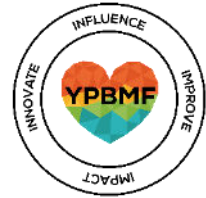




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## **Child Poverty Strategy Briefing: Care Experienced Parents**

**National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, Catch22**

[National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum](#), part of the Charity [Catch22](#) is a forum of 133 local authority leaving care teams in England working together to share good practice to improve services and support for young people leaving care. The Young People's Benchmarking Forum is made up of care experienced young people and is at the heart of our work.

## **Key Asks for care experienced parents, developed with care experienced parents from the Young People's Benchmarking Forum:**

### **Increase income:**

- A 'Starting Nursery Fund' to cover the first month of nursery costs
- Extend guidance for employing care experienced individuals to include consideration of the needs of care experienced parents.
- Support care experienced parents practically to return to education
- Paid time for care experienced parents aged 16-25 when their child is sick
- Care experience awareness training for nurseries

### **Reduce Outgoings:**

- Enhanced maternity grant for care experienced parents up to the age of 25
- Extend Cold Weather payments for energy to all care experienced parents on Universal Credit even if they are working
- Care Leavers Covenant to work with businesses in the children and family industry to provide specific discounts and opportunities

### **Increase Resilience:**

- Emergency fund in Local Authority leaving care teams for essentials/emergencies
- Create Child Trust Funds for the children of care experienced parents who may find it difficult to provide savings for their children.
- Provide a national model of support for care experienced parents such as that provided by [Project Unity in Wales](#).

### **Enhance Local and community support:**

- Dedicated section of each LA's Local Offer for care-experienced parents
- All LAs to sign up to [Good practice charter for care experienced parents](#)
- Build awareness and advocacy about the needs and rights of care experienced parents within health and other early years services.
- Care-experienced parents should get support build their own 'village' of informal support
- Commission the Family Nurse Partnership nationally and remove the upper age limit for eligibility for care experienced parents

**Recommendations for care leavers generally - [see separate briefing](#).**

## Why consider Care experienced young parents within the Child Poverty Strategy?

Care experienced parents & their children are at increased risk of child poverty. As evidenced by:

- [UCL's Policy briefing in 2024](#) shows that care-experienced mothers suffer multiple disadvantages. They had lower levels of education than their peers and were more likely to be in workless families, on benefits or in poverty. They were more likely to live in rented, damp housing, to lack peace and quiet at home and to be dissatisfied with the areas where they lived.
- [Barnardo's 2022 research](#) demonstrates how care-experienced parents are at increased risk of isolation and loneliness, find it difficult to access mental health support, and often face financial difficulties since they often face the costs of raising a child on a very low income. There is often an absence of informal support networks other parents rely on for financial, practical, and emotional support.
- NLCBF's 2024 [In Their Own Words: Communities of Support](#) report found that only half of care-experienced parents felt connected to their community to some extent.
- Through the work of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum with leaving care teams, we also hear from care experienced parents that they often do not feel comfortable accessing general parent groups but would welcome the opportunity to build networks with other care experienced parents.

### To increase incomes, we propose:

- A 'Starting Nursery Fund' to cover the first month of nursery costs
- Extend guidance for employing care experienced individuals to include consideration of the needs of care experienced parents. Flexible working and reasonable adjustments and increasing employers understanding of what this can look like in practice.

*"I was able to take my child to my job interview as I had no childcare options but not all organisations have that flexibility and awareness" – YPBMF representative*

- Support care experienced parents practically to return to education, as recommended in the [UCL 2024 policy briefing](#). They must be supported to acquire appropriate qualifications, and to fulfil their desires for upskilling and reskilling. Eg. childcare provision, reflecting poorer support networks and lack of family support among care experienced parents.
- Paid time for care experienced parents aged 16-25 when their child is sick - Parents still pay for childcare even if their child cannot attend causing an income deficit.
- Care experience awareness training (Eg. Total Respect training) for nurseries to ensure their policies and practice are care experience aware

- Ofsted inspections of nurseries should highlight best practice in this area to encourage awareness and flexibility from nurseries.

*My payday was a few days after when nursery fees were due so each month, I had to pay late fees of £125 to nursery.” – YPBMF representative*

- When separated parents are both working there should be a joint responsibility for childcare costs. Currently this falls to the main carer creating barriers to work for this parent.

### **To reduce essential costs, we propose:**

- Enhanced [maternity grant](#) for care experienced parents up to the age of 25, to reflect the poorer support networks and lack of family support. Remove the application deadline of 6 months so parents can access funds when they need it most. There is precedent within DWP for different arrangements for care experienced young people (exempt from single room rate). We have heard that some parents experience significant delays in the process. In these cases, Local Authorities should be able to fund the grant for the young person.
- Extend [Cold Weather payments](#) for energy to all care experienced parents on Universal Credit even if they are working. Currently, only parents of children under 5 who are not employed, and whose partner is not employed, qualify. This is regardless of income or hours worked which disadvantages those in low paid or part time roles who are still struggling with energy costs.
- [Care Leavers Covenant](#) to work with businesses in the children and family industry to provide discounts and opportunities to this group of care experienced individuals. E.g. Discounts on baby equipment
- As recommended in the NLCBF Safe & Affordable Homes report all care experienced individuals of 18 – 25 years should be on priority banding for housing. This improves quality of housing and takes away need for guarantor/deposits.
- Baby box projects such as the [Warwickshire model](#) which provides essential items like nappies, toiletries, wipes, newborn clothes, books, bibs, towels, and other necessities. Separately, the project also provides the young parents with financial support to help them buy essential items. The project [Baby Box - The Childrens Foundation](#) could be expanded nationally to include links with health and mental health services which will help to improve the health of babies and children but also parents who can then return to the workforce and increase economic productivity.

### **To Increase financial resilience, we propose:**

- Emergency fund in Local Authority leaving care teams for essentials/emergencies – to reflect their role as corporate parents & grandparents.

- Create Child Trust Funds for the children of care experienced parents who may find it difficult to provide savings for their children.
- Provide a national model of support for care experienced parents such as that provided by [Project Unity in Wales](#). Project Unity provides confidence building, access to resources and grants, housing support and budgeting guidance for care experienced parents.
- The Money House and Barclays Life Skills are examples of good practice in increasing financial literacy and resilience which could be offered to all care experienced parents.
- Council tax and water discounts for care experienced individuals are useful where available but these often end at 25 causing a 'cliff edge' – a gradual discount up to age 30 would help prepare and learn budgeting.

### **To enhance local & Community Support, we propose:**

- Dedicated section of each LA's Local Offer for care-experienced parents – This could include specialist workers, and dedicated activities or groups in Care Leavers Hubs. For example, Bromley's OFSTED report states *input of the specialist parenting worker for care-experienced parents is well received by parents, and they say it makes a real difference to their daily lives and how they meet their children's needs*.
- Encourage all local authorities to sign up to the [Good practice charter for care experienced parents](#) which details the range of support that should be available to care experienced young people before and after parenthood.
- Building awareness and advocacy about the needs and rights of care experienced parents within health and other early years services. Health and education services and information can be complex to navigate and care experienced parents can feel stigmatised – creating significant barriers to access and engagement.
- Care-experienced parents should get support build their own 'village' of informal support ([Care Experienced Parents Unite for Change, Barnardo's, 2022](#)). This includes access to family-finding support and 'buddies' which can reduce isolation for parents and children. In Calderdale parenting mentors are recruited through the Independent Visitor Service. They are experienced parents who will attend baby groups, give tips from their experience and listen when parents need to talk.
- Commission the [Family Nurse Partnership](#) nationally and remove the upper age limit for eligibility for care experienced parents who may benefit from this type of support at any age.
- Parenting support and role models: For example: [Pure Insight](#) offer support for care experienced parents by listening to what families need and matching with a small team of volunteers who can help. It can involve practical and emotional support.

**For more information or to hear from care experienced parents directly, please contact:  
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