



Planning Transition to Adulthood for Looked After Children (including guidance on the amended Children (Leaving care) (England) Regulations 2001)

Response from the Foyer Federation 25 March 2010

Foyer Federation

1. For over a decade, the Foyer Federation has helped turn young people's experiences of disadvantage into solutions that support their transition into adult independence. We develop transformational programmes and campaigns that fill gaps in community services and inspire policy and decision makers to make a more effective investment in young people. The direct experience of vulnerable young people and those working with them helps inform our understanding of the barriers facing young people and develop new approaches to overcome them. Until now, our work has largely been channelled through integrated learning and accommodation centres, known as Foyers. Foyers now operate in over 130 urban and rural communities across the UK, providing safe, quality assured environments, where experts reconnect vulnerable young people with personal development opportunities.
 - 1.1 Evidence from across our network shows that the needs of young people are becoming ever more complex; crime and anti-social behaviour, poor health and well-being, low educational achievement, fears of worklessness and declining social mobility are as much a concern for young people now as street homelessness was in the 1990s. The challenge this poses for vulnerable young people is made even more acute by the present recession and, we believe, this demands a broader range of interventions to provide fairer access to the skills, resources, and opportunities that all young people are entitled to. It also requires a fundamental shift in policies and institutions to recognise the different stages of social development that cut across traditional markers of age and identity.
 - 1.2 At the heart of everything we do is a belief that young people will only achieve their full potential when there is a fair exchange between their responsibilities to contribute and engage and society's obligation to tailor services to their needs. For

Foyers, this often means picking up the threads of a young person's education, developing their skills for independence and encouraging greater resilience, and often includes rebuilding relationships, overcoming mental health issues and developing stronger confidence and self-belief.

Chapter 1 - Overarching Questions

2. The Foyer Federation welcomes both the priorities that have been identified in supporting the transition into adulthood for looked after children, and also the recognition that Foyers provide appropriate support for such vulnerable groups.
 - 2.1. A successful transition into adulthood is heavily reliant upon a number of factors, and the most critical, we believe, is a support plan based on a needs assessment. Other factors that must be considered are: ensuring access to services, awareness of services available, learning how to budget, to recognise how invaluable physical, emotional and mental well-being is, and being able to identify their own skills, resources and opportunities.

Chapter 2 - The Legal Framework

3. The information in this chapter is reasonably clear, although it would be helpful to have a summary of obligations against each Section such as obligations under S.17 and S.20, and reference to the recent landmark Southwark case.

Chapter 3 - Assessing Transition and Pathway Planning

4. We welcome the recognition that the transition into adulthood is not a quick and easy process and emphasise the need of ensuring a close relationship is formed between the services involved, the young person and the local authority. In our experience, we have found that the journey to adulthood can be made effectively without unnecessary disruption when:
 - a. The service is based upon a holistic approach assessing the needs and addressing the aspirations of the client
 - b. The service expresses an approach that takes account of the reciprocal responsibilities faced by both the young person and the service provider
 - c. The service promotes active and engaged citizenship where the voice of the client is taken into account in the shaping and delivery of service provision.
- 4.1. The essence of the Foyer service does not lie in the range of provisions but in the concept of conditionality. With conditionality, there is a 'something for something' deal in which participation is paramount. The commitment of the young person to engage through participation is critical to ensure a smooth transition to independent adulthood. Along with conditionality, a young person entering the Foyer will work with the designated key worker to produce a support plan based on needs. The support plan is integral to the whole Foyer process in that the young person

throughout their stay will work towards achieving the objectives/goals that have been identified.

- 4.2. Having the appropriate pathway plan is critical to a successful transition to adulthood and should by all accounts include an assessment of the potential accommodation. The Foyer Federation welcomes the Private Member's Bill, Young People Leaving Care (Accommodation) introduced by Helen Southworth MP, calling for the Government to set minimum standards with regard to accommodation for young people leaving care and for local authorities to ensure its implementation.
- 4.3. Whilst the relevant and necessary areas are factored into the pathway plan, such as health, education, financial support, emotional and family, we strongly recommend an explicit reference to skills, resources and opportunities is also made. The young person should be made aware of what skills they already possess such as the extent of their confidence, well-being and the level of their commitment, and what resources are already available, such as access to transport and accommodation, and finally, what opportunities are available in terms of education, employment and volunteering.
- 4.4. The focus on career planning is critical and this should include both the aspirations of the young person and to recognise the young person's existing assets in that their skills, resources and opportunities are again identified. The following example demonstrates the Foyer Federation's approach in tackling worklessness and supporting vulnerable young people to prepare for employment.

Working Assets

Funded by the Tenants Services Authority, this project set out to explore the theme of young people tackling the problems associated with employability in collaboration with Axiom Housing Association. Working Assets aims to move beyond simply helping young people to cope with dependency by changing the way in which programmes and services are designed, commissioned, funded, delivered and evaluated across the third and public sector. The Working Assets model provides a framework to help services establish an asset based approach that will help nurture young people's work readiness and this includes: engaging young people and local community in a positive activity, looking at ways to build young people's skills and resources through that activity, and to strengthen the Foyer's support process, and finally to recognise the achievements of young people and identify their future opportunities.

- 4.5. With regard to the timescale of 28 days, we would propose the initial review takes place before 28 days to ensure the young person is settling into the accommodation without problems regardless of whether the accommodation is regulated by Ofsted under the Care Standards Act 2000. Whilst 28 days may appear an appropriate length of time, there is a potential risk to assume that all young care leavers will be secure in themselves to go without support for 28 days. We would recommend the

first review in the form of ‘checking in’ to take place by the appropriate qualified person at 12 days followed by a comprehensive review, involving all relevant agencies at 28 days to ensure personalisation of the service through joint working and participation.

- 4.6. The identified ‘trigger’ events are reasonable causes to initiate a review although we would also recommend that the risk of deteriorating emotional and mental well-being should also explicitly constitute a reason for a review to take place, as mental health issues are often undetected for a period of time before diagnosis.

Chapter 4 - Personal Advisors

5. Whilst the guidance provides an overview of the role of the personal advisor, we would suggest there is explicit reference to required educational qualifications and relevant work experience rather than a “working knowledge”. One of the biggest barriers to successful transition to adulthood is not having the right support and guidance, and there is a potential risk that support will be hindered should the personal advisor lack the necessary training and qualification.
 - 5.1. It is appropriate for the visit to take place within 7 days after the initial 28 day review however, as suggested in the above paragraph 4.5 we would recommend that the first visit takes place before 28 days.

Chapter 5 - Care leavers aged 18-24

6. The information about the support levels is generally clear although its sufficiency will be determined by the contents of the personalised pathway plan that entails all the relevant and necessary support mechanisms. The transition to adulthood for ages 18-24 years is particularly challenging in that during this period, there are certain expectations to make the ‘right’ decisions which helps determine the success of the future. In practice, this is extremely difficult for vulnerable young people who lack the necessarily support of family and/or social networks. The age of 18 years is seen as ‘coming of age’ in so many ways, and it is therefore critical that the support and guidance is available to help make this transformation.
 - 6.1. The following example demonstrates the Foyer Federation’s approach in addressing how best to ‘come of age’, helping young people to prepare themselves and make the journey to adulthood.

MyNav

Funded by the Department of Business, Innovations and Skills, the project demonstrates how choice and influence can be offered through participation of education and learning. By participating in workshops, young learners address 5 key questions of: Where have I been? Who am I? Where am I going? What do I need to get there? How am I progressing?

MyNav offers young adults both a practical and digital framework to map out their life and shape the best routes towards an enriched future, sharing their stories and supporting each other along the way. MyNav will help equip young adults to take control of their individual transition, enabling them to participate in different learning communities at a local, national and virtual level, and to learn from each other, sharing the routes they take in their lives.

The MyNav journey offers participants access to a local and national 'PowerPack' of learning opportunities through which they can identify, develop and track the skills and resources they need to navigate their transitions. Participants will be able to add their own unique talent offers into the PowerPack and build online portfolios, similar to those found on social networking sites to demonstrate their transitional achievements.

- 6.2. Again, assessing whether support is clear and proportionate for those up to the age of 25 years engaged in education can only be determined by the level of personalisation. It is encouraging to know aspirations will be promoted through individual pathway plans, however in reality these aspirations can be easily dampened under the regulations of the welfare system. Whilst we welcome the increasing threshold to 21 years under the 16 Hour Rule, it remains an issue as more than often, care leavers may not know what it is they would actually like to learn until they are post 19 years. At a recent All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs, many concerns were raised with regard to the issue of having to sacrifice the opportunity to attend university in return for housing benefit. Additionally, there are concerns around the interface between pre and post 19 years and the potential impact this will have on individuals with the changes laid in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Chapter 6 - Care leavers who require additional specialist support

7. Yes, the information is clear and we would again, reiterate the need for ensuring provisions of support are personalised to help achieve transformational outcomes for care leavers with specialist needs.
 - 7.1. With regard to those at risk of offending, and re-offending, again, we would emphasise the need for systems to be in place enabling effective implementation of

joint working between agencies both at the local and regional level. There is concern with regard to care leavers detained on a short term custodial sentence as the level of support may be disrupted by their detention in one or more locations.

Chapter 7 - Planning and arranging suitable accommodation for the transition to independent living

8. We welcome the recognition that Foyers are effective in providing supported accommodation to care leavers. When a person enters the Foyer, a support package is prepared and a key worker is allocated to help 'navigate' the young person in a guided direction. The maximum stay is 2 years and thereafter the young person enters the 'move on' stage. It is therefore critical that a whole systems approach along with joint working partnerships at the local level are implemented to ensure the transition to independent living is not disrupted and will therefore help prevent the risk of homelessness.
- 8.1. One of the common problems that face the supported housing sector is the lifting of the Supporting People ring fence. Whilst service providers are aware of the need to tap into Local Area Agreements, we would encourage continuous awareness of the available funding streams, particularly for smaller service providers.
- 8.2. Joint protocols are paramount to successful transition. Floating support has an important role to play and can help ensure the implementation of joint working. In order to achieve a transformational outcome, there must be a close relationship between the commissioner, service provider and care leaver, and therefore we would recommend, there is an explicit reference to participation from the care leaver to ensure that both personalisation and effective engagement is achieved
- 8.3. As mentioned above in paragraph 4.2, we fully endorse the proposals made by Helen Southworth MP calling for a duty to ensure minimum standards are set with regard to accommodation for care leavers. We would strongly encourage careful consideration be taken with regard to location of accommodation as transportation links are severely limited in some rural areas.

Chapter 8 - Finance Matters

9. The listed priorities are appropriate although we would also recommend there needs to be explicit reference to healthy eating as there is much concern that young people will resort to quick and easy food for the sake of both cost and convenience.
- 9.1. We would recommend local authorities to adopt a whole systems approach in ensuring young people outside the authority's area are aware of and gain access to financial assistance.

- 9.2. The information about Setting up Homes Allowances is helpful and we would also recommend basic equipment such as minimum set cutlery, dishes and furniture such as a bed, sofa and table.
- 9.3. With regard to benefits, there is much concern of the barriers that face young people particularly around the 16 Hour Rule. There is also the frequently reported issue of young people feeling 'trapped' on benefit since, at least in the short term, wages earned are barely more than their benefit entitlement if they remained on benefit.

Conclusion

10. In conclusion, the Foyer Federation welcomes the guidance that will help ensure a successful transition to adulthood. However, there is concern with regard to the capacity and available resource of local authorities to fulfil their obligations. Additionally there is concern around the legislation laid down in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 with regard to the interface between pre 19 and post 19 year olds, and the barriers young people face in seeking employment, education and training such as cost of transportation, limited transportation links and welfare restrictions.
 - 10.1. The recent ruling in the Southwark case has been welcomed by the Foyer Federation. However, the ruling does potentially impact on existing resources. The main concern would be identifying when the duty of Section 20 begins. Would it be at the start of the assessment or on completion of assessment? This in turn leads to cost implications in that the young person should be able to claim accommodation and living expenses as benefit whilst being assessed.¹
 - 10.2. A successful transition to adulthood is determined by the appropriate level of personalisation and participation in that the care leaver recognises what skills, resources and opportunities are available to make the journey.

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¹ National Care Advisory Service, Law Lords Judgement: G vs. Southwark briefing, May 2009