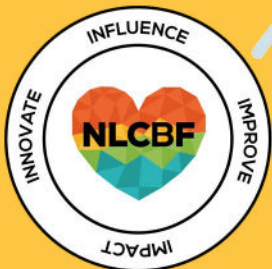


# IN THEIR OWN WORDS: MENTAL HEALTH & HEALTH

Capturing the views of 200+ care  
experienced individuals from around  
the UK.

**September 2024**



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## **Foreword by Nathan (YPBMF Legend)**

Health, including both physical and mental well-being, is essential for everyone, but for care experienced individuals the journey to good health can be particularly challenging. It is so important for care experienced young people to access health and mental health care, yet the systems that exist often struggle to meet their unique needs. From moving areas and finding new support services to long waiting lists and services that don't fully understand their circumstances, care experienced individuals often encounter significant obstacles when trying to get the help they need.

I have been on my own journey of accessing physical and mental health support and can relate to and understand the responses of the young people who have answered this survey, I know how difficult it can be! It is such an important topic as it has such an impact in shaping what the future looks like for many. It is the responsibility of those in positions of influence and power to support care experienced people transition into an adulthood of good health (whatever that looks like), hope and possibility.

This section explores the health and mental health experiences of care-experienced people, in their own words, highlighting the obstacles they have faced when accessing physical and mental support. It also reflects on the support received by care experienced young people that has been helpful including the positive impact young people have felt from Personal Advisors and Care Leaver Teams who have had training in mental health and understand the process of helping young people to access support.

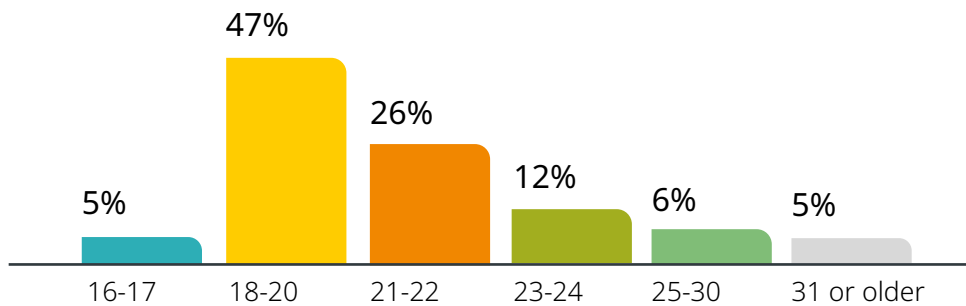
Neurodivergence, something I am myself very familiar with, has been highlighted throughout this section as a key area of importance. The difficulties in getting an assessment or diagnosis was shared among a large number of respondents. Which raises the question, how can care experienced young people get the appropriate support they need for a condition if the process of diagnosis is so inaccessible?

My hope is that by continually raising the voices of care experienced young people through surveys like this, those who hold the power to shape and form the future of leaving care services and offers will make the changes needed.

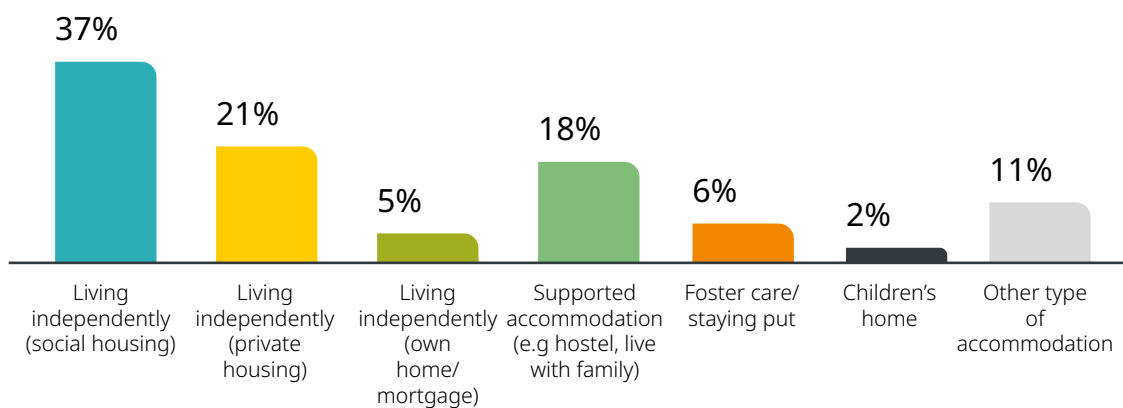
It is clear that there are areas needing further research and understanding, as well as improvements to services, accessibility and support for care leavers. Listening to the voices of care experienced individual is crucial to creating a system that can begin to address the gaps in health and mental health support for care-experienced young people and ensure they receive the care they deserve, allowing them to lead healthier and more fulfilling lives.



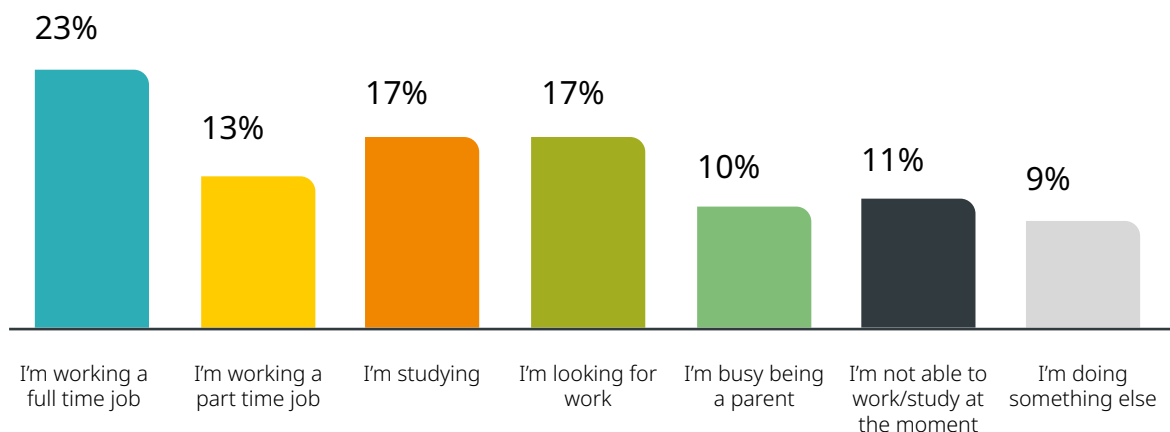
## How old are the participants?



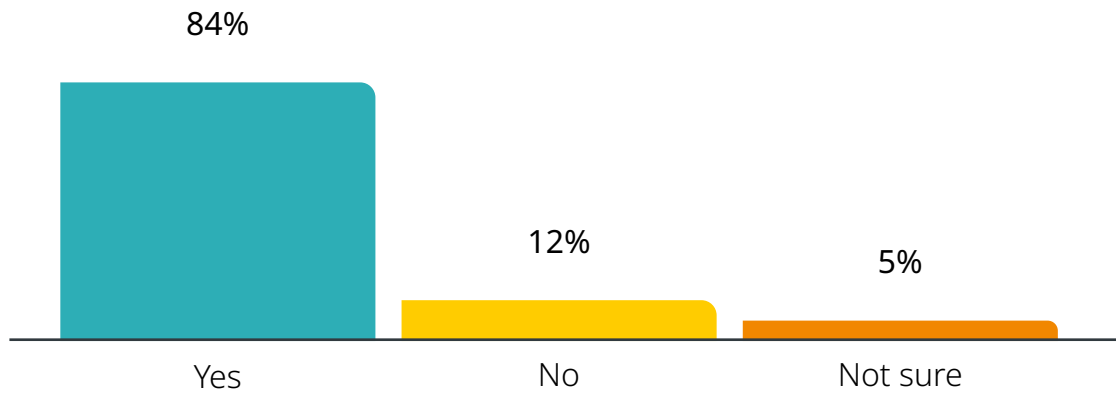
## Where are participants living?



## What's the main thing participants are doing right now?

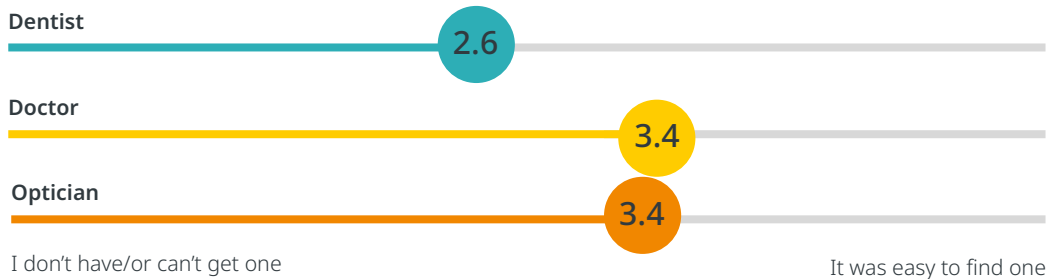


## Do you have a Personal Advisor/ Leaving Care Worker or support from your Local Authority?



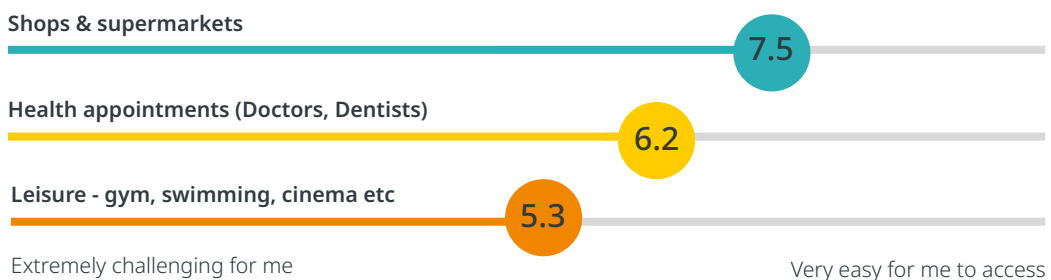
## Health services

How easy is it to find an appointment at the following:



Care experienced individuals experience specific barriers to health services. There is a lack of continuity for those moving area, and it can be hard to register and provide necessary information.

**Can you get to places in your community easily e.g shops and supermarkets, doctors, parks, leisure, facilities. Are they nearby?**

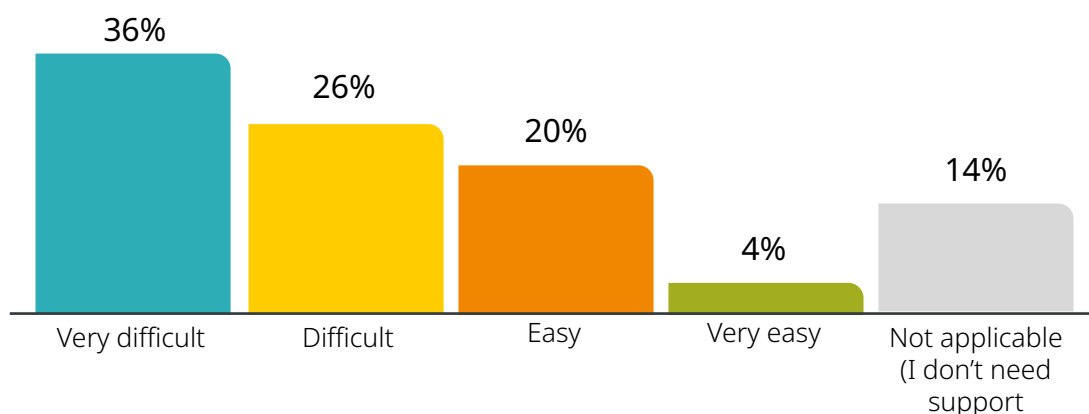


Neurodivergence and mental health conditions impact access to services. For these groups making, attending and travelling to appointments often feels overwhelming. Find out more in [In Their Own Words: Communities of Support report](#).

## Mental health support

**62%** of care experienced people found it difficult to get the mental health support they needed.

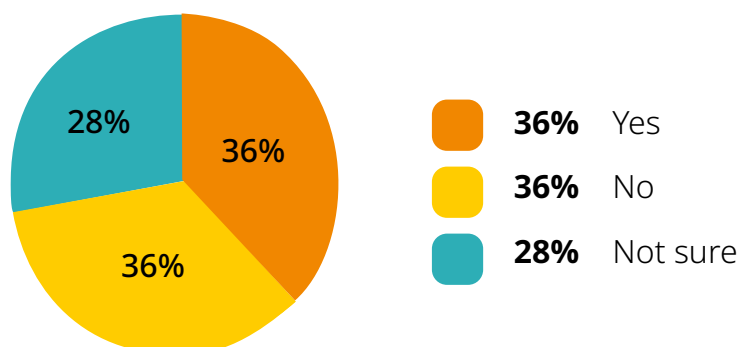
### How easy is it to get the mental health support that you need?



Care experienced individuals are more likely to get the mental health support they need when their PA / leaving care team are well trained. For those that found it easy to get support, 61% felt their PA / leaving care team are well trained. This training is important because care experienced people often need a specialised approach.

Approximately **1/3** think that their leaving care team are well trained in health and mental health, but **1/3** think that they are not.

### Do you feel like your leaving care team/ Personal Adviser are well trained around health and mental health?



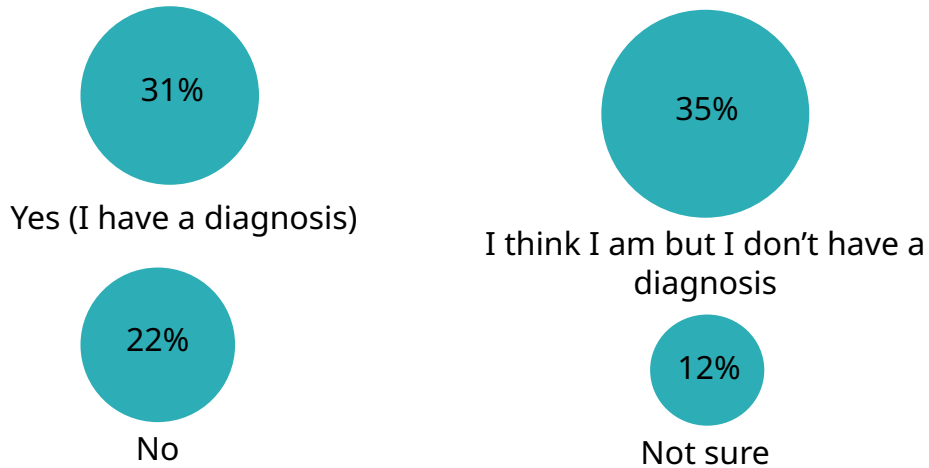
This shows a stark difference in experience for care experienced individuals in different areas and highlights the need for more training. Some reported individual Personal Advisors attending training with their own time and money. Whilst this shows how caring and dedicated Personal Advisors are, it should not be their responsibility to resource their own training and instead this should be provided to all leaving care teams.



## Neurodivergence diagnosis and support

**31%** have a diagnosis, but a further **35%** believe they are neurodivergent.

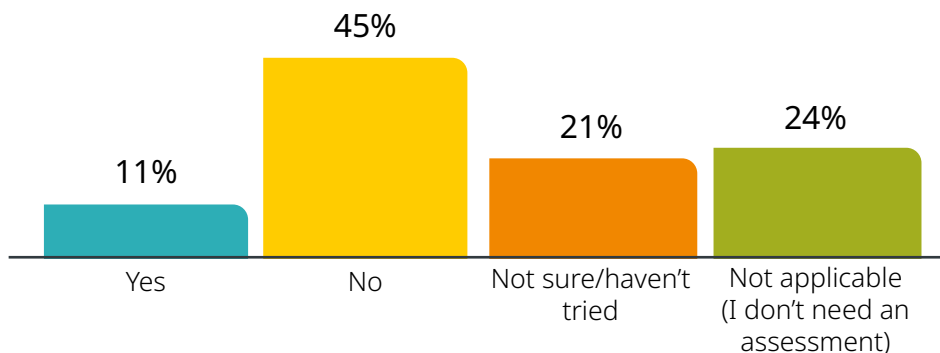
### Are you neurodivergent? E.g dyslexia, ADHD, Autism



YPBMF were not surprised by numbers of neurodivergent care experienced individuals but they were concerned by the high number of those needing or waiting for a diagnosis. Even those who had managed to get a diagnosis thought it was challenging - only **8%** said it was easy to get a diagnosis, and **64%** felt it was difficult.

**45%** said it is difficult to get an assessment for neurodiversity.

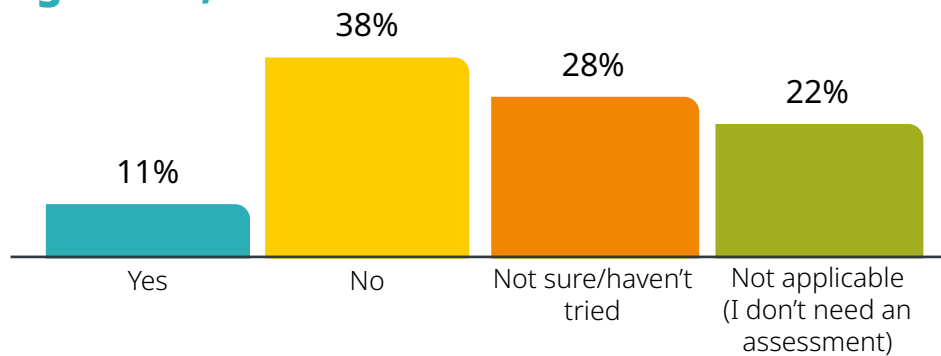
### Is it easy to get an assessment around neurodiversity? e.g. ADHD, Autism



Everybody should have access to services and support for neurodivergence. Yet large numbers of care experienced individuals are left without the diagnosis they need. We found that **59%** of those without a diagnosis (who think they are neurodivergent) said it was difficult to get an assessment. In comparison, only **7%** said it was easy, and **27%** had not tried.

**38%** said it is difficult to get support around neurodiversity

### Is it easy to get support around neurodiversity? e.g. ADHD, Autism



There was a clear link between neurodivergence assessment and accessing support. Care experienced individuals who found it easy to get an assessment were more likely to find it easier to access support, and vice versa. **78%** who thought it was easy to get an assessment also find it easy to get support. **80%** who found it difficult to get an assessment also found it difficult to get support. This highlights the real difference in experience across the UK.



# What health and mental health support has been useful for you?

## Nothing

Many care experienced individuals had received no helpful support.



*I need the opportunity to get assessed for ADHD and Autism. I struggle so so much. I get labelled as having anxiety and lazy with depression...but I genuinely can't focus."*

## Mental health services

Counselling, therapy, and CAMHS services were useful for those able to access them. Dedicated support for care experienced individuals is also an enabler for accessibility. For example, mental health workers in leaving care teams, and training for PA's were frequently mentioned.



*Mental health care leavers nurse. We need more of those! Community mental health services are god awful. That really needs looking at."*

## Free prescriptions

Without these, many would be unable to afford the medication they need. Free prescriptions are in some local offers but it is not the norm across all local authorities.

## Gym memberships

Discounted or free gym passes support overall health and mental health. Lots of local authorities provide some leisure offer which is usually a local gym. Best practice is a gym membership plus 1 to help care experienced individuals deal with anxiety of trying something new and instead can go with a friend or family member.

## Positive relationships

Having somebody to talk to has a positive impact on mental health. Forming supportive relationships with friends, family, and professionals, where respondents feel listened to and understood is important.



*My personal advisor went on a course to study Borderline Personality Disorder, to better help me. She did it in her spare time and out of her own money."*

## What can help you to improve your health and mental health?

### Activities that support wellbeing

Fun activities, spending time outdoors, and attending groups all improve health and mental health. These can provide structure, and a chance to get out of the house. Care experienced individuals would also like support for areas of wellbeing; exercise, sleep, and healthy eating. Find out more in the [In Their Own Words: Communities of support report](#).

### Improving and increasing support

Improving the availability and accessibility of services for support and diagnosis including a better understanding of the challenges faced by those with care experience. Care experienced individuals would benefit from somebody helping them to understand the support on offer, and how to access it.



*I recently had a mental health support request denied because I had "enough support"....PA support and living in supported accommodation should not prevent you from getting a mental health referral."*

## Positive relationships

Opportunities to meet people with shared interests or experiences, alongside support to make and maintain friendships. Regular communications with Personal Advisors also help build positive relationships so young people feel listened to and supported.

## Support for external pressures

Mental health and health can be supported by initiatives that help with external pressures such as parenting, housing, and finances. Find out more in the [In Their Own Words: Safe & Affordable Housing](#) and [In Their Own Words: Cost of Living](#) reports.



# What are we asking for?

## Local asks:

- **Health & Mental Health Specialist within Care Leavers Teams** – Having mental health workers and leaving care nurses who are accessible at Care Leavers Hubs.
- **Mental Health & Health training** – leaving care teams benefit from having specialists within the team but all PAs should have Mental Health training and be trauma informed.
- **Out of hours support** – finding solutions for out of hours support such as commissioning voluntary organisations, Care Leavers Hubs with crisis support and Apps e.g [Kooth](#), or [Ask Jan](#).
- **Creating and promoting groups and activities** – helping to reduce isolation and get care experienced people involved in positive activities and communities.

## National asks:

- **Neurodiversity Research** – fund national research into Neurodiversity and care experience to get an idea of the scale of the issue and how to support individuals appropriately to thrive in work, education and life in general.
- **National offer around health** – ensure that all Local Authorities and organisations are providing a good health offer e.g. gym memberships, free NHS prescriptions in all areas.
- **Address the dental health crisis** – care experienced young people cannot get NHS dental health care and cannot afford private dental care. They can be left in debilitating pain which impacts on work, education and standard of life. Learn from emerging best practice and research such as the [Sunny Smiles](#) project in Plymouth.
- **Specialised mental health support** – care experienced individuals often require specialist mental health interventions.
- **Provide access to Operation Courage** – allow care experienced individuals to access the dedicated mental health services that veterans can access. Care experienced individuals are often traumatised and can suffer from PTSD.

## Best practice examples & Top tips

- **Free prescriptions up to the age of 25 from [Pan London Care Leavers' Compact](#).**
- **'Ask Jan' membership, including 24/7 support & 8 sessions of counselling through the Ree's Foundation.**
- **Dedicated mental health professionals based in Newham's leaving care team.**
- **Social prescribing support in [Hull's 'Room 42' care leavers hub and Leaving Care Service](#).**
- **Specialist therapeutic interventions commissioned to support young people's emotional and mental health in Lewisham.**
- **Commissioned dental scheme or '[D Scheme](#)' enables care experienced young people to access dentists across the**

## Top Tips for care experienced young people struggling with their Health & Mental Health

“

*Don't suffer in silence. Seek help.”*

“

*Get a diagnosis. Learn about yourself. Learn about your condition.”*

**Please watch more words of advice & encouragement from care experienced young people on our [In Their Own Words](#) page.**

## **Senior decision makers pledges & reflections:**

Here are some actions senior policy and decision makers said they were going to take following our In Their Own words event in July 2024.

“

***Full Council Tax exemption for all care leavers  
Liaise with others from the event to share best practice and improve our own practice.”***

“

***The number that struggle with buying food in your survey made me think of how many approaches for support to my Personal Advisors and made me think how many are NOT sharing their struggle or anxiety.”***

“

***Young people are really struggling, and the money given is not realistic for a good quality of life.”***

**What do you plan to do to help us?**











*Please scan QR code to view the 'In Their Own Words' page*

**Thank you to the care experienced young people and adults who shared their views and contributed to this report.**

Thanks to our YPBMF Champions, Legends and NLCBF Sessional workers who co-produced our workshops, events and reports.

Thank you to the Local Authority Leaving Care teams, Coram Voice, Become, Care Leavers National Movement, Drive Forward Foundation, and everybody who circulated the survey.

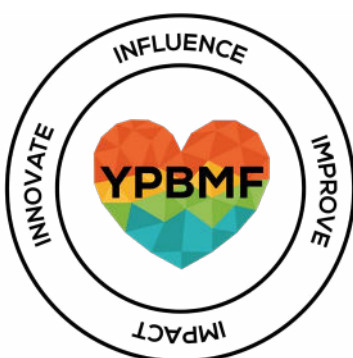
## CONTACT US

Invite us to your events, ask us questions about the reports and let us know what you are planning to do as a result of reading our reports, listening to or watching our events:

**Email: [nlcbf@catch-22.org.uk](mailto:nlcbf@catch-22.org.uk)**

**Website: [www.leavingcare.org](http://www.leavingcare.org)**

The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum is run by the charity Catch22 & funded through membership fees from local authorities.



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