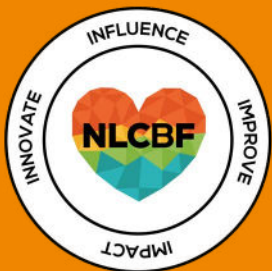


# IN THEIR OWN WORDS: COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT REPORT

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

**September 2024**



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## **Foreword from Dyllan (YPBMF Champion)**

Welcome to our 'Communities of Support' report created from findings of the 'In Their Own Words' survey, which was filled in by care experienced individuals (CEI) across the United Kingdom. This topic was chosen as a survey focus by CEI, which is very unsurprising given the important effects of being part of a community on countless examples too long to list in this short introduction.

Delving into the vital importance communities of support have for CEI and indeed all young people and adults, experiencing a sense of belonging and personal identity are pillars of a positive psychological and physical wellbeing. There are countless ways to develop these two wellbeing pillars, but a key component of this stems from belonging to a community or a group of people you can go to for help and support. There are a plethora of different examples that fit this definition, but some key examples could stem from religion, interests or even identity such as being care experienced. Connecting and being a part of these communities have countless benefits, such as reducing social isolation and loneliness by connecting with others, providing advice where needed and even emotional support in times of crisis. While the benefits are clear to see, there are barriers which prevent or dissuade individuals from wanting to join or feel part of a community. Key examples of these barriers preventing individuals could be financial such as paying to participate in events or activities, accessibility in comfortably getting to community venues or individuals experiencing health or mental health difficulties.

Specifically, for CEI, communities of support are arguably even more important as by nature of being care experienced you may have been uprooted from one environment to another when entering the care system, affecting or indeed shattering that vital sense of belonging and identity as mentioned previously. This detrimental effect of entering the care system could cause individuals to feel socially isolated and alone which could negatively affect their own mental and physical health, further cementing the vital role of CEI accessing and benefiting from these communities. As stated, there are a plethora of communities on offer for individuals to access, including care experienced groups which support and create events such as day trips out or workshops which enable CEI to connect with one another in their local authority. While it is useful that communities of support exist for CEI to access and benefit from, there are associated issues which create barriers for participation, supporting the importance of the survey assessing this issue so that improvements can be made that encourage or assist CEI to access communities of support.

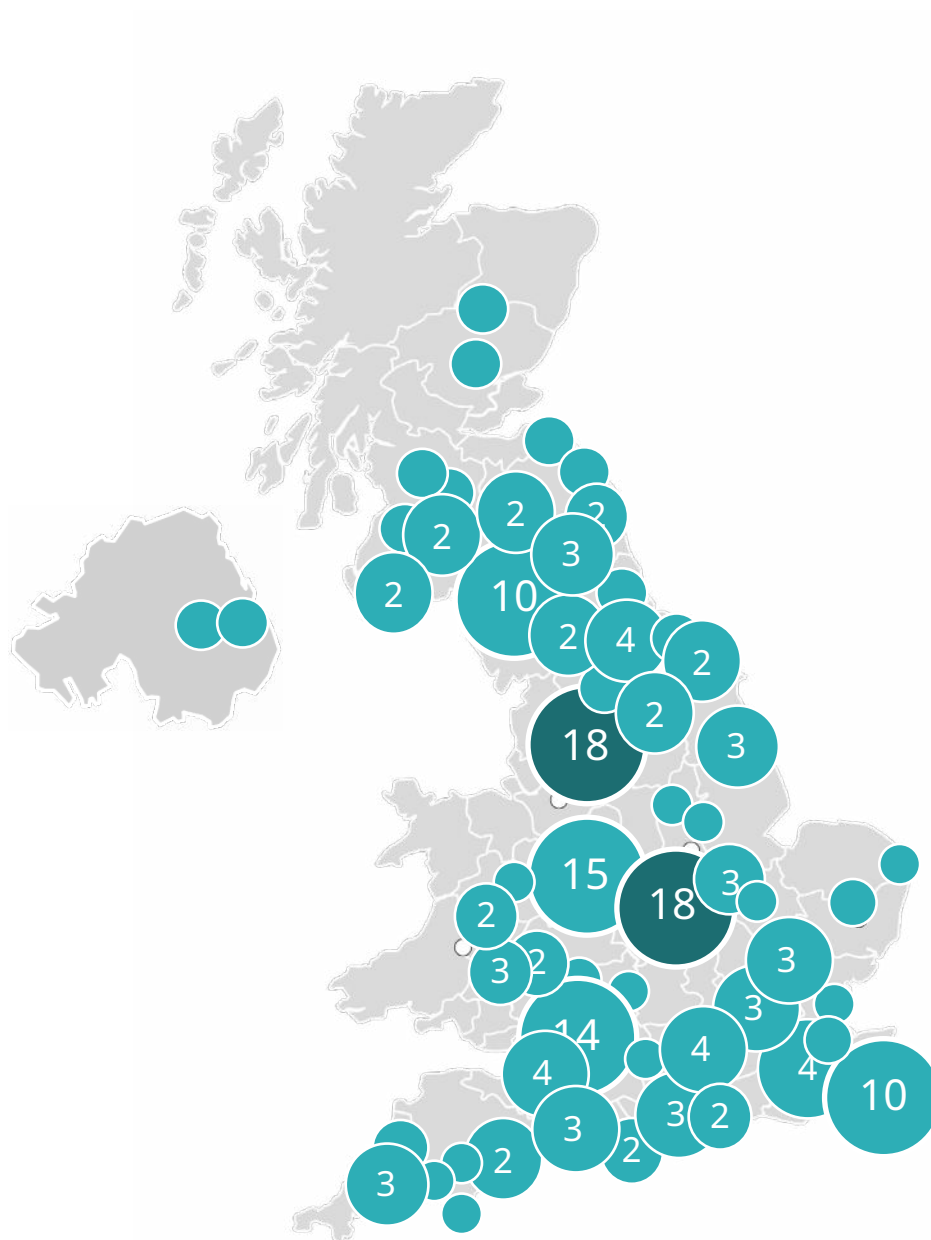
Within this report, the findings of the 'Communities of Support' survey will be presented, which will outline the views of CEI on this topic. Additionally, these views and experiences of CEI will be used to create local and national asks to hopefully lead to beneficial changes and improvements for care experienced young people and adults.

## Who took part?

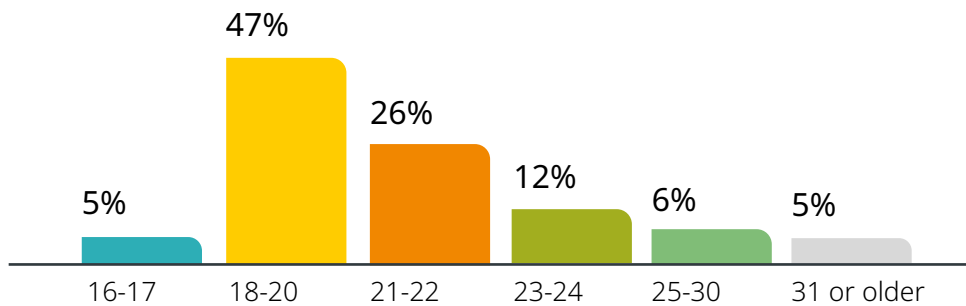
In June 2024, over 200 care experienced young people and young adults from around the UK took part in our "In Their Own Words Survey". The survey was co-produced with the Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) and contained questions on 5 key themes, chosen as priority areas by care experienced young people.

### Location:

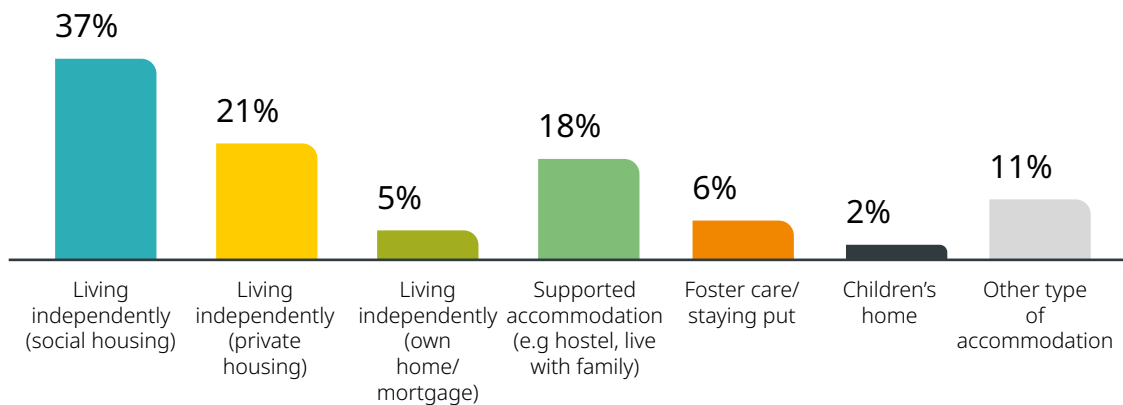
Pin on the map where you live



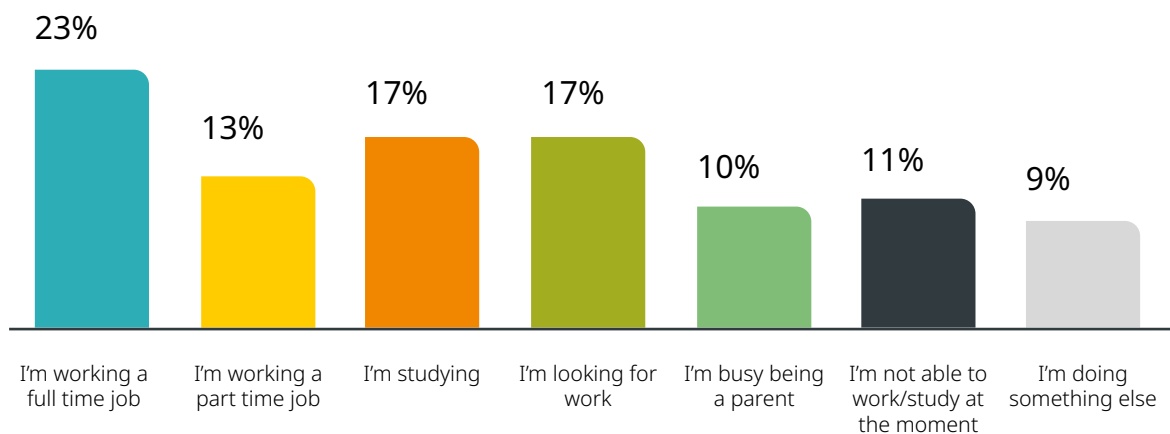
## How old are the participants?



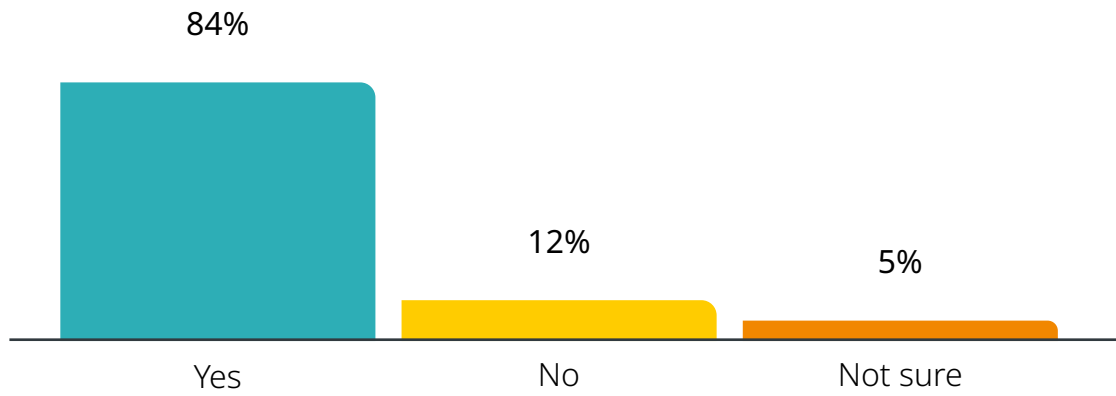
## Where are participants living?



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



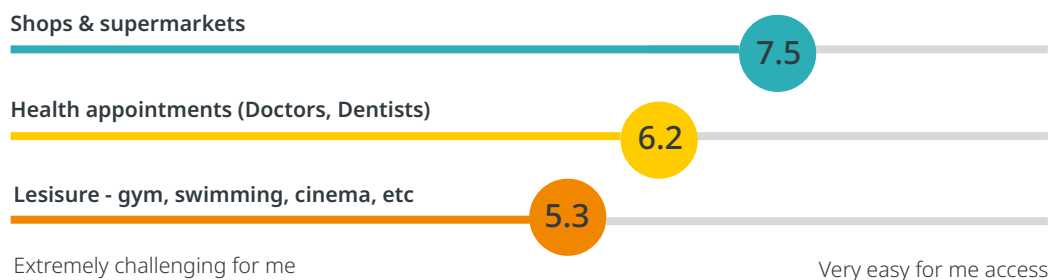
## Do participants have a Personal Advisor/Leaving Care Worker or support from your Local Authority?



## Access & connection to communities

*Access to the community is difficult, especially for leisure facilities*

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



It is concerning that care experienced individuals are struggling to get to health services and leisure facilities as good access positively impacts on mental health and health. Find out more in [In Their Own Words: Mental health and health report.](#)

**52%** of young people felt somewhat connected to their community, but only 12% felt very connected.

## How connected to your local community do you feel?



Given the importance of connection it is worrying that so few gave the response 'a lot' in relation to how connected they felt to their community. Certain groups may feel less connected, for example only half of care-experienced parents felt connected to their community to some extent. We also found that connection seems to decrease with age. For example, 58% of 18–20-year-olds feel somewhat connected to their community. In comparison only 27% of 25–30-year-olds feel the same. This demonstrates the ongoing need for support Post 25. Find out more in the [In Their Own Words: post 21 & 25 Support' report.](#)

## What makes it difficult to get to places in your community like the shops or doctors?

### Mental health and health

Neurodivergent respondents and those with mental health conditions experience specific barriers to accessing community spaces and services. For these groups making, attending and travelling to appointments often feels overwhelming. Crowded spaces, and public transport can be particularly anxiety-provoking for young people. Disabled young people and those with limited mobility also find it challenging to access their community.



*My anxiety – I don't completely understand it, but it's really hard. I struggle in social situations or going outside or in public. I feel more at ease when I'm in nature, but just leaving the house is so hard."*

### Travel and transport

The cost, frequency, and reliability of public transport are all issues young people face when trying to access services. The distance to community spaces can make travel difficult without a car. Yet purchasing a vehicle, paying for lessons, fuel, and parking charges come at a high cost.



*Anxiety, plus I don't have much money to spend, so I'd rather not spend it on bus fares or giving petrol money."*



### Other answers:

- Had no issue with travel e.g. within walking distance or own a vehicle,
- Availability and accessibility of health services,
- Feeling unsafe,
- No support or nobody to go with,
- Caring for children,
- Not knowing the local area,
- Finding the time.



*I have no friends to go with to places. I am happy with my dog going on walks. I only feel safe with my dog. I feel uncomfortable & unsafe in my town.”*



## Groups & activities

### What groups are you able to attend or be a part in your area?

- **Specific groups for care experienced young people** – Young People Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF), Care Leavers Hubs, advisory groups, children in care council, and corporate parent panels.
- **Sports and gyms** - swimming, football, dance, martial arts, and yoga.
- **None or unsure** – including none that were affordable, or none locally.
- **Creative or interest-based groups**- art, reading, or performing arts groups.
- **Identity and inclusion groups** - LGBTQ+ and BAME groups or events.
- **EET communities**- including college, and university groups.
- **Parenting groups** - including stay and plays, play groups, and baby spa.
- **Other answers included:** youth groups, SEND specific groups, mental health support groups, family hubs, and other local services.



## What fun things would you like to see in your area? (things you would get involved in)

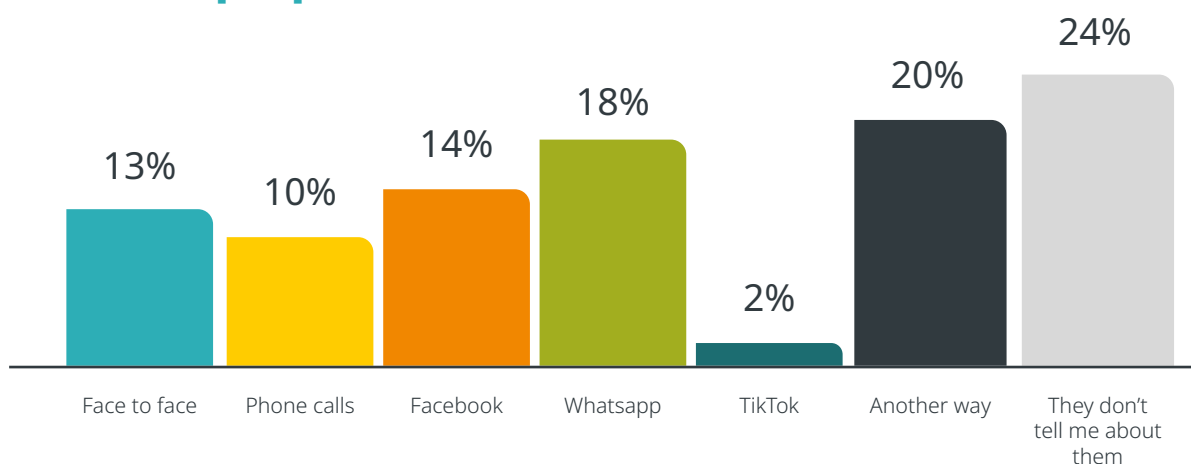
- **Sports or fitness;** including gyms, football, boxing, and running or walking groups.
- **Hobbies or interests;** including book clubs, cooking, pottery, art, gardening or gaming clubs. Music clubs, concerts and festivals.
- **Not sure or none;** including those that are not interested in attending any groups or activities.
- **Accessible and affordable;** local, inclusive groups which are free to attend.
- **Social events;** including meals out, fun days, and social events to meet and make friends.
- **More opportunities;** more things to do.
- **Youth focused;** youth clubs and hubs.
- **Family friendly;** groups for parents, babies, and children.
- **Access to nature;** including more natural spaces, conservation groups and animal centers.
- **Care experienced focused;** including Care Leavers Hubs, groups, and social events specifically for care experienced young people.
- **Other answers included;** job or volunteering opportunities, life skills, and trips or attractions.



## Finding out about opportunities

Leaving care teams share information about opportunities in many ways. Yet, **24%** of care experienced individuals are still not hearing about them.

### How do your leaving care team let you know about groups, activities and opportunities to meet people and have fun?



It's good to see that a range of methods are being used to inform care experienced individuals about opportunities. However, many still don't receive this information. This is worrying as this group are less likely to feel connected to their community. In fact, for those that don't get told about opportunities 60% said they don't feel 'at all' connected.

### Do you have any ideas about ways your local authority/leaving care teams/PA's could help you to find out about groups, activities & opportunities?

- **Talk to us.** Stay in regular contact through face-to-face conversations and phone calls. Ask about interests, and proactively find out about relevant opportunities.
- **Email**
- **Support to attend**
- **Social media**
- **Text or WhatsApp Messages**
- **Create more opportunities**
- **Newsletter**
- **Printed materials** e.g. posters, or letters.

## Is there anything that would help you to get more involved in local groups or doing fun things in your local area?

### No

Some care experienced individuals didn't feel that there was anything that would help them get more involved, and some simply didn't want to. Others mentioned barriers such as mental health, and time pressures such as education, employment, or parenting.

### Information and awareness

Hearing more about what is available through a wider range of methods. Information about getting there, parking or accessibility arrangements, and if children can attend is important. They'd like their PAs to talk to them about their interests and support them to find groups they want to attend.



*I don't actually know anyone that lives in my area. When I moved, it would have been great to have the chance to sit with my PA and go through what's in the area."*

### Support to attend

Some care experienced individuals felt anxious about travelling to and attending a new group alone. Suggested support included being able to bring somebody along or knowing group members beforehand. Associated costs, especially for transport is another barrier.



*More awareness. Buddy system for first time attending."*

## Activity choices

A wider choice of groups, and more fun or exciting activities.

“

*Being told about fun events that are happening.”*

## Make them accessible

Having activities which are specifically for care experienced young people, that are accessible for them. This includes having activities close to where they live, in youth centered spaces, with smaller group sizes.



# What are we asking for?

## Local asks:

- **Variety of opportunities** – Create a variety of opportunities for young people to engage with, including plenty of active activities & activities they can bring a friend/child to.
- **Communication** – Tell us about what we can get involved with.
- **Young people's interests** - Support young people to explore their interests & see how you can support them to attend new things.
- **Address barriers** – Eg. Travel costs, gym costs.
- **Anxiety** - Support us around anxiety e.g. confidence to leave our homes and participate in opportunities.

## National asks:

- **Universal free gym offer for young person plus one**
- **Wide range of taster & ongoing offers** – Care Leaver Covenant to source a wide range of leisure/interest offers for young people to try and get involved with including cinema, sports clubs, etc.
- **Free travel** – To address the barrier of transport to accessing opportunities.
- **Mental health barriers** – Address the mental health barriers we face that prevent us being part of the community.

## Examples of best practice

- Involving care experienced young people with Park Run in Herefordshire and other local authorities.
- Use multiple ways to communicate opportunities e.g. Sheffield Care Leavers Team (advised by Sheffield Care Leavers Union), use group text and Whatsapp to direct care experienced people to opportunities on a closed Facebook group.
- Dog walking groups available in some local authorities.
- Dedicated space for care experienced parents' group at Wigan Care Leaver Hub and the Warwickshire Baby Box Project.
- Personal Wellbeing monthly fund for each young person, that can be spent on gym, hobbies or interests in Wandsworth.
- National House Project are now in 19 English Local Authorities (with 2 more in process of being set up), creating a network of support around sustainable housing.
- Free bus pass for care leavers (age 18-21/25) in Cornwall and Greater Manchester and funding for 10 driving lessons in Wigan.
- Half price bus and tram travel for care leavers (age 18-25) "Care Leaver Oyster Photocard" living in London boroughs through Pan London Care Leavers' Compact.



## Top Tips for care experienced young people to join communities, find friends and build their support networks

“

Go to care leavers 'clubs', they may not seem like your type of thing, but I pushed myself and went and now I have friends, a job and extra qualifications because of it!”

“

Be brave and Just go! You never know you might like it when you get there. There is a group out there for everyone, it just takes time to find it. Be Patient and try it more than once.”

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

### Senior decision makers pledges & reflections:

Senior decision makers pledges: 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.

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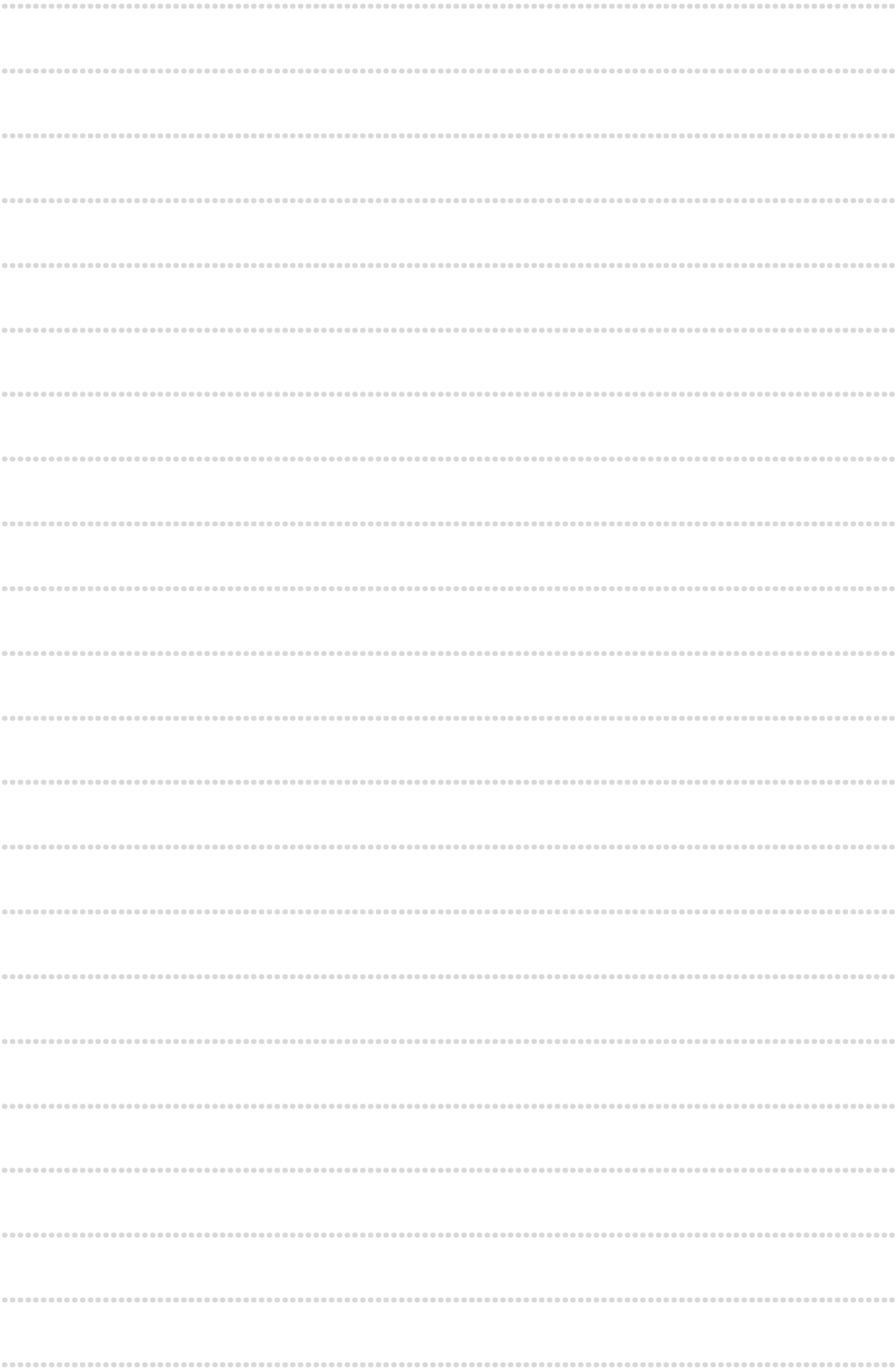
More activities outdoors for young people and staff. Having fun together. Creating youth spaces a Hub and Jobs/training club.”

“

Create more communities of support, focus on supporting young people to build relationships.”

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

## Notes

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*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.

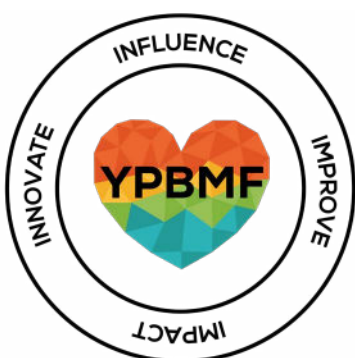
## CONTACT US

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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