

The Fostering Network's response to the Scottish Government consultation on 'moving on' from care into adulthood

October 2024

Planning and preparation for moving on from care into adulthood

1. How can we ensure that young people, and those who support them, are given enough time, advice and resources to effectively prepare them for moving on from care?

Please explain your answer in the open text box.

The Fostering Network published 'Supporting positive transitions through and out of foster care: A supplement to the Principles of Good Transitions', in partnership with the Scottish Transitions Forum, in 2022.¹ It states that to give young people and their carers enough time to prepare for moving on from foster care, a shift in culture and practice is required, such that children's social workers understand the need for pathway planning, and throughcare and aftercare teams are involved early. At present, planning is not happening early enough for enough of our care experienced young people: in our 2024 State of the Nations' Foster Care survey, only 11.9% of foster carers we surveyed in Scotland who have fostered a young person moving on from care said that services typically start planning more than two years before the young person's transition out of care or into Continuing Care.² Aside from 6% who did not know how early planning started, the remaining responses were split equally (20.5% each) between 'one to two years', 'six months to one year', 'less than six months', and alarmingly, 'there is typically no planning'.

We believe a concerted effort is required to move towards a culture in which early planning is embedded and expected, and we suggest that the Scottish Government should expand their data collection on the proportion of young people with a pathway plan and pathway coordinator to include young people aged fourteen and fifteen, to reflect this expectation.

The supplement also notes that staff involved in the planning process must have a good understanding of trauma and the way it affects young people during transitions. It says that extra time may be needed to ensure the young person can communicate their views meaningfully, and

¹ The Fostering Network (2022) [Supporting positive transitions through and out of foster care: A supplement to the Principles of Good Transitions](#)

² The Fostering Network (forthcoming 2025) *State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024*

independent advocacy must be offered both to the young person – as called for by The Promise³ – and their foster carers. We believe that advocacy is central to ensuring young people and those supporting them have the advice and resources they need to prepare them for transitions out of care. Work ongoing to scope and deliver a national lifelong advocacy service for care experienced children, young people, adults and families in Scotland⁴ is therefore greatly encouraging and we strongly support proposals to create a statutory right to independent advocacy for care experienced people.

The Promise Scotland's scoping work cites the statutory provision for advocacy in the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) Scotland Act 2003 as a precedent for this change, but the Scottish Government should also look to Wales where the National Approach to Advocacy for Children requires that an 'active offer' of independent advocacy is made to all children and young people who are looked after,⁵ making advocacy 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in'. In our view, making advocacy services an explicit and continuous offer, and therefore removing the burden on individuals to find out about or request such services, is the only way to ensure that all young people with care experience have an equal opportunity to access them.

Alongside advocacy, it's also crucial that young people and their carers are aware of the option of Continuing Care and understand what it entails. Positively, in our 2024 State of the Nations survey, of foster carers in Scotland who said an eligible young person did not remain with them in Continuing Care, only 5% said this was because they weren't asked if they wanted to offer Continuing Care.² However, written comments in this section of the survey reveal that while awareness of Continuing Care as a concept may be high, understanding of how it works in practice is lacking. For example: "I am just exploring continuing care for my young person. Seems unclear about finances and whether they can stay under LAAC status after 18 years. Also unclear whether I can remain as a foster carer. It's also difficult to find clear answers."

There should be no foster carers in this position; Continuing Care should always be discussed openly well in advance of potential transitions. Indeed, we would suggest that foster carers providing long term or permanent care should be informed of and open to the possibility of Continuing Care from the point at which they are approved to foster. CELCIS's 2022 report on Continuing Care⁶ supports this position, stating that "Foster carers' recruitment, assessment, registration, induction, and ongoing support should be based on the explicit presumption of foster carers providing continuing care through to 21."

Key recommendations:

- Raise awareness of the need for early pathway planning among children's social workers.
- Increase capacity for throughcare and aftercare teams to be involved in pathway planning.
- Collect data on the proportion of young people aged fourteen and fifteen with a pathway plan and pathway coordinator.

³ Independent Care Review (2020) [The Promise](#)

⁴ The Promise Scotland (2023) [Scoping and delivering a national lifelong advocacy service for care experienced children, adults and families](#)

⁵ Welsh Government (2019) [Independent Professional Advocacy: National Standards and Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People in Wales](#)

⁶ Lough Dennell, B. L., McGhee, K., Porter, R. (2022) [Continuing Care: An exploration of implementation](#), CELCIS

- Create a statutory right to independent advocacy for care experienced people.
- Ensure that Continuing Care is discussed with foster carers from initial approval and throughout their time in the role, well in advance of potential transitions for young people.

2. Are there any barriers to starting the process of planning and preparing for young people leaving care at an early stage?

Please explain your answer in the open text box.

A significant barrier to early planning for young people leaving foster care is the lack of capacity for throughcare and aftercare teams to become involved early. As this consultation notes, almost half of young people leaving care aged sixteen or over do not have a pathway coordinator, suggesting that throughcare capacity is already stretched. Responses to our 2024 State of the Nations survey highlighted that one local authority in particular does not have a throughcare team at all.² One respondent wrote: “[the service] removed their throughcare team and never replaced it with anyone or anything. There is NO support or documentation at all about leaving care.” This total absence of a support structure is unacceptable. Even in areas where throughcare and aftercare support is in place, high staff turnover also affects the ability for pathway coordinators to develop meaningful relationships and get to know the young people they are supporting.

Evidence from CELCIS also suggests that adults can sometimes avoid raising the subject of transitions with young people in care because they don't want to cause anxiety.⁶ As the research notes, this can in part be fuelled by uncertainty on the part of carers that a young person will be able to stay with them. As well as encouraging foster carers and other members of the team around the child to begin conversations about planning and transitions early, at a systemic level, this issue can best be addressed by guaranteeing financial security and continued approval status for carers in Continuing Care arrangements (see our response to question 8).

Accessing information, services and support

5. Can you provide examples of good practice where services have worked together in a holistic way to support birth families and young people moving on from care when the young person returns to live with their birth family?

Please provide any examples and share your views in the open text box.

Step Up Step Down (SUSD) is an innovative programme which primarily supports families on the edge of care to stay together, giving parents the help of a trained Family Support Foster Carer who can 'step up' when the parents need it and 'step down' when they are in a better place to care for their children.⁷ SUSD has also been used to support children who have been in care to return to their birth families, providing birth families with mentoring and guidance from carers who they often find easier to trust than those working for formal social services. SUSD launched in Northern Ireland in 2016 and a pilot in two local authorities in Wales began in 2023 but it has not yet reached Scotland. We have been advocating for the Scottish Government to fund and roll out

⁷ The Fostering Network (n.d.) '[Step Up Step Down](#)'

Step Up Step Down in Scotland and have been encouraged by the Minister's interest in it. We would encourage government departments to collaborate on the development and rollout of the model to ensure its benefits are shared with care experienced people returning to live with their birth family as well as young people at risk of being taken into care.

More broadly, we believe there should be a more consistent process for all young people moving from foster care back to their birth family. We would typically advocate for a phased transition from the foster family to the birth family, including sleepovers with the birth family before moving back in permanently. As well as ensuring young people have the opportunity to stay in touch with former foster carers if they want to (see our response to question 28), birth families and foster families should also be encouraged to stay connected where appropriate to enable the foster family to provide support if required post-reunification. This has worked well for some respondents to our 2024 State of the Nations survey in Scotland, for example: "2 returned home to mum and she chose and insisted we keep in touch. She and the children are now a part of the extended family. It is beneficial for the children to know we are still around."²

Key recommendations:

- Collaborate across government on the development and rollout of Step Up Step Down in Scotland to ensure its benefits are shared with care experienced people returning to live with their birth family.
- Increase consistency in transitions back to birth family, encouraging sustained relationships between birth families and former foster carers where appropriate.

6. How do we ensure that young people with care experience, and those who provide them with care, can easily access information about entitlements and support?

Please provide any examples of good practice you are aware of in the open text box.

Children in Wales recently launched their Getting Ready Project⁸ which aims to "empower young people by enhancing their knowledge and understanding of their rights and entitlements when planning to leave care". Resources are developed in partnership with care experienced young people and have so far been tailored to three local authority areas in Wales. The project is designed to complement Wales's 'When I am Ready' scheme which is similar to our Continuing Care scheme. We believe a similar project would be welcomed in Scotland and we would encourage the Scottish Government to discuss with the Welsh Government how learning from the project could be shared.

Continuing Care

7. Are there any changes you would like to see as part of the eligibility criteria for Continuing Care?

⁸ Children in Wales (n.d.) '[Getting Ready Project](#)'

Please provide details of your suggestions in the open text box.

Initial eligibility criteria for Continuing Care are generally adequate for young people moving directly from foster care, as reflected in the comparatively high proportion of young people leaving foster care who enter Continuing Care arrangements (45%) compared to those leaving residential (30%) or kinship care (15%).⁹ However, for those who leave foster care before the age of 18, or who enter and then leave Continuing Care at any point before the age of 21, the inability to return to Continuing Care is a barrier which disadvantages them in comparison to their peers without care experience, who often – and increasingly¹⁰ – return to live with their family at various points in early adulthood. We believe that, as called for in *The Promise*,³ young people must have a ‘right to return’ to care if needed. The updated Continuing Care guidance¹¹ acknowledges that there is no reason why a young person cannot return to their Continuing Care accommodation under section 29 (Aftercare) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 if it is still available and needed. Yet the lack of a right to return to the same accommodation under Continuing Care, and the statement that a young person leaving Continuing Care is unlikely to be able to return to Continuing Care, both contradict the spirit of the model as a natural extension of the supportive family environment provided by foster care.

While we appreciate that in some cases it will not be possible for a young person to return to their foster family after moving on, we believe the duty on local authorities to provide Continuing Care should not cease after a young person first decides to leave the accommodation of their own volition. Instead, the offer of Continuing Care should remain an ‘open door’ up to the age of 21, unless either of the other two exemptions apply (b, that the accommodation ceases to be available, or c, that remaining in the current home would significantly affect the welfare of the young person, as evidenced in a Welfare Assessment). This would bring experiences of transitions for care experienced young people closer in line with those of their peers without care experience.

Beyond introducing a right to return, we believe there should be greater flexibility in the upper age limit for Continuing Care. Staf suggest that for young people in further and higher education, the right to Continuing Care could be extended to match the length of their study.¹² However, we are concerned that this would create another arbitrary cut-off in support and mean young people facing multiple simultaneous transitions. Instead, as *The Promise* states,³ “Young people must be encouraged to ‘stay put’ in their setting of care for as long as they need to. Rules, regulations and systems must support that approach. There must be no regulatory barrier for young people to stay with foster carers for as long as is required.” To achieve this, a first step could be to introduce a six-month or one-year ‘grace period’ after a young person turns 21 or completes their education course, whichever is later, within which local authorities remain under a duty to provide Continuing Care, notwithstanding, in this case, the three exemptions specified in the guidance.

⁹ Scottish Government (2024) [Children’s Social Work Statistics 2022-23 – Looked After Children](#)

¹⁰ Hill, K., Hirsch, D., Stone, J., & Webber, R. (2020) [Home Truths: Young adults living with their parents in low to middle income families](#), Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University

¹¹ Scottish Government (2024) [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014: Guidance on Part 11: Continuing Care](#)

¹² Staf (2024) [100 Days of Listening](#)

Over the longer term, this provisional upper age limit could be increased to 23, with the 'grace period' extended to two years.

Key recommendations:

- Introduce a 'right to return' to Continuing Care.
- Increase flexibility in the upper age limit for Continuing Care by raising the maximum age and introducing a 'grace period'.

8. What additional support do you think is required for families, professionals and practitioners who are responsible for providing Continuing Care arrangements?

Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Three key elements of support are required for foster carers providing Continuing Care arrangements. The first is financial support. In our 2024 State of the Nations survey, over half (57%) of foster carer respondents in Scotland said they were slightly (25%) or significantly (32%) worse off as a result of offering Continuing Care.² This is likely to affect the opportunities they can offer their young people, as well as their own wellbeing and quality of life. It highlights the need for a Scottish Recommended Allowance for Continuing Care which is at least on par with current rates for 16- and 17-year-olds, as well as a national minimum fee framework for foster carers looking after children and young people up to the age of 21.

We would add that young people should never be expected to contribute to their own allowances as this can be stigmatising, alienating, and potentially damaging to their relationships with their carers, repositioning them as landlord and tenant. Yet in our 2024 State of the Nations survey, we found that a quarter (23%) of foster carers with a young person in Continuing Care reported that the young person is expected to contribute to their own allowance. This practice is not in line with The Promise and must end immediately.

The second element of support required for foster carers is clarity about the financial help available. Until a Scottish Recommended Allowance for Continuing Care is introduced, local authorities and independent fostering services should be required to publish their Continuing Care allowance rates on their websites along with their allowance rates for children in foster care. This would provide foster carers with the clarity they need to decide what they can offer their young people and to plan effectively. We also believe more clarity is required around financial arrangements for young people in Continuing Care who may be living away at university or college for most of the year. While the updated guidance reiterates that young people under Continuing Care are entitled to as much financial support as they were when they were looked after,¹¹ we know that local authorities often withhold allowances from the carer when a young person is not living with them. We would like clarity that allowances should either continue to be paid to carers throughout the duration of the Continuing Care arrangement, with the expectation that they pass the funds to the young person in term-time if they are living away from home; or that the allowance will be paid directly to the young person when they are not living in the foster home.

The third element of support required is continued approval as a foster carer. Encouragingly, in our 2024 State of the Nations survey, 73% of foster carers in a Continuing Care arrangement with no other children in foster care said they are still approved as foster carers. However, 11% of

foster carers said they were no longer approved and 15% did not know. The approval process is necessarily time-consuming and often invasive so it is important that foster carers are not required to repeat this process on the basis that young people they foster are no longer officially 'looked after'. This policy should also be clear to foster carers so they do not worry that supporting a Continuing Care arrangement will result in them losing their approval as a foster carer.

Key recommendations:

- Introduce a Scottish Recommended Allowance for Continuing Care, and a national foster carer fee framework which includes Continuing Care.
- End the practice of expecting young people in Continuing Care to contribute to their own allowances.
- Require fostering services to make their Continuing Care allowance and fee rates publicly available.
- Clarify financial entitlements for young people in Continuing Care who may be living away from their foster family for most of the year.
- Ensure foster carers can retain their approval if their young person enters Continuing Care and they are not fostering another child or young person.

9. How do we ensure that young people, and their views, are heard during discussions on Continuing Care which impact them?

Please explain your answer in the open text box.

As discussed in our response to question 1, our 'Supplement to the Principles of Good Transitions' notes that young people may need extra time to communicate their views meaningfully and that this must be facilitated in a trauma-informed way.¹ The National Trauma Transformation Programme (NTTP) has set high ambitions for the way Scotland's workforce responds to people with experience of trauma and adversity but this must now be embedded in initial and continuous learning and development for all staff involved in planning for care experienced children and young people. Endings and transitions can be particularly difficult for young people with care experience, so it is vital that all those involved in the planning process are aware of this and can respond sensitively.

We are encouraged that as part of the NTTP, trauma training for alternative caregivers including foster and kinship carers is being developed. Considering participation and involvement on a wider scale, we believe young people – and indeed their carers – must be heard during discussions about the development of these resources, as well as about their own care planning. We are concerned that the timescales we have heard for this work may not be sufficient to allow meaningful co-production or participation, so we would urge the Scottish Government and partners in NHS Education for Scotland to consider the additional time and scaffolding that may be needed to develop this resource in line with the needs of young people and their carers.

With respect to discussions on Continuing Care at an individual level, as noted above, independent advocacy is key to ensuring young people's views are heard. Again, we would encourage the Scottish Government to consider establishing a statutory right to independent advocacy for care experienced people, building on Wales's 'opt-out' approach for young people

who are looked after.⁵ Data on the uptake of independent advocacy services among care experienced young people would also be beneficial to monitor progress and enable services to target groups which may be underrepresented.

Another change required to ensure young people's views are heard is greater consistency in the use of welfare assessments. We know from engagement with services and foster carers that these are not always carried out when they should be, and CELCIS's 2022 research on Continuing Care notes several issues including a lack of clear processes around welfare assessments, lack of capacity to carry them out, and even perceptions that they are a "hurdle" to be overcome before young people can access Continuing Care.⁶ Some participants in this research appeared to describe using welfare assessments to gatekeep access to Continuing Care, suggesting that assessments should identify a particular 'need' for Continuing Care, rather than being used to assess whether it would be detrimental to a young person to remaining in Continuing Care. It is crucial that welfare assessments are used as intended, to ensure decisions about young people's care are right for them, not to gatekeep access to support. As CELCIS et al.'s joint practice note emphasises, welfare assessments should be a tool through which young people's views are considered along with those of their family, carers, education and health professionals.¹³

Key recommendations:

- Continue work to embed trauma-informed practice in training and development for staff who may be involved in planning for care experienced children and young people.
- Involve care experienced young people, and carers, in the development of trauma training for alternative caregivers including foster carers.
- Introduce a statutory right to independent advocacy for care experienced people, and collect data on the uptake of independent advocacy services.
- Ensure welfare assessments are used appropriately as a tool for listening to young people, not gatekeeping access to support.

Lifelong Care

13. What do you think would be the best way to provide long term support and services to adults with care experience?

Please explain your answer in the open text box.

The most effective and inclusive way to provide long term support and services to adults with care experience would be by making care experience a protected characteristic under the 2010 Equality Act. We encourage the Scottish Government to work with the new UK Government to progress this. Within devolved powers, the Scottish Government must bring forward a Scottish Human Rights Bill which includes an equality provision explicitly naming care experienced

¹³ CELCIS, Clan Childlaw & Care Inspectorate (2020) [Continuing Care and the Welfare Assessment: Practice Note](#)

people, as called for by Who Cares? Scotland.¹⁴ We were disappointed that the 2024-25 Programme for Government dropped the Scottish Government's commitment to introducing the Human Rights Bill this parliamentary year and, along with over a hundred other organisations,¹⁵ we urge the Scottish Government to reconsider.

Peer support and maintaining lifelong links

27. Do you know of any examples where peer support networks have had a positive impact on the experience of leaving care, either for care leavers or those who supported them?

Please explain your answer in the open text box.

The Mockingbird programme,¹⁶ led by The Fostering Network in the UK, is an evidence-based, sustainable model of foster care structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. It brings young people and foster carers together in a 'constellation', with a hub home supported by a liaison worker at the centre and satellite families around them, providing vital peer support and guidance alongside social activities and sleepovers. Children and young people benefit from familial relationships with foster aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins, while foster carers benefit from the support of other carers and the guidance of the more experienced hub home carers, who keep a room free for emergencies and planned sleepovers for children in their constellation. The programme closely aligns with the five principles of The Promise, as follows:

- A good childhood: Mockingbird nurtures positive and trusting relationships, supports visits and time with birth family including siblings, and provides proactive support and intervention that reduces the risk of children having to move.
- Whole family support: Mockingbird supports the building of resilient and caring communities, nurturing the stability and love of an extended family. It provides opportunities for social activities and supports the development of peer friendship groups with shared care experiences.
- Supporting the workforce: the constellation offers peer support for foster carers and children and young people; the hub home carer and liaison worker lead the constellation, and new foster carers have access to more experienced carers.
- Planning: The Fostering Network's Mockingbird coach provides advice, guidance and training, mitigating the risk of children having to move and reducing crisis planning.
- Building capacity: Mockingbird supports the recruitment and retention of foster carers. Data is collected and reports provided annually to capture impact.

The Department for Education is aiming for 200 Mockingbird constellations to be in place across England by 2025, after funding 97 new constellations as part of their recruitment and retention

¹⁴ Who Cares? Scotland (2023) [A Human Rights Bill for Scotland: Response to the Scottish Government's public consultation](#)

¹⁵ Human Rights Consortium Scotland (2024) ['100+ Organisations Write to the First Minister to Reverse Delaying Scottish Human Rights Bill'](#)

¹⁶ The Fostering Network (n.d.) ['The Mockingbird programme'](#)

clusters. Barnardo's Scotland Fostering currently has two Mockingbird constellations in Edinburgh,¹⁷ and Falkirk Council is in the process of setting up the first local authority constellation in Scotland with support from The Fostering Network. Evidence from the programme in England and early findings from Scotland have shown the transformational effect it can have on young people's relationships and self-esteem.¹⁸ For example, one young person who joined a Mockingbird constellation aged 15 shared: "From my point of view Mockingbird is more than family: it is a collection of likeminded people all sharing ideas and thoughts and making amazing things happen. [...] I'm at university currently, Mockingbird has improved my relationships with people and boosted my confidence." Through creating an extended family structure for children and young people in foster care, Mockingbird not only develops their sense of belonging and self-efficacy, but also provides them with a strong network of people they can turn to if they need support after leaving care.

We will be working closely with Falkirk Council to monitor the impact of the new Mockingbird constellation and encourage the Scottish Government to join us in considering the potential role of the programme in supporting care experienced young people after they move on from care. For example, if a young person is struggling with living independently but their former foster carers have not planned to keep a room available for them, the hub home or a satellite home with a free room could offer an opportunity for them to return to a familiar environment and still receive support from their former carers and other members of the constellation. Services could also explore the possibility for care experienced people who move into independent accommodation near their foster family to remain part of the Mockingbird constellation.

Key recommendation:

- Consider the potential role of the Mockingbird programme in supporting care experienced young people after they move on from care.

28. How can we better enable young people and the supportive adults in their lives to maintain healthy relationships once the young person has moved on from care?

Please provide any suggestions or examples you may have.

Our 'Keep Connected' principles¹⁹ set out expectations for how children and young people's relationships with their foster families should be supported after they move on from their care, or from care altogether. These include the expectations that relationships should not be ended abruptly; children and young people should be consulted about the relationships that are important to them and how they would like to maintain these; keeping in touch should be considered part of the foster carer's role; and foster carers should be supported in this role.

The Keep Connected principles align closely with the commitment in The Promise³ that "All children must be supported to continue relationships that are important to them, where it is safe to do so", and the acknowledgement that "It is not only sibling relationships that are important to children but cousins, step-siblings and a range of other relationships including former carers."

¹⁷Barnardo's (2022) [From pillar to post: how to achieve greater stability for children in the care system](#)

¹⁸The Fostering Network (2023) [Mockingbird Impact Report 2022](#)

¹⁹ The Fostering Network (2019) ['Keep Connected Principles'](#)

Yet, despite the fundamental importance of positive relationships to children's wellbeing and life outcomes, of the 20 fostering services that completed our 2024 State of the Nations' Foster Care survey in Scotland,² only three said they have signed up to the Keep Connected principles.

We sought an amendment to the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 to create a duty to promote continued relationships between children and former foster carers.²⁰ This was not ultimately taken forward but we were pleased that the Scottish Government committed to developing guidance setting out how local authorities should support children and young people to keep in touch with people who are important to them, including their former foster families. However, while guidance on supporting sibling relationships was published in 2021,²¹ the promised guidance on supporting other important relationships was never published, and it is clear that the issues it intended to address persist. In our 2024 State of the Nations' Foster Care survey, less than a quarter (23%) of foster carers in Scotland said they felt very (11%) or quite (12%) supported to keep in touch with former foster children where appropriate, while 16% said they feel a little supported, 17% not very supported and 34% not at all supported.

Even more concerning are the findings that 20% of foster carers said local practice did not allow them to keep in touch with former foster children, and 16% said adopters did not want them to keep in touch, in cases where the foster carer felt it would have been appropriate to do so. More than budgetary constraints or a lack of capacity to support young people and former foster carers to keep in touch, this indicates a fundamental misunderstanding of what children and young people need from their relationships with significant adults in their lives. While in some cases it will not be in a child's best interests to keep in touch with their former foster families, this will be the exception rather than the rule. We would certainly contest that it is not in a child's best interests to keep in touch with former foster carers in 20% of cases where a foster carer believes it is appropriate to do so.

Local authorities and independent fostering services can take various steps to support children and young people to stay in touch with former foster carers where appropriate. In our 2024 State of the Nations survey, four services in Scotland said they provide training to foster carers on keeping in touch with children after they move on, five said they discuss ongoing relationships at transition planning, and four provide expenses to foster carers to facilitate ongoing relationships. One said they provide a retainer between placements to support transitions. However, without an explicit expectation on services to promote these relationships, support for keeping in touch is inconsistent and often dependent on the views and attitudes of individual practitioners. We are therefore calling on the Scottish Government to review the drafted guidance on keeping in touch and publish it as soon as practicable.

Key recommendations:

- Encourage services to sign up to the Keep Connected principles.
- Review and publish guidance on supporting children and young people to keep in touch with people who are important to them, including their former foster families.

²⁰ The Scottish Parliament (2020) [Justice Committee \(Virtual\), Children \(Scotland\) Bill: Stage 2](#)

²¹ The Scottish Government (2021) [Staying Together and Connected: Getting it Right for Sisters and Brothers. National Practice Guidance](#)

Health and wellbeing

30. What improvements do you think could be made to ensure care leavers have access to services which support their physical health, and mental health and wellbeing?

Please explain your answer in the open text box.

One tool which could be used to increase care experienced people's access to services that support their health and wellbeing is Coordinated Support Plans (CSP). Although all looked after children in Scotland are entitled to a CSP, our 2024 State of the Nations' Foster Care survey² found that too many young people in foster care still don't have one. Of the 279 foster carers who responded to this question, just over a quarter (28%) said any of the children or young people they foster have a CSP. A fifth (19%) did not know, while 37% said none of the children or young people they foster have a CSP, and 15% selected 'N/A', despite the fact that this universal entitlement makes CSPs applicable to all children looked after. Increasing the proportion of children and young people with a CSP would not only give these children greater access to services while they are looked after, but it could also enable CSPs to be used as a referral mechanism for adult services.

Housing

33. What do you think are the main barriers in securing appropriate housing for a young person with care experience?

Please explain your answer in the open text box.

Housing shortages

In our experience, the primary barrier is a lack of affordable and social housing. As one respondent to our 2024 State of the Nations survey² said of their young person, "It's impossible for them to get a house as on the housing list with extra points but there are no houses. Social worker even suggested they take a private let which is more expensive." This is placing the burden on foster carers to find and often fund private accommodation for their young people. Another respondent wrote, "No support for young people moving on from social worker[:]; we found accommodation and paid for most of furniture etc when young person was 22". Housing plays a crucial part in helping care experienced young people progress towards independence and has been described as "a vehicle for stability",²² but too many are being denied the opportunity to find a place to call home, simply due to a lack of available housing.

Guarantors and deposits

²² Fortune, R., & Smith, N. (2021) [No Place Like Home. A look at young people's experiences of leaving the care system](#), Barnardo's

Other barriers to securing appropriate housing are that many care experienced young people do not have someone to act as a guarantor or the means to pay a deposit for rented accommodation. The Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway²³ suggested that local authorities could act as guarantors for care experienced people, and Barnardo's has called for a national rent guarantor and deposit scheme for care experienced people in England,²⁴ which we believe would be of equal benefit in Scotland. Some local authorities in England already provide this support, for example, Kent County Council has a rent deposit and rent guarantor scheme for care experienced people aged 18-25 and in employment or higher education²⁵. As the source author notes, this approach may ultimately be cost-saving for local authorities as it reduces the risk of young people becoming homeless and requiring temporary accommodation. We propose using the Housing Bill to create a duty for local authorities in Scotland to act as a guarantor and provide deposits for care experienced people as part of their corporate parenting duties.

Discrimination

Another barrier to securing appropriate housing is discrimination against care experienced people. If care experience was considered a protected characteristic, housing providers would no longer be legally able to discriminate against care experienced people. As above, within devolved powers, the most effective action the Scottish Government can take here is to recommit to introducing a Human Rights Bill this parliamentary year, with an equality provision explicitly naming care experienced people.

Key recommendations:

- Accelerate the delivery of affordable and social homes in Scotland.
- Create a duty for local authorities to act as a rent guarantor and provide deposits for care experienced people.
- Introduce a Human Rights Bill with an equality provision naming care experienced people to prevent housing discrimination.

Further and Higher education

38. How can we better support care experienced students to complete their studies?

Please explain your answer and provide any examples of good practice in the open text box.

Awareness of entitlements

The support available in Scotland through bursaries, grants and loans is highly valuable to reduce barriers to education for care experienced young people. However, it's crucial that care experienced young people are aware of and make use of this support. Our 'Tick the Box'

²³ The Scottish Government, CELCIS, & A Way Home Scotland (2019) [Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway: Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathways](#)

²⁴ Barnardo's (2023) [The case for a national rent guarantor and deposit scheme for care leavers aged 18-24 in England](#)

²⁵ Children and Young People Now (2024) ['Scandal over advert reveals care leavers' acute housing challenges'](#)

campaign²⁶ encourages care experienced young people to declare their care experience when applying to college or university, to ensure not only that they receive a guaranteed offer if they meet the minimum entry requirements on their chosen undergraduate course, but also that they receive the support they are entitled to throughout their studies. We have seen great examples of universities and colleges participating in the campaign and raising awareness of entitlements for care experienced applicants and students,²⁷ but we would urge all institutions to publicise the scheme more widely, including a clear definition of 'care experienced' which speaks to young people who have grown up in all types of care. Some young people who have lived with foster families for a large part of their childhood, or who have grown up in kinship care, may not realise that they are care experienced, so it is vital that they don't miss out on their entitlements.

Returning home and maintaining relationships

Additionally, we believe all care experienced young people should have the same opportunities as their peers to return home during holidays. While the Summer Accommodation Grant is an excellent initiative to support care experienced students with their accommodation costs through the summer break, this should not be seen as a substitute for young people's ability to return to their foster families during the holidays if they prefer. Nor should moving to university or college be seen as the end of the young person's relationship with their foster family if both parties would like this to continue. As one 2024 State of the Nations survey respondent in Scotland said,² "In some cases I've been discouraged from maintaining contact with the young people as it's said to me that as I take in more young people, I won't have the capacity to continue to support those who were previously with me. I find this difficult as we're being asked to provide a family environment to make the young people feel supported and for it to be like a 'normal' situation but once they have moved on, there is little support or encouragement to maintain that family like environment." Another noted that "we do not put an age limit on our biological kids to live independently". Returning home to family during holidays and drawing on their support throughout the year can greatly help young people to manage the transition to living independently and do well in their studies, and should be an option for all young people, regardless of their background.

Financial support for foster carers

To enable foster carers to continue supporting their young people through education and beyond, payments for foster carers need to be proportionate to the support they are providing. Discussing a young person they had supported to attend university, a 2024 State of the Nations respondent in Scotland said, "she was away 2-3 days a week and for those days, our payments stopped/were reduced. Apparently, because she wasn't staying in the house full time we were no longer entitled to the full payment. This I argued was ridiculous as when she was away, I spoke to her at least twice a day, provided support and encouragement as well as funds when she was running low and needed money for food etc. Just because she was away for a couple of days didn't mean the care that we give her just stopped." This is one example of payments reducing when a young person in Continuing Care is not at home for some time, but payments also reduce for many foster carers even when their young person is still at home with them. No foster carer

²⁶ The Fostering Network (n.d.) ['Tick the Box'](#)

²⁷ Upton, S. (2022) ['How students are helping to shape University-led and peer support for students with care experience'](#), CELCIS

should be financially worse off as a result of supporting a young person in Continuing Care – yet we know from our 2024 State of the Nations survey that over half are.

Flexible transitions

Care transitions and endings should also be planned around significant events in young people's lives so they are not having to manage multiple changes at once. One 2024 State of the Nations respondent in Scotland shared, "I feel that the timing in one particular case was not great – he had two months to finish his college course and was 'moved on'. He then due to that pressure had to drop out of college." This was echoed by multiple comments stating that transitions should be based on young people's individual circumstances and needs rather than arbitrary age thresholds. Timings for moves, endings and changes in the levels of support provided should be adjusted to ensure they don't coincide with significant educational transitions for young people, otherwise, as numerous respondents commented, they are "set up to fail".

Key recommendations:

- Support universities and colleges to publicise the 'Tick the Box' campaign.
- Ensure young people have the option to return home to their foster families during holidays from college or university.
- Maintain adequate fees and allowances for foster carers supporting young people in Continuing Care.
- Allow flexibility for transitions to avoid coinciding with other major life events.