

National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum

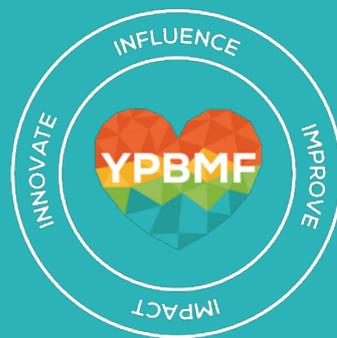
Annual Report



2023-2024



catch
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INTRODUCTION

What is the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF)?

A forum of 133 local authority leaving care teams across England.

Our Aim

To work together to share good practice and improve services and support for care experienced young people.

What is the Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF)?

The Young People's Benchmarking Forum is at the heart of everything we do, ensuring that the voices of care experienced young people are heard loud and clear in all of our events and activities as well as helping shape the decisions and priorities of the forum

NLCBF & Catch22

The Forum is run by the charity Catch22 and predominantly funded through membership fees from Local Authorities. The Forum has a steering group of 10 Local Authority representatives and a YPBMF representative who work closely with the staff team at Catch22 to shape the development of the Forum.

Our main areas of focus:

Membership

Our offer to member local authorities including access to events, workshops, networks and the NLCBF members website.

National Influence

Using our collective voice to influence influencing leaving care policy and practice.

Young People's Benchmarking Forum

Care experienced young people play a key role in shaping and delivering our membership offer and national influence work.

"Every time a member of our service attends an NLCBF event, they return invigorated & full of great ideas."

Leaving Care Manager

"I found the whole event a very valuable learning experience"

Personal Adviser

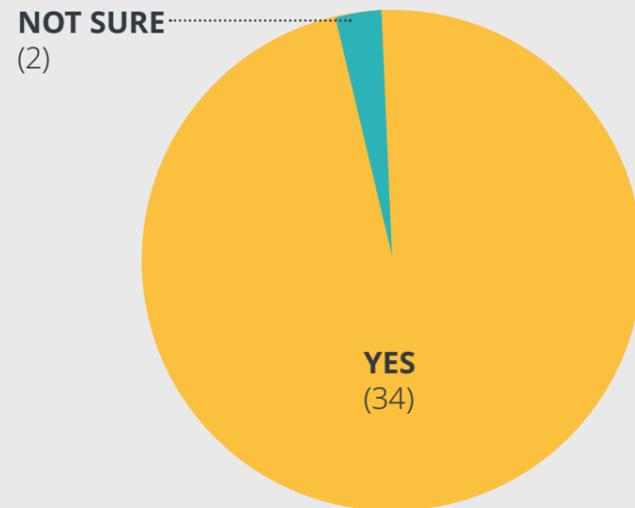
"It was really helpful for members to hear directly from young people with care experience about the priority issues for them and how councils can look to improve support, and we had great feedback from the session."

Megan Edwards, Policy Lead, Local Government Association.

Reece & Victoria take part in the APPG for Children

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

In the last year, has NLCBF membership impacted leaving care practice in your local area in a positive way?



NLCBF Members Survey, Nov 2023

Our continued offer for member local authorities...

- 9 hybrid events throughout the year focussing on sharing good practice & policy updates & raising the voice of care experienced young people:
 - 3 x Leaving Care Managers events
 - 3 x Practitioner Events
 - 3 x Young People's Benchmarking Forum events
- Annual PA of the Year Awards, recognising the contribution of PAs
- Online networks with a specialist focus: Education, Employment & Training; Participation & Care X Apprentice
- Local Offer Development Day Workshop
- Policy, practice & research updates via the NLCBF members website.

New for this year...

- 3 x Pathway planning workshops, hosted by local authorities
- Commissioned Dr Claire Baker to map the new care leaver judgement & shared key themes with members
- Peer Learning Group: Relational Practice & Care leavers facilitated, with resources developed to share.
- Illegal Migration Act Workshop to support local authorities supporting unaccompanied minors
- Launched the 'Mental Health & Care Leavers Community of Practice with Drive Forward Foundation.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Influencing at a local & national level

- **Local Government Association** – We have worked closely with them on their priority area of care leavers - members of YPBMF have presented to their Children & Young People's Board & at an LGA webinar.
- **Stable Homes Built on Love** – NLCBF fed into the final consultation, including sharing the views of 56 care experienced young people around Corporate Parenting. These views also fed into Become's APPG enquiry on Corporate Parenting.
- **Improving Employability Summit** hosted with DfE & Esmée Fairbairn. 266 attendees including 71 local authorities.
- **Ofsted** - YPBMF workshops on supported accommodation inspections.
- **PA's: Mental Health Training** – Hosted workshop for DfE to consult directly with Personal Advisers.
- **PA's: Workload** – Consulted for DfE with leaving care managers & Personal Advisers on the changing role of PAs & numbers of young people they support.
- **German Visitors** – Hosted a group of 7 people from Germany at NLCBF events and arranged for visits to LAs & leaving care projects.

Sharing what works...

Members of our Care Experienced Apprentice network has been invited to share their insights about how they would like to be supported, including providing a panel discussion at the launch of the 'Moving on Up' network which is working to increase the number of care experienced young people accessing apprenticeships:

"This session has been invaluable. I have made lots of notes for the legal sector. Thank you so much JJ and Toni for your time and practical advice about what helps." Launch Attendee.

"Thank you for an amazing piece of work & presentation on the key points."

Transformation Lead re. Ofsted Mapping resource workshop

YOUNG PEOPLE'S BENCHMARKING FORUM

Bigger...Better...Bolder

Over 2023-24 we saw a year of events and the national influence of YPBMF growing bigger with over 300 people attending our YPBMF events!

We are proud of our events and activities, the personal benefits that they bring to care experienced young people who attend, design and deliver and the impact that their voice and experience has on services.

It was a year of recognition for the great work we have done and continued to do.... In a year that NLCBF turned 20 years old, YPBMF was also celebrating 15 years in style with some key moments:

- Our largest ever National Care Leavers Week Celebration Event in Birmingham with over 130 people attending the event.
- We were joined by a very special guest HRH Princess Anne who gave a speech and presented the Local Hero Award.
- Our North & South events are also becoming really popular with over 200 people joining us in Brentford in May '23 & Manchester in Feb '24
- Our Champions & YPBMF Steering Group Rep continue to see their influence grow with invitations to speak at Ministerial Roundtables & APPG's.
- YPBMF on Tour visited local authorities for events & training including Staffordshire PA training, Derbyshire Care Leavers Hub opening, Greater Manchester Care Leavers Awards & Carefree Cornwall's Care Leaver week Event.

New Champions & Legends Model

In 2023 we explored and re-designed our volunteering model known as YPBMF Champions. Working with the experience of years of YPBMF Champions we decided to make some changes and here's what we achieved:

- Found YPBMF Representatives from every area of England and Northern Ireland – achieved 10 of 11 regions
- Established a new induction and monthly meetings
- Established a new alumni group called YPBMF Legends

"It's a sense of community and family. Also knowing that the young people and professionals see us as 'experts by experience' which are continuing the drive to improve the experiences of care leavers."

YPBMF Champion



YPBMF: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Inspirational Messages

In Their Own Words Event - Over 300 people attended the event including Councillors & representatives from Youth Justice Board, DfE & DLUCH, voluntary sector, supported accommodation, NHS, HMPPS & research organisations.

The event was live streamed from our Leeds Managers event. Champions Rylee & Leigh, Sessional Workers Billie Jo & Victoria were joined by young people from Barnardo's & Carefree Cornwall to deliver key messages & key asks of the audience in 5 areas:

1. Support for separated minors
2. Free bus travel
3. Cost-of-living crisis,
4. Care leavers hubs
5. Care experience as a protected characteristic.

Ongoing Influence

Our guests were impressed on the day:

"I always have something to say about the world of our care experienced and care leavers. It still feels like a postcode lottery, what you get is based on where they live... To sum up, everything I have heard today, I will be taking back to parliament and government."

– Mark Riddell MBE, National Adviser, DfE

Since the event we have been hearing about continued impact such as the setting up of Care Leavers Hubs in Staffordshire, Warrington, Wigan & Leeds. YPBMF has been invited to share these messages through the year including at a Roundtable with Minister Johnny Mercer & David Johnston.



POSITIVITREES

Growing aspirations for Care Leavers

In 2023 to mark 20 years of the Forum, we launched the "Positivitree" Project. We asked our local authority members to plant a tree symbolising:

1. Their commitment to seeing care experienced young people grow and thrive.
2. A commitment to growing their local offer to care experienced young people

The most important part – other than the tree – was a conversation about what the current Local offer looked like and how young people and local authorities wanted it to grow in the coming months and years!

10 in the ground...120 to go!!

In the first 6 months since launching, 10 local authorities have planted trees and we know a further 10 have plans to plant a tree this year. We are keen to see as many of the remaining 120 NLCBF members get involved...especially during Care Leavers Week, a perfect time to plant a tree and celebrate!!

The tree hasn't just been a symbol. Local authorities have talked about renewed commitment from Corporate Parents, Business Links, Picnics, Family Days and all kinds of benefits to being involved.

A huge thanks to all the LA's who have got involved so far and to Timpsons who have helped with the costs and production of Positivitree Plaques.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges

1. **Pressures on local authority finances** - Leaving Care managers are having to increasingly justify the costs of forum membership & we are working closely with the NLCBF steering group to ensure continued value for money.
2. **Increasing costs of venues etc.** – due to the Cost of Living crisis, the Forum's costs have increased significantly. We have moved our Managers venue, are being creative with using local authority spaces for workshops etc. & have worked with the NLCBF steering group to increase the membership fee.
3. **Passing of the Illegal Immigration Act** – With 30% of young people leaving care being unaccompanied minors, this Act is having a significant negative impact on many care experienced young people. We are responding to this through the support we offer to local authorities & ensuring we are raising these issues in our influencing work.
4. **Cost of Living Crisis**– This continues to disproportionately impact care experienced young people & increase challenges in other areas such as housing, mental health & having the resources to stay connected to friends & family.

Opportunities

We are also seeing a number of reasons for hope & optimism including:

1. **Strong interest in supporting care experienced young people** including across businesses, public bodies & funders. There is increased awareness around the need for support & an openness to respond to this. E.g. The launch of the NHS 'Universal Family' commitment to creating employment opportunities.
2. **Growth of Regional Offers for care leavers** – This year we saw the launch of the London Compact & the further development of other regional offers – improving the offer available to young people in key areas including prescription & travel costs.
3. **Ofsted's Leaving Care Judgement** – Introduced in January 2023, leaving care managers are telling us that the separate judgement for care leavers has brought a welcome focus to their work & is opening doors to improve the support they can offer young people.



WORKING TOGETHER

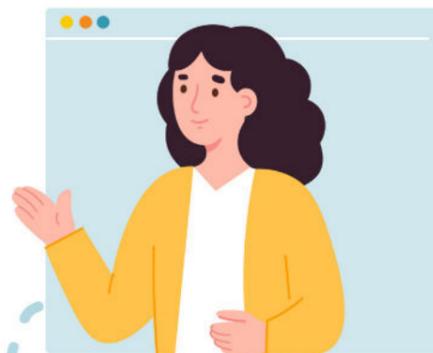
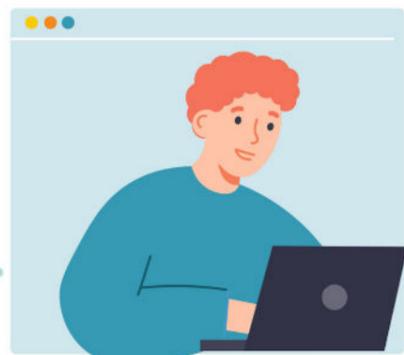
Government & Public Bodies

This year we have worked closely with government departments and public bodies including:

- Department for Education
- Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
- Ofsted – active member of the Ofsted's consultative group.
- Her Majesty's Prison & Probation Service – NLCBF are a member of their care experience advisory group
- DWP – meeting regularly as they develop a trauma informed approach
- NHS – Discussing the mental health needs of young people with care experience
- Children's Commissioner's Office

Working in Collaboration with leaving care organisations including...

- Children in Care and Care Leavers Alliance, with NLCBF team members chairing the mental health and leaving care week subgroups.
- Esmée Fairbairn Leaving Care Learning Programme
- CLEESinHE Group – organisations working to support care leavers and estranged students in Higher Education
- National Association of Supported Accommodation Providers
- Research in Practice – working together on a series of podcasts focussing on mental health
- Care Leaver Covenant – co-hosting the EET Network
- Drive Forward Foundation – co-hosting the Mental Health & Care Leavers Community of Practice
- Moving on Up and Amazing Apprenticeships
- British Baby Box Project
- Become, Rees Foundation, National House Project, Coram Voice & many others



FUTURE PLANS

1. Participation Officer Starting

Thanks to funding from Esmée Fairbairn Funding, we will have a Participation Officer starting early in the new year, with a particular focus on helping us to reach groups of young people we hear less from including separated minors and those in custody.

2. In Their Own Words event returns

We can't wait to hear the key messages from YPBMF at this year's event in July.

3. Regional Offers

We want to strengthen our connections with those developing regional offers.

4. Home office

Build relationship with the Home Office & invite their representatives to speak at NLCBF events, alongside equipping local authorities to support unaccompanied minors, in this challenging period.

5. Other areas of focus

Young people with additional need, housing, mental health and wellbeing; transitions at 16/17.

6. Launching the YPBMF Podcast

To share key messages event wider.

7. Continuing our offer

With a rich programme of events, networks and workshops planned for the year ahead.

And if we can secure the funding..

4. YPBMF Champions residential

Enabling our care experienced volunteers from across the country to come together to get to know each other and the team and get the most out of their year as a Champion.



Jasmine Jones from Derbyshire awarded PA of the Year, PA Awards

"I've left bursting with ideas to take back & share with the team."

Leaving Care Manager
NLCBF Managers Event – March 2024

Celebrating
20 years
of NLCBF
Birthday
Event, Dec '23



NATIONAL
LEAVING CARE
BENCHMARKING
FORUM



CONTACT US

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www.leavingcare.org



Thank you to the YPBMF Champions & Legends; the NLCBF Steering group & Stakeholder Group who have given their time to support the forum this year.

Thank you to Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for funding the Relational Practice Peer Learning Programme.



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