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Fife & Tayside
Wider Access Forum

Supporting Care Leavers into Higher Education

Conference Report

November 2007



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1. Background to the care-leavers project

The project to address the needs of young people leaving care to support their progression to tertiary education was launched in the autumn of 2006 following a successful bid for funding to the Fife & Tayside Wider Access Forum by a grouping of colleges, universities and local authorities within the region, led by the University of Abertay Dundee.

Scottish Executive guidance and legislation in the past five years have placed significant additional requirements on social work services to improve the support provided to young people as they move through care and into aftercare. Among the key principles for enhanced work in the area is that it should be multi-disciplinary and multi-agency. Progress has been made in this regard, not least the signing of a partnership agreement between Careers Scotland and social work services. However, the project team recognised that colleges and universities could take further pro-active steps to improve guidance to care leavers in response to the new challenges presented by the Executive.

The broader context for this proposal is the continuing minimal participation among care leavers in tertiary education. In a period of mass higher education, typically just 1% of care leavers progress to university. Factors associated directly with the experience of being in care, such as disruption through multiple placements and changes in school, correlate closely with lower educational attainment. Attendance at school is typically far lower than among the general population and rates of exclusion dramatically higher. Research has produced recommendations for how universities, social work services and others might work in partnership to address that low rate, including:

- A full discussion of post-16 plans including the option of continuing to higher education;
- Every student should have a named Personal Adviser for the duration of their course;
- All HEIs should have a comprehensive policy for recruitment, retention and support of students from a care background; and
- Admissions tutors and widening participation officers should be better informed about the care system.

The project brought together colleges, universities, social work services and other key partners in Fife and Tayside to stimulate the adaptation and adoption of national best practice to address those recommendations. However, it was recognised that the concerted partnership activities envisaged in the proposal would not address all those issues, but it would go some way to supporting care leavers and those working with them to alleviate them.

Overall, the project was intended to increase participation in higher education among care leavers, with the following objectives:

- To improve the guidance and support provided to care leavers.
- To improve the provision of information regarding higher education to care leavers' families, foster carers, professional workers and others.
- To improve universities' and colleges' policies and procedures regarding support for care leavers.

The project was intended in stage 1 to explore issues surrounding care leavers and current responses by agencies regional and in stage 2 to initiate additional and complementary activities in response to stage 1 outputs. The November 2006 conference formed the centrepiece of stage 1 of the project.

2. Background to the conference:

a. Organising team:

Implementation of stage 1 of the project was undertaken by a team including representation from:

- Local authority care leaver teams:**
 - o Dundee City Council.
 - o Fife Council.
 - o Perth & Kinross Council.
- Colleges:**
 - o Adam Smith College.
 - o (Dundee College has joined the team for stage 2.)
- Universities:**
 - o University of Abertay Dundee (lead partner).
 - o University of Dundee.
 - o University of St Andrews.

In addition, Ann Petrie (Transitions Co-ordinator) and latterly Sarah Morrison (Lift Off Co-ordinator) provided liaison with the Forum.

b. Development of programme:

The conference programme was intended to perform several tasks. First, it was to provide a general overview of the needs of care leavers today, support currently in place and the status of Scottish Executive interest in the topic. Secondly, it was to facilitate guided discussion on key aspects of the debate around care leavers' on-going support needs. Thirdly, it was to provide pointers for further action regionally that might be followed up during stage 2 of the project or that individual organisations might consider independently. Fourthly, it was to provide opportunities for networking to foster the development of links between agencies.

The conference enjoyed a keynote presentation from Gerri MacAndrew, chief executive of the Frank Buttle Trust, one of the leading organisations acting to raise awareness of the needs of care leavers and to improve the levels of support available to them. Her presentation established the status of the issue on the UK political stage and introduced the delegates to the main findings of recent research funded by the Trust on the experiences of care leavers entering higher education. The afternoon session started with recorded interviews with two young people – one currently in foster care and intending to apply to university, the other starting in her first graduate job and who had been in care for most of her childhood.

The bulk of the day was taken up with focused group discussions on key themes facilitated by members of the organising team, addressing problems in the morning before considering possible practical solutions to issues raised by a different group.

3. Conference discussions and outputs in brief:

a. Working together:

- To develop a network of colleagues across agencies, both for formal dissemination and routine collaboration / support.
- To improve communication between agencies to deliver personalised support, eg liaison between care leavers team and university admissions staff to meet additional information needs of care leavers in making career choices to support transitions.
- Recognition of the possible stigma of being in care and past experiences and provide opportunities for young people to make positive education career choices.
- Staff development programme, each sector contributing and benefiting in turn.

b. Providing greater support for young people in care - before and after leaving care:

- i. Locus of action on schools and carers (residential staff, foster carers) as partners in delivering key messages and actual support.
- ii. Need to assume a very low baseline of engagement in careers planning for young people with disrupted school careers and provide additional pathway support.
- iii. Identification of alternative progression routes and 'second chances' for young people coming from disrupted backgrounds.
- iv. Targeted events for young people and (foster, residential) carers.
- v. Use of role models / mentors / peer support.

c. Actions for individual agencies:

- i. Care leavers need to be made a greater priority by universities and colleges, with clear and communicated statements of support levels required.
- ii. Procedures for post-admission disclosure and follow-up required in colleges and universities, including named member of staff charged with co-ordinating responses.
- iii. Tertiary education sector needs to consider year-round accommodation options.

4. Outcomes of stage 1 of project:

- a. Wider range of agencies from across the region with a raised awareness / interest in issues surrounding care leavers' progression to post-compulsory education.
- b. Interest and enthusiasm generated among relevant agency staff to address issues and provide improved support to care leavers.
- c. Opportunity for networking among colleagues from across the range of relevant agencies to stimulate possible future co-operation.

5. Intentions for stage 2 of project:

The original project proposal approved by the forum suggested the following actions under stage 2 of the care-leavers project:

- a. Support materials: the development of materials to support the target group and those around them. Of special interest are the guides being published in March 2006 by the Who Cares? Trust, which could possibly be used with limited amendment. The project would make decisions on content and formats based on a range of good practice models developed elsewhere and original research undertaken principally through structured interviews and focus groups.
- b. Aspirational events: development of a programme of events targeted directly at the target group and those around them, including information and taster days.

In response to the outputs of the successful conference held under stage 1 of the project and the outcomes achieved to date from the project overall, the following actions are now proposed:

- a. Establishment of a networking group for professionals working across the range of relevant agencies with periodic events to draw people together.
- b. Development of awareness raising literature targeted principally at admissions and accommodation staff in universities and, to a lesser extent, colleges.

The organising team is also keen to respond not only to the outcomes of stage 1 of the project but to the recent report Looked after children & young people: we can and must do better (Scottish Executive, 2007) in pursuit of its stage 2 objectives. In particular, it recognises the following issues raised in the report:

- a. The importance of multi-agency / multi-sector collaboration, training and awareness-raising.
- b. The value of involving young people in care and care leavers in planning and delivering training.
- c. Contributing to work newly commissioned by the Executive to avoid duplication, eg the development of a national network and information website and the resource pack to be produced for care leavers progressing to tertiary education.
- d. The need for greater efforts on (among other factors):
 - The post-school transition.
 - Subject choice.
 - Making decisions that affect future career options.
 - Accommodation.
 - Possible contributions by colleges and universities to providing facilities highlighted as potentially beneficial but in short supply for care leavers, including positive out-of-school study environments

a. Characteristics of looked after children by local authority, 31st March 2006

Local authority area	Gender of looked after children: boys		Age of looked after children				Children known to be from ethnic minority groups		Children known to have a disability	
	Children under 5		Children 16 and over		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage						
Angus	138	55	64	25	23	9	7	3	7	3
Dundee City	264	56	110	23	42	9	8	2	34	7
Fife	334	53	132	21	54	9	16	3	0	0
Perth & Kinross	90	60	24	16	9	6	*	*	12	8
Scotland	7,220	56	2,361	18	1,599	12	239	2	1,357	11

Note: Table excludes children who are on a planned series of short term placements. Cells containing * represent small numbers that are suppressed to maintain confidentiality. 'Minority Ethnic Group' includes the ethnic groups Black-Caribbean, Black-African, Black-other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Mixed ethnicity, other ethnic group. Source: Table LA1, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/12/08105227/48>

b. Number of children looked after, by local authority, accommodation type and characteristics of care away from home, 31st March 2006

Local authority area	Accommodation type of all children looked after on 31st March 2006		Children in residential care				Children looked after away from home on 31st March 2006			
	Children in community setting		In placement for 1 year +		With 3+ placements		Total		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Angus	227	90	26	10	127	69	40	22	185	
Dundee City	427	90	47	10	222	72	118	38	307	
Fife	546	87	82	13	340	72	153	32	472	
Perth & Kinross	138	91	13	9	83	76	31	28	109	
Scotland	11,328	87	1,638	13	5,535	74	2,163	29	7,460	

Note: Cells containing * represent small numbers that are suppressed to maintain confidentiality. Source: Table LA1, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/12/08105227/48>

c. Number of care leavers beyond minimum school leaving age with at least one qualification at SCQF level 3 or above, 2005-06

Local authority area	leavers from care at home		leavers from care away from home		Percentage with at least 1 qualification at SCQF level 3 or above		Change in percentage points since 2004-05			
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Looked after at home	Looked after away from home	Looked after at home	Looked after away from home	Total	Total
Angus	6	6	8	0	63	36	-13	-4	-5	
Dundee City	37	37	26	41	73	54	6	45	21	
Fife	28	28	47	57	64	61	3	34	25	
Perth & Kinross	10	10	10	50	70	60	36	37	40	
SCOTLAND	705	705	562	45	57	50	7	2	4	

Note: Cells containing * represent small numbers that are suppressed to maintain confidentiality. Source: Table LA1, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/12/08105227/48>

d. Number of care leavers beyond minimum school leaving age with qualifications in maths and English, 2005-06

Local authority area	Percentage with maths and English at SCQF level 3 or above		Change in percentage points since 2004-05	
	Looked after at home	Looked after away from home	Looked after at home	Looked after away from home
Angus	0	63	-13	29
Dundee City	30	50	7	29
Fife	32	45	-4	21
Perth & Kinross	30	40	16	23
SCOTLAND	28	41	5	3

Note: Cells containing * represent small numbers that are suppressed to maintain confidentiality. Source: Table LA1, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/12/08105227/48>

e. **S4 Attainment, by education authority** (for comparison with table c) Attainment by the end of S4 is calculated as a percentage of the S4 year group of that same year

Education Authority	Percentage of the S4 year group achieving:							
	2005/06		2003/04		2004/05		2005/06	
	English and Maths at SCQF level 3 (e.g. Standard Grade Foundation) or better		5+ Awards at SCQF level 3 (e.g. Standard Grade Foundation or better)		2004/05		2005/06	
Angus	1,416	92	92	88	91	91	89	
Dundee City	1,686	83	84	86	81	81	82	
Fife	4,327	91	90	91	91	90	91	
Perth & Kinross	1,576	91	89	89	90	90	90	
SCOTLAND	61,190	91	90	91	91	90	91	

Note: 2006 figures are pre-appeal. In past years, the post-appeal figures are generally no more than one percentage point higher than the equivalent pre-appeal figure.
Source: Table LA1, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/14140034/14>

f. **Percentage of care leavers beyond minimum school leaving age with a pathway plan and a pathway co-ordinator**

Local authority area	Care leavers	% with a pathway plan	% with a pathway co-ordinator
Angus	14	100	100
Dundee City	63	35	63
Fife	75	25	72
Perth & Kinross	26	73	73
SCOTLAND	1,393	52	60

Cells containing * represent small numbers that are suppressed to maintain confidentiality.
Source: Table LA1, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/12/08105227/48>

g. **Young people entitled to aftercare, percentage in touch with social services and in employment, education or training, 2005-06**

Local authority area	People entitled to aftercare support	% still in touch with social services	In employment, education or training	
			As % of those with known economic activity	As % of all entitled to aftercare support
Angus	29	100	32	31
Dundee City	84	100	27	27
Fife	226	45	35	16
Perth & Kinross	83	86	43	35
SCOTLAND	2,828	85	37	23

Cells containing * represent small numbers that are suppressed to maintain confidentiality.
Source: Table LA1, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/12/08105227/48>

Appendix 2: full conference write-up

Challenge:	Issues:	Responses:
Liaison between sectors and professionals:	Who to contact with a question? How can institutional policy aid the provision of support to care leavers? How can we assess care leavers' needs – generically and individually?	A directory of contacts, including: - details of the range of sectors; - roles typically found in each sector / department; - key individuals. Whatever approach is taken, it needs to be flexible enough to cope with routine organisational / sector restructuring and staff turnover. Requires clarity and implementation in consultation / co-ordination with relevant partner agencies and other stakeholders. Work required to identify needs clearly and for co-ordination between partner agencies to ensure continuity of provision / support / recognition of needs.
How to deal with the challenges/problems facing agencies	- Procedural – accommodation age limits, funding availability, identification of additional needs, records systems, stretched resources. - Working with other agencies – variability of services within and across sectors / regions, difficult / non-existent communications, planning across agencies, planned transfers and follow-ups, mutual support with a common purpose. - Different agendas – eg value placed on education / levels of direct support. - Identifying care leavers when not previously identified – eg on application / entry.	- Focus on schools as vehicle / location for targeting young people capable of / planning progression to college / university - Co-ordinated planned hand-over, including follow-up post 16/18 - Personalisation of support offered across transitions - Gaps need to be identified - Colleges / universities need to prepare for post-entry disclosure and need to provide clear information on the implications of disclosure – what will / will not happen - Identifying additional support that is useful / appropriate / sustainable and communicating what is available across agencies and to young people - Additional educational support where required while still at school

How to support the transition from the structure of life in care living to greater freedom, flexibility and responsibility of independent living?	- Pathway support / personal development planning. - Positive / aspirational role models. - Building on past experiences and successes to recognise skills in different areas and how they might be transferable. - Provision of clearly identified safety-nets. - Support to identify and work through the range of choices available. - Recognition of past experiences and presentation of opportunities to 'break the cycle' / leave things behind, such as: o Possible stigma of past o Assistance required to address poor school experiences / poor qualifications. o Possible stigma of past o Lack of social / practical skills. o Fear of rejection – eg at interviews. o Lack of family support. o Lack of resilience - Logistics of applying for courses / jobs. - Need for a 'champion' / supporter.	- Improved lines of communication at and between every level. - Clear financial policy (local authorities). - Look at how carers can become a 'home base'. - Start preparation for independent living earlier. - 'Active' support in school. - Access to courses – need to consider more than previous qualifications as entry criteria. - Careers staff need to be better aware of the impact they can have on care leavers. - Peer-group mentoring / buddying. - Provision of fresh-start activities. - Need to stop 'interrupting' school education for things like appointments, contact time, panels, reviews. - Need to know the range of mainstream and alternative sources of support. - Better links between social work departments and colleges / universities with expected levels of co-operation across services and a protocol to establish service levels / expectations. - More investment in the corporate parent approach. - Better preparation for care leavers for interviews. - Need to know what alternative sources of support might be available and how to access them.
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<p>How to support young people in care to persist and succeed in compulsory education and beyond?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lower awareness of opportunities. - Lower motivation / aspirations. - Inadequate links between education, social work, care providers, voluntary organisations. - Lack of knowledge / inaccessibility for funding and financial support. - No co-ordinated transition support at any level. - No awareness that college can be accessed at any age. - 'Red tape' of admissions procedures. - Overwhelming information on entry to course. - (Generally negative) perception of college / university as 'just like school'. - Difficulty for education institution in identifying care leavers. - Broken schooling can lead to lower literacy, numeracy, emotional / maturity levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sufficient flexibility in system to address individuals' needs. - 'One stop shop' collection of voluntary agencies, housing, benefits, learning providers, care providers, etc – possibly online, such as a virtual forum. - Named contact in each local authority to oversee each case. - CPD for guidance staff. - Use of current students who have been through care as role models. - 'Post-School Practitioners Forum' – possibly linked to local authorities' NEET strategies.
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<p>How colleges and universities can work more closely with relevant partners?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inadequate communications from admissions / student support / widening participation teams. - No named contacts in colleges / universities / aftercare teams. - Lack of incentives for aftercare teams / foster carers / etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drawing up a schedule of routine communications and target audiences, eg open day dates to aftercare teams. - Adapting and targeting current student shadowing / mentoring schemes for care leavers. - Named contact within family placement / aftercare teams who can deal with educational issues as they arise. - Named contacts within college / universities. - Roles for Careers Scotland / Foster Carers Association / etc. - Workshops for aftercare teams / foster carers / others on support available in colleges / universities. - Workshops for guidance staff at range of level. - Workshops on building motivation / confidence in care leavers, involving young people, care leavers, care leavers in tertiary education. - Preparatory meetings for aftercare workers / foster carers before advising care leaver. - Collaboration between social work departments / colleges / universities to tackle post-18 accommodation problems.
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<p>How to address the difficulties young people in care can face in compulsory education?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of flexibility in curriculum. - Lack of assessment of needs. - Transfers between accommodation, schools. - Lack of individuals' self-esteem, confidence. - Stigma of being in care. - Emotional stability / maturity and impact on learning / being able cope with mainstream education. - Lack of key relationships in schools. - Transferring information about young people between organisations / sectors. - Different focuses of different sectors – social workers, teachers, educational psychologists, residential, foster carers, etc – can lead to problems being overlooked. - Limited educational attainment at school. - Difficult peer relationships. - Differences between local authorities make transfers problematic. - Lack of resources for foster carers. - Breaking negative cycles (eg family, peers). - Young peoples' fear of failure. - Keeping young people engaged / motivated between 16 and 18. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate support for carers and young people to maintain their placement. - Professionalisation of fostering serviced. - Mentoring projects, possibly bringing together schools, colleges and universities. - Identification of role models. - Range of supported accommodation on offer. - Greater consistency between local authorities' / colleges / universities policies and procedures. - Role of designated contact teacher in school extended into college / university to support transition. - Named contacts in each team / institution.
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<p>How to tackle practical problems facing care leavers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where to get information? - Gaps in education - Aftercare priorities including accommodation - Lack of self-belief - Difficulty accessing resources - Career planning - Different financial packages - Inclusion - Placements - Relationships - Expectations - Varying levels of support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Closer working relationships between sectors / agencies - More joint training days across agencies - More effective action planning - Early intervention packages targeting young people before 16 needing greater assistance - Greater support for primary / secondary school teachers to build their general understanding and to help them deal with specific cases during the school day - Support for foster carers to acquire skills and understanding to assist the children in their care more fully - Action to reduce the incidence of multiple placements - 'Passport' of information similar to medical records to accompany children moving between placements - Greater targeting to engage young people in care in wider access / aspiration-raising activities
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Appendix 3: participating agencies and individuals

- Aberlour Child Care Trust
- Adam Smith College
- Angus College
- Angus Council
- Apex Scotland
- Careers Scotland
- Dundee City Council
- Dundee College
- Elmwood College
- Fife & Tayside Wider Access Forum
- Fife Council
- Fife Education Service
- Fife Foster Carers Association
- Foster Carer
- Includem
- Kick It Kick Off
- Kirkland High School
- Lauder College
- NCH Cowan Grove
- Off-site Education
- Perth & Kinross Council
- Quarriers
- Scottish Funding Council
- SWAP-East
- The Frank Buttle Trust
- The Inclusion Group
- University of Abertay Dundee
- University of Dundee
- University of St Andrews
- Volunteer Centre Angus
- Who Cares? Scotland
- Plus individual foster carers

Appendix 4: conference programme

Outline Programme:

9.30 – 10:00: **Registration**

10.00 – 10.05: **Welcome** – Keith Mackle

Chair of the Transitions group,
Fife & Tayside Wider Access Forum.

10.05 – 10.30: **Scene setting**

Standards of support for care leavers, a UK perspective
Gerri McAndrew, Chief Executive, The Frank Buttle Trust.

10.35 – 11.00: **Ice breaker**

11.05 – 11.30: **Coffee**

11.35 – 12.25: **Workshop 1:** Identifying problems

12.30 – 1.30: **Lunch**

1.35 – 1.55: **Care leavers' experiences**

A DVD presentation.

2.00 – 2.50: **Workshop 2:**

Identifying possible practical solutions.

3.00 – 3.15: **Feedback on the workshops from the facilitators:**

Key problems raised in workshop 1;
Possible solutions considered in workshop 2.

3.15 – 3.25: **Review of the day** – Margaret Dundas

National Co-ordinator for Widening Participation.
Scottish Funding Council.

3.25 – 3.30: **Closing remarks** – what happens next?

Appendix 5: Conference evaluation (summary)

Presentations	Icebreaker	Workshop 1	Workshop 2
4	3	4	4
Closing Sessions	Overall	Planning	Value
4	4	4	4

All categories scored from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good)

Presentations:

Very useful and positive in terms of content.
Gerri McAndrew's summaries of findings were particularly helpful.
Related specifically to England. Scottish stats / perspective would have been useful.
Left no time for networking at coffee. However, good to hear about Frank Buttle Trust.

Icebreaker:

Better questions and more light-hearted than usual.
Better than at first expected.
A delegate list would have enabled us to identify / seek out contacts.
Too much time taken with a topic that was not useful / helpful.
A bit contrived but it did get us talking. A chat about our roles / agencies may have been more useful.

Workshop 1:

Good to be involved in own workshop then hear of others in the afternoon.
Good not having the 'stress' of who's talking / who's reading out.
Good to hear different perspectives. However, too much time for workshops and not enough for feedback. Feedback from 7 groups was a bit heavy.
Interesting discussions in both workshops – important issues raised. Looking forward to seeing the progress which results from this.
The group was a good size, not too big.

Workshop 2:

As many solutions as questions.
Gave opportunity to respond to issues raised positively.
Good to hear the similarities across the groups in feedback.
Will be interesting to see the feedback typed up and see what we can eventually change.
Able to think of appropriate solutions that we could take away to our workplaces.
A lot of repetition in feedback – may have been better for each group to identify anything new.
Good sense of collective working to begin to identify practical solutions.

Closing sessions:

Momentum needs to continue.
But we need to make sure we do something.
Good. Hope there will be a follow up.
The notes will be helpful as I won't remember everything that was said.
Motivating. Would use information in the future.
Very useful. The first time I have been at a conference where the workshop notes will be typed up and forwarded.

Overall:

Excellent day. I have learned lots.
Always have done this. Now know others are helping in their roles to do this too.
Make info of local resources required in order to maintain the momentum.
The network should continue to develop,
My role is to identify needs for all. However, I will not be more tuned in to the needs of care leavers.
Not sure I have learned anything more or new.
Lots of encouraging ideas and work to consider.

Planning:

Well planned event. Nice mix of formal and informal.

Venue:

Too cold in room (repeated comment.)

Any other comments:

Very worthwhile. Hopefully action can follow from some good ideas.
Good valuable and positive day.
A PA system would have helped.
Disappointing the DVD didn't work visually. But good to hear it.