

Your Life Beyond Care

*The views of care leavers in
Southwark on their well-being &
what makes life good*

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About this research

Bright Spots

This research is part of the Bright Spots programme: a partnership between the University of Bristol and Coram Voice, with the aim to:

- improve the care experience for all looked after children and care leavers;
- give young people a voice on their own well-being; and
- highlight the 'Bright Spots' of practice that contribute to children flourishing in and after care.

The project development of the care leaver survey 'Your Life Beyond Care' was funded by Coram-i through the DfE Social Care Innovation Fund.

- This report is part of a pilot project to develop a subjective well-being survey for care leavers, building on the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys for children in care (4-18yrs).
- The development of the new survey included a literature review of care leavers' views (Baker, 2017), research into comparative data, feedback and seminars with professionals working with care leavers and workshops with 31 care leavers to co-produce the survey. Through the workshops young people from two local authorities identified what was important to care leavers, selected questions and helped plan how to distribute the survey.
- The *Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators* put care leavers' experience and voices at the heart of measuring subjective well-being. The indicators are measured by the '*Your Life Beyond Care*' survey.
- The survey identifies the areas where care leavers are doing well and where things could be improved, providing an insight into young people's experience and well-being to inform service improvements.

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Key findings (1):

60 care leavers (40%) in Southwark responded to the survey with slightly more women taking part.



Many (78%) care leavers felt they had either been treated better or the same as young people who had not been in care.



Virtually all care leavers could identify at least one person (average 2-3 types of people) who gave them emotional support. Friends were the most frequent response followed by leaving care worker.



Most care leavers (72%) trusted their leaving care worker. Those who reported more negative experiences noted how their workers could be hard to contact and did not always do what they said they would do.



Whilst many care leavers felt involved in pathway planning, 19% did not. They either did not know what a pathway plan was, did not have one or had rarely or never felt involved.



Care leavers experienced fewer changes of worker compared to young people in care (11-18yrs) in Southwark.

Key findings (2):



- Just over half of care leavers lived on their own.

- 59% of care leavers *always* felt safe in their home and a similar proportion (60%) thought their home was '*mainly right*' for them. 17% 'never' felt settled where they lived.
- Most of the comments on accommodation were negative with care leavers feeling that their accommodation was temporary or unsuitable.
- Care leavers were as likely as their peers in the general population to live in households that had internet access and to have a smart phone.



93% felt they had the skills needed to take care of themselves but 4 young people did not.



Care leavers enjoyed a range of activities in their spare time. The top 5 were:

- playing/ listening to music
- watching TV/films
- hanging out with people they liked
- using social media
- shopping.

Lack of money and health issues were the biggest barrier to having fun.

Key findings (3):



12 (21%) care leavers had low well-being.

Care leavers with low well-being were more likely to report:

- they often felt lonely
- did not like their appearance
- did not always feel settled in their homes
- were not involved in pathway planning
- did not have a person who told them when they had done well.



About a fifth (19%) of care leavers had felt lonely *all or most of the time* in the last few weeks.



35% of care leavers reported high levels of anxiety compared to 18% in the general population.

Key findings (4):

Compared to young people in the general population:



Care leavers in Southwark (24%) were more than three times as likely to report financial difficulties compared to the general population (7%).



A similar proportion of care leavers (13%) reported they had a disability as young people (12%) in the general population.



Fewer care leavers had a trusted person in their lives both compared to their peers in the general population and young people (11-18yrs) in care in Southwark.



A greater proportion of care leavers (18%) recorded that they did not have a good friend compared to their peers (13%) in the general population.



Across all measures of well-being care leavers had much lower scores compared to young people in the general population.

Methodology

- An online survey was used to capture care leavers' views on their own well-being.
- Paper surveys were also available and used in cases where no Internet was available, or when the young person preferred this method.
- In Southwark at the time of the survey there were 150 care leavers aged 16-25yrs able to do the survey.
- There are 40 questions in the survey.
- Care leavers mostly responded to the survey with a trusted adult present. The trusted adult role was given to a wide range of professionals including the participation and engagement officer, advanced practitioners, semi-independent accommodation providers, education and employment advisers, and colleagues from the Youth Offending Service.
- A student on work experience also helped distribute the survey with the support of the participation coordinator, contacting young people directly by phone and via WhatsApp and text message.
- Personal advisers were asked to promote the survey to their young people, but were not asked to act as trusted adults.
- Care leavers were asked to complete the online survey in February and March 2018.
- Young people completed the survey anonymously: individual identifiers such as name, locations etc. were not collected in order to allow responses without fear of consequences.
- If young people recorded names or any identifying information on the survey these were removed by the researchers.

Methodology

Subjective well-being:

- This survey measures 'subjective well-being' how young people themselves feel about their lives.
- There are questions in the surveys about affect (e.g. how happy a young person feels now), cognitive judgements (e.g. evaluations of relationships) and the inner world (e.g. life having meaning).
- All these elements help us understand whether young people are flourishing.

- Where possible, care leaver data are compared to data on young people in the general population (aged 16-24), to responses from looked after young people aged 11-18yrs in Southwark (Coram Voice, 2018) and to averages responses across 6 local authorities who participated in Your Life Beyond Care in 2017-18.
- Throughout the report there are examples of what care leavers wrote in relation to specific questions or themes, but not all quotes could be included. Your local authority will receive the full set of comments from young people in a separate document which can be used to explore issues in more detail.



On some pages of this report you will see a '**Bright Spots**' icon (shown left). This indicates a 'good news' story – a positive aspect of practice in your local authority. This is where 100% of young people have given a positive response, or report the same or higher well-being than their peers in the general population.

Section 3: Survey results

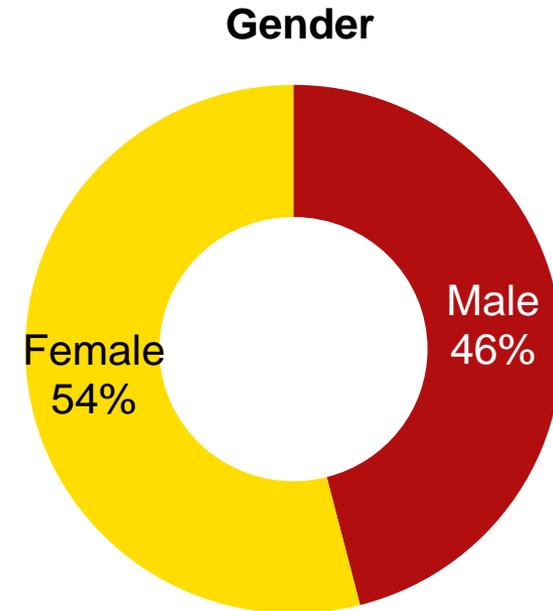


Sample size, age and gender

- 60 young people responded to the survey from a possible care leaver population of 150.
- The response rate was 40%.
- All the questions were optional.
- The biggest group of respondents (55%) were aged between 21 and 25yrs.

Age group	Total <i>n</i> (%)
16-17yrs	2 (4%)
18-20yrs	23 (41%)
21-25yrs	31 (55%)
TOTAL	56 (100%)*

*4 young people did not respond



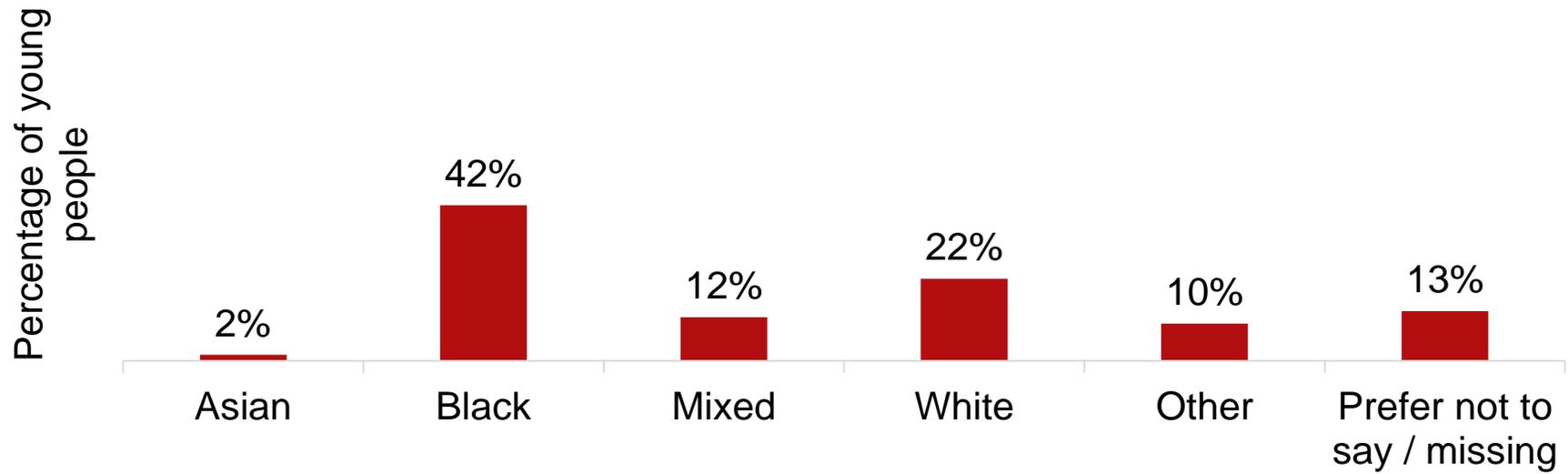
- In Southwark, slightly more women ($n=29$) than men ($n=25$) responded to the survey. 6 young people did not respond to the question on gender.

Ethnicity

Young people of Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicities appear proportionately represented in the survey, as they make up 70% of the care population in Southwark's statistical return to the DfE (2017) compared to 66% in our sample.

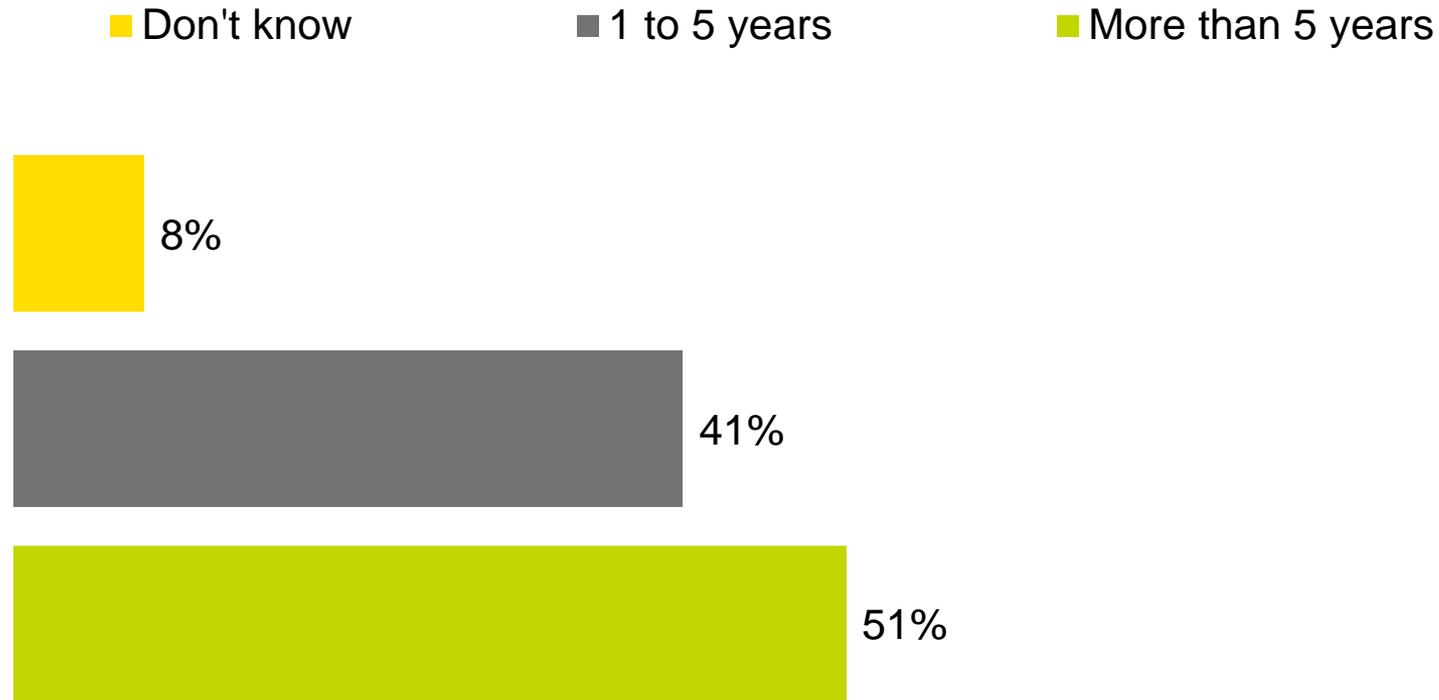
- Just under half (42%) of young people who completed the survey were black.

The ethnicity of young people who completed the survey $n=60$



Number of years spent in care

How many years were you in care in total?



Percentage of young people

- Just over half of the care leavers who responded had been in care for more than five years. No young people had been in care for less than a year.

Partners, being a parent and / or pregnant

All care leavers were asked, *are you a parent?* They could choose more than one answer: *'yes', 'no' or 'I am pregnant/my partner is pregnant'*

Research evidence shows the benefits of good quality, stable couple relationships for well-being. (Sserwanja, 2016)

Research with care leavers has shown that some felt living with a partner could reduce loneliness and provide emotional support, but others described their relationships as volatile. (Dixon, 2004)
Some young people had experienced abusive or manipulative relationships. (Kelly, 2016)

All care leavers were asked, *do you have a partner (are you in a relationship)?*

- 22 care leavers (37%) had a partner.
- Female care leavers were more likely to have a partner – 55% of female care leavers had a partner compared to 20% male care leavers.



10 (19%) care leavers were a parent and/or they or their partner was pregnant.

- 16 of care leavers with a partner (73%) said their partner gave them emotional support.

What would make leaving care better for you?

Don't allow you not having a mum or dad be the reason you get looked upon as being a bad parent.

The people in your life

- Good friends
- Pets
- Trusted person
- Who gives you emotional support?
- People who listen to, encourage and believe in you



Good friends

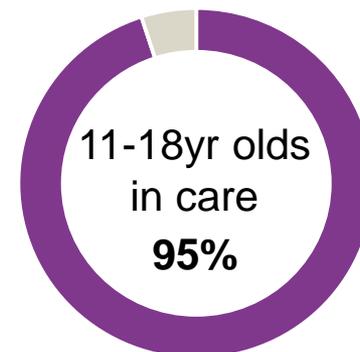
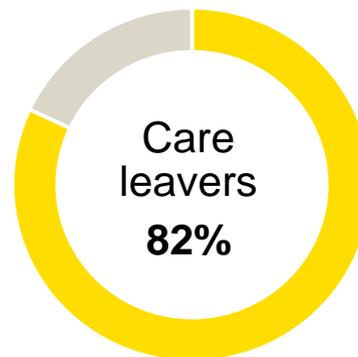
Young people in the focus groups identified good friends as important to them. Our research review also found that care leavers thought that their friends could be an important source of support and help reduce social isolation. (Baker, 2017)



All care leavers were asked whether they *had a really good friend*.

- Many care leavers stated that they had at least one good friend but 11 (18%) did not, which is a greater proportion than their peers (13%) in the general population. (Relate, 2017)

Do you have a really good friend?



The friends I do have can't support me 100% because I can't explain the bad things I went through in care because it won't make sense.

My friend helps me a lot.

Pets



Pets were important to some of the care leavers in the focus groups.

These young people said their pets loved them unconditionally. Care leavers were asked if they *had a pet*.

- 14% of care leavers had a pet but a larger number (31%) didn't have a pet and wanted one.
- In the 2018 Southwark survey of looked after children, 51% of young people (11-18yrs) had a pet where they lived.
- There may be a range of reasons why care leavers were less likely to have a pet. It may be that as young people become care leavers they lose the pets in their lives.

Do you have a pet?	<i>n</i> (%)
Yes	8 (14%)
No, but I'd like one	18 (31%)
No, and I don't want one	23 (39%)
I'm not allowed a pet where I live	10 (17%)
Total	59 (101%)*

*Due to rounding does not equal 100%

Trusted person

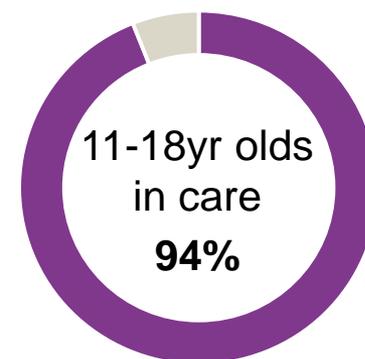
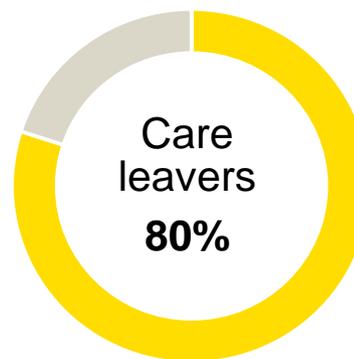
Care leavers were asked, *do you have a person who you trust, who helps you and sticks by you no matter what?*

The availability of one key adult has been shown to be the turning point in many looked after young people's lives. (Gilligan, 2009).

Having this person continued to be important for care leavers. In our research review (Baker, 2017) young people reported that coping with transitions was easier when they had a key person to rely on.

General population comparison: 98% of young people (16-24yrs) reported they had someone to rely on. (ONS, 2017)

Trusted person



- Four-fifths of care leavers (80%) had a trusted person in their lives, 12 (20%) did not.



Fewer care leavers (80%) felt they had a trusted person in their lives in comparison with their peers (98%) in the general population and young people in care (94%) in Southwark.

Who gives you emotional support?

Research has found that some care leavers reported that the availability of emotional support diminished after they had left care (Dixon & Baker, 2016). Care leavers were asked, *who gives you emotional support?* And we counted the types of people who care leavers thought gave them emotional support. It was possible to tick more than one answer.

I am lucky enough to have a supportive foster family, birth family and partner

- 3 care leavers reported having no-one to give them emotional support.



- Most care leavers had about 2 types of people in their lives (range: 0-7 types of people) who gave them emotional support (average 2.5).

Who gives you emotional support?	n	%
Friends	33	55%
Leaving care worker	22	37%
Mum	17	28%
Partner	17	28%
Brother(s) or sister(s)	16	27%
Other relatives	13	22%
Foster carer(s)	10	17%
Dad	7	12%
Counsellor / mental health professional	6	10%
Other care leavers	5	8%
Other e.g. church; Pause project	4	7%
Own child(ren)	3	5%
Pet(s)	3	5%
Residential staff	3	5%
I don't have anyone	3	5%

People who listen to, encourage and believe in you

Care leavers who were involved in developing the survey stressed how important it was to know that there was someone there for them in both “*good and dark times.*”

- Most care leavers (90%) had someone who listened to them.
- But fewer young people felt they had someone who believed in them or told them when they had done well.

- Not feeling involved in their pathway planning or trusting their worker was associated with low well-being.
- Often feeling lonely was associated with not having someone who told you when you had done well.

Do you have a person who...	Yes <i>n</i> (%)	No <i>n</i> (%)	TOTAL <i>n</i> (%)
Listens to you?	53 (90%)	6 (10%)	59 (100%)
Tells you when you've done well?	48 (84%)	9 (16%)	57 (100%)
Believes you'll be a success?	59 (86%)	8 (14%)	58 (100%)

Knowing & getting in touch with leaving care worker

All care leavers were asked if they *knew who their current leaving care worker was*. Knowing their worker was an important issue for young people in focus groups.

Young people who knew their worker were asked, *how easy it was to get in touch with their leaving care worker*.

Young people in care (11-18yrs) were asked, *how easy it was to get in touch with their social worker*.

- A slightly larger proportion of care leavers (92%) thought it was easy to contact their worker compared to 88% of young people in care aged 11-18yrs.



- Many young people (83%) knew their worker but 10 (17%) care leavers did not compared to 8% across other LAs who did the survey.

Ease of getting in touch with worker	Care leaver n %	11-18 year olds in care n %
All of most of the time / Sometimes	46 (92%)	74 (88%)
Hardly ever / Never	4 (8%)	10 (12%)

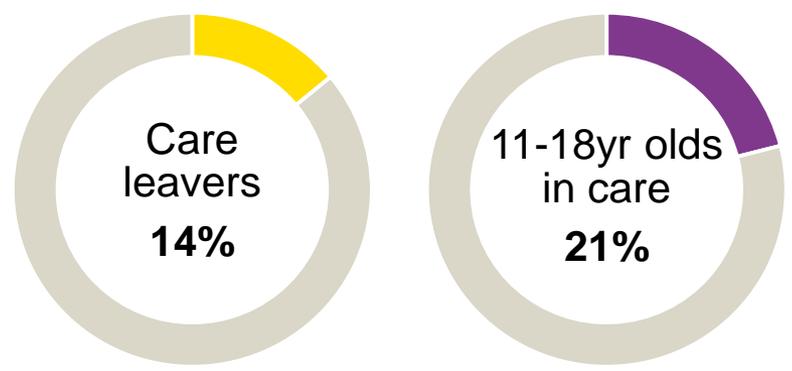
Leaving care worker: Continuity

Care leavers were asked, *how many leaving care workers have you had in the last 12 months?*

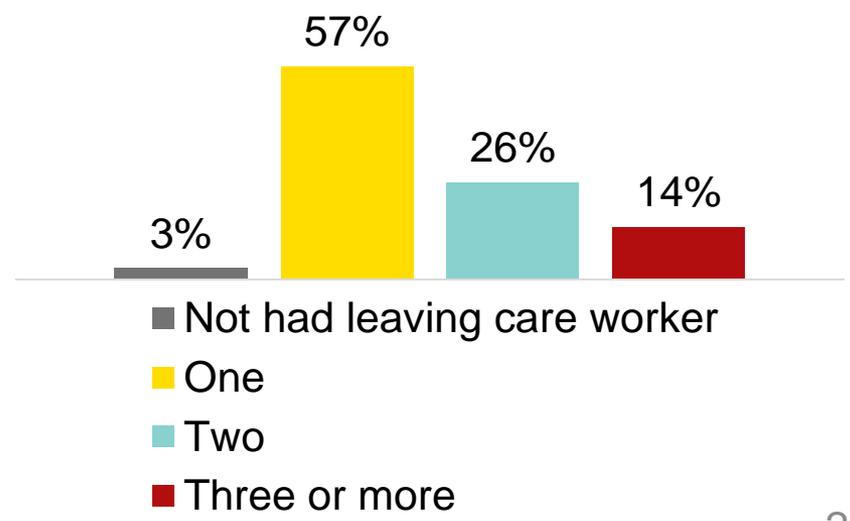
Across a range of research in our review (Baker, 2017), care leavers were clear about the qualities they valued in workers such as, someone who was responsive, consistent, and reliable.

- Just over half (57%) care leavers had the same worker over the past year.
- Care leavers experienced greater stability of worker compared to looked after young people (11-18yrs) in Southwark.

3 or more workers in a year



How many leaving care workers have you had in the last 12 months?



Leaving care worker: Trust

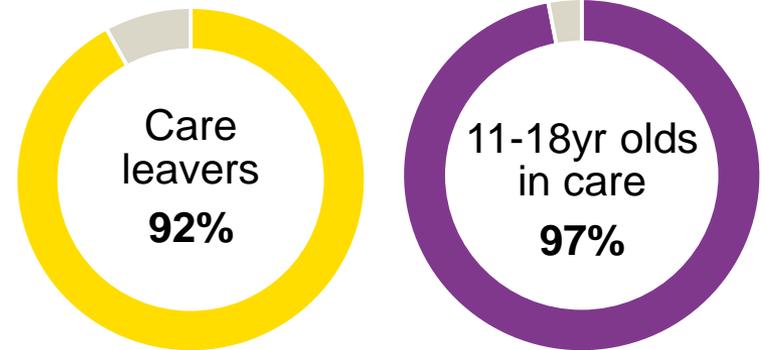
Both our focus groups and research review identified 'trust' as a very important quality in relationships with leaving care workers.

Care leavers were asked, *do you trust the leaving care worker you have now?*

My personal Adviser is [Name] and I don't feel like he understands my full potential I cannot trust him and we barely have conversations about me.

I think she is honest and she does what she says she will do

Trust workers 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'



- 72% reported they trusted their worker 'all or most of the time'.
- 20% 'sometimes' trusted their worker.
- Only 4 (8%) care leavers recorded 'hardly ever' or 'never' trusting their leaving care worker.

Comments: leaving care worker

Young people were also given the option of providing *comments about their leaving care worker*. 24 (60%) young people wrote how they felt about their workers.

- About two-thirds of comments were positive. These young people tended to describe the help they received and how they valued it when their worker did what they said they would do.

Gets things done.

She is consistent.

She is so helpful and supports me.

I like her and I think she does her best for me.

She is brilliant and helps me in every way possible, could [not] ask for a better one.

She tells me what I'm entitled to. Things that I was never given or told about with my previous workers. She encourages and pushes me to motivate me. And it works. She is very encouraging and tells me that I can achieve what ever I want in life...

Negative comments: leaving care worker

- Care leavers who reported more mixed or negative experiences mainly described how their worker was not always available or emphasised frequent change of workers.

Doesn't offer me the help I'm actually entitled to.

Sometimes it is hard to get the care worker on call or email.

Involvement in pathway planning



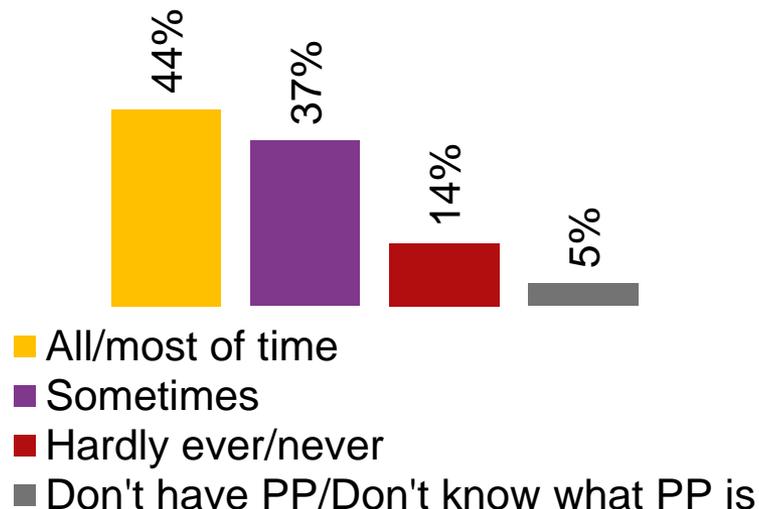
Pathway planning involves a local authority and young person setting goals and outlining the support needed to reach those goals.

Research shows care leavers have mixed experiences; some reported pathway planning as helpful, but others found it stressful and irrelevant. (Dixon & Lee, 2015)

Care leavers were asked, *do you feel involved in your pathway planning?*

- Only half (44%) of care leavers felt involved in their pathway planning 'all or most of the time' compared to 59% of care leavers in the 6 LAs who completed YLBC in the same time period.

Feeling involved in pathway planning



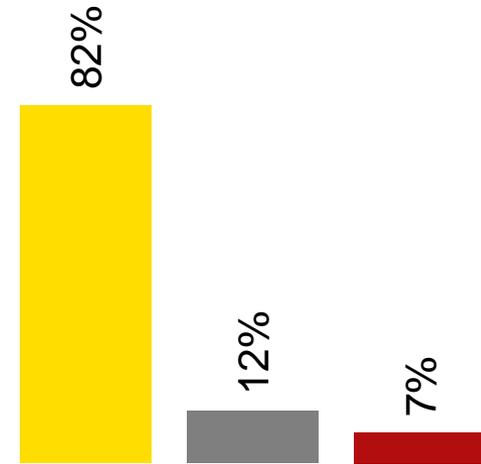
Understanding reason for care

Research with care leavers has shown that some young people felt strongly that the care system had not sufficiently equipped them with an understanding of their background and personal history. (Kelly, 2016)

All care leavers were asked, *do you understand why you were in care?*

- Many care leavers felt that they understood why they had been in care.
- However, about a fifth recorded that they wanted to know more or did not know why they had been in care ($n=11$; 19%).

Do you understand why you were in care?*



- Yes, I know all I want to
- Yes, but I'd like to know more
- No I don't know

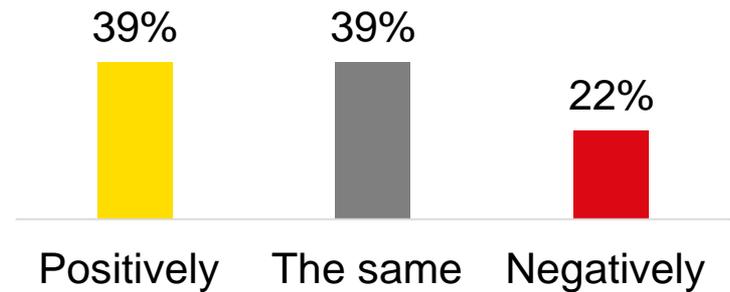
*Due to rounding does not equal 100%

Being treated differently

Care leavers taking part in research described the stigma associated with coming from a care background and some young people had experienced discrimination as a result of being a care leaver. (CRD, 2012)

Care leavers in Southwark were asked, *overall, as a care leaver I have been treated... 'positively', 'the same as any other young person' or 'negatively' by others.*

Overall, as a care leaver I have been treated...



I feel very abandoned and treated unjustly by Southwark social services.

Great experience

Normal reactions as any young person

Always treated like I was below certain people or were raised by aliens.

Housing

- Who care leavers live with
- Feeling safe where you live
- Feeling settled where you live
- Suitability of accommodation
- Comments: housing



Who care leavers live with

All care leavers were asked *who they shared a home with*. They could give more than one answer.

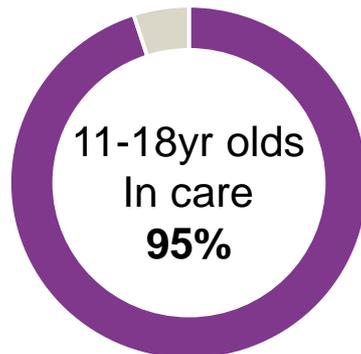
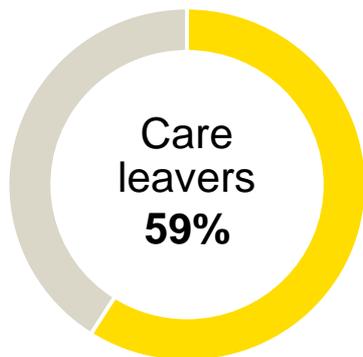
- Most commonly (53%) care leavers recorded that they lived on their own (compared to 33% of care leavers in other LAs who did the survey).

Who do you share a home with?	n (%)
I live on my own	31 (53%)
Foster carers	7 (12%)
Other residents	6 (10%)
Child/ren	4 (7%)
Partner	4 (7%)
Friend(s)	4 (7%)
Homeless	3 (5%)
Parents/relatives	3 (5%)
Other e.g. temporary accommodation	2 (3%)
Pets	1 (2%)
Custody	0 (0%)

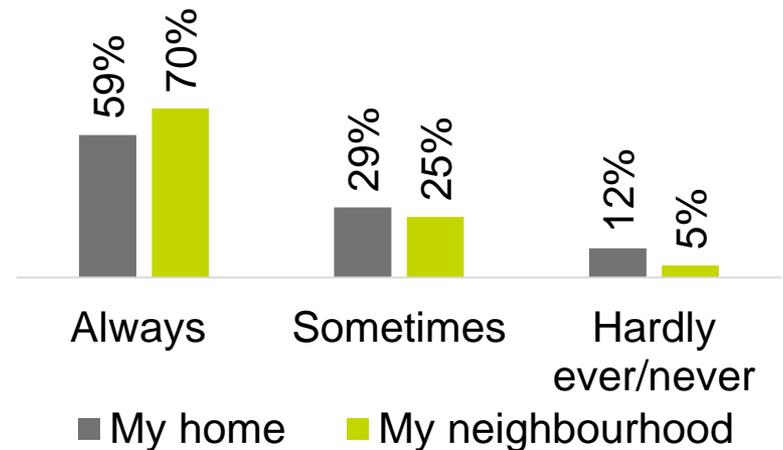
Feeling safe where you live

In our research review of care leavers' views young people emphasised the importance of feeling safe in their homes and neighbourhoods and having good quality housing. Care leavers were asked, *how do you feel about where you live?* and asked to rate *'in my home/ neighbourhood I feel safe'*. The answer options were *'always'*, *'sometimes'* or *'hardly ever/never'*.

Do you *always* feel safe where you live?



I feel safe where I live



Just over half (59%) of care leavers in Southwark reported that they *'always'* felt safe in their home.

This is a much lower proportion compared to looked after young people in Southwark aged 11-18yrs where 95% *'always'* felt safe.

Feeling settled where you live

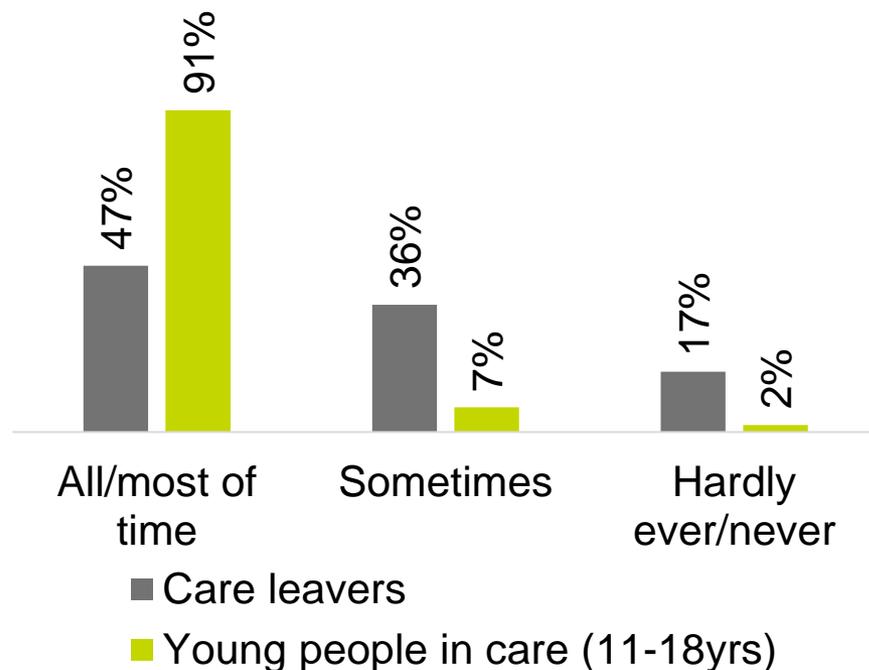
Our care leaver focus groups emphasised the importance of ‘security’ in relation to where they lived – not feeling ‘home’ was temporary but somewhere they could settle.

Care leavers were asked, *how do you feel about where you live?* and asked to rate *‘in my home I feel settled’*. Answer options were *‘always’*, *‘sometimes’* or *‘hardly ever/never’*.

- 47% of care leavers ‘always’ felt settled where they lived: a much smaller proportion than the 91% of looked after young people aged 11-18yrs who felt settled in Southwark.

I live in rented property. The landlord is going to sell the property. I want to have my council flat, so that I can feel settled to finish my degree.

In my home I feel settled



Suitability of accommodation



We asked care leavers, *is where you live now right for you?*

- Official statistics (DfE, 2017) show that 80% of care leavers in Southwark aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation.
- Though not exactly the same question, young people in the general population aged 16-24 are asked how satisfied they are with their accommodation. 80% reported they were. (ONS, 2017a)

- In this survey 60% of care leavers responded 'mainly yes' to the question 'Is where you live now right for you?'
- 23 (40%) care leavers answered 'mainly no'. Fewer care leavers felt their accommodation was suitable than the 80% reported to be in suitable accommodation (DfE, 2017) in Southwark.

It's too big, far from where I want to be, I have a lot of locations that are unsafe for me to be in. I'm in a temporary studio flat with supported housing.

It is too small for me and my child.

Comments: housing

- Nearly a third (30%) of care leavers provided comments about where they lived. Commonly young people described the **temporary nature** of where they lived. Some wrote about their **poor housing conditions** or why they felt their **home was unsuitable** for them and a few care leavers reported that they wanted to move.
- A couple of young people wrote about their positive experiences and emphasised how they felt settled where they lived.

Staying put in my foster care. I am not ready to move out yet. I am very happy there and I am part of the family. I am close to my step brothers who live there as well.

It's alright for now but I want my own place. I'm waiting for my bidding number.

Not a place of care, no not like it, want to leave.

...it's full of ants and bugs with drafty windows and doors and the heating costs so much.

I am moving to my council tenancy. Waiting for refurb to be completed.

I might move in a couple of years as my property might be pulled down.

Living independently

- Life skills
- Life day-to-day
- Coping financially
- Coping financially: comparison with general population
- Comments: coping financially



Life skills

- Care leavers are much more likely to live on their own at a younger age compared to young people in the general population.
- Feeling prepared for independent living and having the right support is crucial and was a theme in both our focus groups and research review. (Baker, 2017)
- All care leavers in Southwark were asked if they agreed with the statement, *I have the life skills needed to take care of myself.*



The majority of young people (93%) 'mostly agreed' that they had the skills needed.

- 4 young people felt that they did not have the necessary life skills.

I have ruined a lot of good properties so this accommodation is a test for myself ... When I was younger I wouldn't have dared staying here so it shows I'm growing and dealing with my mistakes. I don't wish to stay here but it's happening.

Life day-to-day

Care leavers were asked, *how do you spend most of your time day to day?* and could tick more than one answer.

Research has found that engaging in fulfilling activities (e.g. education, training, volunteering or work) is important to quality of life. Being unemployed has a negative impact on subjective well-being, diminishing young people's sense of purpose and reducing social connections. (ONS, 2017a)

General population:

Only one in 10 (11%) of young people in the general population (16-24yrs) were not in education, employment or training (NEET). (DfE, 2017)

In Southwark 39% of care leavers are recorded as NEET. (DfE, 2017)

- 16% of care leavers indicated that they were unemployed. About a third (34%) were in work. 43% were in education or caring for their children (7%).
- Young people who chose 'Other' recorded activities including waiting to start college or working part time.

How do you spend your time day to day?	n (%)
Education (school, college, Uni)	25 (43%)
Working (job, apprenticeship)	20 (34%)
Caring for my child/ren	4 (7%)
Volunteering	11 (19%)
Unemployed and not in education	9 (16%)
Other	5 (9%)

I am working full time however I am trying to start the next level to my course, however, short of funds.

Coping financially

Having a very low income or experiencing economic deprivation is associated with low well-being. (What Works Centre for Well-being, 2017)

A theme in both our research review, and the focus groups, was the financial worries care leavers could experience.

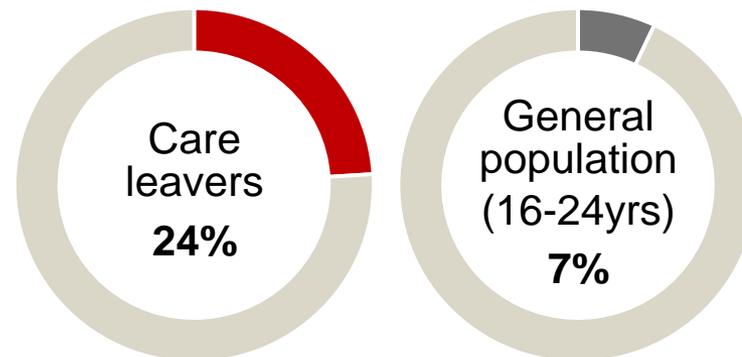
All care leavers were asked, *how are you coping financially?* Answer options were *'living comfortably,' 'doing alright,' 'just about getting by,' 'finding it quite difficult',* and *'finding it very difficult'*.

The questions replicates one asked by the ONS to 16-24 year olds in the general population. This allows us to compare how care leavers are doing compared to young people who are not care leavers.



In comparison to young people in the general population, care leavers in Southwark were more than three times as likely to report financial difficulties.

Proportion finding it 'quite' or 'very' difficult to get by financially



Coping financially: comparison with general population

	Care leavers (16-25yrs) %	ONS (2017a) general population (16-24yrs) %
Living comfortably	15%	31%
Doing alright	36%	44%
Just about getting by	25%	18%
Finding it quite difficult	14%	5%
Finding it very difficult	10%	2%

Comments: coping financially

- 14 (23%) care leavers wrote comments on how they felt about managing money.
- Care leavers generally wrote that it was difficult to manage on the money they had available. Some young people reported how unexpected bills or change in circumstances could impact on their finances in a negative way.

I can manage my finances. I pay my rent and bills etc. but just because I can do it doesn't mean it doesn't drag me down. When I get a letter it can very easily throw me into my depression and just the general managing of adult life makes me very depressed.

I'm very well at managing money but certain circumstances like rent, tax, bills leaves it difficult to get by. Now I don't have a contract phone, no internet, no extra bills than liveable ones.

It's difficult to live on the money I earn but my leaving care tries to help out as much as she is able.

Not working at the moment and waiting for benefits. My PA gives me weekly allowance till my JSA comes.

It's difficult but I manage.

I manage very well but bills [and] tax makes it difficult.

Taking part in society

- Having fun
- Having fun: Comments
- Loneliness
- Internet access and phone use



Having fun

In our focus groups when care leavers talked about '*What makes a good life*' they were keen to emphasise that doing enjoyable things was important. However, young people were very aware that there were barriers to having fun such as not having enough money or having mental health concerns.

Care leavers were asked, *in your spare time what do you like doing?*

Top 5: What care leavers enjoyed doing

1. Listening to/playing music
2. Watching TV/films
3. Hanging out with people
4. Using social media
5. Shopping

Activity	%	n
Listening to/playing music	64%	37
Watching TV/films	60%	35
Hanging out with people I like	57%	32
Using social media	48%	28
Shopping	41%	24
Exercising/sports	34%	19
Exploring outdoors	31%	18
Pampering/looking after self	28%	16
Volunteering	24%	14
Clubbing	24%	14
Gaming	21%	12
Other e.g. run football club; church; acting/theatre	19%	11

Having fun: Comments

Care leavers were asked, *what fun stuff do you wish you could do more of? Is there anything that stops you having fun?*

- 19 care leavers provided comments. Top of the wish list for some young people was to go on holiday more.
- Some care leavers wrote about the things that stopped them having fun: lack of money and health issues (such as depression) were most commonly cited.

Going on holiday but money is a problem.

Money and a car.

Doing the normal things with my son. What stops me is only seeing him once a week.

I have fun at church.

Did do horse riding but social services no longer pay.

Depression. I can barely drag myself to work. It's hard to enjoy yourself when you're in debt and the flat is a nightmare. I'd love to go to the gym but the free membership has all but disappeared.

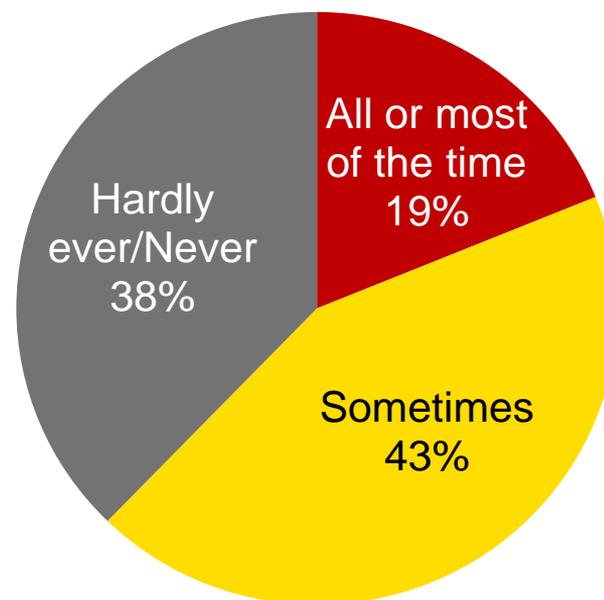
Loneliness

- ONS (2017a) work has shown that a key determinant of well-being is having positive social connections.
- Our research review found that care leavers in many studies described feeling very lonely and socially isolated since leaving care. Some reflected how this affected their emotional well-being. (Baker, 2017)
- All care leavers were asked, *in the last few weeks how often have you felt lonely?*



10% of young people (16-24yrs) in the general population report feeling lonely often/always. (ONS, 2018) Nearly twice as many care leavers in Southwark (19%) reported loneliness 'all or most of the time' in the last few weeks.

Felt lonely in the last few weeks



[Is there anything you want to tell us about your feelings?]

I am lost.

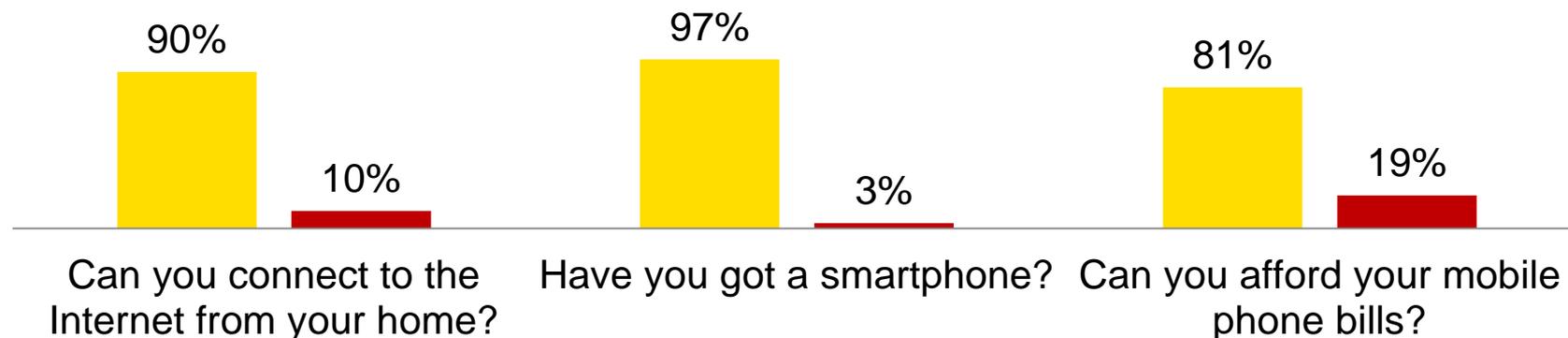
Internet access and phone use

- 'Having and using a phone' was very important to care leavers in our focus groups – a phone was a way to keep memories and photos, keep you in touch with people and source information. It was especially important if living alone.
- Research has shown that social media can be beneficial to young people in care. It can help young people maintain networks and reduce isolation, contribute to increased self-esteem and mental well-being, and give opportunities to network with support organisations.

A comparable proportion of care leavers in Southwark lived in households (90%) that had Internet access compared to the general population (90%) (ONS, 2017b) – they were also as likely to have a smart phone (97%) compared to their peers (96%). (Statista, 2017)

Mobile phone & Internet usage

■ Yes ■ No



Anxiety

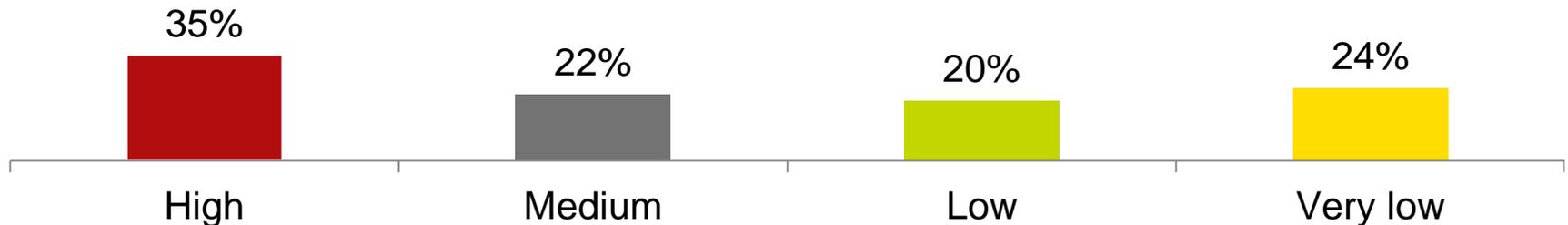


Care leavers were asked on an 11-point scale *how anxious did you feel yesterday?*

General population: The ONS found that in the general population (16-24yrs) 42% reported very low anxiety and 18% reported high anxiety. (ONS, 2017)

- 35% of care leavers reported high anxiety yesterday compared to 18% in the general population.

How anxious did you feel yesterday?



Happiness with appearance

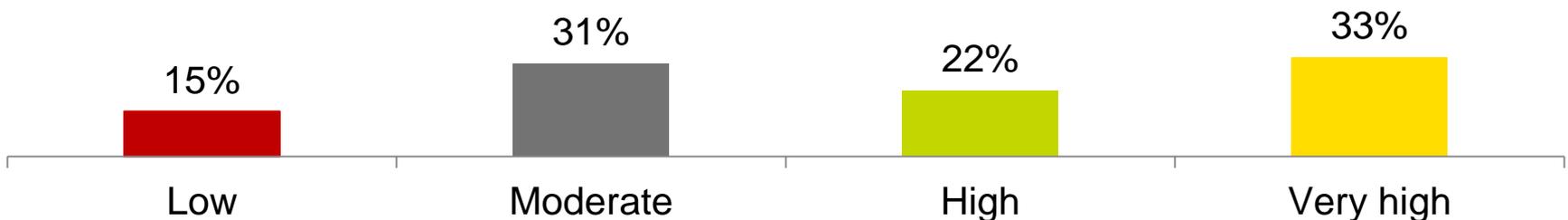


Studies have shown that poor body image is associated with low self-esteem, depression and self-harm. (Cash and Smolek, 2011)

Care leavers in our focus groups discussed how they thought that the way you felt about your appearance was closely linked to self-confidence.

- Our previous Bright Spots work showed that looked after girls were more likely to have a lower opinion of their appearance than boys. (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2017)
- In Southwark there was no difference between men and women care leavers and how they felt about their appearance.

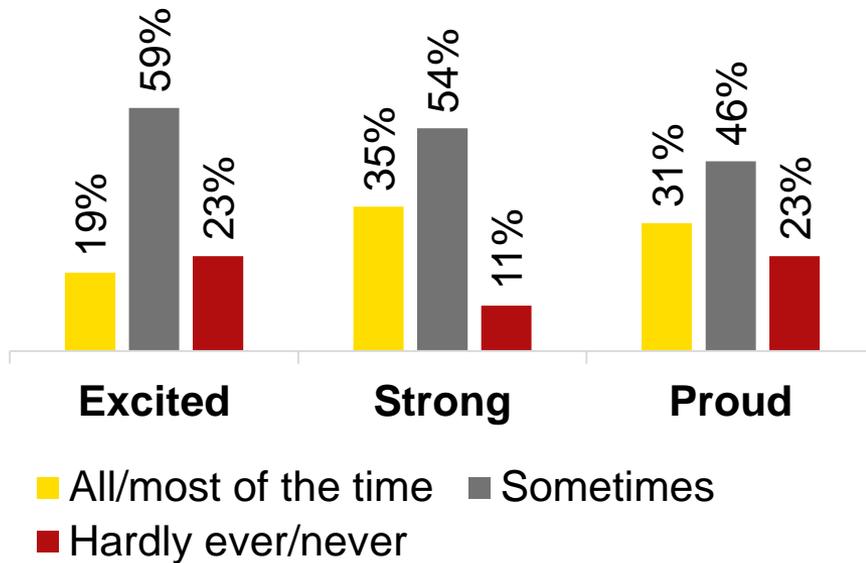
How happy are you with the way you look?



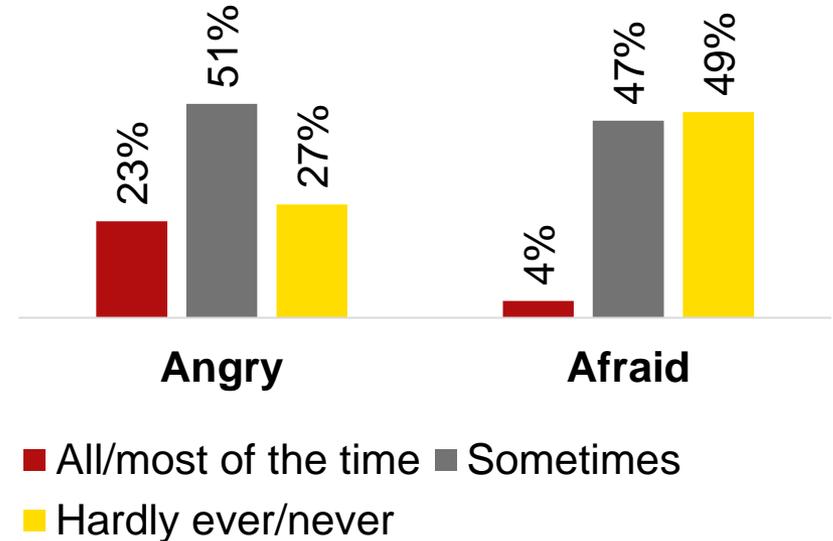
Different feelings in the last few weeks

All care leavers were asked, *in the last few weeks how often have you felt ... excited? strong? proud? angry? afraid?*

Positive feelings in last few weeks



Negative feelings in last few weeks



Stress

We used questions from the 'perceived stress scale' (Cohen and Williamson, 1983) to ask care leavers about their feelings and thoughts during the last month. The questions can be scored on a scale from 0-4 with a maximum of 16 and minimum of 0. High scores suggests a higher level of stress. (Warttig et al., 2013)

Stress, depression and discomfort generally. I have an expensive, stressful life that I didn't ask for and I can't lean on my parents like other families do.

- Care leavers had higher 'stress scores' (average score was 7.3) compared to peers in the general population (average score of 6.7).

	Often	Fairly often	Some-times	Almost never	Never
Unable to control the important things in life	9%	22%	46%	13%	9%
Difficulties were piling up higher than you could solve them	18%	14%	36%	20%	11%
Things were going your way	11%	16%	47%	16%	9%
Confident about your ability to handle your personal problems	33%	31%	31%	5%	0%

Happiness yesterday

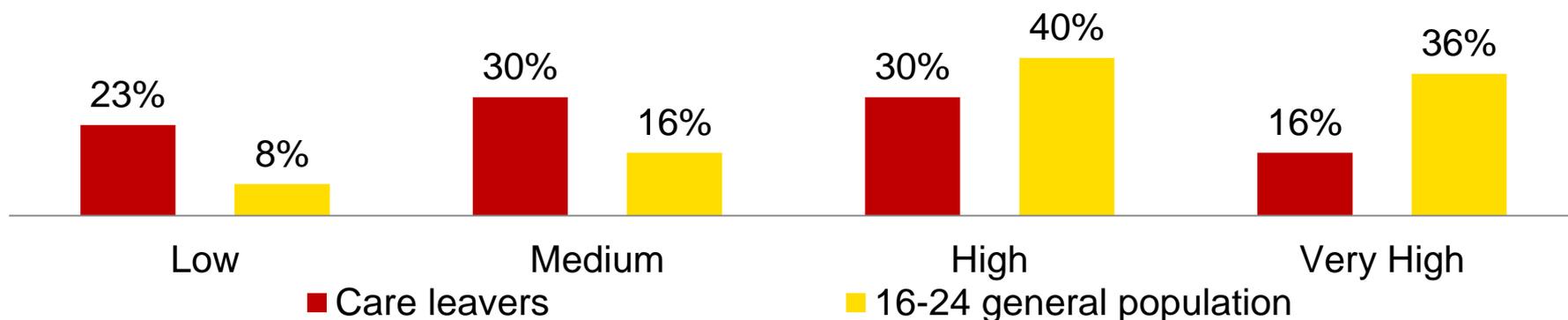
To compare to young people in the general population care leavers were asked the same questions that are used to measure subjective well-being by the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

All care leavers were asked, *how happy did you feel yesterday?* and selected a point on a 0-10 scale where 0 = 'not at all' and 10 = 'completely'.



- 46% of care leavers in Southwark reported high or very high happiness the previous day compared to 76% of young people (16-24yrs) in the general population.

Happiness yesterday (n=56)



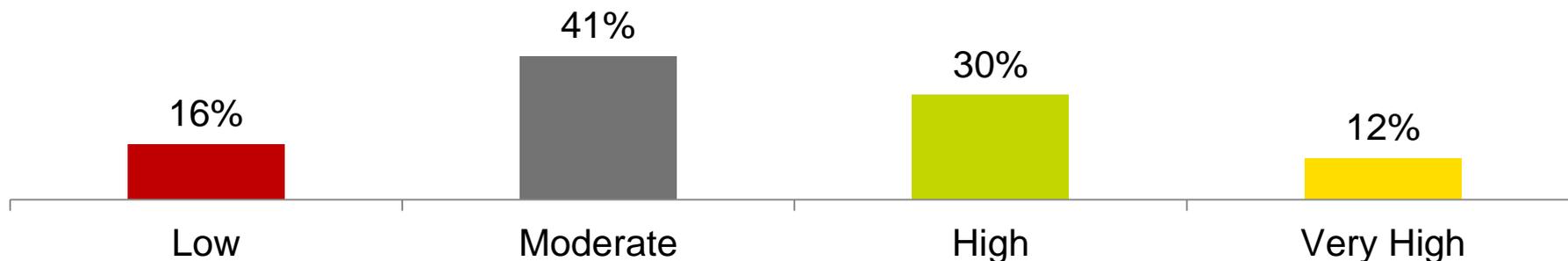
Life satisfaction



Care leavers were asked, *overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?* on a 0-10 scale. A score of 7-8 is considered to be high life satisfaction and a score of 9-10 very high.

- 12% of care leavers reported 'very high' life satisfaction compared to 27% of young people in the general population aged 16-24yrs.
- 16% of care leavers recorded low life satisfaction compared to 3% of young people in the general population.

Life satisfaction (n=56)



Are the things you do worthwhile?

Having a meaning or a purpose to life is strongly associated with well-being. (ONS, 2014)

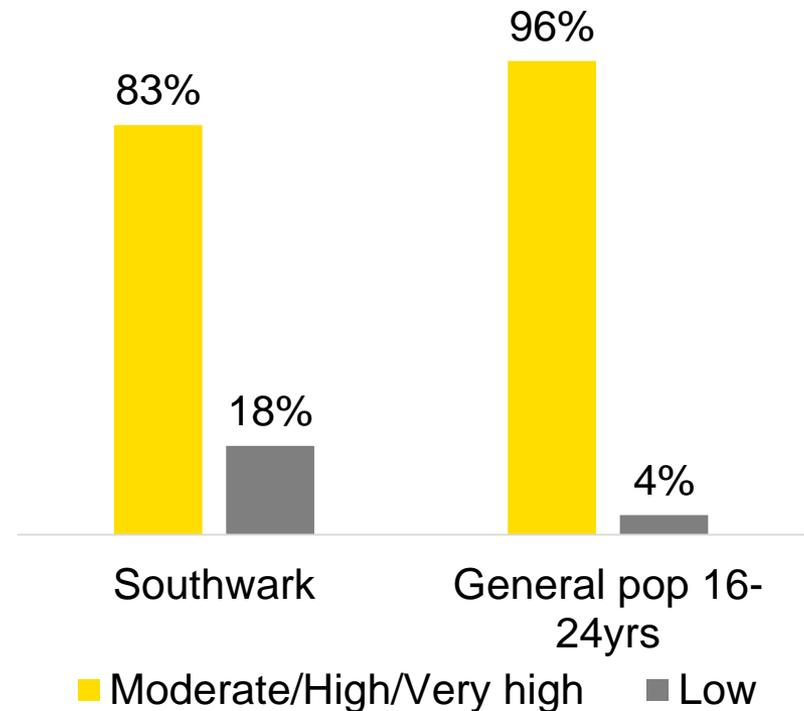
Young people were asked, *Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?*

Out of 56 care leavers in Southwark:

- 29% scored very high;
- 27% high;
- 27% moderate; and
- 18% low.

- In comparison with their peers in the general population a similar proportion (29%) of care leavers had very high scores: 29% of care leavers and 32% of peers in the general population.

Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

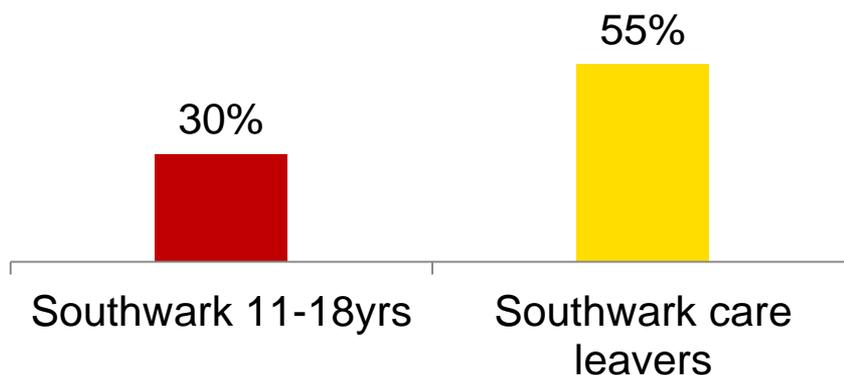


Positivity about the future



Young people were asked on a scale of 0-10, *how positive are you about your future?*

Very positive about the future scores



- 17 (30%) care leavers were **very positive** about their future.
- 12 (21%) had low scores and did not feel positive about their future

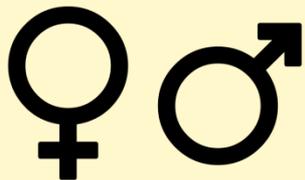
In the focus groups a main theme for young people was *'having and achieving goals'*. All care leavers in Southwark were asked if they agreed with the statement, *I've got goals and plans for the future.*

- Many young people (85%) 'mostly agreed' with the statement and had goals and plans for the future, but 8 (15%) disagreed with the statement.
- 7 of the 8 care leavers who did not think they had goals and plans for the future were women.

[Is there anything you want to tell us about your feelings?]

Just want to achieve my goals in life and not give up.

Gender differences



Our previous research with children in care (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall,

2017) showed that girls in care felt the stigma of their situation more keenly than boys, were much more likely to worry about their appearance and less likely to enjoy school. Girls in care aged 11-18yrs were less likely to say life was worthwhile and were more negative about the future than boys.

Similarly ONS (2017a) found that young women in the general population were significantly more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression than young men; in 2014 to 2015, around 1 in 4 young women (25%) reported symptoms of anxiety or depression compared with fewer than 1 in 6 young men (15%).

Overall our analysis in Southwark revealed few gender differences:



- 7 of the 8 young people (88%) who didn't think they had goals and plans for the future were women.
- Women (55%) were more likely to report they had a partner compared to male care leavers (20%).



- Male care leavers (56%) were more likely to report that where they lived was not right for them compared to female (25%) care leavers.

Comparisons with LAC and general population



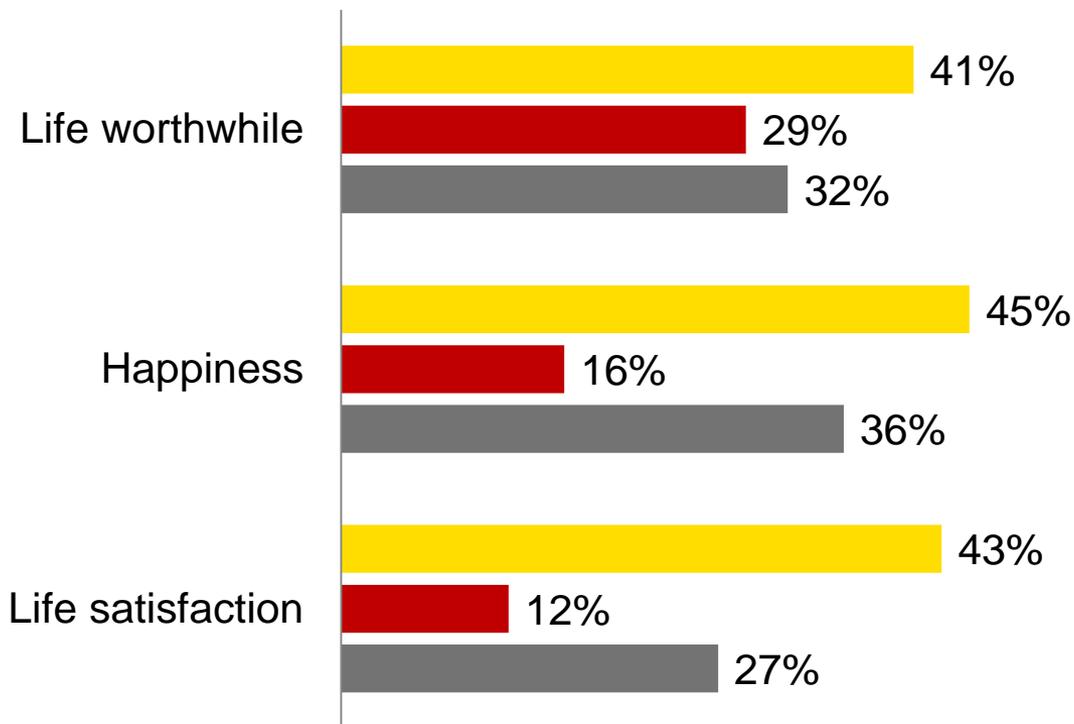
Levels of well-being – Southwark care leavers compared to peers (16-24yrs) in the general population (ONS, 2017a) and to the average scores of looked after young people aged 11-18yrs in Southwark (YLYC, 2018)

		Southwark care leavers (18-25yrs)	Southwark young people in care (11-18yrs)	ONS general population (16-24yrs)
Life satisfaction	Very high scores	12%	43%	27%
	Low scores	16%	13%	3%
Happiness yesterday	Very high scores	16%	45%	36%
	Low scores	23%	11%	8%
Things I do in life are worthwhile	Very high scores	29%	41%	32%
	Low scores	18%	8%	4%
Anxiety yesterday	Very low scores	24%	n/a	42%
	High scores	35%	n/a	18%

Very high well-being



Proportion of young people with high well-being – comparison with general population and looked after children



■ Southwark young people in care (11-18yrs) ■ Southwark care leavers

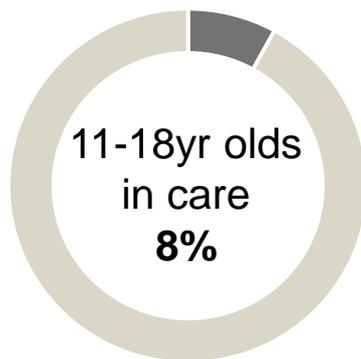
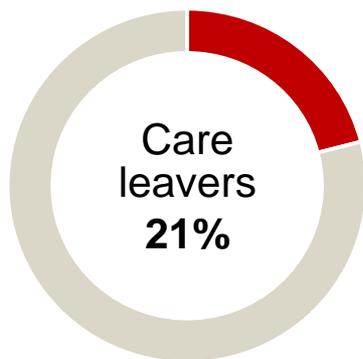
■ ONS general pop 16-24

Low well-being



12 (21%) care leavers had low well-being (i.e. scored 4 or less on two or more of the 0-10 well-being scales).

Young people with low well-being



- Age, gender and disability were not statistically associated with low well-being.

The factors with the strongest statistical effect on low well-being for care leavers were:

- Not being happy with appearance;
- Feeling lonely 'all or most of the time';
- Not having a person who tells you when you've done well;
- Not always feeling settled where you live; and
- 'Hardly ever/never' feeling involved in pathway planning.

Comments on leaving care

24 (40%) care leavers gave text responses on:

What would you like to say or tell us about leaving care? What could make your experiences better?

- Most care leavers emphasised that they would like more support; a few young people reported they were **not getting the help they needed** and were **unclear about their entitlements**. Others wanted extra **help with housing options** and **emotional support**.
- Some wanted services to **listen to their views** more.

*Been happy with it.
Been treated fairly.
No feedback.*

*Listen to
us more.*

*Having more support from
social services. They just
throw you away like a rag
doll.*

Comments: positive & negative experiences of leaving care

Positive experiences

- *I am grateful for social services. I will like to continue receiving support to get the best out of my future. I will like to have my council property so I can focus on my studies.*
- *I am very happy with the leaving care support they are very friendly. I hope to continue in the same way. A big thank you for their support.*
- *Leaving care is what you make it. Some people don't have a plan, so they sometimes don't know where they are heading, which comes with anxiety and lack of motivation. It's an experience and you don't have to dwell on the fact that your life didn't go to plan but you can control the way you engage with professionals. You're in control of your own situation and where you want social services are there to guide you.*

Negative experiences

- *I'm really angry on how social services move and do not look into certain things the way they should.*
- *I would prefer to have been shot like a dog, just as my grandparents in [name of country] were, than to live here in Southwark. No degree of money can effectively repair the damage made by the social services and I hope all of you realise that.*

Comments: improved support

Increased support:

- *My entitlements not being met.*
- *More information about going to University before I went. Would like more people to go.*
- *When children leave care there is no direction. No guidance of what to expect.*
- *More support, more opportunities, other boroughs open opportunities but not Southwark.*

Improve housing options:

- *If you can help me with moving from this house to other that will grateful. Wish you the best.*
- *I need my own tenancy. I am bidding but I can't win any property that I like. This is my only problem.*
- *Help with housing issues with people with immigration issues in care.*

Better emotional support

- *Dealing with emotional situations better, supporting and understanding the young person better.*

Comments: improved support

Leaving care, get every young person in with plenty of time prepared and ask them about every single care home. Ask them about things they might not have been able to say when they were younger. Ask them what they saw if they were abused etc. Let them move into adulthood completely healed and leave their life in care in the past. There is no acknowledgement of the years of suffering they might have been through and then we are casually tossed into adult life without really knowing what to do and some of us not believing that we've made it.

What could be improved?

- **Improve access to suitable accommodation.** A significant proportion of care leavers feel their accommodation is transient and not suitable for them. This seemed to be a particular issue for male care leavers.
- **Improve involvement in pathway planning.** Close to a fifth (19%) of care leavers rarely or never felt involved in pathway planning, did not have a pathway plan or didn't know what one was. Not feeling involved with pathway planning was associated with low well-being.
- **Help care leavers cope financially.** Care leavers in Southwark were more than three times as likely to report financial difficulties as young people in the general population.
- **Provide opportunities for care leavers to build positive social networks, make new friends and take part in society.** Not having the support of a trusted adult and feeling lonely were associated with low well-being. Care leavers in Southwark were less likely to have a good friend and an adult they could trust in their lives.
- **Explore partnerships in the local community (e.g. local gym memberships, activities for children) to give care leavers opportunities to do things they enjoy.** Young people named lack of money and health issues as being the biggest barriers to having fun.
- **Incorporate questions about well-being into regular reviews and explore what individual young people need to feel supported and like life is getting better.** Care leavers in Southwark were nearly twice as likely to report high levels of anxiety as young people in the general population.

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For enquiries about the Bright Spots project see:
<http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/professional-zone/bright-spots>

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