national care
ADVISORY SERVICE
making the difference for young people in and from care aged 13-25

What could make the difference? Care leavers and benefits

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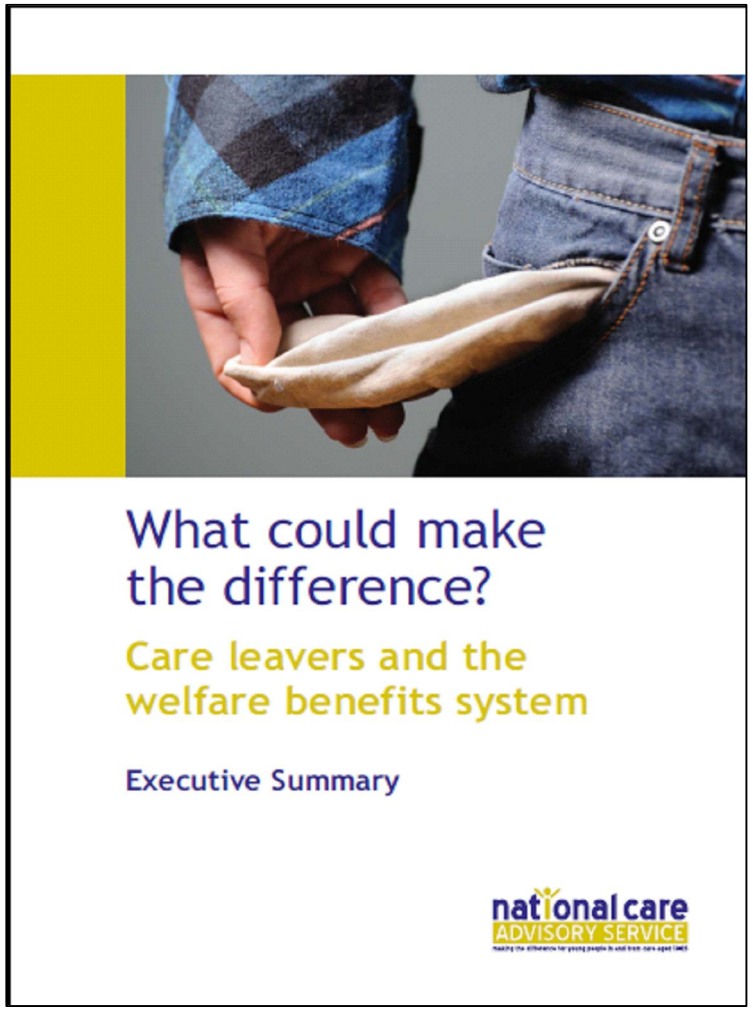
NCAS report – why benefits?



- **Priority issue raised by young people and those that support them.**
- **Specific barrier in implementing From Care2Work programme to improve employability for care leavers.**
- **Attempt to pull together and summarise the issues and identify how they can be overcome.**

www.leavingcare.org/news/185

Context - filling the parenting gap

- Policy to move away from ‘compressed and accelerated transitions’, improve outcomes & minimise disadvantage associated with care
- Previous move away from benefits for 16/17 year olds – C(LC)A 2000
- Extending support through Care Matters – Staying put pilots, Personal Adviser to 25
- Care system that is needs rather than age led, as opposed to a benefit system focussing on aged based entitlements
- Most young people would stay on with their parents and do not move onto benefits at 18

System does not replicate parenting

While other young people their age are out celebrating, young people leaving care in further education must spend their 18th birthday putting in their claims for Income Support and Housing Benefit/LHA.

(Leaving care manager)

Barriers in current system

- **Inconsistencies in entitlements and support across England**
  - Duty/power to assist with ETE but not to be 'primary source of funding'
- **Problematic processes**
  - Call centres, delays
  - Poor communication between services
- **Lack of information**
  - Inconsistencies in advice
  - Poor understanding of entitlement

Barriers to postive PSA 16 (ETE and accommodation) outcomes

- **Short term and low paid employment**
- **Prospect of losing benefit whilst accessing employability/education schemes**
  - 16-hour rule can hinder work experience
  - Too old to access FE through second chance learning and receive IS/HB.
- **Proving vulnerability for LHA to be paid to landlords.**
- **Private accommodation becomes unaffordable at 22 as LHA shared room rate restriction is imposed.**

Levelling the playing field

'If this was my own child, what would I do?'

- **Corporate parents should continue to offer financial support through Section 24 payments to young people who are in further education instead of pushing them onto benefits, and they should reclaim this money from benefits budgets. This would ensure that the up to 5,000 care leavers in England in further education are supported by their corporate parent in the same way that their peers are supported by their families.**

Ironing out the creases

- Named contacts in Jobcentre plus (under-18 advisers) and leaving care teams
- Training on specific entitlements and needs for named contacts
- Paper claims as preferred method for care leavers
- Guidance on entitlements
- recognition of leaving care teams as partner providers, with blueprint developed through 'Transitions – from Care2Work' project - DWP/DFE Joint working guidance
- Choice of LHA payments to landlords without proving vulnerability

Amending regulations

- Training allowance (8 wks training available after 6 months on JSA or at discretion of Jobcentre adviser) - Should be automatically offered to care leavers and allow for at least 6 months training
- Entitlement to second chance learning support should be extended to 25 and allow young people to start course at any point until 25th birthday.
- Extend the exemption to the LHA shared room rate to 25

Response to report

- **DCSF commitments in March 2010**
  - begin work on developing a care leavers' page on Directgov and work with NCAS on their benefits guidance for young people leaving care
  - support local initiatives that allow young people leaving care to apply for benefits up to two weeks before they turn 18, meaning they will have access to payments earlier
  - consider increasing the flexibility in the Income Support rules concerning second-chance learning.

What now?

- **Improving information - Benefits guide for care leavers**
- **Approach new ministers/administration re recommendations and explore how they fit with new welfare plans**
- **Supporting services to find local solutions**
  - Devon and housing benefits
  - Total place pilot in Bradford
  - West Midlands work on early claims and links

Keep in touch

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