

Care leavers feel they left care too early, Ofsted finds

The report, '[Ready or not: care leavers' views of preparing to leave care](#)', brings to light the lack of choice many care leavers experienced: some felt they had to leave care 'whether they were ready or not'. Local authorities are required to prepare children for leaving care but today's report finds that care leavers' experiences of this preparation have been varied, and many were unaware of the support they are entitled to.

Statutory guidance requires children in care to be introduced to their personal advisor (PA) from age 16 to support them as they leave care. However, over a quarter did not meet their PA until they were 18 or older, and a fifth of care leavers said they met their PA too late.

In a nationwide survey and follow-up interviews, many care leavers said they were not aware of the different kinds of support they are entitled to. Only around half remembered being told about the help available to them in their local area. A similar proportion reported being told how to complain about the support, or lack of, they received. Even fewer were told how to get advocacy support.

Many care leavers also told us about feeling isolated and not knowing who to turn to for help after leaving care. A third (32%) of respondents said that they did not know who to contact in an emergency, and a quarter (24%) said they had to find out on their own. Worrying about money was the most common reason young people felt unsafe after leaving care, and several attributed money-related problems in later life to a lack of financial preparation. As one care leaver put it:

I had little help in learning the financial side of things; I am in years of debt with council tax and water rates due to this.

The picture is slightly more positive for those children in care currently. The majority reported that they were getting help with their money skills.

However, overall the report suggests that there is more for corporate parents to do to give children leaving care the support and help they need.

Yvette Stanley, Ofsted's National Director for Social Care, said:

The transition out of care can be a daunting prospect for many. It's so important that children feel prepared with the skills they need to live independently and a support network there to help them if they need it. Unfortunately, many of the young people we spoke to felt they left care before they were ready and didn't know where to turn to for help.

The insights these young people have shared with us strike a powerful chord and are valuable in identifying how things can be improved for care leavers. We will continue to draw on these findings in our future research and as we make improvements to our inspection work so that it always reflects what matters most to children in care and care leavers.

This research only reports on care leavers' perceptions of the preparation they received. What they told us is not necessarily representative of all care leavers' experiences.

The report is part of a wider project looking at local authority decision-making for children in care, children on the edge of care and care leavers in England. Our next report will look at sufficiency of accommodation for children in care and care leavers.