

As academics, we wish to share our concern at the impact of changes to the support given to young people leaving care introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014. The Act introduced the opportunity for children in foster care to ‘Stay Put’ in their final placement beyond the age of 18 if it is their wish, agreed by the carers and considered to be meeting their needs. We welcome this but are concerned that the Act has imposed limitations upon this provision that we consider unacceptable.

The ‘Staying Put’ option is limited to young people in foster care. As such, it excludes 9%¹ of young people in care who are placed in residential care and other settings. Moreover, the ‘Staying Put’ option is not funded by central government and as a result, some authorities are not providing it. Recent data suggest that only 25% of the young people entitled to ‘stay put’ are doing so.

The ‘Every Child Leaving Care Matters’ (ECLCM) campaign, formed in December 2013 in response to this provision, has called this discriminatory legislation. We support the aims of the ECLCM campaign and want to see part 5 Welfare of Children (98) of the Children and Families Act 2014 extended to include all care leavers up to at least the age of 21, irrespective of their placement.

There is a wealth of academic research into the lives of children in care and their outcomes, and we recognise that such outcomes for children and young people need to be improved and, currently fall well below what we would want for all our children. Moreover, the majority of the most troubled and vulnerable children and young people tend to be those placed in children’s homes and other residential settings and are often those for whom a family setting is not suitable. The Children and Families Act 2014, aimed to offer vulnerable children in care the opportunity to continue to live in homes where they were settled and feel safe but in practice it excludes the most vulnerable from doing so, based only on final placement and not assessed need.

In our view, it is unacceptable and ill-judged to exclude young people as young as 16 years old who are leaving residential care from the ‘Staying Put’ option. To expect this group to be able to cope and successfully make the transition to adulthood is inhumane and flies in the face of the wealth of evidence on their struggles and outcomes post care. The evidence on the disproportionate number of care leavers in the prison and secure hospitals population alongside the numbers who are unemployed and homeless has been repeatedly highlighted, including by the government’s own Education Select Committee in their report ‘Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options’.

We call on the government to review and overturn the exclusion of children in residential care and other settings from the option to ‘Stay Put’ as a matter of urgency.

¹ As Professor Mike Stein, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy Research Unit points out this (official) figure is a little misleading “A very similar percentage of young people, aged 16-18 and over, leave care from residential and foster care placements. For the year ending 2014 just under a third (32%) of young people left from all types of residential placements: children’s homes, secure units, hostels (21%), ‘other residential settings’ (9%) and residential schools (2%), representing a slight increase in the use of residential placements (2%) from 2010 - whereas just over a third (37%) of young people left from foster placements, down 2 per cent from 2010.”

Academics 'signed up' to letter

1. Dr Brid Featherstone – Professor of SW Huddersfield
2. Anna Gupta Senior Lecturer - Royal Holloway University
3. Jason Schaub – Senior Lecturer University of Bucks
4. Dr Jenny Pryboda – Forensic Psychologist
5. Bob Banks - Academic Group Leader (SWAPH) Staffordshire
6. Dr Jim Goddard - Head of Sociology and Criminology.
7. Jane Callaghan - Prof of Psychology, University of Northampton
8. Dr Janet Boddy - Professor of Child, Youth & Family Studies; Co-Director Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth at University of Sussex
9. Dave Mason – Senior Lecturer in social work Staffs University
10. Prof. Hugh McLaughlin PhD - Professor of Social Work
11. Peter McParlin - Consultant Child Psychologist
12. Ffion Evans - Senior Lecturer Manchester Metropolitan University
13. Dr Simon John Duffy - Centre for Welfare Reform
14. Dr Reima Ana Maglajlic - Senior Lecturer in Social Work/Course Lead, MA in Social Work
15. Professor Anna Maslin PhD
16. Kirstin Parkes - Lecturer in Social Work
17. Dr Julie Shaw - Senior Lecturer in Criminology
18. Dr Sue White - Professor of Social Work (Children and Families)
19. Dr Justin Rogers - Lecturer in social work University of Bath
20. Peter Simcock - Senior Lecturer in Social Work Uni of Staffs
21. Glen Jankowski
22. Judy Furnivall - Residential child care lecturer
23. Daniel G Scott - Associate Professor Victoria BC, Acting Graduate Advisor School of Child & Youth Care University of Victoria
24. Laura Steckley - Course Director, MSc Advanced Residential Child Care Joint Editor, Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care School of Social Work & Social Policy/CELCIS University of Strathclyde
25. Varda R. Mann-Feder - Professor Graduate Program Director for Youth Work Department of Applied Human Sciences Concordia University
26. Donna Peach - Universities of Salford and Huddersfield
27. Alyson Daley - Lecturer Bradford College
28. Dr Delyh Hughes
29. Professor June Thoburn
30. Professor Mike Stein - Emeritus Professor, Social Policy Research Unit University of York
31. Cathie Jasper - Senior Lecturer MMU
32. Gavin Heron - Lecturer, University of Strathclyde
33. Hadi Jameel
34. Dr Mandy Chivers - Director SHIFT HAPPENS, Associate Manchester Business School, Faculty NHS Leadership Academy Nye Bevan, Non Executive Director The Alternative School Ltd
35. Marie Lebacqz - Principal Lecturer in Social Work MMU
36. Dr Yvon Guest - UWE Bristol
37. Dr Julie Selwyn
38. Rosie Canning - Doctoral Student
39. Val Houghton -Lecturer Salford University
40. Dr Helen Limon - Newcastle University
41. Karen Smith MA - Doctoral Researcher
42. Professor Andrew Kendrick - Professor of Residential Care, University of Strathclyde
43. Dr Louise Almond C.Psychol (Forensic) AFBPsS - Snr Lecturer University of Liverpool
44. Dr Kate M Bennett - Liverpool University Reader