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Exploring care leavers' transitions to independence

Submission date 22/01/2025	**Recruitment status** No longer recruiting	[_] Prospectively registered [_] Protocol [_] Statistical analysis plan [_] Results [_] Individual participant data [X] Record updated in last year
Registration date 07/02/2025	**Overall study status** Completed	
Last Edited 10/03/2026	**Condition category** Other	

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
'Care leavers' are young people who were in the care of their Local Authority for 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday. Around 10,000 young people in England leave the care system annually when they turn 18 years old and 25% are former unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers (children seeking asylum who arrived in the UK without a parent or carer and are placed in Local Authority care). Many young adult care leavers struggle with a range of social, emotional, and mental health challenges and can face problems adjusting to a life of independence. It is important to understand care leavers' experiences to design and provide support services. Not much is known about the experiences of young adult care leavers from different backgrounds and what matters to them when they prepare to leave care. This study aims to find out more about the experiences of a diverse range of young adult care leavers and how they leave care. The study will find ways to improve information, support, and services.

Who can participate?
'Care leavers' aged 18-25 years old who have transitioned out of the care system

What does the study involve?
The objectives will be achieved by:
1. Gathering published information about Local Authorities' services and support (both before and during the Covid-19 pandemic) for care leavers. The research will also look for past research studies about experiences of leaving care. Reviewing this information will help us to understand what to ask care leavers in interviews.
2. Interviewing up to 40 care leavers (18-25 years) from different backgrounds about leaving care and their current life. The interviews will be recorded on film if they are happy to do so. The participants will have a chance to read their interviews after it is typed up, and remove any information (if they like) before the research team looks in-depth at the interviews.
3. Writing about what matters to care leavers with illustrative quotes (written, audio or video) from the interviews. Short films will be prepared to be used in service improvement and teaching.
4. Asking 6-8 people in the social care sector, in three group meetings what they think of the

resources and if there is anything that needs to be added or changed.
5. Sharing what is learned as a new section on Socialcaretalk.org, a free, public-facing website featuring social care experiences.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Benefits – The participants may feel empowered by sharing their voice and experience in an area that is under-researched and underrepresented.

Risks – The participants may experience post-traumatic stress or anxiety after sharing their experiences.

Where is the study run from?
Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
April 2023 to November 2025

Who is funding the study?
The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) School for Social Care Research (SSCR)

Who is the main contact?
Dr Suzanne Ii, suzanne.ii@phc.ox.ac.uk

Contact information

Type(s)
Principal investigator

Contact name
Dr Suzanne Ii

ORCID ID
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5128-0300

Contact details
Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences
University of Oxford, Radcliffe Observatory Quarter
Woodstock Road, Oxford
United Kingdom
OX2 6GG
+44 (0)7767755196
suzanne.ii@phc.ox.ac.uk

Type(s)
Public

Contact name
Mrs Elizabeth Woolliams

Contact details

Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences
University of Oxford, Radcliffe Observatory Quarter
Woodstock Road, Oxford
United Kingdom
OX2 6GG
+44(0)1865 617844
elizabeth.woolliams@phc.ox.ac.uk

Type(s)
Scientific

Contact name
Prof Sue Ziebland

ORCID ID
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6496-4859

Contact details
Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences
University of Oxford, Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, Woodstock Road
Oxford
United Kingdom
OX2 6GG
+44 (0)1865 617844
sue.ziebland@phc.ox.ac.uk

Additional identifiers

Integrated Research Application System (IRAS)
325315

Central Portfolio Management System (CPMS)
61508

Study information

Scientific Title
Exploring care leavers' transitions to independence: A qualitative study to be published on Socialcaretalk.org for prospective care leavers, educators, service providers and policy makers

Acronym
SCTCL

Study objectives
The purpose of the research: We would like to find out more about the experiences of a diverse range of young adult care leavers and how they leave care. We aim to find ways to improve information, support, and services.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 28/07/2023, Medical Sciences Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee (Research Services, Boundary Brook House, Churchill Drive, Headington, Oxford, OX3 7GB, United Kingdom; +44(0)1865 616575; ethics@medsci.ox.ac.uk), ref: R79689/RE001

Primary study design
Other

Study design
Qualitative narrative interview study

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Understanding leaving care support and services to care leavers who transition out of the Local Authority care

Interventions
This is a qualitative, narrative interview study with up to 40 care leavers aged 18-25 years.

The objectives are to:
1. Conduct a scoping review of Local Authorities' (LAs) service provision for the transition process out of care in England and a literature review around transition support, pathway planning and policy
2. Explore the perspectives of care leavers and their experiences transitioning out of care
3. Develop Socialcaretalk.org resources to inform and support young people through transition and guide improvements in the pathway planning process
4. Invite stakeholders to assess the new resource on Socialcaretalk.org

Intervention Type
Other

Primary outcome(s)
Participant interviews at baseline will be taken to explore leaving care transitions and support given by local authorities. The One Sheet of Paper method (a mapping process to organise and produce thematic results) will be used.

Key secondary outcome(s)
There are no secondary outcome measures

Completion date
31/01/2026

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Participant is willing and able to give informed consent for participation in the study.
2. Aged 18-25 years
3. Participant has been in the care of a Local Authority for 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th

birthday.
4. The participant has transitioned out of the care system and is defined as a ‘care leaver’ according to the criteria set out above.

Participant type(s)
Service user

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Adult

Lower age limit
18 Years

Upper age limit
25 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
30

Key exclusion criteria
Participant is care experienced but has not been in the care of a Local Authority for 13 weeks or more, spanning their 16th birthday.

Date of first enrolment
01/08/2023

Date of final enrolment
30/06/2025

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
Medical Sociology & Health Experiences Research Group
Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences
University of Oxford, Radcliffe Observatory Quarter
Woodstock Road, Oxford
England
OX2 6GG

Sponsor information

Organisation
University of Oxford

ROR
https://ror.org/052gg0110

Funder(s)

Funder type
Government

Funder Name
School for Social Care Research

Alternative Name(s)
NIHR School for Social Care Research, SSCR

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
National government

Location
United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during the current study will be stored in a non-publicly available repository MS&HERG Archive. The contact name is Ruth Sanders, ruth.sanders@phc.ox.ac.uk.

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in non-publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes

Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes