

Briefing Paper: Looked After Children and Care Leavers

The aim of this briefing paper is to provide an insight for Admission Tutors working within the new Contextual Admissions Model on the barriers faced by young people in care. The briefing will explore the facts and figures behind being in care, will examine the barriers that looked after children and care leavers face in regard to educational attainment and hopes to develop your awareness of the support systems in place at Cardiff University and beyond for students who study with us, who have been in care.

Facts and Figures:

Life for children in public care has changed significantly since the 1970's. There has been a move away from institutionalised, residential care towards foster care and greater emphasis on trying to keep families together in the first place.

These days, around three-quarters of children in care are with foster families rather than in 'residential' care.

Children and young people come into care for a variety of reasons. For some children and young people in care it may be a relief, escaping abuse or neglect. For others, living away from their families brings a huge sadness when illness, poverty or overwhelming problems mean that parents can no longer look after them.

Over **59,000** children live with **45,000** foster families across the UK each day.

For some, it will be a short stay before returning home or being adopted. For others, it will be long-term until they move into independence. This is about four-fifths of all the children in care in the UK.

Unfortunately, looked after children and care leavers as a social group experience a high level of disadvantage: "care leavers are much more likely than average to experience unemployment, homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill-health, early parenthood and leaving school with few or no qualifications."

Holland, S (2010) How was your day? Cardiff University, Cardiff

What is the scale of the problem of low educational attainment for Looked After Children and Care Leavers?

Comparison of the attainment levels of looked after children compared with all pupils in Wales:

- 50% of looked after children compared with 82% of all Welsh pupils attained Key Stage 1
- 21% of looked after children compared to 64% of all Welsh pupils attained Key Stage 4
- 21% of looked after children compared to 64% of all pupils in Wales achieved five GCSEs at grade A*

Seven factors contributing to the poor education outcomes:

1. A lack of ambition.
2. Placement instability.
3. High rates of school exclusion and poor quality educational provision.
4. A lack of remedial help.
5. Leaving foster care too young.
6. The low educational achievements of foster carers.
7. The failure of corporate parenting.

Higher Education

- Only 7% per cent of care leavers aged 19 go on to university compared to 43% of all young people.

Number of care leavers enrolled at Cardiff University 2012:

- 13 students in first year
- 10 students in second year
- 7 students in third year
- 2 students in fourth year
- **Total =32**

What are the problems at university level?

'The main problems identified at the point of application to university were lack of information and advice when choosing universities and courses; changes of placement during preparation for examinations; uncertainty about available financial support; and anxiety about accommodation during term time and vacations.'

Jackson, S. Ajayi, S. (2007) *Foster Care and Higher Education, Adoption & Fostering*, Vol 31:1, pp 62-72

What support is available at Cardiff University and beyond?

The Buttle Trust Quality Mark

Many care leavers worry about the loneliness and financial insecurity that can happen at university.

'I couldn't just go on holiday like the other students: I had to arrange it all in advance with social services. It would have really helped if I'd had somewhere to stay and someone to talk to on campus.'

Many universities now do offer just that, spurred on by Buttle UK, which awards a Buttle UK Quality Mark to Higher Education institutions that actively support and encourage care leavers.

To be awarded the Quality mark HEIs must demonstrate a commitment to four broad principles:

1. To raise aspirations and achievements.
2. To have appropriate admissions procedures.
3. To provide entry and on-going support.
4. To monitor the implementation of the Commitment.

The Buttle Quality Mark at Cardiff University:

- **Contextual Admissions Model:** allowing additional consideration for applicants from care
- **Confident Futures Scheme:** offering pre entry activities with looked after children (Course work club, Conference and Mentoring)
- **Dedicated Mentor for Care leavers:** Einir Evans in the Student Support Centre is the dedicated member of staff that acts as the first point of contact for student from care, social services and academic staff working with care leavers.
- **Care Leaver Bursary:** £1,000 in 1st year, £750 in subsequent years and £500 in final term of final year.
- **12 month accommodation** in the first year for students from care
- **The Student Support Centre** provides a comprehensive advice service on every aspect of pastoral support including the Counselling Service and Disability and Dyslexia Service

Concluding Thought...

For many young people in care, it takes just one person to believe in them.

It does not take much for a looked after child to believe they are destined to fail because most people that they come across will expect them to.

Sometimes, all it takes is for one person to spend the time, to believe and encourage them to succeed and achieve in life.

Will that person be you?

For Further information and Resources

If you would like to discuss any issues brought up in this briefing paper please contact:

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For Further insight please read **Ben** and **Jade's Stories**, provided as case studies by Fostering Network and The Who Cares Trust.

You might also find **Amy's Diary** a useful resource. This is a fictional diary of a fostered young person's journey through secondary school. This was produced by Fostering Network and gives notes to teachers and social workers.

Another useful resources is: **Jackson, S. & Ajayi, S (2007) "Foster care and higher education," *Adoption and Fostering*, Vol 31, No 1: 62-72**