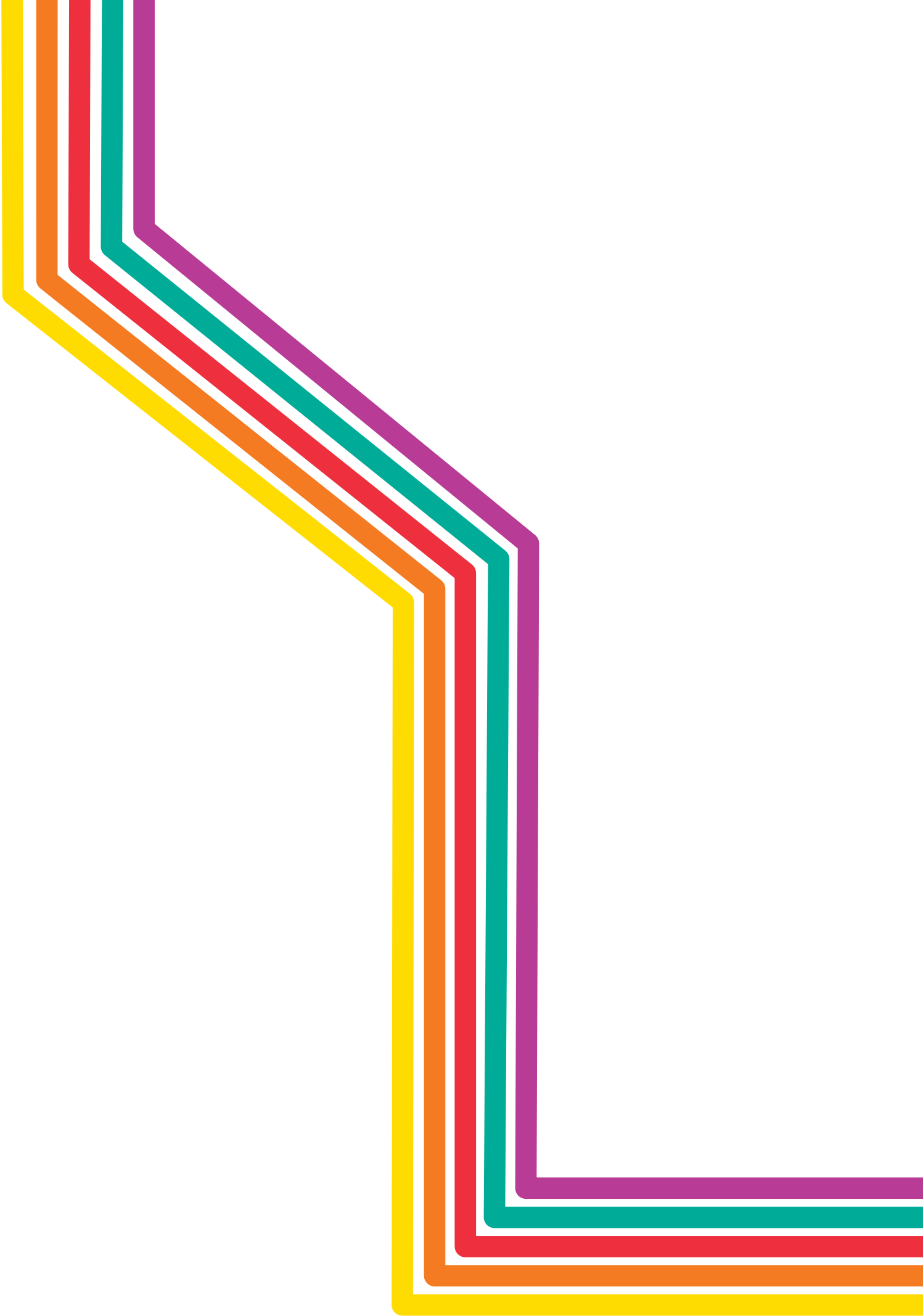




# Staying Put

**18+ Family Placement Programme  
(Peer Research Report)**

**written by the National Care Advisory Service**



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This summary report was written by NCAS.

## Main Report

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# Foreword

**Over the past 18 months I have had the pleasure of working on the staying put evaluation with 12 young people who have been instrumental in ensuring the successful completion of the study. Trained as peer researchers, they have all been engaged in key stages of the research cycle, including the design of research tools, conducting interviews, analysing data and identifying the key findings. The peer researchers were also responsible for the design of the report and approving its content. The final version is a testament to their hard work, skill and commitment.**

I am delighted to present this publication, which offers a rich insight into the realities of living in foster care and how this and childhood experiences can shape young people's opportunities and how they fare as they make the journey from care to independence. The key findings identified by the peer researchers provide valuable messages to inform policy and practice developments to maximise the life chances of young people making the transition from care to adulthood.

**Emily R. Munro**

Assistant Director, Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University

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# Introduction

## **The Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement**

**Programme offers young people in foster care the opportunity to remain with their carers until they reach 21, so that they can maintain and develop their existing relationships and be supported to make a gradual move to independence at their own pace. It aims to support transitions that are similar to those experienced by young people in the general population. The pilot is also intended to provide support and stability for young people to help them achieve in education, employment or training (EET). It is important to acknowledge that young people in residential care are not able to stay put and in most pilot areas young people have to be in or demonstrate a commitment to being in EET to be allowed to remain with their foster carers.**

Eleven local authorities participated in the evaluation, including: Bristol, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Dorset, Lincolnshire, Merton, North Tyneside, North Yorkshire, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and York. Eight of these authorities required young people to remain in their current foster placements, living with carers they had an established relationship ('pure familial' model) with. Three authorities adopted a more flexible approach, known as the 'hybrid' model, whereby the requirement to remain with current carers was removed.

This summary report reflects the views and experiences of young people from six pilot authorities (five operating the 'pure familial' model and one operating the 'hybrid' model). With the exception of the peer researcher case study, this report has been written by the National Care Advisory Service based on work by the peer researchers, who reviewed and analysed the interview data they had collected and identified key messages from young people. The peer researchers were also instrumental in developing the ideas behind the design of this report.



# Methodology

**The aims of the evaluation were to explore the role and contribution that staying put can make to promoting positive outcomes for young people, including:**

- Remaining in employment, education or training;
- Nurturing attachments to significant 'parental' figures; and
- Making the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way just like other young people who can rely on their own families for this support.

Interviews were undertaken with young people (including those who stayed put and those who did not), foster carers and leaving care personal advisers (LCPA). Quantitative data from management information systems was also obtained as well as financial information. This report is based solely on interviews with young people. To read the full findings of the evaluation please read the main report (Munro *et al.*, 2012).

The purpose of the interviews with young people was to find out what informed their decisions about whether to stay put or move to independence and their subsequent experiences. Those that stayed put were asked how they had benefitted, how their relationship with their foster carers had changed over time and about their experience of moving to independence if they had since moved on from their staying put placement. Those who had not stayed put were asked about their transition to independence and

experiences of living independently as well as the effectiveness of support from their leaving care team and former foster carers.

Interviews were carried out by peer researchers (care experienced young people who have been trained in research methods). Twelve care leavers from six local authorities were identified as peer researchers. They attended a series of events at Loughborough University where they helped design interview topic guides and related materials, and received training in how to conduct interviews and analyse findings. A key component of the training involved covering key areas such as informed consent, data protection, child protection and dealing with disclosures. They also oversaw the design and contributed to the write up of this peer research report.

A total of 32 interviews were undertaken. Twenty one interviews were conducted with young people who had stayed put or stayed put and then moved to independence and 11 were undertaken with young people who had not stayed put. Interviews took between 60 and 90 minutes and peer researchers did not interview young people from their own local authority.

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed the peer researchers undertook thematic analysis; highlighting what they thought were the key themes and messages. The names of the participants in this study have been changed to protect their identities.



## Case study of a peer researcher

**My name is Jade, I am 22 years old and worked as a peer researcher on the staying put evaluation which saw me working with a small team of other peer researchers to track and record the progress of the pilot. I met with the other peer researchers on three occasions to undertake training in interview techniques and analysis (which was provided by staff at Loughborough University and the National Care Advisory Service), develop interview guides and draw out findings to put into a report.**

After completing training all peer researchers were provided with an interview script based on the questions we suggested. The script guided us through a face-to-face interview. Two peer researchers from each local authority interviewed, on average, six young people from another authority, including those who had stayed put and those who had not.

Following the completion of all interviews, the team headed back to Loughborough for an evaluative meeting in which the findings of the interviews were assessed. These findings consequently influenced the topics included in this report.

In order to present these findings, the team worked with a designer to create an eye catching design for the report which would provide information on the research to other young people as a means of raising awareness, interest and support for the scheme.

# Decision to stay put or move to independence

One of the aims of the interviews was to explore the reasons why young people decided to stay put or leave and if they were involved in the decision about if and when they moved. What was apparent for many (14 out of 21) who stayed put was that they had strong existing attachments to their carers and felt part of the family and that the placement actually felt like home.

The interviews revealed that for those young people who did stay put they were happy with the decision as it allowed them the chance to stay in an established placement and build upon their existing relationships with their carer.

***“We had a really good relationship, and my foster mum she was, talked, like, straight and told me how it is and... like that so I felt really comfortable and accepted into the family and... I was really settled there. It was nice because it was a big family as well so there was always people around.”***

(Kate, stayed put).

***“Well, they’re like a normal family to me. Yeah, you know, you have your ups and your downs, but they’re more family than my real family. I have a good relationship [with them].”***

(Catherine, stayed put).

Of the 15 that were staying put and in education, eight highlighted that remaining with their carers beyond the age of 18 had enabled them to continue with their education. Others revealed that it allowed them more time to prepare for independence and be in control of their transition. There did appear to be a level of anxiety or concern from some young people who felt that they would not have been able to cope with living on their own at 18, if they had been forced to do so.

***“I was really chuffed ’cos at 18, to know that, if that [staying put] wasn’t there, I’d be living out on my own – I would have had an emotional breakdown, I really would, ’cos I love the family environment.”***

(Michelle, stayed put).

***“Because I’ve been able to stay put, by the time I move on it will be more of a choice that I’ve made because I know I’m ready, rather than being forced to, which I wasn’t ready to do at 18. It’s made a massive difference in the sense that I know that when I do move out I will be able to cope.”***

(Layla, stayed put).

***“I think it [staying put] made a hell of a difference. It was, yeah, it was really good, purely because it doesn’t throw you in at the deep end, and it’s sort of like a sort of approach to being an adult. It was good.”***

(Tim, stayed put).

Five young people made the decision to move to independence rather than stay put because they felt that they were ready or that it was the right time to move on. Two young people were also expecting their first child so there were additional reasons for wanting to move on from care.

***“I feel it was the right decision and the best one that I could have made.”***

(Amanda, did not stay put).

***“I thought it was time to move on... because I was about 18 then. Yeah, 18. I just felt like I wanted to be more independent and just kind of... kind of be more independent, like start dealing with money and kind of paying my bills.”***

(Kristen, did not stay put).

However, for one young woman although she wanted to move the actual reality of moving to independence and managing her money proved quite daunting.

***“When I was in foster care and that I was really relaxed and didn’t feel like I had to worry about anything whereas now everything’s a worry. Money’s a worry and... everything’s just worrying.”***

(Emma, did not stay put).

One young man decided to move out of his placement out of necessity rather because he wanted to do.

***“[I] just could not be bothered to do three hours of travelling a day, and I wanted to move out – well, I didn’t want to move out from my foster carers but I wanted to get closer to college.”***

(Greg, did not stay put).

What was clear for this group of young people who chose not to stay put was that overall they were happy with the decision that they made. They felt in control of the decision.

Four young people were not able to stay put because their carers were unwilling or unable to continue their placement for longer. All would have preferred to have remained in a family placement post 18 years of age.

***“I got told when I was 18 I had to move out of my foster placement.”***

(Michael, did not stay put).

There was also evidence to suggest that one of these young people was not involved in the decision making process.

***“It wasn’t like I was [involved in] discussing it. It was like a one way thing.”***

(Christian, did not stay put).

There was also an example of one young man wanting to stay put, but unable to because his local authority would not fund the placement. Staying put was introduced a month later which meant the young man missed out on the opportunity to remain in his foster placement for longer.

***“I turned 18, so I had to move. Like, it was, like, a month afterwards or something, they brought in, you could stay with your carer for a bit longer if they would still have you there, sort of thing, but I wasn’t eligible for that because I turned 18 in June and it wasn’t coming into practice ‘til July... So I was just in that, like, stupid bit between... otherwise I would have stayed.”***

(Robert, did not stay put).

It was evident that those who were not given the option of staying put did not feel they were ready to move to independence and wished they had in fact been given the chance to remain in care beyond 18 years of age.

***“I wasn’t ready to move on.”***

(Christian, did not stay put).

***“I would have preferred it if I, like, just stayed there, sort of thing, ‘cos then, like, I could have got sorted, got a job and everything and whatever, and then, like, moved out when I was ready to, sort of thing, rather than, like, ‘Oh, you’re 18, go away,’ sort of thing.”***

(Robert, did not stay put).

The decision to stay put or move to independence did not always rest with the young person and it appeared more difficult if the young person was told they had to leave when they clearly wanted to stay. This group of young people were more vociferous about displaying their disagreement with the decision and more likely to express their dissatisfaction with their move to independence. It was clear from the interviews, however, that for young people who had existing relationships with carers the decision to stay put had a positive impact.

The peer researchers strongly believed that young people should not have to move out of their foster placement just because they are not in education, employment or training. They believed that these young people need to stay put as they need a stable environment to gain some focus and feel more prepared before moving on.

# Young people's experiences of staying put

Staying put was a positive experience for young people as they were able to remain in familiar placements with carers who they had built strong relationships with over time.

***"I've been there so long, like 16 years really, like, same people, and, like, if you've grown up with them, I kind of, they're like my mum and dad."*** (Alex).

It also helped some young people to continue with their education.

***"Yeah...it's done what it needs to do. It's allowed me to stay at home, erm... and while I do my degree, 'cos I know I wouldn't be able to afford to live on my own just yet."*** (Catherine).

Eight young people indicated that the continuation of their placement resulted in very few changes with many carrying on as normal. Most reported that they were given more responsibility, allowed more freedom and given a greater degree of independence and trust as befitting a young adult.

***"There weren't really that many changes, if I'm honest, things just stayed the same."*** (Helen).

***"I have that little bit more responsibility now that I'm 18."*** (Michelle).

In an isolated case one young man felt that staying put had not resulted in greater freedom or independence and wanted his carers to relax the parental reigns.

***"I think sometimes they don't realise that I'm 20. Still think, because they are foster carers, they still think that I'm a kid and they have to look out for me, whereas they don't really, because they don't realise that obviously I'm big enough to look after myself now, that sort of thing."*** (Warren).

The potential risk is that young people remain in placements with over protective carers, which could mean they are not properly prepared for adulthood when the time comes to leave their placement.

At least three young people reported that they were not given house keys until they turned 18. The peer researchers felt strongly that young people should be

allowed house keys at an earlier age. This issue was also raised during the evaluation of the Right2BCared4 initiative (see Edwards, 2011).

Young people were asked to contribute to the upkeep of their placement, by paying some money towards rent. The idea was that young people would learn about financial responsibilities and budgeting in preparation for when they leave their placement. The peer researchers felt that young people staying put should be made more aware of how staying put works financially and other available options. The findings from the interviews revealed that seven out of 21 young people found it quite difficult to contribute towards their rent and other household bills.

***"I had to start paying rent...when I was only working part-time it was really hard."*** (Warren).

***"Most weeks I was paying 55 quid a week, so it worked out a lot more money than I expected. That just put me off the idea of it altogether, to be honest. Because I was paying most weeks 55 quid, and then in most places, like flats and stuff, you can pay 56 quid rent a week and you can have a whole flat."*** (Kate).

***"It is more of a struggle because you've got to watch what you spend; got to make sure you've got the money in your bank to save."*** (Charlotte).

Two young people were able to supplement their income and save money through having a part time job, for one young person this made managing their money slightly easier as they had struggled initially with budgeting.

The interviews highlighted that the transition from a foster placement to a staying put placement was often smooth and without incident. Young people overall highlighted that there were few differences, although some had been given greater freedom and more responsibilities. What was also evident was that the preparation for independent living had started in the majority of the placements.

**“Okay, what do I like about carers, well, I suppose it’s the trust and the support and love that they give. And they do actually see us as their own children.... I would say it’s just like a normal relationship... suppose it’s like having a family relationship with your mum or your dad, it’s the same”**

(Catherine, stayed put and currently at university).



# Young people's relationships and support networks

The interviews clearly showed that young people valued their relationships, including support from their foster carers, leaving care personal adviser (LCPA), family and friends. However, there were differences between those who stayed put and those that did not as to who they would turn to for advice and support. The young people who did stay put were more likely to turn to their foster carers for advice and support.

*"I think I've got a perfect relationship with them: it's like my own mum and dad now, like they are my family now."* (Elizabeth, stayed put).

*"They're [carers] extremely good, they're next to, you know, basically are my parents, you know, we are very close."*

(Amy, stayed put).

Six (55%) out of the 11 that did not stay put chose not to stay in contact with their former carers. The remaining five (45%) maintained their relationships with their previous carers.

*"I went there [previous foster carer's] last Christmas; I went to stay with her before Christmas. And she had a present for me as well. That was funny because ... it was just funny that she remembered, you know, to buy me a present, it was good."*

(Kristen, did not stay put).

It was evident that those who stayed put had a wider network of support than those who did not and could turn to foster carers, friends, birth family and others. Those that stayed put were also more likely to reveal that they had a close relationship with their LCPA and would turn to them for support, than those who did not. Young people turned to

their LCPA for a range of reasons, including emotional and practical support.

*"I have a really good relationship with my leaving care worker...I can talk to her about anything that's bothering me."*

(Amanda, did not stay put).

*"[My LCPA supports me] If I get problems through the post, I need anything filling out, or I need to ask questions, like... if I need to ask questions about, like, different forms that I've to fill out for my benefit, stuff like that. Like college applications forms, stuff like that, she can help me out with them."*

(Alex, stayed put).

Young people emphasised the importance of relationships in the interviews and this is also endorsed by previous studies (Edwards 2011; WMTD/Rainer and NCB, 2007; Munro et al., 2011). Young people that stayed put often had stronger relationships with their carers and a wider network of support. This was also true for five young people who did not stay put, but it was clear that for six of the young people in this group they were more reliant on their local authority, friends or birth family for support.

The peer researchers believe that relationships formed between the young person and their foster family should not stop once the young person has moved to independence. The relationships should, where possible, be continued and maintained and there should be an arrangement whereby the young person can return to their previous placement for an evening meal or a cup of tea.



**“My first foster carer... she’s like a mum, she treats me like a daughter still. We go out, we have meals and stuff like that and everything’s really good.”**

(Emma, did not stay put and about to enter employment).



**“Since I was about 15 or 16, like, I’ve always done my own washing and things like that and ironing, but as soon as I turned 18 I started doing my own cooking and buying my own food as well.”**

(Warren, stayed put and in employment).



# Pathway planning and preparation for independence

Moving from any placement should be planned and young people should be properly prepared and supported. Pathway planning should prepare a young person before they move into independence and identify any ongoing support they need. Peer researchers asked young people what they thought of pathway planning as well as exploring how prepared they were for independence.

It appeared that for young people staying put allowed them more time to prepare, not just practically but also emotionally for making the transition to adulthood and independence. All young people who were in a continuous staying put placement felt they were being prepared for the practical aspects of living independently and/or were receiving support from their carers in preparation of the transition. They gained, for example, budgeting and cooking skills:

***“I can cook for myself; I do my own washing every week; clean my own room... like, do you know what I mean? So it’s not like my Mum mother’s me, she’s just like, ‘Well, you know, you’re 21. If you can’t do your own washing now, then...’”*** (Layla, stayed put).

This contrasts with young people who did not stay put whose experiences were varied with four out of 11 (36%) young people feeling that they were not practically prepared for independence.

***“I was not taught how to do things properly... everything was just skimmed over.”*** (Emma, did not stay put).

Three of the young people who did not stay put and who received very little preparation, revealed that the experience made them stronger, as they had to mature quickly and develop the skills needed to live independently.

***“I’ve learned more since I’ve been living on my own, and like paying bills and stuff.”*** (Kristen, did not stay put).

Pathway planning is meant to be a tool to support and prepare young people for their futures but there were varied messages from both groups of young people about its effectiveness. In an isolated case it had to be explained by a peer researcher what a pathway plan was.

***“I don’t know if I ever saw it, but I presume I did. I must have had to have seen it.”*** (Kim, stayed put).

Eight young people (out of 32; 25% (five who had stayed put and three who had not)) felt pathway planning gave them a bit more time to focus on their education, future plans and prepare for independence rather than rushing into it.

***“It’s just, like, helping me to realise my dream, like, what I want in life and what I want to achieve.”*** (Helen, stayed put).

***“I think it’s helpful because it’s kind of like goals and aims and things, and it’s not kind of just, it’s not like all this is going to happen but it’s just a bit of a plan really, a bit of guideline to what would be helpful for later on in life.”*** (Kristen, did not stay put).

The remaining 24 (75%) did not deem the pathway plan to be particularly valuable.

***“Absolutely rubbish. I’m not going to lie, and they take so long to do, and you never even look at them again after they’ve been done. I don’t even know what mine says, to be honest.”*** (Ellie, stayed put).

The peer researchers believe that the pathway planning process needs overhauling. They suggested some workers suffer from ‘pathway plan syndrome’. That is, some workers are just concerned with completing the relevant sections of the plan because they are required to rather than in order to help the young person. Two of the interviewees confirmed that workers had completed their pathway plans.

***“To be honest, I haven’t really done that much on my pathway plan, my pathway worker’s completed it for me.”*** (Helen, stayed put).

It was not clear if this was because the young people did not want to be involved in preparing their pathway plan, but it does highlight that they were not actively involved in the process. Pathway planning is a process that should be done in partnership by the young person and their leaving care personal adviser. Overall what was evident was that young people had mixed opinions and experiences about the effectiveness of pathway planning.

# Transitions and young people's experience of leaving care and moving to independence

The Peer Researchers explored with young people their thoughts and experiences about leaving their foster placements and moving to independence.

Living independently was seen as having its advantages, particularly to those who chose not to stay put. These young people desired greater freedom and the opportunity to make their own decisions rather than having to abide by someone else's rules or be reliant on others.

***"The fact that now I'm on my own I'm happy. So the fact that I'm independent, I don't like to report to people. If I do something wrong, it's up to me to fix it, as where other people are involved I've got a lot more stress."***

(Mathew, did not stay put).

Experiences of moving to independence varied. Most had encountered some challenges upon leaving care. Those that had not stayed put were more likely to experience difficulties upon making the transition and it was the emotional and financial aspects that they found to be the most difficult part of making the transition to living on their own. Seven (64%) young people out of eleven reported that they had struggled financially once they left care compared to one (14%) young person out of seven who had stayed put and then moved to independence.

***"Financially it [moving to independence] knocked me back a little bit because all of a sudden I was paying my own rent and having to get my own food and stuff, but I was able to cope with it."***

(Amanda, did not stay put).

The emotional turmoil of leaving care and making the transition to adulthood was a common theme amongst those young people that did not stay put. Half (9, 50%) of those interviewed said that they found the move emotionally distressing at times. Eight were young people that had not stayed put.

***"It was hell [moving to independence]. Everything, I was just so scared of everything was... moving in by yourself is so scary, especially if you're a lass."***  
(Emma, did not stay put).

Only one young person that had stayed put and then moved to independence, reported that the transition to independence had impacted on her emotional wellbeing. This young woman felt ready to live independently, having remained with her carers until the age of 20, but found it difficult to adjust to adulthood, as she explained;

***Peer researcher: "Did you feel prepared emotionally for leaving home and living alone?"***

***Young person: "I thought I did, and then I had my breakdown. I did, I had to go to hospital and was put on antidepressants. They said it was all because I'd moved out so quick, but I felt, I felt that I was fine, but... and they do say maybe it's because this blanket's been taken away now, like, you're on your own from here, but I thought I was fine."***

(Kim, stayed put).

On the whole young people managed well with the practical aspects of living independently.

***"So I like cleaning and stuff, I've not got a problem with things like that. I just do it when it needs doing, and I kind of enjoy it actually and I just love cooking. I'm good at cooking now."***

(Kristen, did not stay put).

Despite the challenges of moving to independence most were making progress and continuing to develop their practical life skills.

***"I moved in with my partner nearly two year ago now. I'm engaged; we've just re-done the house and stuff like that, so... I'm doing really, really well at the moment."***

(Emma, did not stay put).

***“I’d say I’m doing great and I’m really proud of how well I’m doing. I don’t want to blow my own trumpet, but I’m not in any debt with anything and I keep all my washing and everything done up to date, like, it’s not building up or anything. Change my bed sheets... everything. I’m so dead grown up.”***

(Kim, stayed put for two years).

The majority now appeared settled in their new homes, were enjoying their independence and had gained confidence during their transition to early adulthood.

***“I just enjoy now being in my, my flat, ’cos it’s sort of just coming together really, it’s feeling more homely.”***

(Kristen, did not stay put).

**Peer researcher: “And how do you feel that you’re doing generally now that you’ve left care?”**

**Young person: “I like it, I like to have my own independence... and do stuff by myself.”**

(Kate, stayed put for seven months).

Sixteen young people were asked whether they would return to their previous foster placement if they were given the opportunity to do so. The majority said that they would not return to their former placement (11, 69%). Six of those that stayed put and then moved to independence answered this question and three (50%) said that they would not return to their previous carers, with the remaining three (50%) admitting that they might in the future. Indicating that they felt the door was open for them to return if they wished to do so, but that they were happy to continue to live independently at present. Those that had not stayed put were most likely to say that they would not return to their previous carers (eight out of ten, 80%).

***“I don’t think I would now, no, not after learning to live independently. It’d be a bit like taking one step forward and ten steps back”***

(Amanda, did not stay put).

However, a small number (two) of those that did not stay put and would not return now, admitted that immediately upon leaving they

probably would have returned to their carers if they had been given such an opportunity. The young people felt that the decision had been made and despite struggling at the beginning they had been able to get on with it and cope.

***“Well, when I first moved out and... and I thought, and I knew that I could move back in, I would have. But like now... now... it’s like, essentially, to move back in, I probably wouldn’t ’cos I’ve two years of being on my own now”***

(Christian, did not stay put).

One of the main reasons for wanting to return to a particular foster family is reflected below;

***“Everything was just perfect: you felt like it was a proper family and everything and everyone was close-knit and that, and you didn’t have nought to worry about”***

(Emma, did not stay put).

Two young people that did not stay put reported that they would return to care if it was possible to be placed with new foster carers as they would not wish to return to their former carers.

The interviews revealed that those who had stayed put temporarily but had since moved to independence felt more prepared for their transition and experienced fewer difficulties compared to those that had not stayed put. The main source of concern for young people was managing their finances and the emotional turmoil of leaving care and making the transition to adulthood.

# Young people's advice about preparing for independence

Young people were asked what advice they would give to other young people about staying put or moving to independence.

Ten interviewees responded that young people should stay put, reflecting that young people should continue to remain with their carers and only move when they feel ready and fully prepared.

***“I’d say stay put because it has just given me that much more support before I move out. Like, without that I really would have felt that I would have gone under; I think I would have crashed and burned.”***

(Michelle, stayed put).

***“Don’t leave staying put ‘til you know you’re ready.”***

(Layla, stayed put).

As well as highlighting that young people should stay put the interviewees were clear that young people should be prepared emotionally and financially and think things through before they move, as well making sure they have a good support network.

***“Make sure there’s lots of people supporting you: don’t do it by yourself.”***

(Emma, did not stay put).

What is important to note is that all young people, regardless of whether they stayed put or not, recognised the benefits of not moving too soon and felt that staying put was advantageous as it enabled young people to remain with their carers until they were ready, and prepared, to move on. It would appear that a planned and carefully thought through process where young people are prepared and supported is key to moving on successfully.



**“I’d say wait ‘til you’re at a place where you’re... ready in your head; you’ve maybe got a job or whatever; and you’re ready to support yourself – and also, if you get the opportunity to try independently living before you get to the age you have to leave care.”**

(Tim, stayed put and in employment).



# Case Studies

## Stayed put

Catherine is 19 years old and has been living with her foster carers for seven years. She is currently at university.

Catherine did not feel she was ready to leave her foster placement and move to independence and wanted to stay with her carers as she felt part of the family. There is mutual trust between Catherine and her carers. Her foster carers see her as their own daughter and she is supported to make her own choices as part of her development and preparation for independence. She is not reliant on support from her local authority and leaving care personal adviser due to her close relationship with her carers. Catherine feels she will have matured when she does eventually move on and knows the door will always be open for her to return if she should wish to do so.

## Did not stay put (carers' decision)

Christian is 21 and lived with his foster carers from the age of nine to 18. He is now living in semi independent accommodation after initially moving into a hostel upon leaving his foster placement.

Christian was very happy with his foster placement and referred to his carers as his mum and dad but the decision was made that he should leave his placement. He felt he was pushed into leaving and was not involved in any discussions about ending the placement. He was happy there and wished to stay and complete his education. Although Christian would not return there now he would have done if he had been offered the opportunity immediately after he left. He said moving from his foster placement was easy but he had struggled emotionally and financially initially; although he is now comfortable where he is. Christian is still in touch with his previous carers and often goes round there for dinner.

## Did not stay put (young person's decision)

Amanda is 20 years old and is currently living in shared accommodation having left her foster placement of three years. She is studying part time at college and is hoping to go onto university.

Amanda thought she was too young at 16 to live independently but decided at 17 that she was ready to do so as she wanted to be fully independent. She feels that she made the right decision to move, but she did acknowledge that to begin with she struggled emotionally and financially. Amanda had good support from her local authority and her leaving care personal adviser and thought that her pathway plan was really helpful when she was preparing to move on. She said she learnt how to cook, clean and do the laundry when she was in her foster placement but would have liked support in other areas such as coping emotionally, even though she does feel she is getting better at living on her own.

# Conclusion

**The evaluation revealed that for the majority of young people being able to stay put was a positive experience, even if it was for a short period of time. The additional time to complete a course of education or allowing more time to prepare prior to moving was greatly valued and many who had stayed put acknowledged that having this additional time had a significant impact. Staying put also allowed young people to maintain those relationships and attachments with their carers and continue to experience a more normative family life.**

There were young people who chose not to stay put and wanted to move on and live independently. It was clear from the interviews that many of these young people did not necessarily feel ready for independence but in the absence of good relationships with their foster carers they were inclined to leave. Like those who lacked the option of staying put they were not prepared for adulthood and experienced emotional and financial difficulties upon leaving care. The feelings of anxiety about coping emotionally and financially were not unique to young people who did not stay put; the vast majority of young people, staying put or not, expressed their anxiety and highlighted how challenging living independently was initially.

**“Stay put ‘til you feel secure and emotionally and financially ready to move. Don’t jump the gun. It may look nicer: the grass is not always greener on the other side, it’s really not ”**

(Tim, stayed put and in employment).

As in Right2BCared4 (Edwards 2011), the value of the pathway plan was varied. Some did not deem it a useful tool, however, others found it helpful. The peer researchers suggested that some leaving care workers suffer from ‘pathway planning syndrome’ and are more concerned with completing the paperwork than ensuring the process is useful to the young people concerned.

What is apparent from the interviews is that being able to choose, have options and be involved in the decision making process was important to young people. For young people who had stayed put the strength of the relationship with their carers and the experiences that were being provided ensured they could make an informed choice about their future. The pilots revealed distinct benefits and advantages to staying put, especially with regards to maintaining and strengthening the relationships between young people and their carers and continuation with education. However, to pave the way for a smoother transition, which all young people will have to make, it appears that having options, choices and being in control also makes a difference.



#### References:

Edwards, G. (2011) *Right2BCared4 Peer Research Summary Report*. London: Department for Education.

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### **Related documents**

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