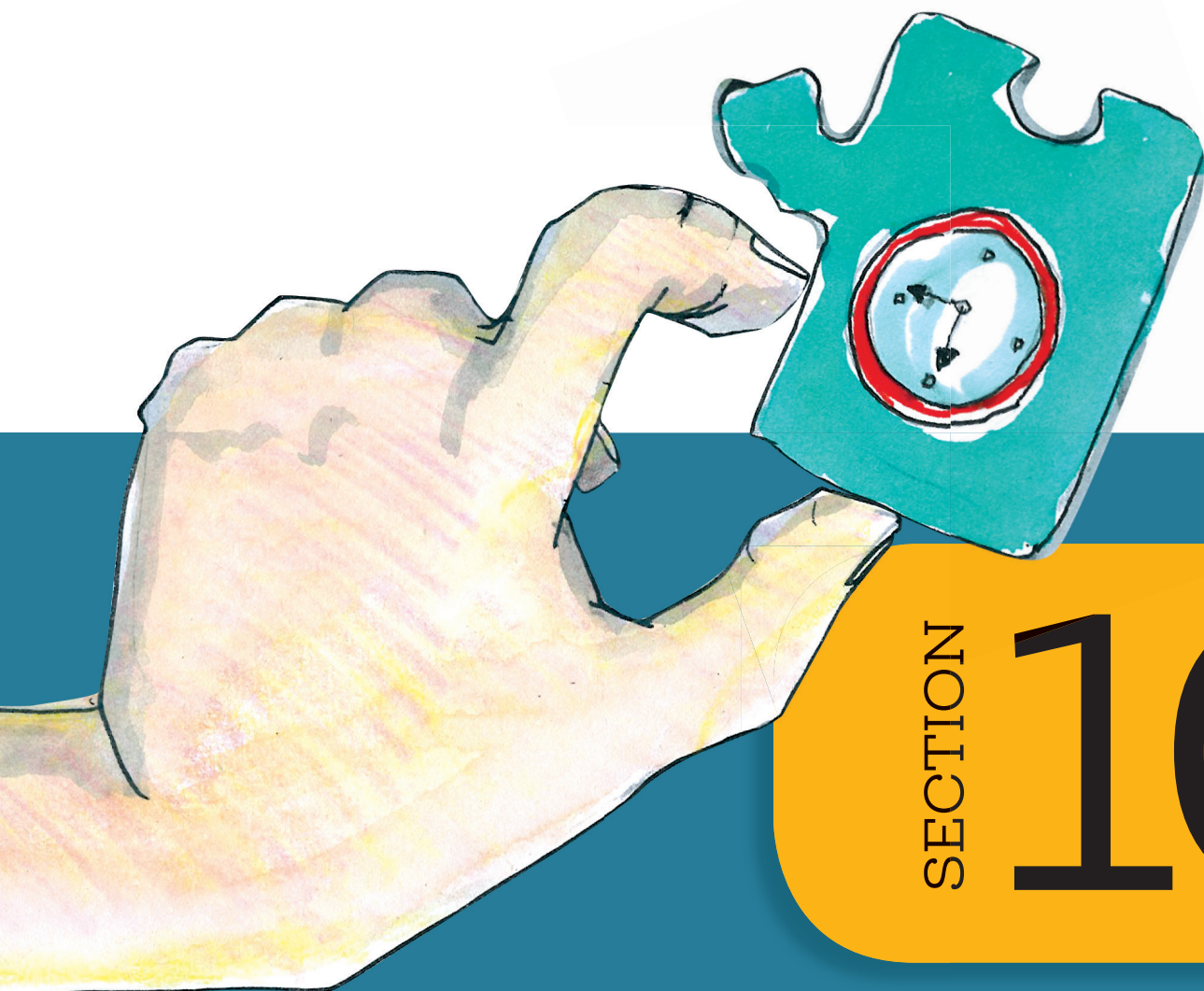
2. A YEG member also says she was able to benefit from maintaining her relationship with one of her educators which, once her pathway in care was over, gradually evolved into something similar to a peer-to-peer relationship, as they are mutually supportive.
3. Peer support is crucial if care leavers are to have the chance to know other people with similar experiences and family backgrounds, confronting and sharing views and copying strategies. Care leavers say that this way they feel they are not alone and that together they can find many more solutions. As an example, a number of young people who had met for the first time as they took part in the project *'Training professionals working with children in care'*<sup>19</sup>, implemented in five cities in Italy, expressed a need to keep meeting in the group when the project was over. While they had no financial resources to meet outside their places of care, and needed to wait for another project to support them, the response to their need for peer support and sharing experience was quite positive. This led a number of them to choose to take part to the Care Leavers Network project which started a few months later.



### Action Point:

Does your organisation/service encourage and support past care leavers to make themselves available to help other young people leaving care? If it does, how well do you think it works, and are there any changes you would like to make? If it does not, what could you do to help develop this idea?





SECTION

10

# DEVELOPING A PATHWAY PLAN:

THE IMPORTANCE OF FULL AND MEANINGFUL  
PARTICIPATION OF CARE LEAVERS IN  
DETERMINING THEIR OWN FUTURES



# DEVELOPING A PATHWAY PLAN: THE IMPORTANCE OF FULL AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CARE LEAVERS IN DETERMINING THEIR OWN FUTURES

**‘It doesn’t depend on me, it depends on them. Everything depends on the management and carers.’**

## FROM THE SCOPING EXERCISE



Full and meaningful participation in decisions that affect their own lives is important to everyone – including care leavers! Care leavers want opportunities to express their views, influence decision-making and map out the way they want to achieve change in their lives. In order to make informed decisions, care leavers want to know about their rights, entitlements, and all options open to them. Care leavers feel they are often unable to participate fully and that decisions of their key workers take precedence.

- The active involvement of the young person is one of
- the central principles underpinning good practice (see
- Principle II under Section 4 above). This essentially
- means empowering the young person to make
- decisions and take control of their lives. To do this they
- must be at the heart of the assessment and planning
- process and, with appropriate support, be fully
- involved in all aspects of planning for their own future.

**Young people want to be involved in decisions both about their individual care and the services they receive.** Although many young people feel involved, not all think that they have real choice when they leave care, or feel genuinely involved in their assessment and Pathway Planning. You will want to consider how well you and your agency/setting support young people's meaningful participation in their care plans and planning for the future. You will also want to consider how young people can influence how services are improved, developed and delivered.



**Young people's participation should be at the heart of the leaving care legislation. We need to make processes meaningful and straightforward. We need to follow young peoples' plans and support them when they make mistakes, we need to advocate on their behalf, we need to campaign for better resources, we need to challenge our colleagues to ensure they get the service they deserve, we need to challenge stereotypes, we need to believe in the young people. (McGhee et al, 2014, p.6).**

The **empowerment and enhanced self-worth** that should result from genuine participation can contribute very significantly to another crucial factor for young people's successful preparation for leaving care and adulthood: the development of resilience (see under Section 7).



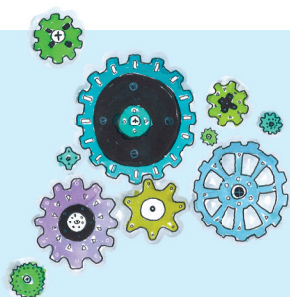
### Action Point:

Please refer to Annex 4 where you will find further information about selected models of participation.

## GOOD PRACTICE INDICATORS FOR PARTICIPATION

Here are some indicators that could help you assess how well your care leaver is enabled to participate in the Pathway Planning process:

- young people are involved in decision-making about their day-to-day care
- there is time set aside before meetings to prepare with a young person and rehearse what they would like to say
- young people are playing an active role in the assessment of their needs and in their own planning
- young people are offered a supporter, independent advocate or mentor to support their participation and involvement and improve their confidence



### TASK

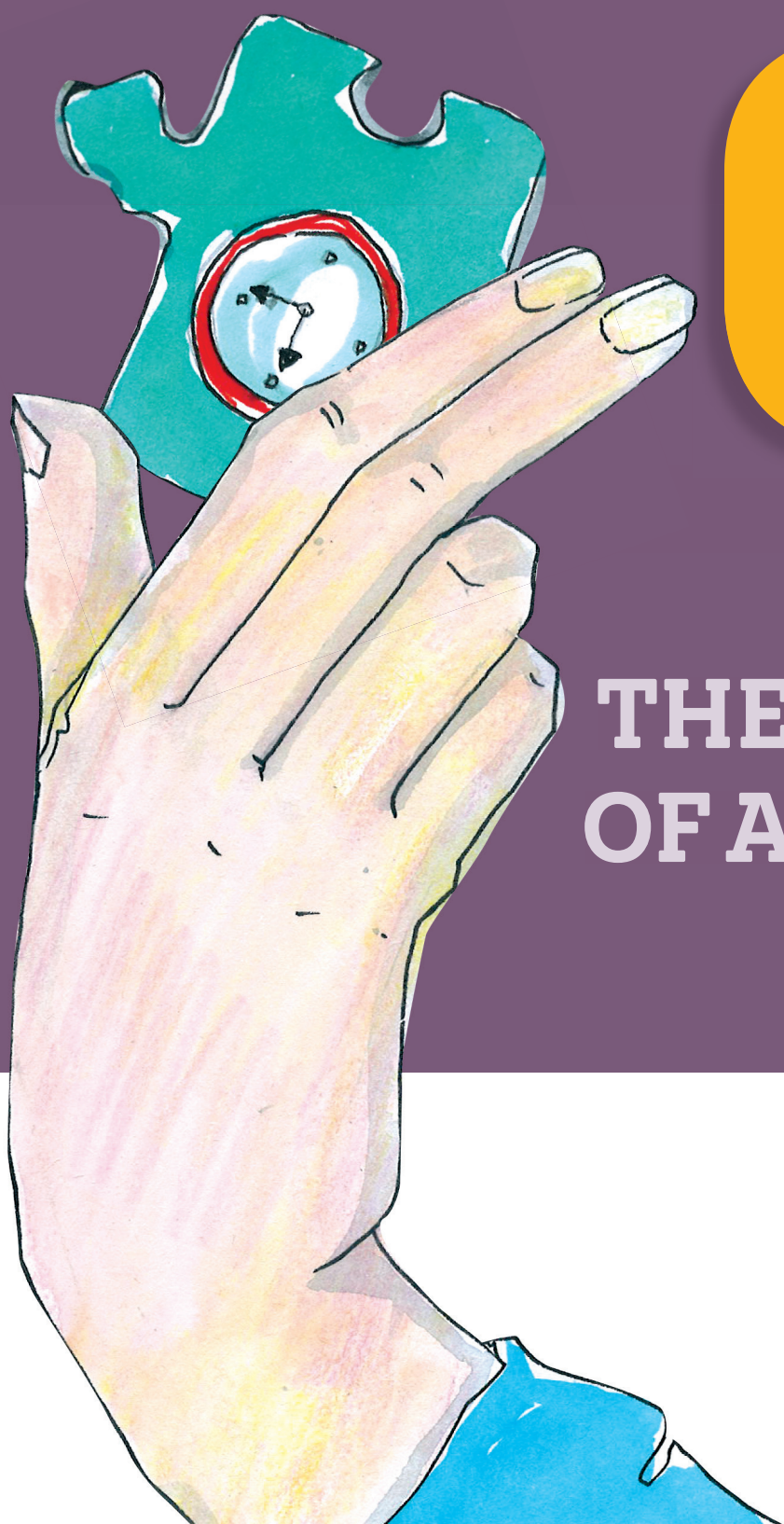
#### Give responsibility for decision-making appropriate to age and level of ability

- Remember that young people with care experience do not always behave or act in an age-appropriate manner. The impact of harmful experiences on their development can have an impact on their social and behavioural functioning.
- Young people will make poor decisions and mistakes – you should seek to support young people to see these as learning opportunities and encourage the young person to reflect, learn and grow from experience.



### Action Point:

You may want to share your ideas with other colleagues to explore and agree on your agency's approach to meaningful participation.



SECTION

11

# THE CONTENT OF A PATHWAY PLAN

# THE CONTENT OF A PATHWAY PLAN

- This section sets out the key ‘themes’ or topics to be included in a Pathway Plan.

## 1. REVISITING THE IMPORTANCE OF PATHWAY PLANNING

Before moving on to the key ‘themes’ contained within a Pathway Plan, **let us remind ourselves of some of the main aspects of the Pathway Planning process** already covered in this *Practice Guidance*.

Remember the focus needs to be on:

- getting to know the care leaver
- gathering views and identifying individual circumstances, needs, goals and aspirations
- planning action
- reviewing progress

The Pathway Planning process should consider:

- the preparation and implementation of a Pathway Plan is **a process** involving the care leaver, an assigned key worker and, as necessary and applicable, a range of other professionals, family members and other carers
- how care leavers must have **hopes, aspirations and a vision for their future**, in the same way as other young people. Carers and support staff should focus on nurturing positive goals and promoting realistic ways for the young person to achieve them

A Pathway Plan should be based on an assessment that identifies the care leaver’s circumstances, needs, goals and aspirations through a process that reflects the following requirements:

- move through the assessment and planning process in a way, and **at a pace, that suits the young person**
- take a holistic view of the care leaver’s **circumstances, needs, goals and aspirations** – all aspects are important and inter-related

- undertake an assessment that covers key 'themes' and areas of need **to suit the individual requirements of each care leaver** (additional information on 'themes' is set out later in this section)
- produce **a written record** of the assessment to be shared with the care leaver

A Pathway Plan should ensure no young person leaves care without the preparation and **practical and social skills** necessary for success. The Pathway Plan therefore identifies, plans for and monitors the undertaking of **all necessary support including actions, services, advice and resources** as young people prepare for leaving care, move through any transitional period of semi-independence and, after care.



### Action Point:

- Look to the future – think about personal goals and the steps to get to where the care leaver would like to be.
- Help the young person make informed decisions about their future by ensuring they have access to good quality information.
- Decide together with the care leaver which are most appropriate areas to focus on.
- Consider the different people who may assist with different sections of the Pathway Plan, e.g. a trusted school teacher or career adviser may help with 'Learning & Work', a housing adviser may help with 'Where I Will Live', a foster carer may help with 'Hopes for the Future'.
- Help the young person prepare for adulthood and life skills development at a pace that is suitable to their age, characteristics and stage of development.

It is highly unlikely that everything will go according to the 'Plan', and there should be no hesitation about consulting with the care leaver to **adjust any goals and timeframe as necessary**.

While the acquisition of practical skills is highly important, **it is the on-going emotional and social support to young people which is often most critical through and after care**. As they would for their own children, carers and staff across all agencies should be looking to ensure that a young person embarks on independent living with the networks of supportive relationships that underpin successful adult life.



### Action Point:

- think about the role that carers or family members play
- consider if and how the care leaver wants other people to be involved in supporting and assisting them - who plays a big part in their life?
- think about who has a positive, supportive relationship with the care leaver and who is already involved in their life
- consider where there may be gaps
- take account of any additional social and emotional support needs the care leaver may have

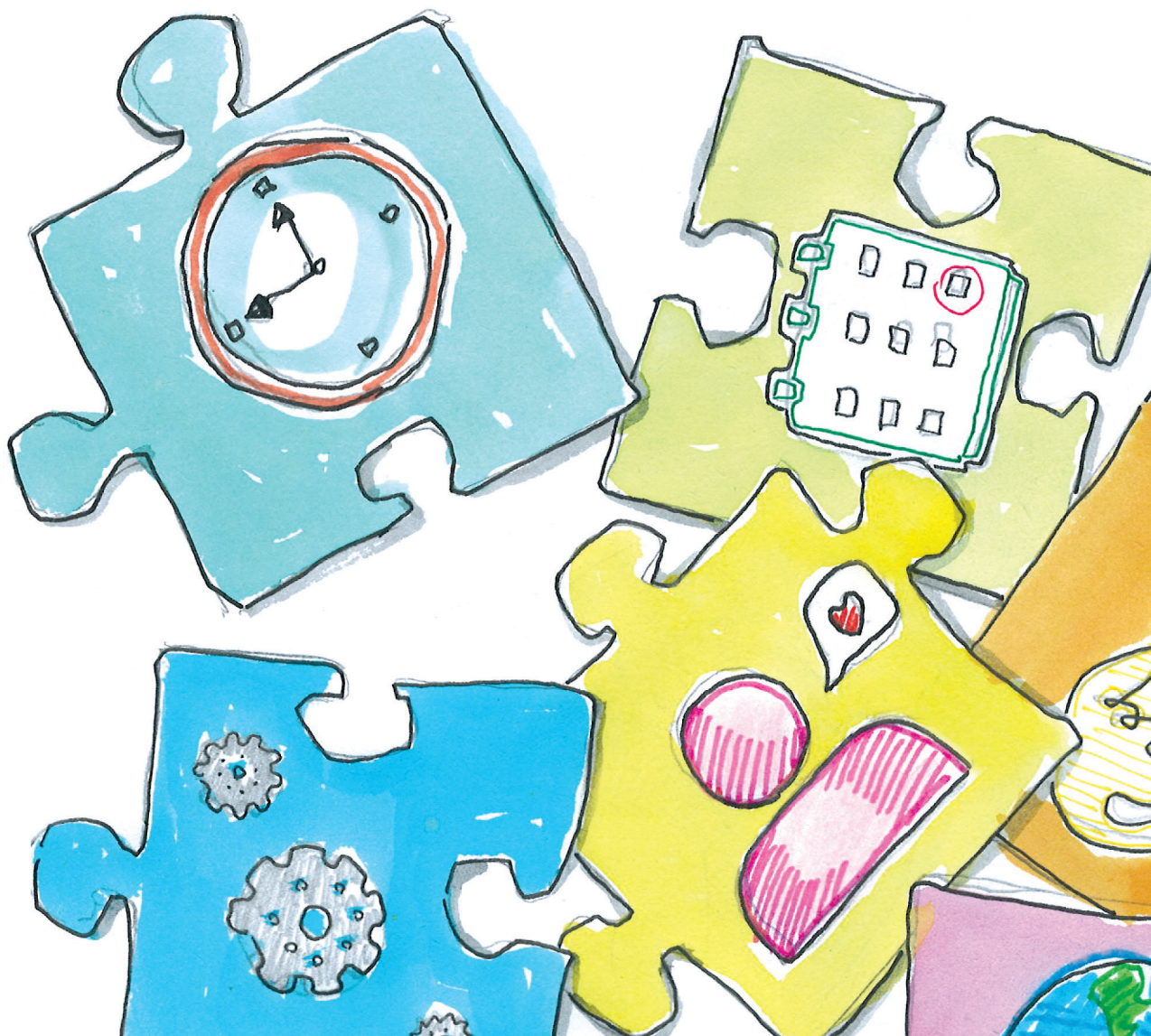
Remember, working with a care leaver and building a trusting relationship can take time but investing this time in a young person can really help engage them more meaningfully in their plan for the future. **Key workers, other support workers and carers should aim to:**

- take a flexible and caring approach - be honest, authentic, reliable and trustworthy
- engage with the young person on a personal level first – does the young person know you well enough to get started on this?
- be a positive role model – model the behaviour, attributes and values you would wish the young person to develop
- keep the care leaver at the centre of planning and actions and make it a participatory and meaningful process for them
- make sure the care leaver feels valued - focus on what they are most looking forward to about their future and let them know their future matters
- identify any worries that the young person may have around trying to achieve their goals.
- encourage the young person to share the ownership of the assessment and planning process
- hear what the young person is saying - have you really *listened* to the young person's views?
- consider any specific support related to disability, health needs, language problems, etc.
- understand if the care leaver requires increased support to express their views



Bearing in mind the above guidance, **let us also remind ourselves that the content of a written Pathway Plan should consider and include:**

- identified circumstances, needs, goals and aspirations of the care leaver
- identification of the most appropriate support including actions, services, advice and resources to be provided to meet these circumstances, needs, goals and aspirations
- when and how services are to be provided including the date the support/ service will commence
- named persons responsible for providing/facilitating support and services
- how goals and actions identified in the Pathway Plan will be regularly monitored and reviewed, necessary changes made and, by whom



## 2. KEY THEMES IN A PATHWAY PLAN

**‘It was a shock, because you were used to having almost everything done for you, they made your food, washed your clothes, cleaned your floor... and today those are things I have to do in my house, and they should have prepared us a lot more for that.’**

**‘There are children who will always have parents to go to for advice. In here, we don’t have it. We have to become independent on our own.’**

### FROM THE SCOPING EXERCISE



Care leavers believe it is important to be prepared and ready for independent living. They want:

- to be able to develop all the necessary practical skills such as cooking, cleaning, knowing how to do laundry, etc. before leaving care
- to know how to use money, pay bills, get a bank account and access financial entitlements, etc.
- to get advice about, and access to, accommodation that is safe, of good quality and affordable
- to be provided accommodation in a suitable location consistent with other aspects of their lives such as proximity to work, place of study, and/or friends and family
- to know about educational opportunities and request support in accessing those opportunities
- to know how to look after their own health and how to access health care when necessary
- guidance in preparing for and finding employment so they can be financially secure and take their place as productive members of society

We have already noted that the development of Pathway Plans involves working closely with care leavers to consider a range of topics that will be important to them. The consideration and inclusion of the following **‘themes’** will help to form a framework that ensures the **relevant areas of a care leaver’s life are covered as part of the overall assessment and planning process** for leaving care and after-care.

**These ‘themes’ include:**

- A. Health and wellbeing**
- B. Personal development**
- C. Family and friends**
- D. Learning and work**
- E. Where I would want to live**
- F. Practical skills**
- G. Money**
- H. Rights and legal matters**

Remember, Pathways planning also involves **identifying and working with other agencies and individuals** who have a role to play, such as providers of housing and education, medical services, employers and judges. Your role will include helping to make connections and acting as an advocate, helping young people to build relationships with them too.

The remainder of this section of the *Practice Guidance* focuses on the main ‘themes’ to be considered in the Pathway Plan.










## **A. HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

Health and well-being is not just about the physical needs of young people but also, and importantly, their emotional health and wellbeing. Social isolation, loneliness and unresolved childhood trauma are all factors which can impact on the emotional well-being and mental health of young people leaving care.

Young people should be able to continue to obtain health advice and services at what can be a very stressful time for them. Support staff should work with child and adult health professionals to ensure that access is not impaired once a young person moves out of care.

One role of a key worker is to obtain a full understanding of the young person’s physical and mental health needs. It is important to attend to their emotional well-being and positive mental health. This would include encouraging and supporting the young person to develop positive peer support and friendship networks.







**Steps to be taken in preparation for leaving care and to support after-care include:**

	All Pathway Plans should take account of the assessed health needs of the care leaver and how these needs are to be met. Discuss with the young person any concerns or issues they may have about their health now or in the future.
	Ensure that the young person is registered with a GP and dentist and is confident and able to access these services when needed.
	If there are identified health needs, who is responsible for ensuring that these needs are being met?
	Is the young person able to access counselling, mentoring and other community-based services aimed at promoting improved emotional well-being?
	Does the young person have easy access to specialist services, including access to adult mental health services, if they require?
	Is specialist support, assessment and advice available regarding self-harm and suicide risks? How does the young person access this?
	Are there substance misuse services appropriate to the individual circumstances and level of functioning of care leavers? How does the young person access this?
	Are sexual health clinics available, including for emergency appointments? How does the young person access this?
	Provide information about healthy habits in relation to lifestyle, diet and exercise, and encourage the young person to adopt them.

## B. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Personal development is used to describe a young person's interests, opinions, behaviours, attitudes, way of life and values. The development of a young person's life choices is one means of forging a sense of personal identity.

**Steps to be taken with the young person in preparation for leaving care and to support after-care include:**

	Help the young person develop interpersonal skills, self esteem, how to set behavioural boundaries and skills in decision-making: do this by encouraging, coaching, creating opportunities, and being a positive role model.
	Help the young person identify and develop skills, talents or hobbies and support them to access cultural, artistic and other recreational opportunities building on their strengths and interests.
	Introduce the young person to new opportunities and experiences which develop social skills and self-confidence, including group activities such as hiking/camping.
	Share interests in books, movies, sports and music to stimulate a young person's interest and develop your relationship with them.
	Make sure that young people have access to sufficient funds and opportunities to be able to meet up with friends and peers, and to develop positive social networks.
	Take action to reduce social exclusion and isolation, which impact mental and physical health and emotional well-being, by helping to find free/discounted access to leisure facilities, public transport, etc. wherever possible.

## C. FAMILY AND FRIENDS

For many care leavers, **positive family relationships or positive peer networks can be a significant factor**. Young people often return to the family home, even briefly and for a variety of reasons, after moving on from care. In so doing, however, they may be confronted with unresolved problems that can jeopardise their care-leaving experience.

Often young people can hold an idealised image of their birth family, holding conflicted and contradictory views and expectations. The natural desire for connection and belonging and ongoing issues around identity can lead young people to seek a return home regardless of the circumstances of coming into state care. However, unresolved trauma, untended or unrepaired relationships or a lack of informed understanding as to reasons for their care placement can lead to expectations being unrealistic unless managed appropriately. This can lead to further conflict, breakdown and rejection.

It is important to ensure that young people are fully supported to make sense of and appropriately manage relationships with parents and family members.

Consequently, young people need to be supported as far as possible to address and resolve any outstanding matters with their family, both before and after leaving care. At the same time, it is vital that the family be prepared for the care leaver's return – especially if the absence has been relatively long, contact has been sporadic and/or relations are strained.

**Steps to be taken with the young person in preparation for leaving care and to support after-care include:**








- ✓ Provide emotional support, including dealing with any past problems and conflicts, help with relationships, social networks and friendships.
- ✓ Support young people's contact with birth parent(s) when it is safe to do so, is in their best interests and is something they wish to do - act as a mediator and help young people understand and make sense of family relationships.
- ✓ Create opportunities for peer to peer support - this might be a network of peer supporters drawn from previous care leavers for example.
- ✓ Help young people create a positive identity by helping them make sense of family relationships, supporting them to develop positive friendships, relationships and social networks. Help them understand their background and culture.
- ✓ Create supportive opportunities for young people to engage in a wide variety of social settings, to develop interpersonal skills and confidence. For example, encourage and support young people to take part in sporting, artistic or leisure activities with other young people.



## D. LEARNING AND WORK

Helping the care leaver develop a vision for their future and drawing up a realistic plan for them to achieve that vision is a significant motivating factor for young people. Having **suitable employment or attending college can also foster the development of identity, resilience and self-esteem.** Exploring employment and education options with them, and guiding them in making informed choices in those respects, is a key contribution to their leaving care experience.







**Steps to be taken with the young person in preparation for leaving care and to support after-care include:**

	Motivate and encourage care leavers to find employment if that is what they wish and help identify the range of, and most suitable, work options.
	Establish links with your local college or university and help develop assisted opportunities for care leavers .
	Develop additional supports that can be provided to help the young person gain employment, such as support with application forms and interview skills.
	Make sure that young people can access additional support if, for example, they have missed out on achieving qualifications at school, or struggle with literacy or numeracy skills.
	Develop supportive networks and links with local employers who may be able to offer apprenticeships, internships, employment and career opportunities to care leavers.
	Motivate and encourage care leavers to continue with education or training and help identify the range of the most suitable and realistically accessible education or training options.
	Help the young person gain access to education opportunities through, for example, support with application forms and requests for grants.

## E. WHERE I WOULD WANT TO LIVE

**Safe, stable and sustainable housing accommodation** is a key factor in helping young people move on from care. Simply having a place to stay cannot be seen as sufficient: like anyone else, care leavers need to feel secure and at ease where they live. Having safe, settled accommodation is a critical factor in supporting a young person to sustain employment or college.

**Steps to be taken with the young person in preparation for leaving care and to support after-care include:**

	Make sure that the young person's accommodation needs are matched to the best available resources and they participate in the selection of their accommodation - where it is, who they live with, if they have a room of their own, etc.
	Make sure the accommodation is safe, secure, and suitably furnished.
	Is the location suitable to allow a young person to attend their place of education or place of work?
	Can the young person afford to pay the rent and fuel bills? Make sure they know how and where to read the meters, pay the rent and bills, etc.
	Equip the young person with skills such as managing a personal budget and avoiding risky debt.
	Negotiate with residential managers/foster carers arrangements for care leavers to return for support if wanted/needed, i.e. returning for a meal or an overnight stay, or participating in a social gathering or celebration, can help a young person maintain a sense of place and identity and help overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness. Relationships are part of good leaving care practice and maintaining relationships with former carers can be critical for young people.

## F. PRACTICAL SKILLS

Children and young people who have spent a considerable time in care – especially though not only in residential settings – are often deprived of the gradual learning experience of undertaking practical tasks that they will need when leaving care and entering independent living. These include activities such as shopping, cooking, cleaning etc. **No young person should leave care without the skills and support necessary for success.** As they would for their own children, carers and staff across all agencies should be looking to ensure that a young person leaves their care placement with the necessary practical skills. Preparation for leaving care should therefore seek to initiate them in these skills. Make sure that care leavers have opportunities to not only develop these life skills in a supportive environment but also to ‘test out’ them out with support.

**Steps to be taken with the young person in preparation for leaving care and to support after care include:**



Offer ongoing support with these and other living and household skills after they have left care.









Equip the young person with all necessary everyday living and household skills before they leave their alternative care placement. Offer ongoing support with these and other living and household skills after they have left care. As for example:

- shopping
- healthy eating and cooking
- cleaning
- basic repairs
- how to do the laundry

## G. MONEY

Poverty, economic disadvantage and financial hardship are significant factors for many care leavers. They usually lack the safety net and ongoing family support that many of their peers enjoy.

**Steps to be taken with the young person in preparation for leaving care and to support after-care include:**

	Ensure that young people have access to and are receiving all relevant sources of income and financial support, including welfare benefits and allowances.
	Find out what benefit or welfare payments are available and support the young person to successfully apply for them.
	If the young person obtains a college or university place, help them apply for, and make sure they receive, all available grants or bursaries before they start their studies.
	Support the young person to develop budgeting skills and good financial habits. Before they leave care, help them to understand the costs of living, food, clothes, utilities, rent, cost of local transport, etc.
	Make sure that young people have sufficient funds to maintain their interests and hobbies, and to keep up with current fashion. This helps them develop a healthy identity and reduces stigma and social isolation.
	Help care leavers open a bank account and sign up to all other necessary financial systems.

## H. RIGHTS AND LEGAL ISSUES

Make sure that the young person is fully aware of their legal rights and of any legal matters that may impact them, both in general and specifically as a consequence of their care experience.

**Steps to be taken with the young person in preparation for leaving care and to support after-care include:**

- ✓ Make sure the young person has a copy of their birth certificate and other important documents.
- ✓ Support the young person to apply for a passport and/or identity card.
- ✓ Ensure the young person is registered with relevant authorities to access health care, welfare support, etc.
- ✓ If the young person is involved with the justice authorities, make sure they have access to legal representation.




### Action Point:

Making sure the care leaver has a copy of their Pathway Plan will help provide them with some clarity and reassurance about how their future needs will be met and who will be providing support in relation to the different areas of their lives.

## I. REGULAR REVIEWS OF PATHWAY PLANS

The Pathway Plan initially drawn up with the care leaver is not set in stone. **Any number of changes can – and probably will – take place in the young person's situation** (e.g. health status, personal development, education/employment...). Original goals may not have been met for many reasons, and aspirations and priorities may change over time.

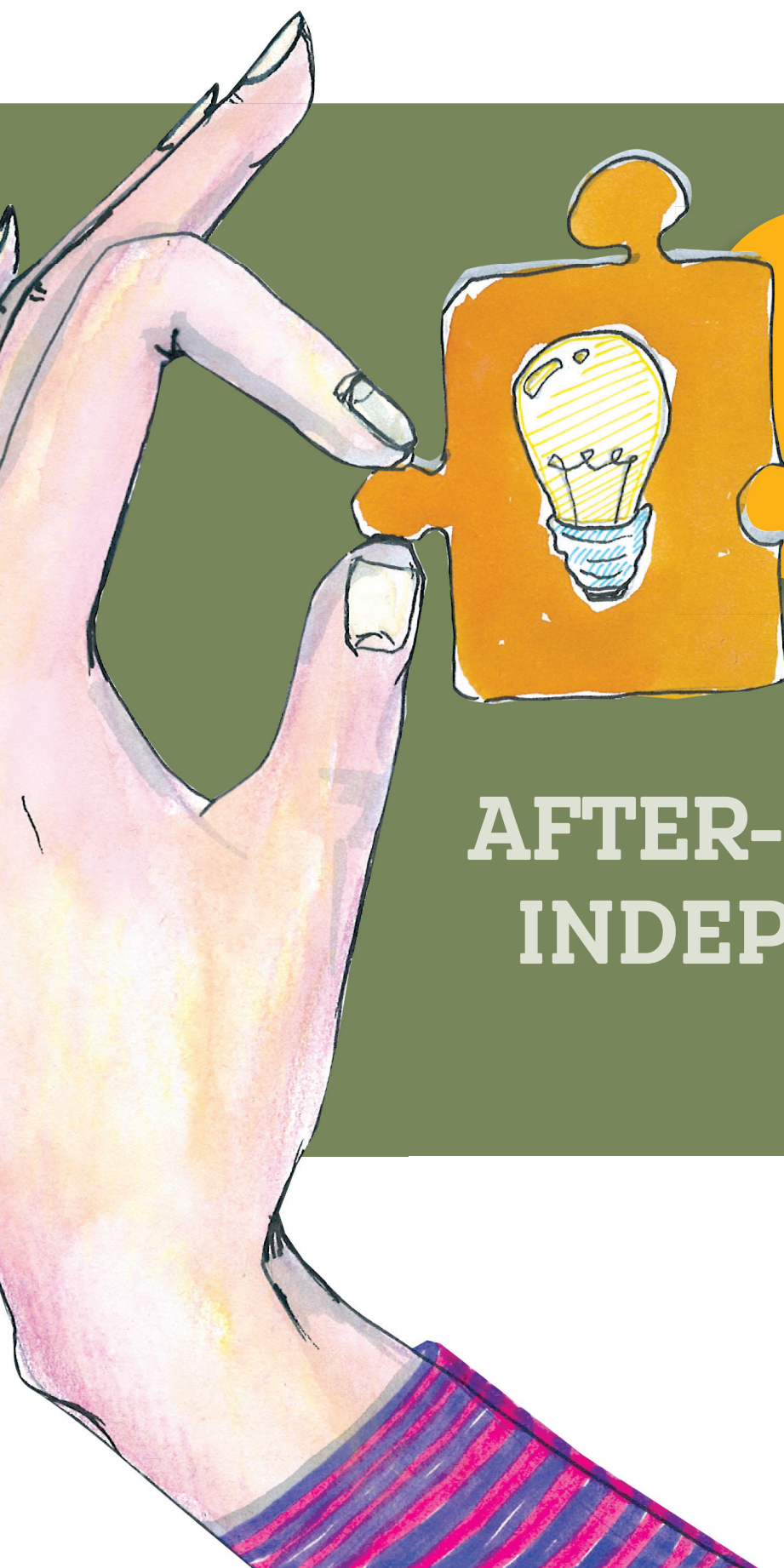
The key worker should therefore **regularly review the Pathway Plan**, in full consultation with the young person, to ensure that it still corresponds fully to realities and to make any necessary modifications along the way. This will of course also entail liaising with relevant agencies and concerned individuals such as carers, as to possible changes in responsibilities and roles that they would be encouraged to take on as a result.



**Reviews may also be usefully undertaken outside the 'regular' framework if necessary, at the proposal of the young person, the key worker or of others concerned.**







SECTION

12

# AFTER-CARE AND INDEPENDENCE

## AFTER-CARE AND INDEPENDENCE

**‘Everyone reacts differently; everyone builds his own independence.’**

**‘First of all, gaining independence should be treated as a process where you could see how things are going. And whether that person is ready. And if she or he isn’t ready, they should at least have someone on their side, so that they don’t just automatically stumble and fall.’**

- In this *Practice Guidance* we emphasise the need to
- support care leavers **beyond the ‘leaving care’** phase
- and to ensure that they have access to on-going
- support and opportunities into adulthood. Access to
- on-going aftercare support is as important as good
- preparation and the Pathways planning.

The Pathway Plan, having been developed by those closely involved in supporting the care leaver, should accompany them as they leave care and move into independence. This section is a reminder of some of the specific topics that need to be explored as regards the period after a young person has left care.

## 1. MOVING TO INDEPENDENCE

It is important to consider and understand the notion of 'independence'. For all of us, the day-to-day reality of 'independent living' implies a certain '*inter*dependence' in the form of an extended range of good:

- inter-personal relationships
- social supports
- social networks

Most of us feel that we are independent – and thus, for example, responsible for decision-making that affects our lives – though we invariably rely on family partners, parents, children, colleagues and friends for advice and support at various times. As young people who have been in care may lack this range of support networks, the role of supporting young people leaving care and preparing them for 'independent living' means giving special attention to building positive relationships and professional and social networks around the care leaver.

## 2. ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS

**'18 years old is too soon to get by on your own...don't leave us alone! 18 years old is too soon for a young person to have to leave care, we should be able to wait until we have finished school and we have found a job and some stability. We need our educators' help in the search for a house and a job, and they are important also to learn how to manage money, we can't make it on our own. After leaving care, we recommend that educators that already know the young person, keep in touch - tutoring him/her - for practical support (how to pay a bill, how to open a bank account), and for emotional support: ask for some advice, have a simple chat... We also ask that our social workers keep following us until we have reached full autonomy, that is to say further than our 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, until we have finished school or apprenticeship. Being alone is too hard.'**<sup>20</sup>

Feeling abandoned is something that care leavers have often reported, so steps must be taken to make sure that this does not occur. Many care leavers want to maintain a connection and constructive relationship with someone who can guide, support and assist them once they have left care. This is where an **ongoing relationship with a key worker can be vital**. Note, there will also be a need for an emergency or substitute arrangement for when the key worker is unavailable.

**The caring manner** in which ongoing support and advice is provided is crucial, and will only be of benefit to the young person if a **positive and constructive relationship exists** with the key worker.

Experience has nonetheless shown that some young people, when destined to leave care, are clear from the outset that they do not wish to prolong contact with the organisation that has been caring for them. While this is of course their right, it may be that this decision is reversed once independence becomes a reality, or when problems emerge, and the newly-independent person needs help in some form. It is vital, therefore, that key workers ensure that **care leavers are aware that they may seek this support at any time**, even if it is years later, and that this approach will be welcomed.

Some evidence shows that support from key workers and other specialist after care workers often falls away after a few months. It cannot be stressed enough that care leavers, as with most young people leaving the shelter of their family homes, are likely to need support in a variety of ways for much longer than this, and it is their right that this is available to them. It is not unreasonable for example, to think in terms of support being made available up to the age of 25 years, though this will vary according to young persons' needs.

Contact with a former care leaver who can **act as a mentor** may be helpful in mitigating isolation and loneliness, as well as potentially being an access point to a supportive network. (Please refer to Section 9 for more information on peer mentoring).

### 3. ONGOING ACCESS TO AFTER-CARE SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Easy access to after-care services and support is key to assisting care leavers make progress. Again, **emphasis must be placed on the individuality of young people** and their needs and concerns. Maturity does not follow a smooth, linear path, and areas of development – psycho-emotional and practical – may need to be revisited over an extended period of time after leaving care.

Once again, **working in partnership with other key agencies and organisations** to ensure support in areas such as material needs and ongoing development of practical skills would contribute greatly. For example, becoming homeless and not being financially secure are frequently worries for young people leaving care. Problems of this nature are likely to have negative repercussions not only in practical ways, but also regarding psycho-emotional well-being. After-care provision must ensure that care leavers continue to have sufficient income to meet basic needs including those of accommodation, food, transport and clothing. It will be important to acknowledge and build on young people's agency and autonomy in dealing with these matters.

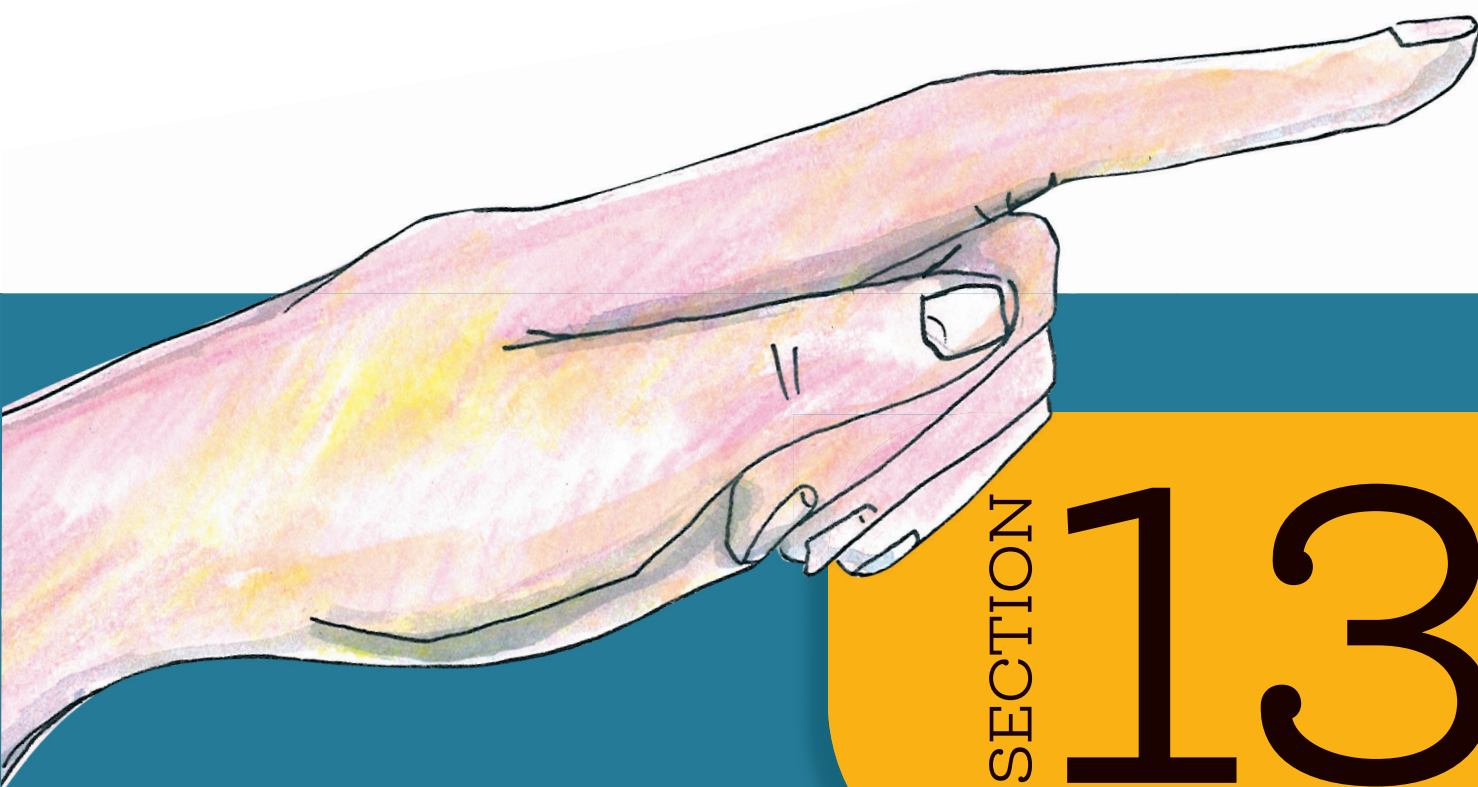


#### Action Point:

Is the material provision proving sufficient for the care leavers? If not, what changes are needed and how can you advocate for change?

Finally, it is important to remember that the success of after-care for care leavers will, to a large extent, be influenced by how well all aspects of the preparation work have been undertaken, including those relating to practical skills. There is every reason to **review regularly the extent to which that preparation is proving sufficient**, especially in the face of changing needs and circumstances.





SECTION

13

**ADVOCATING FOR  
CHANGE - TAKING  
THINGS FORWARD**



# ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE - TAKING THINGS FORWARD

- The Scoping exercise that informed this *Practice Guidance* (please refer to Section 3) identified a need for changes to the leaving care process in different countries. Such required changes include the strengthening of:
- 1. laws and policies
- 2. data collection
- 3. service delivery and resources
- 4. workforce capacity
- 5. monitoring and evaluation
- 6. promoting positive attitudes

Principal stakeholders including children and young people in alternative care, those who have left care, professional care workers and associated professionals, parents, families and alternative carers can all be powerful advocates for change. Working together or individually, they should be ready to advocate with competent authorities or bodies that can directly or indirectly bring about improvements.



## Action Point:

To what extent do you think key workers or carers are aware of their responsibilities to young people leaving care? Are there areas that workers are uncomfortable with or feel insufficiently informed? If so, what are these, and how should they be addressed?

In the remainder of this section we provide a snapshot of some of the key areas for change required in child care systems and services highlighted in the Scoping exercise and a few words about advocating for improvements.

## 1. ADVOCACY TO STRENGTHEN AND CHANGE LAWS AND POLICIES

### FROM THE SCOPING EXERCISE



Each country that took part in the Scoping exercise want the guarantee of a rights- based leaving care process available to all care leavers, with equal access to all necessary support, services and other entitlements in a manner that fully meets individual needs, wishes and circumstances. It was noted how this will require changes to legislation and policy that promote positive changes to the care leaving process, including an increase in dedicated resources. This may involve actions such as legislating an extension of the age of leaving care and the period during which individual support to care leavers is made available. Similarly, increasing mandatory access to all necessary services and entitlements, as well as investment in a more capable and knowledgeable inter-sectoral workforce, should also be mandated through the legislative and policy-development process.

An appropriate legal and regulatory framework is important in that it provides the necessary mandate, focus and guidance for all those holding responsibility for child protection, and child care - including care leaving. Alongside care leavers themselves, all those supporting care leavers should be able to play a role in advocating for changes to the law, regulation and policy where the current arrangements do not work well and where improvements can be made.

## 2. DATA COLLECTION

### FROM THE SCOPING EXERCISE



Information drawn from the Scoping exercise indicates that central governments and regional and local authorities fail to regularly gather and analyse quantitative and qualitative data on children and young people in care, care leavers, and the care leaving process. They should do this in particular to enable statutory and other agencies not only to accurately plan for, resource and facilitate the best quality leaving care process possible, but also to consistently monitor and evaluate aims, objectives and implementation goals.

In order to inform the development of law and policy, central and local government and non-government agencies need **accurate information**. To this end, it is important there are local and national systems of rigorous systematic quantitative and qualitative data collection. For example, such data is essential when working towards improving the outcomes for children in care and care leavers by measuring the situation and progress of individual children and young people, as well as the functioning of a child protection and alternative care system as a whole. Data can also assist in the more accurate allocation of financial, human and other resources. As primary stakeholders, care leavers and those who support them can play a significant role in the identification, collection and analysis of this data.

### 3. COMMITMENT OF SERVICE DELIVERY AND RESOURCES

#### FROM THE SCOPING EXERCISE



Care leavers and professionals note how the leaving care process should be consistent regardless of geographical location within a country. This includes consistency in the quality of the planning and ongoing support, and facilitation of all stages of preparation, transition and after-care. It also means equal access to services and resources including those of education, housing, employment and all other entitlements.

**Access to a range of universal and targeted support services** are essential to care leavers. Providing central and local government policy makers with accurate information that highlights the gaps and challenges and lobbying for change can significantly contribute to ensuring more equitable access to better quality services and availability of other necessary financial and other resources for care leavers.

## 4. BUILDING WORKFORCE CAPACITY

### FROM THE SCOPING EXERCISE



Scoping exercise results show an urgent need to invest in strengthening and maintaining skills, knowledge and abilities of all professionals and carers to a level that allows them to fully support care leavers. It is felt that skills and capacities of professional workers should not only include knowledge of practical duties but also include strong communication skills and the ability to build and maintain trusting and caring relationships with care leavers.

The care leaving experience of each care leaver is greatly influenced by the ability of those holding responsibility to support them through the process. This is not just key workers but also all other professionals who should contribute to a multi-sectoral approach to leaving care. **It is important therefore, that those working with care leavers are fully skilled and equipped to undertake this responsibility and that investment in formal and informal training is a priority.**

As with the Scoping exercise that informed this *Practice Guidance*, care leavers can and should play an active role in identifying the skills, knowledge and aptitude they think it is important for key workers and other professionals to have. Likewise, practitioners may also have a role to play in informing those responsible for training provision about the exact capacities and knowledge they require.

## 5. SYSTEMATIC MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Effective monitoring and evaluations systems are **essential for understanding what is being achieved, how it is being achieved and where gaps and challenges remain**. This for example, should include regular reviews for monitoring Care and Pathway Plans of individual children and young people as well as systematic processes and delivery of services within the child protection and alternative care system you work in. Once again, as primary stakeholders, care leavers and those who support them can play a significant role in advocating for the systematic use of monitoring and evaluation.

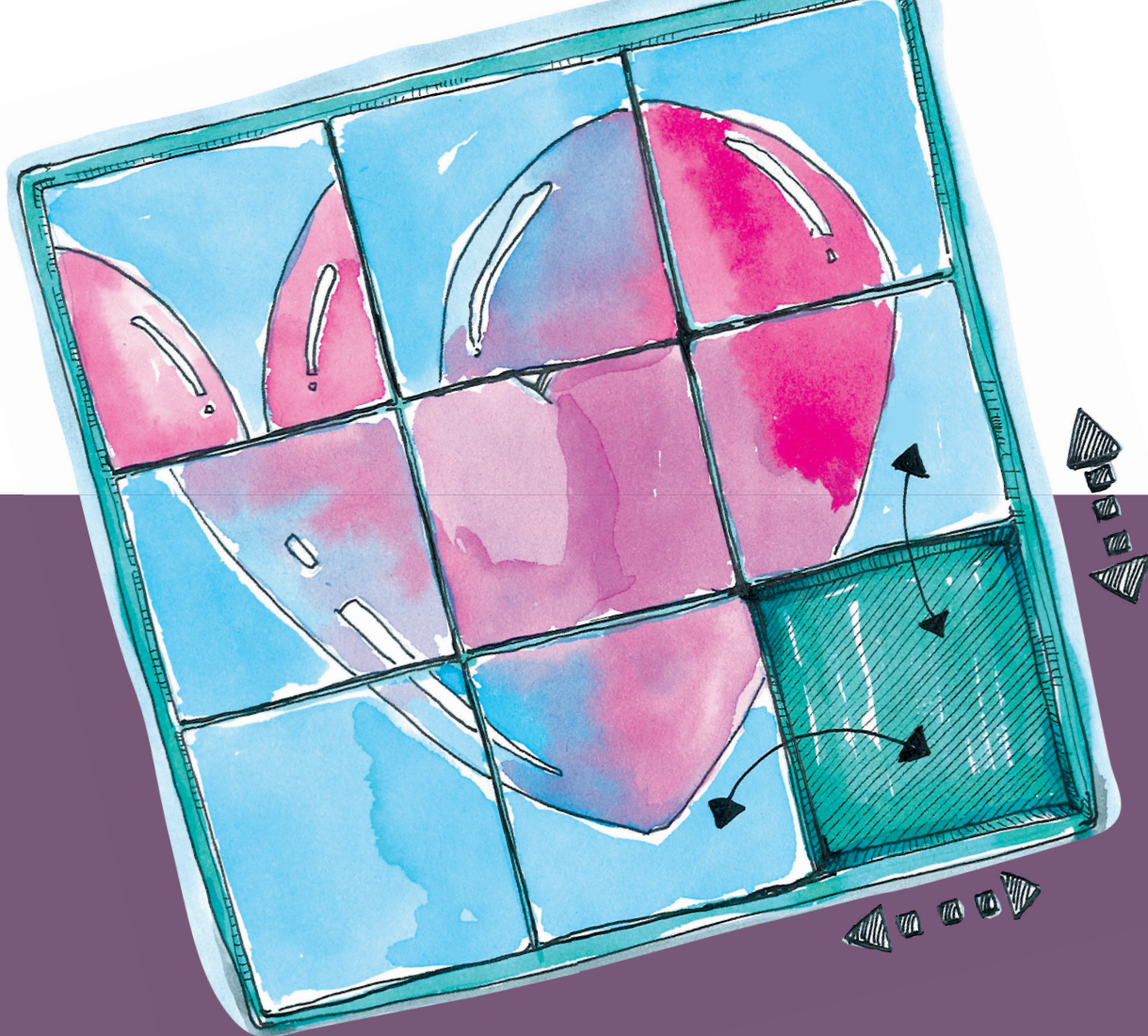
## 6. PROMOTING POSITIVE ATTITUDES

Stigma and discrimination against children in care and care leavers can greatly affect the quality of their lives. Such negative attitudes, whether on the part of professionals or of members of the public, need to be addressed.

**This requires us all to play an active role in promoting positive attitudes and challenging negative ones.**

## 7. ADVOCATING FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

And finally, we should remind ourselves that undertaking a role in **advocating for positive change** to systems and services is an important and vital contribution we can all make toward ensuring children in care and care leavers are provided the best possible support whilst in care, whilst preparing to leave care and, after-care.



# ANNEXES

# ANNEX 1: A PRECIS OF THE UN GUIDELINES FOR THE ALTERNATIVE CARE OF CHILDREN

The primary basis for understanding the rights of children in care or at risk of separation from their family is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). However, recognition that the CRC does not describe in any depth what measures should be taken, led to the development up of the **UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children**.<sup>21</sup> These Guidelines were approved by consensus in the United Nations General Assembly in 2009. They provide authoritative guidance on the implementation of children's rights under the CRC.

While they are not binding, the UN Guidelines do offer concrete guidance to improve both policy and practice and emphasise the overarching responsibility of States for the regulatory framework of registration, authorisation and monitoring of the care system.

An important aspect of the UN Guidelines is the manner in which they urge training and support for care professionals so as to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to provide the best possible quality of care. For example, care professionals should be able to encourage active participation, they should understand the need to respect the views of children in decisions which affect their lives, and they should inform them of their rights and support their full development.



The Guidelines and their implications for policy and practice can be summarised with reference to some basic principles and approaches:

## PRINCIPLE OF 'NECESSITY'

The Guidelines clearly state that the 'fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children' is the family and that 'efforts should primarily be directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members.' The 'necessity' principle means therefore that:

- a screening process (part of a 'gatekeeping' process) should be in place to assess whether there is really a need for a formal placement. It is at this stage that solutions should be sought that are in the child's best interest and, wherever possible, to avoid unwarranted placements and keep the child with their own family.
- no child should be placed in alternative care when the family could have been supported to provide care
- removal from the family should be the last resort
- family strengthening should be offered to prevent separation and promote reintegration back from a care placement

## PRINCIPLE OF 'SUITABILITY'

- It is only after the 'necessity' of a placement has been established that care should be offered which always meets the specific needs, wishes and circumstances of each individual child.
- All forms of alternative care must meet quality standards and must respect and promote all the rights of children and provide suitable individualised care and attention.
- A range of different forms of suitable care placements must be made available within a country.

## BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD

- All decision-making processes concerning ‘necessity’ and ‘suitability’ must be committed to effective participation and to determining, on a case-by-case basis, what is in the best interests of each child.

## RANGE OF OPTIONS

- One-size does not fit all! A suitably diverse range of family support and alternative care options need to be in place to ensure that responses are appropriate and tailored on a case by-case basis.

## NON-DISCRIMINATION

- The Guidelines address issues of discrimination which cause children to be taken into care, and which may affect them while in care.
- Poverty should never be the primary factor in determining the necessity of a placement in care.
- The Guidelines note that family separation should not be the result of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender or disability.
- The Guidelines are committed to promoting non-discrimination at any and all stages of a family or child’s engagement with the care and welfare system. When support is needed, all children and their families must have equal access to services regardless of their particular status or circumstances.

Note: The complete text of the Guidelines as well as the handbook to accompany them, *Moving Forward: Implementing the ‘Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children’*, can be found at:

<http://www.alternativecareguidelines.org/>

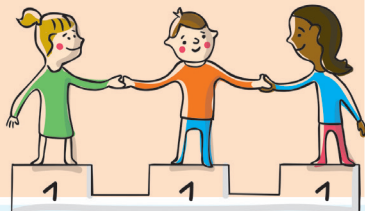
## ANNEX 2

## "I'VE GOT RIGHTS!"

SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGESUNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD  
In Youth-Friendly Language

**1** Everyone under 18 has these rights.

**2** All CHILDREN have these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what their parents do, what language they speak, what their religion is, whether they are a boy or girl, what their culture is, whether they have a disability, whether they are rich or poor.



**3** When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.

**4** The government has a responsibility to make sure your rights are protected. They must help your family to protect your rights and create an environment where you can grow and reach your potential.

**5** Your family has the responsibility to help you learn to exercise your rights, and to ensure that your rights are protected.

**6** You have the right to be alive.

**7** You have the right to a name, and this should be officially recognized by the government. You have the right to a nationality (to belong to a country).

**8** You have the right to an identity – an official record of who you are. No one should take this away from you.



**9** You have the right to live with your parent(s), unless it is bad for you. You have the right to live with a **FAMILY** that cares for you.

**10** If you live in a different country than your parents do, you have the right to be together in the same place.

**11** You have the right to be protected from kidnapping.



**12** You have the right to give your opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously.

**13** You have the right to find out things and share what you think with others, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way unless it harms or offends other people.

**14** You have the right to choose your own religion and beliefs. Your parents should help you decide what is right and wrong, and what is best for you.

**15** You have the right to choose your own friends and join or set up groups, as long as it isn't harmful to others.

**16** You have the right to privacy.

**17** You have the right to get information that is important to your well-being, from radio, newspaper, books, computers and other sources. Adults should make sure that the information you are getting is not harmful, and help you find and understand the information you need.

**18** You have the right to be raised by your parent(s) if possible.

**19** You have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, in body or mind.

**20** You have the right to special care and help if you cannot live with your parents.



**21** You have the right to care and protection if you are adopted or in foster care.

**22** You have the right to special protection and help if you are a refugee (if you have been forced to leave your home and live in another country), as well as all the rights in this Convention.

**23** You have the right to special education and care if you have a disability, as well as all the rights in this Convention, so that you can live a full life.



**24** You have the right to the best **HEALTH** care possible, safe water to drink, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help you stay well.

**25** If you live in care or in other situations away from home, you have the right to have these living arrangements looked at regularly to see if they are the most appropriate.



**26** You have the right to **HELP** from the government if you are poor or in need.

**27** You have the right to food, clothing, a safe place to live and to have your basic needs met. You should not be disadvantaged so that you can't do many of the things other kids can do.

**28** You have the right to a good quality education. You should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level you can.



**29** Your **EDUCATION** should help you use and develop your talents and abilities. It should also help you learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.

**30** You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion - or any you choose. Minority and indigenous groups need special protection of this right.

**31** You have the right to play and rest.



**32** You have the right to protection from work that harms you, and is bad for your health and education. If you work, you have the right to be safe and paid fairly.

**33** You have the right to protection from harmful drugs and from the drug trade.

**34** You have the right to be free from sexual abuse.

**35** No one is allowed to kidnap or sell you.

**36** You have the right to protection from any kind of exploitation (being taken advantage of).

**37** No one is allowed to punish you in a cruel or harmful way.

**38** You have the right to **PROTECTION** and freedom from war. Children under 15 cannot be forced to go into the army or take part in war.

**39** You have the right to help if you've been hurt, neglected or badly treated.

**40** You have the right to **legal** help and fair treatment in the justice system that respects your rights.

**41** If the laws of your country provide better protection of your rights than the articles in this Convention, those laws should apply.



**42** You have the right to know your rights! Adults should know about these rights and help you learn about them, too.



**43 to 54** These articles explain how governments and international organizations like SOS Children's Villages and UNICEF will work to ensure children are protected.

SOS Children's Villages thanks UNICEF for kindly permitting the use of their youth-friendly text for this educational poster.

unicef

For more information visit  
[www.sos-childrensvillages.org](http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org)

SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES

# ANNEX 3: ARTICLES CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

(Adopted and Proclaimed by the United Nations on 10th December 1948)

- Article 1** Right to Equality
- Article 2** Freedom from Discrimination
- Article 3** Right to Life, Liberty, Personal Security
- Article 4** Freedom from Slavery
- Article 5** Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment
- Article 6** Right to Recognition as a Person before the Law
- Article 7** Right to Equality before the Law
- Article 8** Right to Remedy by Competent Tribunal
- Article 9** Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Exile
- Article 10** Right to Fair Public Hearing
- Article 11** Right to be Considered Innocent until Proven Guilty
- Article 12** Freedom from Interference with Privacy, Family, Home and Correspondence
- Article 13** Right to Free Movement in and out of the Country
- Article 14** Right to Asylum in other Countries from Persecution
- Article 15** Right to a Nationality and the Freedom to Change It
- Article 16** Right to Marriage and Family
- Article 17** Right to Own Property
- Article 18** Freedom of Belief and Religion
- Article 19** Freedom of Opinion and Information
- Article 20** Right of Peaceful Assembly and Association
- Article 21** Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections
- Article 22** Right to Social Security
- Article 23** Right to Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions

- Article 24** Right to Rest and Leisure
- Article 25** Right to Adequate Living Standard
- Article 26** Right to Education
- Article 27** Right to Participate in the Cultural Life of Community
- Article 28** Right to a Social Order that Articulates this Document
- Article 29** Community Duties Essential to Free and Full Development
- Article 30** Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the above Rights

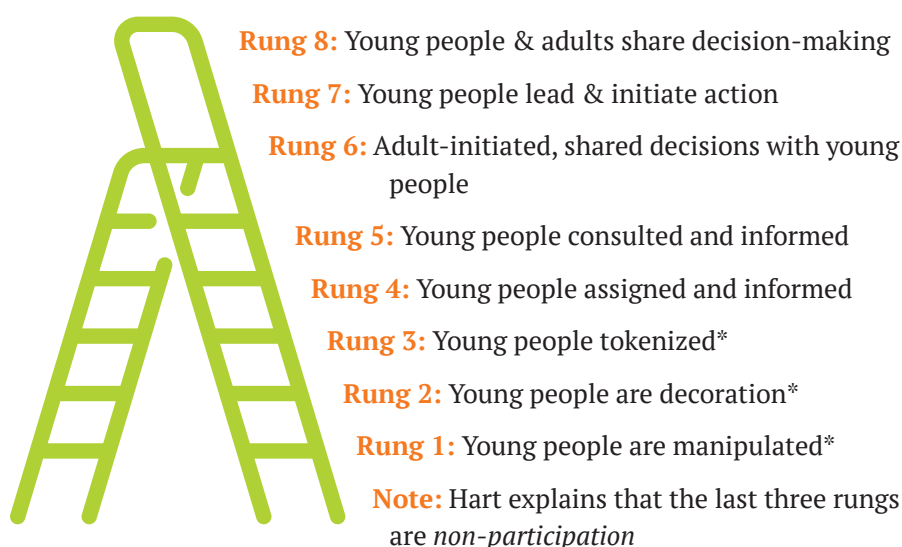
Reproduced with permission: Copyright © 1998, Human Rights Educators' Network Amnesty International, USA Human Rights Resource Centre, ISBN 0-929293-39-8, First Edition, 1998; Second Printing, 1999

## ANNEX 4: MODELS OF PARTICIPATION

- Today there are several ‘models’ for describing the factors that determine how full and genuine participation is, and the following three are probably the best-known of these. It is well worthwhile looking at them all since they provide different perspectives that can help us to assess how effectively we are enabling children and young people to have a say in decision-making about their lives.

### I. HART’S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

Roger Hart developed the idea of the ladder in 1992. In 1997, Hart wrote a book called ‘Children’s Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care’<sup>1</sup>. The Ladder of Participation is one of the tools Hart put in this book. The model of a ladder, which children ‘climb’ to gain more and more participation, is a very powerful and easily understandable image.



1 [https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens\\_participation.pdf](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf)

## THE LADDER SHOWS EIGHT DEGREES OF PARTICIPATION:

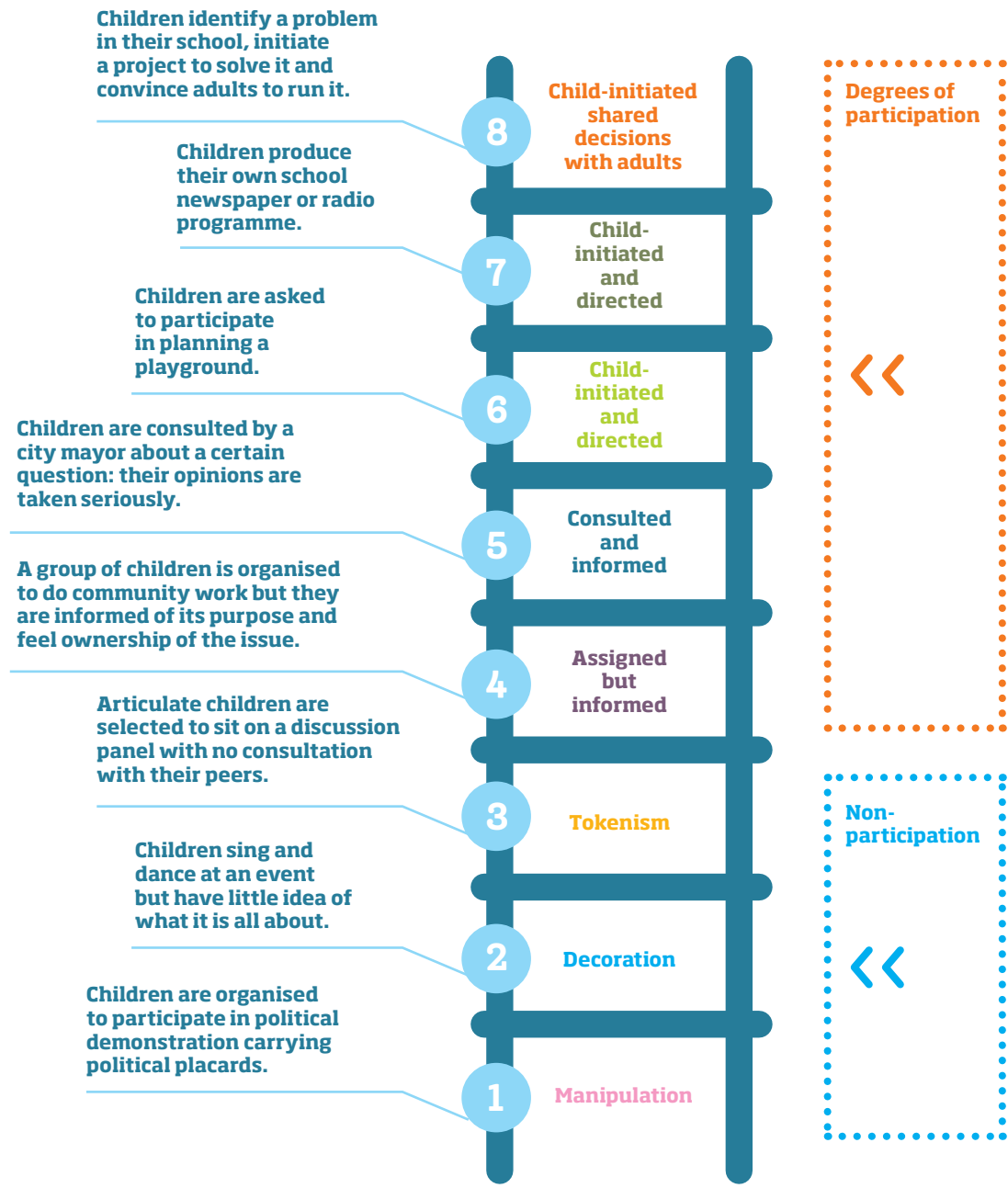
8. **Young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults:** this happens when projects or programmes are initiated by children and young people and decision making is shared between young people and adults.
7. **Young people-initiated and directed:** this step is when children and young people initiate and direct a project or programme and adults are only involved in a supportive role.
6. **Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people:** this occurs when projects or programmes are initiated by adults but the decision making is shared with young people.
5. **Consulted and informed:** this happens when young people give advice on programmes or projects designed and run by adults. They are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decision making.
4. **Assigned but informed:** this is when children and young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are involved.
3. **Tokenism\*:** this is when young people appear to be given a voice but they do not actually have any choice about what they do or how they participate.
2. **Decoration\*:** this happens when young people are used in an indirect way.
1. **Manipulation\*:** this occurs when adults use young people to support causes and pretend they have been inspired by the young people themselves.

**\*Note:** Hart explains that the last three rungs are *non-participation*



THE ILLUSTRATION BELOW IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW HART’S MODEL MIGHT BE INTERPRETED

Examples



This illustration was sourced at:  
[http://www.eycb.coe.int/compasito/chapter\\_5/10.html](http://www.eycb.coe.int/compasito/chapter_5/10.html)

## II. SHIER'S PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATION

In 2001, Harry Shier took the ideas discussed by Hart and simplified these as a pathway. He envisaged five levels of participation with a series of 15 questions which form a tool for checking how well you are encouraging participation. The following table outlines the questions coming from Shier's model

Level	Type of Participation	Openings	Opportunities	Obligations
<b>5</b>	Children share power and responsibility for decision-making	Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children?	Is there a procedure that enables adults and children to share responsibility for decisions?	Is it a policy requirement that adults and children to share responsibility for decisions?
<b>4</b>	Children are involved in decision-making processes	Are you ready to let children join in with the decision-making processes?	Is there a procedure that enables children to join in the decision-making processes?	Is it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decision-making processes?
<b>3</b>	Children's views are taken into account	Are you ready to take children's views into account?	Do your decision-making processes enable you to take children's views into account?	Is it a policy requirement children's views must be given due weight in decision-making?
<b>2</b>	Children are supported in expressing their views	Are you ready to support children in expressing their views?	Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help children to express their views?	Is it a policy requirement that children must be supported in expressing their views?
<b>1</b>	Children are listened to	Are you ready to listen to children?	Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children?	Is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to?

This is a useful tool for reflection, both as a practitioner working with individual children or families, and as a general tool to guide wider community consultation involving children. If you would like to hear Harry Shier explaining more about how to use this tool, you can access the following video clip. The video clip is 22 minutes long but the most relevant part is from 17.00 minutes to 21.00 minutes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K00Ww2MLjF8>

### III. LUNDY'S MODEL OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS-BASED PARTICIPATION

Laura Lundy developed a model of participation that is now widely used by the European Union. Lundy pointed out that VOICE is not enough for children to participate fully. They actually need four factors to facilitate their participation.

- **SPACE:** Children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their views
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate

The following diagram has been sourced from the European Union website where you can find more information about the Lundy Voice Model Checklist:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/lundy\\_model\\_child\\_participation.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/lundy_model_child_participation.pdf)

It is a tool that shows some of the questions you can use to implement this model.

## Space

**HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views**

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

## Voice

**HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views**

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

## Audience

**HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen**

- Is there a process for communicating children's and young adults' views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

## Influence

**HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate**

- Where the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

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16. If you are interested, more information on how to undertake Lifestory work can be found in 'The Positive Contribution of Life Story Work to Individuals and Carers (2010)'  
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17. If you are interested, further information about Person Centred Planning can be found at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/9781859354803.pdf> or <http://helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/maps/>
18. More information on the Care Leavers Network can be found at <http://www.agevolando.org/care-leavers-network/>.
19. More information about the project Training Professionals working with Children in Care can be found at <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/what-we-do/quality-care/alternative-care/promoting-standards-of-care/training-of-care-professionals>
20. Information gathered during a project in Italy supported by the National Ombudsman for Childhood and Adolescence and implemented by SOS Children's Villages International in cooperation with the University of Padua. More information can be found on the Care Leavers Network available at: <http://www.agevolando.org/care-leavers-network/>
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