

Leaving Care: Many Challenges but meeting them is not rocket science.

To declare an interest at the outset I am and have always been part of the Every Child Leaving Care Matters campaign. This of course, was established to challenge the differential application of Staying Put, with children leaving residential care being denied the option to remain in their placements, beyond the age of 18. Following recent legislative changes, however, perhaps we will be campaigning for children of 16 and 17 being allowed to do so rather than be 'supported' in a 'care less' home, newly registered in line with lower (not Quality) standards that, unlike the Children's Homes regulations, will actually determine that 'care' will **not** be offered to residents. This article, however, is not directly about either of these subjects, abhorrent though I may consider them to be, but about some services that can and do actually make a real and very positive difference to care leavers lives.

We are all too aware of the failings of services to support care leavers and the dire consequences that this has be it unemployment, homelessness, imprisonment, substance abuse and tragically the alarmingly high rate of suicide. The most recent study I can reference is this <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/The-lifelong-health-and-well-being-of-care-leavers.-Nuffield-Foundation-and-UCL-policy-briefing.-Oct-2021.pdf> . Sadly, it presents data all too familiar for today as it was yesterdays' 40 years ago. There are many services in this arena and a plethora of organisations established to support Care Leavers but it is evidently not enough. The Govt. has, indeed, recently published yet another requirement for Local Authorities, published in this journal on 01/10/21 requiring them to collect care leaver data on all care leavers up to 25 (previously it being 21) but stating that "You only need to provide information for 22- to 25-year-olds who have been in touch with you, we do not, for reporting purposes, expect you to contact all 22- to 25-year-old care leavers to obtain this information." Do they not realise that most care leavers don't bother getting in touch with them because history has shown that it's a waste of time as they receive little or no assistance? Frankly, if it were possible to maintain contact with all care leavers the data is likely to lead to more depressing conclusions. <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/care-leaver-data-reporting-extended-to-cover-young-people-up-to-25>

So what can be done? It's accepted that LA's are financially challenged currently but some of them have a greater commitment to finding a way to help than others by commissioning services that demonstrably help Care Leavers. Among those that I am aware of are several in the Greater Manchester, Cheshire East and Warrington who work alongside experts in the field – Pure Insight, a charity operated by and for care leavers. Another declaration of interest – I am a trustee of the charity.

By forming partnerships with LA's and to a large extent delivering services to meet the LA's responsibilities they have established a tried and tested (Please see the independent evaluation report based on a study by Dr Claire Baker and published in May 2021 - <https://www.pure-insight.org.uk/about-us>) way of supporting care leavers. They do this in a number of ways.

First, and whilst this appears to be novel to some people given recent reports and reviews, Pure Insight offers a relationship-based service; they do and always have, formed relationships with young people. There is an appreciation, sometimes lacking elsewhere, that this is a process that can take months or even years to occur. This is particularly as the large majority of those children and young adults who become part of the Pure Insight service have, at the first point of contact, no good reason to expose themselves to trust anyone. They may have been moved through a range of placements in care, each of which will have broken down, each set of relationships shattered. Relationships with the Pure Insight service are not transitory but open ended, and they have consistently proven to be

enduring. Basic needs such as having somewhere safe to live, furnishing that place well, having sufficient food to eat and adequate funds to afford the basic utilities are identified, if sometimes necessarily fought for, and met by the team with and on behalf of the young person. A range of services have been developed by the team ensuring that young people are helped into employment, education or training. Other, though linked, services have been developed to address and manage the (almost inevitable) emotional well-being and mental health difficulties experienced by Care Leavers. Initially commissioned, these services are now fully integrated into the in-house service offer supporting and advocating care leaver parents. This may be because they are threatened with safeguarding interventions by the LA or have already lost the right to care for their children who are in care because of their parents' status as care leavers or because they were lacking an adequate support network. Pure Insight become that support network. They ensure that their care leavers have fun in their lives too whether it be mountain climbing, trips to the beach, growing things on the allotment, cycling – on bicycles sourced by the team - or merely meeting to chat over a coffee or cup of tea on a regular or (if it suits) intermittent basis. New life skills are learned budgeting, fulfilling one's domestic responsibilities, facilitating the growth of social activities – and vegetables as it happens through an allotment scheme. Throughout this is supported by an excellent mentoring system. The latter identifies and trains mentors who are required to make an absolute long-term commitment to 'their' mentee and the reality is that they consistently go above and beyond expectations in doing so. Mentors are remarkable unremarkable people bringing their own life skills – as perhaps would a good parent – to being there consistently for their mentee. For many of our care leavers this has been lacking in their lives and what can and generally does happen is that a relationship is developed mirroring what so many care leavers who have successfully transitioned into a happy and fulfilling adulthood have said that having one key adult who believed in/encouraged/pushed/unconditionally supported them through good times and bad was what 'made the difference' enabling them to 'succeed'.

Crucially and invariably this is done with the support of the commissioning LA. Of course there may sometimes be a degree of conflict or disagreement, but this is also managed on the basis of developing a relational model which works for all parties. We know that local services are stretched and for commissioning LA's the opportunity to work in partnership with Pure Insight has proven to be both cost-effective and more importantly successful for their care leavers helping them (the Local Authority) to meet their responsibilities (albeit on a shared basis) under their legislative framework.

Leaving Care has often been described as a 'Care Cliff' what the partnership that Pure Insight and LA's have created delivers both a way to avoid the precipice and, or an impregnable safety net for most care leavers. The old African adage about it taking a village to raise a child has some basis in fact. 'Village' though is simply a metaphor and can be and is replicated in the best of models supporting care leavers. The Pure Insight model is not seeking to suggest that it is 'the' model, but it is for our care leavers 'a' model that consistently works. We are very pleased to have been approached by those responsible for the Independent Review of Children's Social Care who have looked at what we do and, we believe, been very happy with what they have seen and witnessed.

Following Dr Claire Baker's independent evaluation we decided that we would offer this model up to public scrutiny and will be offering an 'eventbrite' presentation on 26th October 2021(<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/pure-insight-best-practice-models-for-care-experienced-young-people-tickets-172788443887>) when we will be sharing and celebrating a little of what we are doing. If you are a care leaver, work with care leavers or are responsible services for care leavers please feel free to join us.