

Jersey Cares Response to the Government Plan 2021 - 2024

Background

Jersey Cares is an independent organisation. We work with people who are, or were, in the care of the Government. Our vision is love, belonging and opportunity for people with experience of care. We work towards this through three core areas of work:

1. **Advocacy** – supporting people with experience of care to have their views heard
2. **Community** – enabling people with experience of care to come together and for the wider community to support, and come together with, people with experience of care
3. **Influencing** – driving change in public awareness, policy, legislation and ‘services’.

On 13th October, we were asked by the Children, Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel to respond to the Government Plan and are pleased to do so. Our response collates direct responses to the Government Plan and the experiences of those we work alongside, providing advocacy.

Jersey Cares offers advocacy in the context of people’s rights and entitlements. Accordingly, where we are aware of relevant Government policy, legislation, or policies these are also included.



“I feel it is another example of the Government going ‘well you are not that important, not as important as other budgets, or other things because we can reduce this by a huge amount. Goes into how they already feel about us anyway”.

“Well they can’t really be reducing it. They said it has been ‘out there’ but not a lot of care leavers know fully what is in it still. So, they shouldn’t be doing that.”

'It isn't being promoted because I still don't know what I can and can't have from the Care Leavers Offer and then also most social workers don't know how to access the money or how to go about getting it sorted, so it clearly isn't well thought out.'

To remove the money because care leavers can access from other budgets doesn't make sense because the care leavers offer was originally out there because there weren't other budgets to cover what the care leavers budget covers."

"The Care Leavers' Offer is not being 'actively promoted' at all, not one bit. Well promoted, but hardly put into practice."

-Feedback from people with experience of care

'In some ways it is worse than before. It is like one big, broken promise'.

'Why do you have to beg?'

'I have spent an untold amount of hours on this, having conversations about this, and meltdowns over this. I start a new course in weeks, I have not got the time, nor brain capacity, to continue on as we are, due to what appears to me as a lack of care. I will also add, that the flat and first home that I have sourced, came with zero help from what is supposed to be a 'leaving care team'. What you are doing ensures that care leavers like I contribute to the ugly statistics of failure among Care Experienced young people, you are helping to add to the stigma that we all apparently try to fight.' – Young care leaver trying to secure a home before the new academic year.

The Care Leavers' Offer was developed, at least in part, in a response to a number of 'care leavers' sharing directly with the senior leadership of Children, Young People Education and Skills (CYPES) that they were often not able to access basic things, like a home. The response in the form of the Care Leavers' Offer was initially seen as very positive as it provided a strong response to this and detail of a range of funded items and opportunities for 'care leavers', including a home, access to university and to mental health support.

The Care Leavers Offer was [launched](#) in February 2020. The Government stated 'The new statutory entitlement and offer for looked-after children and care leavers has been developed and includes the provision of personal advisors who will be allocated to work with children and young people from age 14 up to 25. The offer also sets out information how the Government, as their corporate parent, will support them to access health, education, clothing, housing, holidays and travel'

A considerable amount of our advocacy work has been supporting 'care leavers' to understand what they can access and how to do it. This has been exceedingly difficult. We sought clarity about whether or not the Offer had an implementation plan, as a wide-range of relevant professionals were unaware of it, unsure of its contents and told us that they were not able to access what it offered. Other Government professionals told us that aspects of what it promises did not yet exist. Kindly see the attached minutes of the Care Leavers' Outcomes Board, June 2020 for further details.

The practical consequences of this have include a young person arriving at their university town for their first year, unable to move into her university accommodation, on the day the removal van was

bringing her furniture, as the deposit for her flat had not been paid by the Government. We were told this was because there was not a legal mechanism to make the transfer. It was resolved by relevant professionals, at the very last minute.

The Government Plan states that the Care Leavers Offer has been 'actively promoted'. In addition to the points raised above, Children's Services are not in contact with 50% of 'care leavers' and plan to contact them later this year to inform them about the Offer. The Offer was taken out of printed circulation earlier this year so that it could be re-written, and an implementation plan put in place. As per some of the comments shared above, even where people are aware of it, if it cannot be accessed or is extremely difficult to access, this poses a significant barrier to measuring uptake, which has informed this reduction in budget.

We also see through our work and that of sister organisations elsewhere, that it will take time to install the confidence and trust for some 'care leavers' to believe they really can access aspects of the Offer – be that driving lessons, further education or a permanent home. As such, it seems pre-emptive, and contrary to the promises made by Government to this group who the Care Inquiry said have been 'singularly failed' to reduce the available budget. As you can see from the comments above, offering 'big promises' which then cannot be accessed, or are inordinately difficult to access, can compound the often low self-worth of people who have grown up in Jersey's care system.

We have raised the above concerns on a number of occasions with CYPES, at the Corporate Parenting Board and we, and young people, have done so directly to the Minister.

Questions

- How have the Government concluded that the Care Leavers' Offer is being actively promoted?
- How is the reduction of the budget reflective of the Care Inquiry's observation that care leavers are a group who the Government has treated with 'neglect and indifference' and who have been left 'singularly ill-equipped' to cope?



“Appointing an ombudsman is a vital part of having increased transparency and accountability within any organisation or public body. Delaying the establishment of an ombudsman speaks volumes”.

“I think this being put on hold is absolutely awful and goes to show the lack of accountability that the Government are willing to take. They’re doing this essentially not wanting to listen to a complaint therefore not wanting to be held accountable.”

- Feedback from people with experience of care

In 2018, Jersey Cares was commissioned by the Government and funded by the Children’s Commissioner to produce the [Listen Louder](#) report on what it would take for people with experience of care to be heard. We heard, quite consistently from people with experience of care, those who cared for them and professionals, that their concerns were routinely ignored. These were some of the comments from people with experience of care:

‘It’s as if the whole system is designed to break your spirit, stop you fighting it.’	‘I want to fill in the gaps in my life. But what’s the point in pursuing things?’	‘I told you, what’s the point? If they cared, they would stay.’
‘People don’t listen, that’s the one thing.’	‘I kind of felt like I was going crazy, nobody was listening’	‘There was no point complaining. I wouldn’t have been listened to.’

Comments from six young people

A recurring issue raised through advocacy (Oct 2019 – Oct 2020) is the need for concerns to be heard and for this to lead to change. We often hear that despite people feeling that their rights have been violated and/or their experience of care has been deeply damaging, they do not make a formal complaint due to the expectation that *'nothing will happen'*. The Independent Jersey Care Inquiry made frequent reference to the 'fear factor'. This is apparent where the current recourse to complaint is via the Government of Jersey. People who are involved with Children's Services sometimes fear that if they raise a concern it will negatively impact other areas of their lives, over which Children's Services have influence. This includes care of their own children, access to opportunities and relationships with professionals which they value. These are often considered an impossible price to pay.

Those who complain directly to Government, particularly to Children's Services, often find they have to chase multiple times for any response at all. Responses which have been received have come many months later, people have not considered them honest, or they have been verbal, with no written response. Some complaints are not responded to at all.

The need for accountability and for transparent processes to share feedback and highlight concerns has been a recurrent theme of successive reports, relating to children's social care and wider governmental departments.

On 22 May 2018, the States of Jersey Assembly voted in favour a Proposition (P.32/2018), agreeing in principle that there should be an Ombudsman and calling for further research to be carried out. This was a step towards implementation of a recommendation of the Jersey Law Commission in their 2017 report *Improving Administrative Redress in Jersey*. The Jersey Law Commission completed the requested research in 2018; [Designing a Public Ombudsman for Jersey](#).

The 2019 Care Inquiry report states 'We have referred above to the role of a Public Services Ombudsman and would reemphasise that we consider it to be essential that proposals currently under discussion are taken forward without delay. This role is a key element for further strengthening the rights of children and others to have their voices heard and their concerns and complaints dealt with effectively. Properly constituted, the operation of the role will go some way to resolve deficiencies in complaints processes and to dispel public perceptions of lack of transparency and of partiality in decision-making.'

It seems from lived experience and expert advice, an independent body which investigated complaints would go a long way to addressing the need for accountability.

Questions

- Why is the Government proposing deferring the appointment of a Public Ombudsman until 2024?
- Why has the Government decided not to follow through on the recommendations laid out in detail by the Jersey Law Commission?
- What alternative plans has Children's Services put in place to ensure external accountability, and crucially action? How have they shown these plans to be as robust as a Public Ombudsman?



"I think this has been needed for quite a while and is necessary. I think this is good. I don't think a pop-up unit is ideal. I think some children will need more than a short pop up stay, but I do think it is a step in the right direction."

"I'd love to fight for the idea of a therapeutic centre because it is really important."

"I think it would be great to have a therapeutic centre. I think it needs to be a permanent place. If you had asked me when I was younger and in care if I needed therapy, I would have said no. However, if the place were playful, fun, and cool – a bit like a youth centre but through play therapy, that would have been amazing. If you can help children and families through therapy earlier, a lot of the bad stuff can be avoided."

- Feedback from people with experience of care

"The idea of a pop-up unit - I have a number of issues with this. Firstly, there has been a promise to train residential staff and foster carers in trauma informed practice for approximately 10 years, and it has never materialised. The recent training undertaken has been very superficial, focussed on manual handling/restraint techniques and basic conflict resolution. The staff at Greenfields etc are all dedicated and caring but they are NOT trained to deal with the needs of traumatised children. You need people whose job it is to do this who are properly supervised. Secondly if you rely on a pop-up unit you will inevitably be scratching around and cobbling things together in an emergency rather than having a unit which is ready to go. It will not provide a good or thorough service. If the government is concerned about funding, then spaces to young people in the UK could also perhaps be sold? Then they would make enough money to keep it open full time."

- Feedback from others

Some of the feedback and conversations suggested that the centre could be a 'therapeutic centre' as opposed to solely a 'therapeutic residential centre.' This could be somewhere for children to go to access good quality, play-based therapy in a permanent setting, with consistent staffing and practice.

The need for high-quality, accessible, non-stigmatising, child-friendly therapy has been a recurring observation from people with experience of care and those who care for them. The difficulty in accessing this from consistent adults, with consistently strong practice, has been linked to a range of difficulties in later life and struggles accessing education, building relationships, and managing life.

Questions

- Can the 'needs assessment' be made available in the public domain?
- Did the Government consult children, young people, and their families to reach this conclusion?
- Against what targets, goals and aspirations for children did the Government make the decision that this is not necessary? Does it link to an improvement plan? Those we have access to are all outdated.



"CAMHS is already underfunded and needs desperate help. It is good that there is an increase in budget but are they saying it is only getting a tiny increase?"

"I think it is good. There needs to be lower tier prevention services no doubt, but I think that people in need of specialist support are often put onto a waiting list of people that don't actually need the specialist support. I do feel that this is CAMHS purpose. It should be a specialist mental health service. However, in order for that to be the case there would need to be lower tier support."

"Do the people who decide when budgets go up and down actually speak to the people it goes to to see how they feel about it or how the money is actually spent?"

"The CAMHS waiting list is currently many months, or more. Is this putting children first?"

Young adults we provide advocacy for often say the therapeutic support they needed as a child was not there for them. We hear that therapeutic support for children can still be very difficult to access, with lengthy waiting lists and sometimes they build good relationships with professionals, only for those professionals to leave.

The Care Inquiry (2017) stated:

‘Children in care should have access to a range of mental health therapies, available whenever they need them, and for as long as they need them and support should not be time limited, particularly as young people in care system may take long time to build trust.’

It has been difficult, based on the information in the Government Plan, to understand and seek feedback on the close detail of the proposal for CAMHS. The overwhelming feedback through advocacy is strong, consistent, kind and trauma-informed mental health support is needed, which can be accessed in a timely and non-stigmatising manner.

Questions

- In order for children, young people, their families, and relevant organisations to comment on the service redesign and contribute to it, can information about it please be made available in language and a format which is accessible?

Note

It is positive that care experienced people are able to contribute to any amends to the draft Government Plan. In order for the Government to listen to children in how they deliver, design services it would be very helpful for organisations to have several weeks to do this well. It involves quite complex interlocking elements of understanding policy; understanding budgets; understanding the context and linking it to individuals’ personal and often difficult experience.