



Care Leavers and Public Services Peer Research

Full Report

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1. Background and Objectives

Consumer Focus wished to undertake a research project to examine experiences of care leavers and to identify the barriers they face accessing a range of public services for the first time.

A good deal of research and evidence has already been collated to show that care leavers experience disadvantage in a range of different ways. Care leavers experience particular detriments; 38% are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETS) (DFE, 2010). Only 7% go on to higher education compared to an England average of 36% (DFE, 2010, HEFCE 2010). They are four times more likely to smoke, drink and take drugs and four times more likely to have a mental health disorder than the general population of young people (DFES 2007).

The specific aim of this project was to truly understand their experiences in accessing public services and the barriers they face in doing so. Care leavers are in a unique position as the state through the local authority has a parental role, also known as corporate parenting, with a duty to provide services to care leavers. As care leavers move into adulthood the local authority retains responsibility for supporting them, including facilitating access to public services. Collecting this evidence will allow Consumer Focus to advocate on behalf of care leavers and other young people; ultimately, it must be hoped, improving their access, breaking down barriers and decreasing disadvantage.

Objectives

The overall aim of the project was to:

- Provide robust and in-depth evidence about care leavers need for, awareness of, access to and usage of public services.

This was further defined into the following specific objectives:

- Services
 - To identify the range of services care leavers should be accessing or should know how to access.
- Awareness
 - To identify the extent to which care leavers know what services are available to them, and how to access them.
 - To identify the extent to which care leavers know how to find out what is available to them where they don't know about availability¹.
 - To identify what care leavers think about the quality of information available to them.
- Barriers

¹ Including knowing both what is available at a general level (such as employment support from Jobcentre Plus) and knowing what particular services should be on offer.

- To identify, other than information, what has stopped care leavers from accessing services.
- To identify what has helped care leavers accessing services.
- To identify what services, if any, care leavers feel uncomfortable accessing and why.

2. Methodology.

This research was conducted by peer researchers drawn from a Young People's Panel (YPP), recruited by the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), part of the young people's charity Catch 22. The exercise was purely qualitative and involved in-depth interviews with 14 young care leavers from three local authority areas. Fieldwork was undertaken during February and March 2011.

The project was undertaken via collaboration between Consumer Focus, NCAS and Community Research. NCAS' experience and approach was particularly valuable since NCAS has experience of conducting several national peer research studies and places emphasis on putting young people at the centre of its work. Consumer Focus project managed the overall programme. NCAS coordinated the Young Peoples Panel, the peer research fieldwork and provided liaison with local authorities for recruitment. Community Research provided a lead researcher (Rachel Lopata) who drafted the research materials and analysed research responses. Both the lead researcher and NCAS reported to Consumer Focus' project manager.

The project involved a number of key stages:

2.1 The Process

Stage One

- NCAS organised and recruited a Young Peoples Panel (YPP) made up of care-experienced young people.
- The YPP was convened to give input to the questionnaire and materials that would be used in the later interviews. In order to do this the YPP had the objectives of this research fully explained to them. YPP members gave their views about the kinds of public services that careleavers need to know about and access.
- Community Research designed the interview questionnaire² and materials, on the basis of feedback from the YPP members.
- Drafts of these materials were shared with YPP members and further amendments were made at their suggestion.
- YPP members were trained in interviewing techniques and given time to practice the interview, using the finalised materials.

² Provided at Appendix 1 to this report.

Stage Two

- NCAS liaised with leaving care teams in a number of local authorities around the UK. Three local authorities gave agreement for young people leaving care to be recruited for interview.
- Each local authority partner was asked to recruit six young careleavers to participate in the peer interviews.
- Dates and locations of interviews were arranged with local authorities. At the given time, peer interviewers from the YPP attended the arranged locations in order to conduct interviews.
- Interviews were audio recorded, with each respondent's permission. Notes were also taken. Digital memory cards containing the audio file, along with written notes were sealed in an envelope and sent to Community Research by post.
- 14 interviews were completed.

Stage Three

- Audio files were fully transcribed for analysis.
- Initial analysis of interviews was undertaken by Community Research.
- Draft findings and some transcriptions were shared at a meeting of the YPP. Peer interviewers were given the opportunity to contribute to the analysis process and add their thoughts to the findings.
- The YPP developed recommendations based on the research findings and further informed by their own views and experiences.

2.2 The Peer Research Approach.

A peer research methodology was chosen because peer research encompasses the following attributes:

- It shifts the control and ownership of the research process away from research professionals and towards the research audience, resulting in more collaborative research design and interpretation.
- It makes use of dialogue and collaboration which lends itself to a qualitative approach.
- It ensures that participation is real and not tokenistic.
- It reduces hierarchies within the research environment (between researcher and researched), thus potentially uncovering insights that might not have been discovered by a professional researcher.
- It allows research to become a tool of empowerment. It is therefore appropriate for research with marginalised groups.

The benefits of this approach were:

- Making recruitment of research participants easier (since they feel reassured that the interviewer will understand their issues.)

- Ensuring a supportive and relaxed interview situation - enhancing high quality data.
- Peer researchers may offer a positive role model for participants.
- Peers have extensive knowledge about the subject being researched and can positively contribute to research design and analysis.
- Peers have extensive experience of the subject being researched, their natural empathy enables research to be conducted in a sensitive and informed manner.
- Training opportunities and work experience can be made available for peer researchers in a field which is relevant and important to them.
- Peer researchers are enabled to develop new skills and knowledge which may improve confidence and enhance life chances.

These benefits were felt to fit particularly well with Consumer Focus' objective of consumer empowerment.

However, this approach also created some challenges which had to be addressed:

- Peer researchers are not professional qualitative researchers. Gaining their input to the development of useable research materials required detailed discussion and initial training, which, in turn, added to the time required for the design phase of the project. Providing this level of training supported the young people's personal development and ensured they took away more from the project than simply providing their views.
- The research materials developed also needed to be more structured and detailed than professional researchers may have used.
- The depth of probing within interviews was also less detailed, in places, than professional researchers may have achieved, although the additional insight and ownership gained through involving young people outweighed this.

3. Findings.

3.1 The Range Of Public Services Care leavers Need.

The 2008 National Children’s Bureau Highlights Paper 240, based on a wide-ranging review of existing research evidence points out that, for care leavers:

"Negative life experiences have been compounded by the lack of knowledge of their needs and how these could be met, and by notable service gaps whilst in care. They are more likely than young people who have not been in care to have poorer educational qualifications; have lower levels of participation in post-16 education (especially higher education); be young parents; be homeless; and to have higher levels of unemployment, offending behaviour and mental health problems....."

A consistent finding from studies of careleavers is that a majority move to independent living between 16 and 18 years of age, whereas most of their peers remain at home well into their twenties. They experience a systemic break in the continuity of care, which is frequently allied to a break in support and services. They are expected to undertake their journey to adulthood, from restricted to full citizenship, far younger and in far less time than their peers."³

All of this very clearly indicates that young care leavers are more likely to need and call upon public services at an early age – not only in terms of the care they receive as children, but in terms of broader public services they need during their transition to independence. They are also more likely to call upon a wide range of public services than other young people of the same age.

Initial discussions with the YPP members involved in this project, made it clear that in their view also, those leaving care need to understand and have awareness of a very broad and comprehensive range of public services. During the design of the questionnaire and supporting materials, YPP members felt it very important to ensure that care leavers being interviewed should be given a clear understanding of the kinds of services this research was seeking to explore.

YPP members undertook an initial exercise to explore their own understanding of public services. The breadth and complexity of public services available was felt to be a potentially problematic concept to convey within the interviews.

³ Highlight No. 240 National Children’s Bureau, Professor Mike Stein, May 2008. ISSN: 1365-9081. National Children’s Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE. www.ncb.org.uk

YPP members had not fully considered the range of services available to young people leaving care. Both Consumer Focus and YPP members themselves felt that it would be vitally important to explore a wide range of examples of public services within the interview. The solution preferred by the YPP members was to provide an initial verbal explanation of what public services are and then to offer a visual display giving a large number of examples of these services, expressed in a variety of different ways. For example, public services might be expressed by name (e.g. Connexions) or by the generic service they provide (e.g. debt advice) or by particular well known sub-services or products (e.g. JSA).

YPP members were keen that this was not presented as a simple list, which might suggest that the public services being shown were the only ones available; or might be seen to indicate some kind of order of importance. Their preference was to produce a scatter diagram and to present this very clearly within the interview as a set of examples of the kinds of public services being explored. The diagram presented is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Examples of public services (visual prompt shown during interview).

YPP members had given little consideration to the concept of themselves as customers of public services and had not previously considered many of the services, beyond those that they used on a regular basis.

Clearly, young care leavers' relationship with their local authority is not a straightforward customer to service-provider relationship. The Local authority is also the care leavers Corporate Parent and care provider so whilst young people found no difficulty in considering themselves customers of supermarkets or mobile phone providers, the idea that they might be a customer of their local

authority, the NHS or the police was less familiar. For this reason, the YPP also felt it important to ensure that this was explained within the interview.

In becoming independent after leaving care, it was very clear in the view of YPP members, that care leavers ought to understand and know about the entire range of public services available to adults. Clearly, the YPP felt some public services were likely to be particularly important, including: jobs and careers support, education advice, financial and benefits services and housing.⁴

Public services are clearly vitally important to care leavers as they seek to become independent. Young people within the interviews, described how making this transition can easily become an isolating experience:

"I already left the care system so the care system can't really help me, so I really and truly am on my own and I don't know who to go to." (Male, Unemployed)

"I came out of care three days before my 18th birthday. It was a nightmare, I didn't enjoy it, we didn't know where we were going to go." (Male, In Education)

3.2 Knowledge and Awareness.

Many of the young people interviewed appeared to be reasonably knowledgeable about public services. Indeed, in their own assessment, care leavers often felt that they had good levels of knowledge about services of this kind. The research sought to test this knowledge further and in detail.

"I think it's just common sense, to be honest, most people know where stuff like that is." (Female, Unemployed)

"Yeah, I know a lot about these services..... housing, obviously doctor's surgery and education, like school and college. And Jobcentre Plus, legal advice, dentist, child benefit..... But some of them I don't know where they'd come into it, like the basic ones like libraries and stuff like that." (Male, Unemployed)

"I think I do. I know a lot of the different services that are available. However, there are so many that I don't think you can know everything that there is to know about all of them, but a lot of the ones that are relevant to me, I know quite a bit about.."
(Female, Working)

⁴ The definition of public services used in the research was also intended to include services provided both directly by the public sector; and those provided by the private and non-profit sectors, some of which were felt to be very important for care leavers (e.g. Citizens Advice).

In some cases, it was evident that these young people had quite specific knowledge about their local public services, providing the names and locations of local providers. Young care leavers also sometimes displayed knowledge and familiarity with public services terms such as 'pathways' and 'key workers'. Since all care leavers have to have a pathway plan, which sets out the support and preparation they need for adulthood and an allocated Personal Advisor, the use of these kind of terms is perhaps not surprising.

"My Social Services like explained many things you know like people in care, you have your pathway which is going to tell you more about many things." (Int1)

"I'd go to { local housing options service site} and Social Services, the Council place in town." (Female, Unemployed)

Some public services were particularly well known to care leavers, Jobcentre Plus and Connexions were very familiar to most; and many of those interviewed had knowledge of specific local youth support services. GP services and the wider NHS were also reasonably well understood and some of those interviewed had had experience of mental health services.

Public services that were less well known to young people tended to be those offering advice and counselling. A number of those interviewed felt unable to say where they would go to seek advice if they were in debt, for example. A number were also unclear as to where they should go if they wished to apply for housing benefits, and some wrongly believed that this would be a service offered by Jobcentre Plus. Few care leavers were spontaneously aware of services that might be available to give them advice about drugs. Knowledge of the existence of Citizens Advice Bureau services was patchy.

As has already been referred to, some other services, whilst well known, were not necessarily seen as offering a public service. YPP members in particular said that they had never considered that the police might be seen as offering a public service. The police were seen rather as an enforcement body and tended to be seen in a negative and confrontational light. This was based partly on having had some adverse experiences of the police, but also on wider and more general negative perceptions of the police.

In the interviews the peer researchers asked the young people to suggest where they might go, or who they might ask, in order to access relevant services in a number of situations:

- Finding somewhere else to live
- Claiming for housing benefits

- Applying for student loan
- Applying for Jobseekers Allowance (if unemployed)
- Getting advice about drugs
- Getting help because you are feeling depressed
- Getting support because you feel unsafe at night in your accommodation
- Getting advice because you are in debt
- Applying for a college course or an apprenticeship

Whilst young people varied considerably in how confident they were of what to do in these situations, the situations which were commonly the most difficult to answer were:

- Getting advice because you are in debt
- Applying for student loan
- Getting advice about drugs

"The drugs, because I don't really know where you can get the help from. It's not really publicised, the way you can get help, as much as other stuff." (Male, Volunteering)

Care leavers were, however, in many cases, confident that if they did not know how to access a particular public service then they could easily find out. They had often had help to access public services from their Personal Advisor. The knowledge they already held about public services had been received, very often, from support workers of this kind. Since the local authority has responsibility to provide advice and assistance for care leavers until the age of 21 or longer if in education, this level of support is perhaps to be expected.

For a number of interviewees, there was a clear and very strong reliance and expectation that this person would help them in many of the aspects of their lives, where they might require public services - from finding accommodation, to negotiating the benefits system. Care leavers had not only sought advice about which public services they should approach for help, but Personal Advisors had also accompanied care leavers to appointments at public service providers and helped care leavers to fill in any necessary forms.

It was clear that for a number of care leavers, without this help, they would have found it much more difficult to negotiate their way through and gain access to the public services they needed. For some, this reliance was very strong indeed and when asked where they would go or who they would consult under the various scenarios, their consistent and repeated reply was that they would ask their Personal Advisor.

"I have a social worker to help me with anything for housing and benefit." (Male, In Education)

"She helped me a lot, getting into education and finding independent living on my own." (Male, Volunteering)

"At first I'd go to my personal advisor, so I could get the best advice for me, and then I'd decide what to do." (Male, In Education)

"We do have an education worker at the leaving care place so, it makes it really easy. I love that place, they do have almost everything about the housing, about the education, about the health. So if anything you know where the place is and they send you to the right direction." (Male, In Education)

Without having undertaken comparable research with young people of a similar age who have not experienced the care system, it is not possible to say whether care leavers have a better or worse understanding of public services than their peers.

Young people were asked how and when they should receive information about public services. There was unanimous support for the idea that young people should be provided with information about the public services they might need, as they become independent, at an early stage and certainly before the actual needs arise. Care leavers strongly backed the suggestion that they should receive information whilst still in care and at school. The YPP suggested that 15 would be the ideal age to deliver such information.

"Probably when they're in care, then they know once they leave care that there is support there for them." (Male, Volunteering)

Care leavers almost universally believed that provision of this information should be the responsibility of the local authority or its representatives. Care leavers should not be expected to find out about and negotiate public services alone.

However, there was also clear recognition from some that in order to encourage independence, some onus should be placed on care leavers to find information out for themselves. A number of the young people interviewed were clear that a balance needed to be struck between spoon-feeding young people (and thereby reducing their chances of becoming fully independent) whilst at the same time ensuring that those leaving care are given sufficient help and information to access vital public services.

"Yeah I do think care leavers should at least try to find out as much as they possibly can themselves, it's part of growing up, it's part of becoming an adult So, for instance they could tell me where it is, I could go and find it." (Male, Working)

"They need to do some work for themselves so they know they can progress without help, know that they have to go down the right routes to find things out, but we do need help with it." (Male, Unemployed)

"I think a care leaver needs to know where to go to get advice about public services, I think it's a fifty fifty thing.... I mean, the Leaving Care Service can't do everything and the care leaver needs to learn a bit of independence. However, they may need some support in the way that they don't know where to go about it. "
(Female, Working)

Preferences about how such information might be received were varied. Whilst some liked the idea of receiving written information including leaflets, others were less keen on this idea.

"Nobody reads leaflets do they?" (Female, Unemployed)

"Or actually a leaflet, a leaflet would be brilliant - something that you can keep, you can keep it wherever you live. Something that reminds you, you got the information and addresses. Wherever you end up in one of those situations you've actually got a leaflet where there is you can go and get it." (Male, In Education)

Face-to-face explanation of the range of public services they might need was preferred by many - and care leavers tended to feel this should come from social services, Leaving Care Workers, foster carers or from lessons at school. In addition, many suggested that web information should be the priority and that care leavers should be pointed towards helpful and easily navigated Internet resources.

"Lessons at college and school and one-to-one sessions. Leaflets is just too much to read, if you're 15 or 16 you don't really want to read something like that." (Male, Unemployed)

"A website, it's like they could publish on Facebook. That's what most young people go on." (Male, In Education)

When discussing these findings, YPP members felt that it would be very important for the provision of information about public services to be undertaken through a variety of means, with repeated reinforcement over the months

leading up to a young person leave care. Giving one leaflet or delivering one workshop would not be sufficient. The breadth of possible needs amongst care leavers and the complexity of services on offer, meant that these communications would need to be repeated, reinforced and delivered gradually over time in order that they can be successfully absorbed.

"I think that all depends on the young person. If it's a young person that's able to retain information, then maybe on a one to one level, once it's in there, it's in there, if you see what I mean. Whereas, some people they don't like to take in information. They like to take it away with them and look back on it if and when they need it. So some people may need leaflets. I think, I think all resources should be available for every young person so that then we meet all of their learning abilities." (Female, Working)

3.3 Expectations and Experiences of Public Services.

3.3.1 Expectations

When discussing public services many care leavers displayed low levels of expectation. In general, public services were not expected to provide as good a level of service as private companies. Care leavers rarely talked of public services as the kinds of services where they would expect to receive good treatment or good outcomes.

During the interview young people were asked to sort a mix of private companies and public sector service providers into an order, with those that they would expect to provide the best customer service at the top and those that they would expect to provide the worst customer service at the bottom. Young people tended to rate supermarkets, in particular, as offering higher levels of service than most of the public sector service providers. For some, the degree of competition for private sector companies was the driver for these higher levels of customer service.

"Yeah, I'd have split it in two and said that the public services were the worst services because they didn't need to compete for you, which sounds very Tory, but the supermarkets, restaurants and the mobile phone companies, if they start being rude to you you're just going to leave." (Male, In Education)

"Yeah, supermarkets have to have decent customer service." (Male, Unemployed)

"And then supermarkets, customer service is usually good at a supermarket anyhow so." (Male, Working)

There was some evidence to suggest that care leavers were willing to accept poor service levels from public services without challenging this. There was an expectation of relatively poor treatment, of long waiting times, rude treatment and a lack of empathy.

"I can't expect too much" (Female, Unemployed)

"It's like beggars can't be choosers..... You don't really get heard because you're not the same level as they are." (Male, Unemployed)

"You don't expect much at the doctors." (Male, Unemployed)

The clear exception to this rule was the Connexions service. In many cases during the customer service ranking exercise, Connexions was placed at the top of the list, above all other public services and private sector companies. The reasons for this very different expectation of Connexions compared to other public services, became clear when young people recounted their experiences of using this service. This interviewee captured these higher levels of expectation of the Connexions service particularly well:

"Of all of the ones that you've written down Connexions is the only one that's actually there to help you. They're there as a public service to actually make finding a job or applying for university or applying for benefits easier. That's what they're there for and they do it very well. I feel like out of all the ones you've written down there they are only ones that actually go out of their way to help you, which to me is what customer service is all about, so I think they should be at the top." (Female, Working)

3.3.2 Experiences

Care leavers were asked to talk about specific experiences of using public services and to explain why they needed the service, how they accessed it and what their experience was, in some detail. Experiences of public services ranged from extremely positive to extremely poor. Whilst experiences varied considerably, there were some clear and consistent patterns, in terms of what care leavers valued as positive experiences and what they found to be disappointing.

This section of the report focuses on two main service providers – Jobcentre Plus and Connexions. This is because care leavers had almost always had contact with these two services and when asked to recount their experiences of public

services, almost all of those interviewed referred to one or other of these providers.

Positive Experiences

Many of the care leavers highlighted Connexions as providing excellent customer service within the public sector. The **personal relationship** developed with a specific worker, **over a long period** of time, at Connexions was a highly valued aspect of experience. Getting to know and trust an individual and in turn being able to develop a personal, friendly relationship was key to the positive feelings about the service:

"Connexions probably would be the first person I'd talk to because I get on well with my Connexions worker, he's really helpful." (Male, Unemployed)

"Because my Connexions Advisor has been absolutely brilliant, I've never had a problem with Connexions." (Male, In Education)

"I've known my Connexions worker a good few years now. He's worked with my older brother and sister, worked with my younger brother and, I don't know, I've just got on with him and if I needed help I could just call him up." (Male, Unemployed)

Another aspect of the Connexions experience which led to it being rated so highly was **speed of response and reliability**:

"If I needed something doing then they've done it straight away or if I've needed to do something they've supported me to do it. Yeah, my Connexions Advisor is a godsend really." (Male, In Education)

Above all else, Connexions was seen to provide **reliable, consistent and expert support**. The personalised and highly tailored advice offered to young people by Connexions workers, attracted significant and consistent positive feedback through the interviews. Connexions advisors were seen to keep their promises and provide a constant point of referral and on-going support.

"Connexions, every time I've had problems they get in touch with my authority. So there are ways where if I run out of money, Connexions get in touch with my authority and the authority will get in touch with me or get back in touch with them." (Male, In Education)

"He'd have the answer there for me and he's always pushing me in the right direction, always pushing me to say let's go down, do

your CV and that. He's done four different CVs with me just to help me get a job, four different CVs, one for Mechanics, Carpentry and then one of the supermarkets and then one for warehouse, retail. So they've probably been the best help to me." (Male, Unemployed)

These findings regarding Connexions echo and are backed up by previous studies (see Text Box 1):

Text Box 1

Findings from Other Research Studies: The importance of Connexions to care leavers.

Connexions formed an important partner in many local authorities involved in NCAS national employability programme, From Care2Work. NCAS found that having Connexions workers, or other dedicated education, training and employment specialists, working within leaving care services provides a focus for employability, supporting young people to achieve their potential and advising leaving care staff on education, training and employment.⁵

Beyond the Connexions service, other positive experiences described by care leavers tended to relate to situations where **personalised attention and care** had been taken to ensure that individual needs were met. Young people recounted other positive stories of where individual service providers had gone out of their way to help them in difficult situations:

"I went to {name of youth information, advice and counselling service} in town when I got kicked out of here, they washed my clothes in there and they got me a sandwich because I hadn't had anything to eat for three days. They sorted me out and they were the ones that took me to Social Services about a Council house so they were quite good." (Female, Unemployed)

Negative Experiences

Conversely, a number of experiences had been more negative, with young people encountering disappointments, broken promises and a lack of personal support and attention.

To some degree, dissatisfaction with experiences at Jobcentre Plus arose from **disappointment regarding outcomes** – that is, where they had hoped to gain employment or training opportunities and these hopes had not been met.

⁵ NCAS (2011) From Care2Work Phase 1 Final Report
<http://www.leavingcare.org/admin/uploads/048c472b88c9a3f6c906a46fb8b0e9ff.pdf>

"They didn't get me a job. They didn't get me on the training programme that I wanted to be on and they say they're going to do one thing and they don't end up doing it." (Female, Unemployed)

However, reports of negative experiences at Jobcentre Plus, in particular, went far beyond disappointment with the outcomes achieved. Care leavers disliked the **long waiting times** and slow and unresponsive service that they sometimes experienced at Jobcentre plus:

"You might wait half an hour at the Jobcentre, the College are a lot quicker and they help you a lot. At the Jobcentre you're usually in a queue to get sorted." (Male, Volunteering)

"But it takes so long to do things in there and they tell you what jobs to apply for but you ask for help filling out forms and you don't get it straight away, you have to wait and then by the time you've filled out the form the job's gone." (Male, Unemployed)

"I did four claims and I must have phoned them up about thirty to fifty times just to try and get an answer from them." (Male, In Education)

Frustration and disappointment with waiting times and **poor levels of responsiveness**, was also reported with regards to a number of other public services:

"Police, I think they're the biggest mess around, the lot of them, because when you need them they say "we'll be half an hour". That's just simply not good enough." (Male, Unemployed)

"Normally {with public services} you get stuck in a queue or you get told to sit down and wait for half an hour. You sit there thinking oh my God, this isn't right, you don't know what to do with yourself." (Male, Unemployed)

"The GP is slow, you wait in the waiting room for about an hour to get seen. Better than hospitals though, that's about a four hour wait." (Male, Unemployed)

In stark contrast to the descriptions of Connexions, Jobcentre Plus staff were often described as **rude and unreliable**. The atmosphere at Jobcentres was seen as uncomfortable and unfriendly. Far from delivering the personalised supportive service, which was so highly valued from Connexions, Jobcentre Plus

was seen to treat its customers as case files or numbers rather than as individual human beings.

"Because the Jobcentre, for example, I'd say they get too rude and they think they can just talk to you any way they feel like because you're not a working person. And they don't give you information, say if I want to go training, they lie and say they don't run that course any more or something." (Male, Unemployed)

"They treated me as like a number to them, not even a human being. That's the way I felt I was being treated. And the service made me feel like I'm not human, like I'm a beggar, like I'm someone who's there to beg them to give me money. It makes you feel uncomfortable and you're not happy about what you're doing, like you're asking them for money or something." (Male, In Education)

One of the key positive factors with the Connexions service was the ability to develop a long-term and consistent relationship with a particular worker. This allowed care leavers to develop a clear sense of trust in the service. This element too, was clearly missing from experiences at Jobcentre Plus, resulting in **inconsistent advice**:

"It always seems to me, whenever I was on benefits, it always seemed to me that you're never talking to the same person, you never get the same information and it always seems like you're told one thing by one person and something completely different from another and you never quite know where you stand." (Female, Working)

Furthermore, there were a number of reports from young care leavers of **mistakes** being made with their claim for benefits that led to direct financial detriment for them. Care leavers had trouble understanding and navigating their way through complex claims processes and this led to delays and mistakes. Confusion over the rules around claiming and difficulty with filling in forms made the experience particularly difficult. Given that much research has evidenced poorer educational outcomes and attainment for young care leavers, than for other young people, it may be assumed that care leavers in particular could find difficulty in tackling **complex guidance literature and form filling**.

"No, it took me four claims to get Income Support and that's at the point where I had no money from the Jobcentre and the authority had to pay me £51.85 per week." (Male, In Education)

"I'd have to go down to the Jobcentre and sign on, which is what I've done, but it's as confusing as hell." (Male, Unemployed)

During one interview a detailed story emerged of how one young care leaver had had a distressing and difficult experience in dealing with Jobcentre Plus. The words of this care leaver are presented as a detailed case study in Text Box 2 since this story brings together many of the issues highlighted during a number of the interviews.

Whilst the fact that this young person had been in care did not directly contribute to their treatment, and may not even have been known by Jobcentre Plus staff, it is clear that a story of this kind is much more likely to happen to a care leaver for a number of reasons. It is clear, for example, that care leavers are more likely to be reliant on benefits at an early age than other young people, since they are more likely to live independently and they are also more likely to be unemployed. Research has also shown that care leavers are more likely to become parents at a young age. In addition, careleavers may lack the wider support network that other young people are able to turn to, when encountering difficulties negotiating their way through claims processes.

Text Box 2

Case Study – Detailed Service Experience at Jobcentre Plus

"Well this is the example that sticks out most in my mind. I was claiming Jobseekers Allowance and I was pregnant. It was at the time of the recession, no-one would give me a job while I was pregnant because no-one's that stupid, but I needed to claim something while I wasn't entitled to Income Support.

"It took them ten weeks to give me so much as one payment. Then they lost my details, I had to send them in again and basically, long story short, it was ten weeks of being pregnant and living off my partner's £50 a fortnight between us.

"So after all of that, they told me that it would've taken me a week to attach my claim to my partner's, and I could have got a Jobseekers Allowance claim and it would have taken a week. Whereas instead they didn't tell me this information and it took me over ten weeks to get so much as one payment and I'd already given birth to my baby boy at the time. I remember just lying in the hospital bed just really scared out of my wits that someone was going to try and take my baby away, because I didn't have any money to look after him. And this was all because they didn't give me the information that I required so much.

"I was petrified, I couldn't eat, I can't even begin to describe just how upset and scared I was. And this was all because they didn't tell me one bit of information that would have taken a week. ... I did write a complaint about it and I sent it off to the Jobcentre and they didn't reply. I've not heard anything from them since and, to be honest, I'm quite glad that I'm not on benefits and I'm going to do my best to keep off them now because I don't want that again.

"They treated me like a number, like I wasn't actually a person in a situation. The amount of times I had to call them to double check what they were doing with my claim and them to tell me that they were processing it and then they lost it and I needed to do it again. After all of that I didn't feel like I was treated very well at all but I never managed to get hold of the person whose fault it was. Someone must have made a big mistake to have put me in that situation and yet no-one seems to know who's to blame, who's at fault." (Female, Working)

The findings from this research are very consistent with other research findings from previous work by both NCAS and Consumer Focus. These are outlined briefly in Text Box 3.

Text Box 3

Findings from Other Research Studies: Experience of Jobcentre Plus.

The issues with Jobcentre plus reflect the findings of NCAS report into Care Leavers Experiences of the welfare benefits system.⁶ It found that care leavers are an especially vulnerable group of young people and they can often be disadvantaged in a benefits system that is difficult to navigate. The call centre system and delays in processing claims are extra stressors at a time when young people are dealing with great change in their lives. Poor communication between services and lack of joint working processes can make it difficult for leaving care services to support young people with their claims. NCAS also found that the benefits system is not well understood by care leavers and leaving care workers, or even by those who operate within it. Many services report instances of misinformation from benefits officers and Jobcentre plus services and young people being denied benefits they are entitled to.

Consumer Focus research into customer experiences at Jobcentre Plus also reflects these findings⁷. Consumer Focus found jobseekers of all ages experienced low levels of customer satisfaction, driven by impersonal delivery and low awareness of the different services available to them. This was exacerbated by a system which many felt was designed to process them quickly and not listen to and respond to their individual situations. In the research only customers who had networks of friends and family to rely on were able to identify the services they felt they needed and demand them successfully from Jobcentre Plus staff.

A second report on the quality of the DWP Customer Charter found similar drivers of customer satisfaction at Jobcentre Plus (e.g., personalised service, providing reliable and consistent advice and support). It also found Jobcentre Plus was failing to meet its already low guarantees of quality customer service; poor communications and a lack of respect from personal advisers being significant barriers in service delivery.

Treatment as Care leavers

Care leavers rarely expressed concerns that they were treated differently or more negatively than others in receiving public services. In most cases, the young people interviewed believed that they were treated in a very similar way

⁶ NCAS (2010) What Could Make the Difference: Care Leavers and the Welfare Benefits System
<http://www.leavingcare.org/admin/uploads/169dda73b16a06844105deade66879c7.pdf>

⁷ Consumer Focus (2009) At the Centre
<http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/files/2010/12/Atthecentrefor-web.pdf>;
Consumer Focus (2010) Making a Charter work for jobseekers
<http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/files/2010/10/Making-a-charter-work.pdf>

to anyone else. However, on occasion a care leaver did perceive that their treatment might be different from other young people's:

"I think they kind of look at the lifestyle that you have come from and they judge you on that. Some people feel sorry for you but they're not helping you in any way and some people just don't care, they just think that you're a waste of space." (Male, Unemployed)

"They would talk rude to me saying things really rude. I remember one of them saying to me that "you're a care leaver, never work always want to live for free." Like the meaning of that is that you guys are happy about signing on not looking for a job and he didn't even know me he just judged me." (Male, In Education)

Reactions to care leavers specifically, where the service provider knows that the young person has been in care, can lead to both positive and negative responses. Members of the YPP reported that they had, during their time at school often received more lenient treatment from some public service providers, for example the police, education welfare officers and teachers, because they were in care. This was occasionally mentioned by the care leavers interviewed:

"My tutor's constantly involved in talking to me how you basically get this perk because you are a care leaver and when you go to Uni you'll get this. So if you're not a care leaver you won't get that." (Male, In Education)

3.4 Customer Service

Through the course of the discussions about expectations and experience it became clear that care leavers held very consistent views about what makes good customer service and what, on the other hand, constitutes poor customer service. These findings are entirely consistent with many other studies on customer service amongst other more general population groups⁸. It is clear, therefore, that customer service standards, expectations and requirements, are the same, for care leavers, as they are for any other group.

Care leavers were realistic about the fact that they could not always get what they wanted from public services – they realised they would not always be eligible to receive the services they hoped for. However, the young people interviewed had a strong desire to have such decisions clearly explained. This

⁸ Getting it right, righting the wrongs, Communities and Local Government 2009; Playlist for Public Services, NCC 2005; At the Centre, Consumer Focus 2009.

would constitute good customer service even if the outcome is not as they would hope.

Good customer service consisted of:

- Personalised support.
- Friendly and welcoming staff.
- Being treated like an adult / with respect.
- Clear explanations / information.
- Pleasant physical environment.
- Being dealt with quickly.
- Keeping promises.
- Getting it right first time.
- Convenience of opening hours and location.

"Welcome you in, know your name, probably shake your hand, be polite and understand what your situation is." (Male, Volunteering)

"When I go midnight shopping at Tesco's, when you're a regular they start talking to you. Sometimes they'll walk round the shop with you and show you what's on offer." (Male, In Education)

Poor customer service, conversely, consisted of:

- Being treated like a number rather than a person.
- Being talked down to / disrespected.
- Long waiting times and queues.
- Broken promises.
- Mistakes being made.
- Too much paperwork and bureaucracy.

Given that care leavers attached such high priority to being given personalised one-to-one and empathetic customer service, it is perhaps of no surprise that some care leavers were particularly critical of the use of automated telephone response systems.

"These answering machines you go through and say these things, you have to sound like a computer for the computer to understand you." (Male, Unemployed)

3.5 Barriers and Drivers to Using Public Services.

The research sought to understand both the drivers towards using public services and the barriers that might prevent care leavers from accessing the services they need.

3.5.1 Drivers

The strongest key driver towards using a public service is, quite obviously, the **need** for that service. Some services were more **relevant** to the needs of care leavers than others.

Care leavers had most often had the need of:

- Services to help them make decisions about their education and career options;
- Services to give financial support (e.g. benefits); and
- Services to find accommodation upon leaving care.

Given that these are the most immediate needs of young people leaving care, it is not surprising that most experiences and the highest levels of knowledge of public services surrounded Connexions, Jobcentre Plus and local housing services.

In describing how they had come to access public services, young people very often talked about having been personally told about the existence, availability and location of a particular service. In many cases, a care leavers' Personal Advisor had signposted them towards the public service in question. In other cases the young person, in response to recognising their need for a particular service, had sought advice from those around them or looked up details on the Internet. It was clear that being **signposted** towards a particular service was a driver of service use.

In some cases signposting might not be enough to encourage a care leaver to make use of a public service. A further driver towards using such services was the provision of direct **support** and on occasion accompaniment, often by a trusted support worker. Care leavers described situations where their Leaving Care Worker or a friend had attended public services with them, providing encouragement and reassurance.

Certainly, being aware of a public service provider was not necessarily enough to encourage a care leaver to make use of the service. Care leavers needed to trust that the service provider would be capable of helping them and that they could be **trusted** to do so.

Trust was built upon **good previous experiences** of public services. Such experiences act as a continuing driver towards the use of those services. Care leavers described experiences where they returned to particular service providers, because they had had good outcomes and been treated well in the past. A number of those interviewed had established strong on-going relationships with key workers or advisers at their housing provider or at Connexions.

Care leavers sought to access services which they considered were appropriate for them. Public services that were seen as welcoming, friendly, accessible and appropriate for young people are far more likely to attract young care leavers than those that were not perceived in these ways.

"You just want friendly advice really, friendly useful advice, someone that you can communicate with." (Male, Unemployed)

Barriers

In many cases the reasons why many of the public services that young people were asked to consider (when prompted with the stimulus at Figure 1), had never been used before or were perceived as services they would not personally use, came down to a simple lack of need. For example, those without children identified services for children, as those that they were least likely to use.

However, whilst in some cases there was a straight-forward and genuine lack of need, there was some evidence of wider feelings of **irrelevance** of services, even where there could feasibly be a benefit to the care leaver of knowing about the services in question. For example, a number of care leavers picked out drugs advice as being irrelevant to them, because they did not take drugs. Similarly, if they had not so far experienced debt, they saw debt advice as a service with little relevance for them. We have already seen that knowledge of these particular advice services was patchy and the interviews suggest that this lack of knowledge was perhaps a result of a perceived lack of relevance.

"The debt advice, probably because I've never been in debt whether it would be easy to find out or not, I don't know." (Male, In Education)

Irrelevance was about more than whether or not the care leaver might need to use the service. Some services were seen as being targeted towards the needs of older people and were therefore seen as irrelevant or "not for people like me."

"I would say the libraries because they're just old-fashioned. I don't think in the modern world with computers ... its part of history." (Male, Working)

Whilst **lack of knowledge and awareness** could clearly be a barrier to the use of public services, most care leavers felt confident in being **able to overcome** this barrier. If they did not know about a public service they were mostly confident that they knew someone they could ask or that they could look things up on the Internet. Care leavers tended to feel that if there was something they needed, they would continue to seek out the relevant service until they found it.

"The Internet, or just walk around and see if I can ask them the public to see if they can point me in the right direction." (Male, Volunteering)

"Google. Originally it would've been my social worker but she told me that she looks everything up on Google anyway so there's not really much point." (Male, In Education)

"If I really needed the information, and I wouldn't stop until I got it" (Male, In Education)

In some situations, care leavers said that they may not access services that might be available to them, because they **lack the desire** to get help. Care leavers described situations where, in particular, they might have approached the police to help to them, but where they did not approach the police for help, because the care leaver felt disinclined to make such an approach.

"I wouldn't bother, I'd just leave it" (Female, Unemployed)

In response to the question: "Where would you go / who would you ask if you felt unsafe in your accommodation at night":

"I've been through that you just have to learn to live with it... I just deal with it." (Male, In Education)

In some situations young people reported that they would not seek help because of a **reluctance to admit** that they might **need** to.

"I think, personally, it would be the mental health. And that's purely because I'm... it's hard to explain, I don't like admitting I've got a problem that I can't fix." (Female, Working)

There was a wider sense amongst care leavers that some advice services might be avoided. This was because of a feeling that care leavers in general might tend towards a **denial of their problems** which prevents them from seeking help. Or, in the case of problems with drugs, there might be a lack of desire to tackle the problem head on, until they are ready.

"Debt advice, because no one wants to face their debt." (Male, In Education)

Clearly, not all care leavers will need public services assistance to tackle such problems and some care leavers openly acknowledged their problems but had made active decisions to tackle them independently.

"Basically, through some part of your care life, because there's a lot of pressure on you, you turn to drugs and alcohol but you don't necessarily want to get off from it..... I used to be on weed so I've been clean off for a year and a half, but I didn't go to Drugs Advice." (Male, Unemployed)

This lack of inclination to seek help and the denial of the need for help were both factors that related to care leavers' desire to **demonstrate their independence**. Care leavers are forced to grow up very quickly and face compressed transitions, and to some extent it was clear that seeking to prove their ability to stand on their own two feet, can act as a barrier to using certain public services.

"Because when you're a young care leaver most people might prove they don't need anyone so they find it hard to come forward and ask for the help. That's my own experience of it." (Male, Unemployed)

Previous negative experience of services created a clear **lack of trust** which in turn created a barrier to future use. This barrier was particularly apparent with regard to approaching the police. A number of care leavers had had negative experiences of dealing with the police and were therefore reluctant to approach them for help, should they need it.

"Because when you're young you don't want to get involved with police, even when you do something you want to just keep it by yourself not like to get involved the police." (Female, In Education)

Yeah, I would not go to the Police even if I needed to. I can't even talk to them. I can talk to like an Undercover Copper or someone who's not in uniform, a Plain Clothes Copper, but as soon as Uniform come near me I just go mental or just run off or do whatever. I'm not scared of them or anything, I don't like the look of them. I know what they can do and are going to do to me. (Male, Unemployed)

Care leavers are not always confident in approaching a service for the first time. Some young people described feelings of **nervousness and uncertainty** and even **fear** in doing so. For some, this initial nervousness was overcome with the assistance of a trusted support worker, in some cases such a person had accompanied the care leaver on their first visit to a public service.

"I expected it to be, not messy, but a bit strange walking in and they've got that politeness about them that they're going to help you and things like that. Because when you're care leaver you don't really have that reassurance because of whatever happened in your past." (Male, Volunteering)

"So sometimes you end up in that situation - you don't even know there is help or not, you'd be scared to tell anyone you be afraid that they'd laugh at you." (Male, In Education)

"I know about drug advice but I'm scared to use that, it feels scary." (Male, In Education)

Linked to this fear, young careleavers felt that some services would not be accessed due to feelings of **embarrassment**. This was particularly true of services such as sexual health advice. When asked which public service is the most unlikely for young people to go to, one young person said:

"It would probably be sexual health... because of the embarrassment of going there, but actually it's quite a serious thing if you need to go there." (Male, In Education)

Whilst not raised very often, **inconvenient** opening times, covering only weekdays, sometimes created a more practical barrier to accessing public services.

"The only time I've got is Saturday and Sunday and they're shut." (Male, In Education)

"And I also think Citizens Advice should have extended hours because I think I've rang them on three different occasions and you never get through." (Male, In Education)

A further aspect of public service provision that tended to be off-putting for care leavers was the degree of **complexity, bureaucracy** and very specifically the requirement for **form-filling**. Whilst none of the care leavers interviewed reported that these aspects of public services had prevented access, it was clear that they made access difficult and uncomfortable.

"I struggle with paperwork, I only got an F in my English so I struggle with any writing ... I'd like to have a tiny bit of help." (Male, Unemployed)

4. Recommendations

The following recommendations were discussed and developed with the Young People's Panel, after a review of the research analysis:

1. All local authorities should specifically **ensure that young people leaving care have a good, broad knowledge and understanding of local public services**. This knowledge and information should be provided to meet the following guidelines:
 - a. Information should be provided **early** – before the young person is about to leave care, preferably at age 15.
 - b. Information about public services should be **reinforced** and provided repeatedly over the last months of a young person being in the care system.
 - c. In order to achieve this reinforcement and in order to cater for the varied preferences of young people, **a variety of means of communication** should be developed including printed materials and online resources. An essential part of this mix should always include face to face briefing and discussion.
 - d. Development of a young care leaver's knowledge about public services should be directly linked into the **Pathway Planning process**.
 - e. The process should go beyond information provision and should include dialogue about the kinds of public services that will be needed. Coaching and support to develop key skills (such as form filling) should be provided. Development of this knowledge and awareness should be done in such a way as to give young people **the skills to find out about, and access, public services for themselves**, in the future. It should provide young care leavers with the tools to make informed decisions rather than tell them what to do or spoon feed them.
 - f. Approaches should seek to create **less reliance on a single support worker** and should broaden the network of support that is available to young care leavers. Development of a mentoring scheme whereby older care leavers offer support and advice to young people leaving care should be considered as one possible route to achieving this.
2. Leaving care services should take a lead in gradually building awareness of and confidence in accessing services, specifically addressing each of the barriers highlighted in this research, as part of the pathway planning process.

3. Given the current reliance of many young care leavers on their Personal Advisors, the current national review of statutory duties and the on-going wider reviews of local public spending should consider that young care leavers may find it much more difficult to access public services, if this service is reduced. Similarly, this research suggests that reductions in **Connexions services** will adversely affect young care leavers in particular, who value this service and the personal support they receive from it, very highly.
4. Given the importance of public services to young people leaving care, the findings of this **research should be widely shared** amongst all public service providers. Good customer service standards for young care leavers encompass most of the same attributes identified previously by other population groups and in other research. Public service providers should **continue to improve customer service** and should give particular attention to ensuring that young people in general, and young care leavers in particular, receive services which:
 - a. Treat them as a person, not a case file or a number.
 - b. Provide individually tailored support.
 - c. Are delivered with respect and empathy.
 - d. Keep promises and thereby increase levels of trust.
5. A range of locally provided public services should **specifically seek to better support young people leaving care**. As a priority, Jobcentre Plus; should be required to do this. This can be achieved by each of these services:
 - a. Identifying a named individual to take charge of service delivery for young care leavers.
 - b. That individual receiving training in the needs of care leavers.
 - c. That individual developing direct links to their local leaving care team.
 - d. That individual working with the local Leaving Care team to ensure that knowledge and understanding of their specific service is raised with young care leavers, before they leave care.
 - e. That individual's contact details being provided to all young care leavers, as their first port of call to access the service.
6. At a national and local level, **Jobcentre Plus** should ensure that recommendations 4 and 5 are implemented across the country.
7. **Local police services** should specifically find ways to build awareness of their services amongst young people and to build trust. There is a need to challenge to existing perceptions of the police and

ensure that young people leaving care (and young people more widely) recognise that the police provide a service that they can turn to when in need.

8. **Citizens Advice Bureau** services should more actively promote and explain their services to young care leavers.

5.

Appendix 1 – Research Questionnaire

Remember: keep asking: Who? What? Where? When? How? WHY?

Care leavers and public services research

Informed Consent Form & Interview Guide

Informed consent form	Please tick
I have read and understood the participant information sheet.	
I have had the chance to ask questions.	
I understand that I don't have to take part if I don't want to.	
I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time, without giving a reason.	
I understand that the results of this study may be used to help develop services and policy for care leavers and other young people and that the results may be published, but my name will not be mentioned.	
I understand that people will read about the things that I tell you, but they will not know I said it. I understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if you are concerned that I or others are at risk. (In these circumstances advice will be sought from a senior manager from another local authority who will advise the research team as to whether we need to make your social worker aware of what you have told us.)	
I agree to take part in the interview.	
I agree for the interview to be recorded and understand that the recording and transcript will be kept in a secure place in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.	

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____

Participant's local authority: _____

Date of interview: _____

Name of peer researcher: _____



Interview script / guide

INTERVIEWER: Is the respondent:

Male?

Female?

Section 1 – About You

First a few questions about your current circumstances...

1.1 What type of accommodation do you live in? – e.g. residential home, independent, semi-independent, etc.

_____ (WRITE IN)

1.2 Do you live

On your own?

With a partner?

With others?

Who? _____

1.3 Do you have any children?

Yes How many? _____ What age(s)? _____

No

1.4 What are you doing at the moment?

In education? What are you studying? _____

Working? What do you do? _____

Unemployed?

Something else? What? _____

1.5 Do you have any health problems or disabilities?

Yes What? _____

5 minutes

Remember: keep asking: Who? What? Where? When? How? WHY?

No

Section 2 - Knowledge, Awareness and Understanding of Public Services (20 mins).

SAY: *This interview is all about Public Services. What I mean by Public Services is a very wide range of things – it could be any service, person or organisation that is there to help you become independent after leaving care. A lot of times public services are provided by the Government, your local Council or the NHS; but public services might also be provided by a charity or a company. Public services cover things like Health services, Education, Financial things, like benefits, student loans or tax; Services that keep people safe – like the police and fire service; Housing services and advice and information. It would be really difficult to list everything that might be a public service but this sheet has lots of examples of them – just to give you an idea.*

SHOW HANDOUT 1, READ OUT SOME OF THE EXAMPLES SHOWN

2. *Thinking about public services (KEEP SHOWING HANDOUT):*
- *Do you feel you know a lot about these kinds of services?*
 - *What kinds of services do you know most about?*
 - *What kinds of services do you know least about?*
 - *Why is that?*

Notes:

3 minutes

Remember: keep asking: Who? What? Where? When? How? WHY?

KEEP SHOWING HANDOUT

3. *If you thought you needed some help or advice from one of these kinds of services (for example some health advice or some money advice) but you were not sure where to get that help:*

- *Who would you ask?*
- *What would you do?*
- *Where would you look?*

EXTRA PROMPTS:

What people would you ask?

How and where would you try to find the information?

How hard would you try?

Notes:

2 minutes

Remember: keep asking: Who? What? Where? When? How? WHY?

SAY: I'm now going to ask you where you might go for help in some particular situations. They might not be situations you think you would be in, but just try to imagine that you are and think about what you would do.

INTERVIEWER NOTE: MAKE SURE THEY KNOW THIS IS NOT A TEST TO SEE IF THEY KNOW THE RIGHT ANSWER. IF THEY ARE NOT SURE, THAT'S OK....IN FACT, IT IS IMPORTANT WE FIND THIS OUT

4.1 Who would you ask or where would you go if you wanted to.....

	<i>Where would they go? / Who would they ask? (WRITE IN)</i>	<i>Tick here if 'Don't Know'</i>
<i>Find somewhere else to live?</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Claim for housing benefits</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Apply for student loan</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Apply for Jobseekers Allowance (if unemployed)</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Get advice about drugs</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Get help because you are feeling depressed</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Get support because you feel unsafe at night in your accommodation?</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Get advice because you are in debt?</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Apply for a college course or an apprenticeship?</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>
ASK ONLY IF INTERVIEWEE HAS A CHILD:		
<i>Check your child has had all the right jabs / vaccinations?</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>

4.2 Which ONE of these was most difficult to answer? Why?

Notes:

7-8 minutes

Remember: keep asking: Who? What? Where? When? How? WHY?

5. *SAY: Young people leaving care may need to know about a wide range of public services ...*

a) *Who do you think should make sure that care leavers know all about public services?*

EXTRA PROMPTS:

- *Should care leavers be expected to find out for themselves?*
- *Who should be responsible for this?*

b) *When should care leavers be given information about public services?*

EXTRA PROMPTS

- *Before they need these services*
- *Before they leave care*
- *As and when they ask for it.*

c) *How should care leavers be given this information?*

EXTRA PROMPTS:

- *Leaflets? E-mails? Lessons at school or college? One to one from Personal Advisor? Texts? Websites? Find out for themselves?*

7-8 minutes

Section 3 – Experiences of Using Public Services (30 mins).

*SAY: Now we're now going to talk about **customer service**. You are a customer of all kinds of services, including the public services we have been talking about. HANDOUT SORT CARDS. I want you to look at these organisations and put them in order of which ones you think give the best customer service/ the ones that treat you best as a customer.*

*ASK INTERVIEWEE TO PLACE THE CARDS IN FRONT OF THEM WITH THE **BEST CUSTOMER SERVICE PROVIDER AT THE TOP AND THE WORST AT THE BOTTOM**. IF THEY DON'T KNOW (HAVE NO EXPERIENCE) ABOUT AN ORGANISATION, THEY CAN PUT THAT CARD TO ONE SIDE.*

WHEN PLACED IN ORDER ASK:

- 6. Why have you placed _____ at the bottom? – Why does this have the worst customer service? Why is _____ at the top, what is good about what they do?*

EXPLORE WHY PUBLIC SERVICES HAVE BEEN PLACED WHERE THEY ARE.ASK QUESTIONS LIKE: "Why do GP Surgeries come below Supermarkets?" BASED ON THE ORDER THEY HAVE CHOSEN

Notes:

5 minutes

Remember: keep asking: Who? What? Where? When? How? WHY?

SAY: I now want to ask you to tell me about your experiences of a public service.
SHOW HANDOUT 1 AGAIN.

Thinking of these kinds of services, can you think of a recent example where you have used one of these kinds of services? Think back to that occasion where you used a public service.

IF INTERVIEWEE CANNOT THINK OF AN EXAMPLE THEMSELVES GO STRAIGHT TO Q8

7. Now I want you to tell me all about the experience you are thinking of:

a. What did you need?

b. How did you know / find out about / get information about the service?

c. Did you get everything you needed? Were you satisfied or not?

d. How did they treat you? How did using the service make you feel?

e. Was the experience as you expected? How was it different?

f. Do you think someone else would have been treated the same or differently?
Why?

7-8 minutes

Remember: keep asking: Who? What? Where? When? How? WHY?

(IF YOU HAVE TIME), SAY: I now want to ask you about another example of using a public service, but this time I'm going to choose the example.

INTERVIEWER CHOOSE ONE EXAMPLE FROM THE LIST BELOW MAKE IT A DIFFERENT SERVICE TO THE EXAMPLE YOU HAVE JUST HEARD ABOUT. USE A MIX OF THESE IN THE INTERVIEWS YOU DO.

8. I now want you to think now about a time that you:

- Needed help from the Police.
- Saw your Connexions Advisor
- Went to a Jobcentre Plus office
- Used the NHS (either the GP, health visitor, hospital, clinic or NHS Direct)
- Applied for a course at College or University

IF HAS CHILD:

- Used the NHS (either the GP, health visitor, hospital, clinic or NHS Direct) for your child

Think about that example and tell me all about the experience:

a. What did you need?

b. How did you know / find out about / get information about the service?

c. Did you get everything you needed? Were you satisfied or not?

d. How did they treat you? How did using the service make you feel?

e. Was the experience as you expected? How was it different?

f. Do you think someone else would have been treated the same or differently? Why?

7-8 minutes

Remember: keep asking: Who? What? Where? When? How? WHY?

9. Are there any Public Services (*SHOW HANDOUT 1 AGAIN*) that you think young care leavers would be very unlikely to use, even if they might need to? Which ones? *THEY CAN PICK AS MANY AS THEY WANT*

Notes:

10. Which *ONE* public service do you think young care leavers are **most unlikely** to go to, even if they might need it? *GET THEM TO CHOOSE ONE*

Notes:

11. Why do you think this is the case, is it because....?

Young care leavers don't know about / have enough information the service	<input type="checkbox"/>
The service isn't in convenient places	<input type="checkbox"/>
The service isn't open at convenient times	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worries about privacy or confidentiality	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't trust that the right advice / a good service will be received.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Just doesn't feel right for young people	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other reasons?(WRITE IN)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5 minutes

Remember: keep asking: Who? What? Where? When? How? WHY?

KEEP SHOWING HANDOUT 1

12. And what about you? Are there any services that you think you would be really unlikely to use, even if you needed to? Which ones? **THEY CAN PICK AS MANY AS THEY WANT**

13. Which **ONE** service would you be **least likely** to use, even if you might need it? **GET THEM TO CHOOSE ONE**

14. Why? Is it because....?

I don't know about / have enough information the service	<input type="checkbox"/>
The service isn't in convenient places	<input type="checkbox"/>
The service isn't open at convenient times	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worries about privacy or confidentiality	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't trust that the right advice / a good service will be received.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Just doesn't feel right	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other reasons?(WRITE IN)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5 minutes

Section 4 – Making it Better (5 mins)

15. Imagine you live on a different planet – it is called Planet Perfect. On Planet Perfect they have the best and most welcoming public services, services you would feel really comfortable and happy using. What would they be like?

IF IT IS EASIER INTERVIEWEE CAN CHOOSE A PARTICULAR PUBLIC SERVICE TO THINK ABOUT - E.G.: DESCRIBEA GP SURGERY ON PLANET PERFECT OR,A JOBCENTRE ORA HOUSING OFFICE.

EXTRA PROMPTS:

What would it be like?

How would you find out about it?

How would you use it?

What would the staff be like?

How would they treat you?

How would you feel as a customer using this?

How are these things different from the public services you know in the real world?

Notes:

16. Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make about public services?

5 minutes

FINISH INTERVIEW AND SAY THANK YOU