

01 Summary

“Care leavers are too often forced into independence too early.”

Young people leave foster care in Wales between the ages of 16 and 18. The average age for leaving home in the UK is 24.

Children and young people enter the care system for many reasons, but most will have experienced great distress and upheaval in their childhood. For these reasons young people in care will be less equipped to deal with independence than their peers.

“Emotionally though, I wasn’t ready to leave and live on my own. I was self-harming, withdrawn and wouldn’t talk much to people”. K, 36

Care leavers are too often forced into independence too early. They are more likely to have a mental illness, be homeless, misuse substances, be unemployed or in prison than their peers. They are 4 times more likely to commit suicide in adulthood.

If these young people had more time with their foster carers to develop the skills they need to live independently, they would have a much greater chance of success. Young people tell us that having a stable person you can trust and rely on makes all the difference.

“I know I’m lucky ... I wouldn’t be in college or anything because I wouldn’t have anyone behind me.” D, 20

Research says that young people do much better in adulthood when they are able to stay with their foster carers longer. They are more likely to get qualifications; less likely to abuse alcohol

or other substances; less likely to use mental health services; and less likely to be arrested or in prison.

Supporting these young people to remain with their foster carers longer saves money in the longer term. If we support young people by giving them the opportunities and tools that they need to succeed, they are more likely to be happy, active adults in good health and employment.

The estimated cost of a scheme to allow foster care to continue after 18 in Wales is £1.1 million per year.

Action for Children – Gweithredu dros Blant and the Fostering Network Wales are calling on the Welsh Government to change the law, and give these young people a fair shot at life.

If you would like to find out more about the campaign or help persuade the Welsh Government to change the law please visit:

www.actionforchildren.org.uk/chancetostay

or www.fostering.net/wales/chancetostay

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