National Care Leavers Month 2026

This year's theme is *Leading the Way: From Experience to Empowerment*. It is a moment to recognise care leavers' achievements and the barriers they still face in moving into education and work.

Who are care leavers?

A care leaver is someone who has been in care for 13 weeks or more since age 14, including at age 16. Over 50,000 care leavers aged 17 to 21 live in the UK. Those aged 19 to 21 are nearly three times as likely as their peers to be not in education, employment or training (NEET), according to the Milburn Review.

What care leavers tell us

In the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum's *In Their Own Words* (2024), care leavers described:

- living independently younger than their peers, at a time of high living costs
- difficulty accessing support because of anxiety, travel costs or a lack of information
- challenges getting health diagnoses and support

Losing support networks

56% of young people in education, employment or training had help from family or carers to move towards work or learning, compared with 42% of those who were NEET (Milburn Review). 26% of care-experienced people had support withdrawn or reduced at age 21 or younger (NLCBF, 2024).

What the Milburn Review proposes

- A Care Leaver Transition Allowance of £50 a week for 6 months, for care leavers who are NEET or at risk.

- An extra £2,000 for employers hiring young people facing greater barriers, including care leavers.
- A local Youth Opportunity Service giving each care leaver a named adviser to help with health, housing and skills, with planning from age 16.

Affordable travel and stable housing

Transport costs can put education, training and work out of reach. Policy Connect's *Earning or Learning* report recommends a national free bus entitlement for 16 to 18 year-olds. It builds on Greater Manchester's Our Pass scheme, which already covers care leavers aged 18 to 21.

The Milburn Review recognises the need for joined-up housing support but sets out no specific measures. *Earning or Learning* recommends DfE intervention, with Housing Improvement Plans, where more than 10% of a local authority's care leavers aged 18 to 21 are in unsuitable accommodation.

Next steps

Reducing the number of NEET care leavers needs more than employment support alone. Health, housing, transport, education and skills are connected. Reform will need sustained investment, local capacity and coordination between services.

More information

Read our full analysis on the Policy Connect website.

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