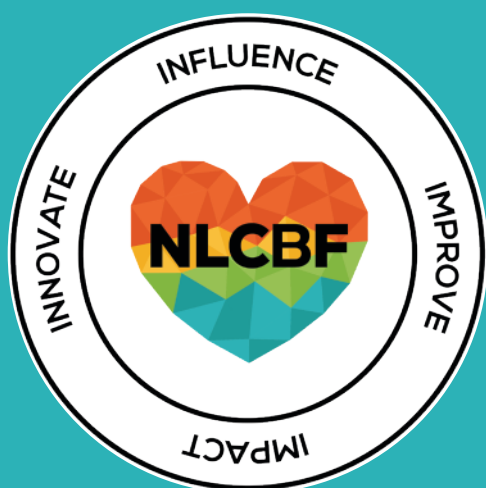


NATIONAL LEAVING CARE BENCHMARKING FORUM

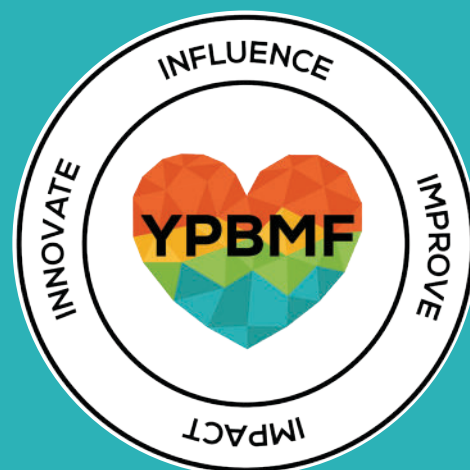
Annual Report



2024-2025



catch
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Ofsted invited members of the Young People's Benchmarking Forum to a celebration at the House of Lords following their input into Supported Accommodation inspections, Oct '24

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Your session discussing how councils can improve support was incredibly informative and insightful. We had some great feedback from attendees on the call and it was great to see so many councillors and officers engaging during the Q&A. The webinar gave all attendees a lot to think about and plenty of practical ideas to take back to their areas.”

Megan Edwards, Policy Adviser, Local Government Association

Introduction

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

NLCBF is made up of over 130 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?

The Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) 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. They also help to shape the decisions and priorities of the Forum.

NLCBF & Catch22

NLCBF is run by the charity Catch22. It is mainly funded through membership fees of local authorities with additional financial support from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Barclays LifeSkills. 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 its development.



Networking and meeting other leaders was important to share practice and have time for discussion and reflection."

Leaving Care Manager, March '25

Our main areas of focus:

- 1. Membership** – Our offer to member local authorities including access to events, workshops, networks and the NLCBF members website.
- 2. National Influence** – Using our collective voice to influence leaving care policy and practice.
- 3. Young People's Benchmarking Forum** – Care experienced young people play a key role in shaping and delivering our membership offer and national influence work.

The years in numbers

YPBMF Champions & Legends delivered In Their Own Words messages to over **1,100** people.

97% of leaving care managers said NLCBF membership had benefited care experienced young people in their area (Annual Survey, Oct 2024).

Over **425** people attended a Relational Practice webinar.

94% of leaving care managers say NLCBF membership offers good or excellent value for money.

34 events/network meetings held throughout the year, including the 9 annual hybrid events for leaving care managers, practitioners & care experienced young people.

4 online networks run regularly throughout the year: Participation; Education, Training & Employment; Mental Health & Care Leavers; & Care Experienced Apprentice Network.

21 care experienced individuals took part in 71 days and 62 hours (where the opportunity was not a full day) of participation opportunities.

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It helps our local authority remain connected to services across the UK where we can share good practice and keep abreast of how LAs are responding to changes in political/financial landscape.”

Leaving Care Practitioner, Annual Survey, Oct '24

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NLCBF membership helps with creation of new ideas and to be ambitious for the local offer. It keeps us up to date with changes in policy through the managers' meetings.”

Leaving Care Manager, Annual Survey, Oct '24

Key achievements

Making a difference for NLCBF Members local authorities

Ofsted care leaver judgement – Thematic mapping of 75 care leaver judgements completed to support development of services and support.

Supporting Qualifying Young People guide – Members guide developed to support leaving care teams.

9 hybrid events delivered, raising the voices of care experienced young people & sharing good practice.

Specialist workshops – Supporting young people with additional needs; Transitional Safeguarding & Student Finance; Local Offer Day and 3 pathway planning workshops.

One-to-one managers support from the NLCBF Practice Lead.

Regular online specialist networks

- a) Education, Training & Employment
- b) Participation
- c) Mental Health & Care Leavers
- d) Care Experienced apprentices

Celebrating the contribution with PAs with our annual PA of the Year celebration including Team of the Year, Lifetime Achievement Award & Rising Star.

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“I love coming to these events as I always feel so inspired and motivated to incorporate new ideas into my practice.”

Leaving Care Practitioner, Feb '25



YPBMF

"Amplifying an Amplifier"

YPBMF takes pride in our events and activities, which provide personal benefits to care experienced young people who participate, design, and implement them. This is in addition to the influence their voices and experiences have on services.

Beyond our events, we have been actively collaborating on nationwide surveys, releasing reports, and engaging directly with both local and national governments. Highlights include:

Our largest national events for care experienced individuals held in Manchester, Bristol, and Birmingham, attracting over **300** attendees.

More than 250 senior policy and decision-makers participating in our 'In Their Own Words' takeover event during the NLCBF Managers Event in Leeds.

Presenting the findings of 'In Their Own Words' at over 20 events, where more than 1100 professionals in policy and decision-making roles received our important messages.

Developing our Champions & Legends model further – We celebrated our inaugural Legends Graduation, acknowledging 10 Champions who contributed that year, as well as all previous Champions who were granted the title of YPBMF Legends.

Our Legends serve as experienced mentors to new champions and those participating in our events for the first time. They relate to the experiences of these individuals and understand the evolving system, offering support to care experienced individuals that they themselves lacked. They excel at helping care experienced young people feel connected to the Forum's work.

Insights beyond the age of 25 – They also provide us with insights into the various challenges faced by care experienced individuals as they transition beyond the age of 25, helping us identify the types of support that may be beneficial as they encounter new milestones and hurdles.

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"It's voice, it's influence & it's advocacy, putting an amplifier on an amplifier taking it even further on a national scale."

YPBMF Champion, April '25

**YPBMF Legends welcome people to the YPBMF
Celebration Event, Nov '24**



Advancing the Model

Regional Representation – This year, our new Champions represented 10 out of 11 regions in England and Northern Ireland. We are exploring the possibility of adding more National Champions next year, focusing not only on different geographical areas but also on those with specific experiences, including separated young people or those in contact with justice services.

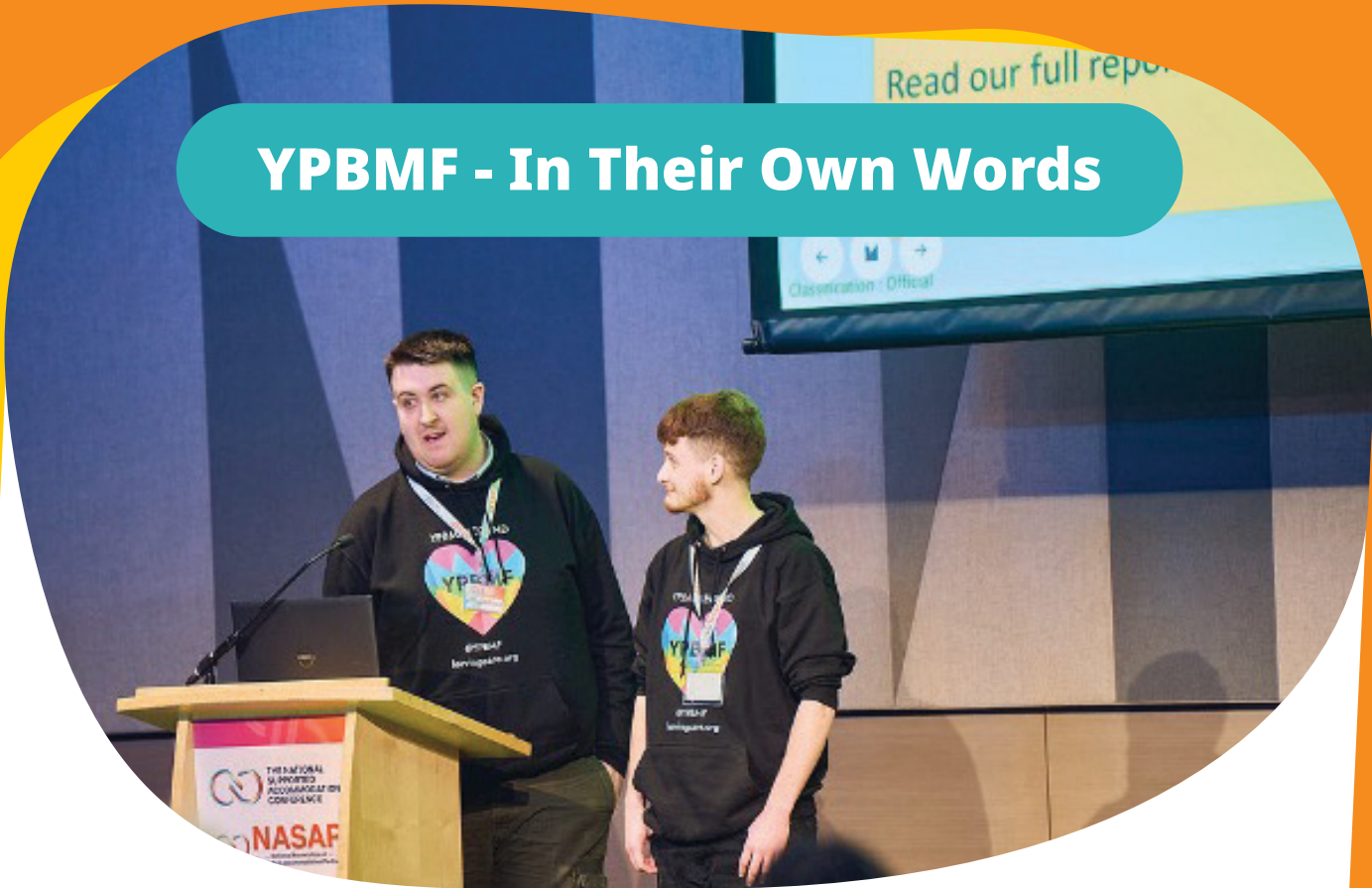
Local Champions – Additionally, we plan to create a new model for local champions in collaboration with our local authorities. The goal is to assist them in supporting care experienced individuals in their communities by incorporating insights from national events to drive change.

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“I know first-hand what it feels like to be a new champion and in the midst of people you’ve never met before and them asking us experienced people what is YPBMF like and what are the events like and it’s nice to share that with new people.”

YPBMF Representative Victoria Odude, Apr '25

YPBMF - In Their Own Words



Mark and Dyllan, YPBMF Legends present 'In Their Own Words' findings, National Association of Supported Accommodation Providers Conference, Nov '24

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This was our third year of running 'In Their Own Words'. Together with YPBMF Legends and Champions we created a new priority list of areas for action to focus on:

1. Cost of Living
2. Mental Health & Health
3. Safe and Affordable Accommodation
4. Communities of Support
5. Support after 21 and 25 years

YPBMF then developed a survey with support from researchers and promoted the survey across the country. Over 200 care experienced individuals from across the country completed the survey. YPBMF Champions & Legends worked with the NLCBF team to analyse the results and turn the findings into 5 reports.

Gaining momentum

Since the launch of the findings, YPBMF have been invited to speak at over 20 conferences and events to share the reports and the findings have been heard by over 1100 professionals including decision makers and policy makers. Events have included:

- National Association of Supported Accommodation Providers Conference
- NCASC conference
- Ofsted Inspectors Workshop
- Local Government Association events

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“I am going to go away and read the full report & not make assumptions that care experienced young people are OK.”
- NCASC, Conference Delegate

YPBMF Legends Esla & Dyllan with YPBMF Mascot, Frodrick, Managers Event, Jul '24



Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- **Lack of housing supply, pressures on mental health services, cost of living pressures** – All of these factors disproportionately affect care experienced young people who often have a limited support network. This is creating a difficult context for young people and local authority teams committed to improving the support they offer.
- **Pressures on local authority finances** – These continue to impact NLCBF members in terms of justifying their membership fees, being able to travel to NLCBF events & most importantly, in the support they can provide to young people.
- **Pressures on separated or unaccompanied asylum seeking young people** – 1 in 3 young people leaving care are separated young people. They are being impacted by lengthy delays in processing asylum claims and, in some areas, are subject to increasing hostility in the community.

Opportunities

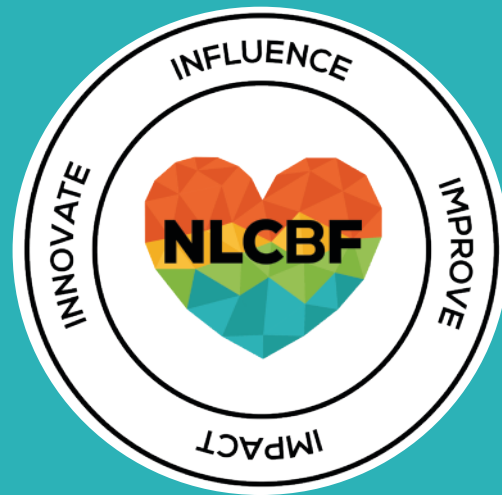
We are also seeing a number of reasons for hope & optimism including:

- **Corporate Parenting Duty extension, Children's Wellbeing Bill** – NLCBF have supported this extension & are delighted to see it included in the Bill. We will be working closely with the DfE to ensure that the guidance leads to meaningful change for care experienced young people. We are continuing to influence the Bill, particularly calling for a national offer for care leavers.
- **Being aspirational for young people leaving care** – As well as influencing to ensure the basic needs of young people are met, we are committed to being extremely ambitious & showcasing examples of what the best parents would be doing for their children. Did you know some local authorities now have a mortgage offer in their local offer?
- **Understanding the unique & best contribution of NLCBF** – We're so pleased to have secured funding for a project evaluation. This will give us a greater understanding of how NLCBF can use its platform to make the most significant change possible.

Future plans

In 2025-26, We're looking forward to...

- 1. Justice Lead starting** – Improving the support that care experienced young people in contact with the justice service receive through better collaboration between services & a greater understanding of the impact of care experience.
- 2. YPBMF's 'In Their Own Words' Event 2025** – We will be holding a follow up event in July '25 to showcase changes made. Throughout the year we'll be looking for more opportunities and people for YPBMF to share their key messages with.
- 3. Launching PA Induction materials** – This resource will be held on the NLCBF members website.
- 4. Influencing Children's Wellbeing Bill & Guidance** – Ensuring we continue to influence the Bill & the guidance that follows, with the messages from YPBMF and local authorities.
- 5. The first National Care Leavers Month** – Following consultation with care experienced young people, National Care Leavers Week will be National Care Leavers Month for the month of November. We can't wait!
- 6. Leaving Care Joint Event, Autumn 2026** – We are starting to put plans together for a leaving care event in November 2026 & we'll be planning for this throughout the year.
- 7. Project evaluation** – With the support of Segelman Trust funding, we will be commissioning an impact evaluation of the work of NLCBF. This evaluation will identify recommendations for the future to ensure the Forum has the greatest possible impact. The findings will contribute to the development of NLCBF's next strategy.
- 8. Continuing our offer** – A rich programme of events, networks and workshops is planned for the year ahead.



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 & Barclays LifeSkills for supporting the work of NLCBF this year.

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