



# The Care Experienced Conference

**The Care Experienced Conference 2019**  
**What's happened since?**  
**Messages from a Knowledge**  
**Exchange 2021**

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Executive Summary

## Introduction

It is now over two years since the Care Experienced Conference took place at Liverpool Hope University on the 26th April 2019. Following the conference, a 'Pledge' was developed to enable its recommendations to be implemented.

- > **What has happened since?**
- > **Have the messages from the conference made any difference?**
- > **Have people been able to use the reports and the top ten messages?**
- > **What has been done with the pledge in different places and for different purposes?**

Research in Practice hosted an online Knowledge Exchange event on the 28th April 2021 to hear from people who had participated in the Care Experienced Conference. They spoke about what it had meant to them and what their hopes were about what would happen next.

All the contributors reflected how the power and clarity of messages from the conference formed a strong basis for planning action. The messages have been translated into technical specifications, have informed local policy and practice, and helped generate specific action plans:

Greater Manchester talked about the adoption of the pledge across the ten local authorities in the city region as part of its focus on youth. This included arrangements that have been made for governance to support implementation and how the work has informed the housing offer for care leavers.

The Liverpool City region explained how they have built the pledge into the commissioning framework across the whole region and the difference this is making for commissioners as well as for providers.

North Yorkshire and Coram talked about how the top ten messages and pledge connected with their work with care leavers and the synergy with the Coram Bright Spots and New Belongings work.

All described how incorporating the messages changed culture. They described how 'bringing the child into the room', or 'placing the child at the centre of thinking', changed ways of working to be driven by what children and young people said. This has included a change in the use of language and the dialogue between people and the professionals working with them. Ways of working between professionals has also been 'humanised'.

However, it remains a big challenge to ensure that the involvement of children in care, care leavers and care experienced people act as constant points of reference. There is further to go with meaningful involvement of older care experienced people in order to bring their advice and wisdom to bear on local working arrangements. Without this, there is a risk that the messages from the conference might become lost in process and bureaucracy.

On the following pages we summarise messages from the presentations at the 2021 Knowledge Exchange event.

**An introduction to the 2019 Care Experienced Conference and how its main messages were developed into a 'Pledge' to help improve things for the better.**

***Presented by David Graham, The Care Leavers' Association, and Selina Anderson, conference participant and facilitator, and Our Care Our Say team member.***

David explained that the care experienced community felt the pace of change had been too slow and their longstanding messages were not being heard and understood.

The conference took place on 26th April 2019 at Liverpool Hope University and was attended by over 160 people, aged from 14 to 82 years. Some had travelled from as far away as Australia to be part of this exciting event. Such was the level of support that some young people in care sent in their pocket money to help fund the conference. Great care was taken to ensure a nurturing environment in which the delegates felt valued and supported.

The conference was roughly split 60/40 between care experienced people and professionals, though some people's experiences crossed both these categories. Many people had become successful, often in the care sector, and they wanted to give back and help change things for the better.

*We wanted to go beyond a standard conference to celebrate the richness and diversity of the care experienced community.*

David Graham

Selina, who attended and facilitated at the conference, said it was a moving and inspirational day where everybody gave some something and gained something.

*The inclusion of creativity in the conference made a huge difference. The inter-generational contact was so positive and this event celebrated care experienced people and helped them to feel valued. Young people can see your intentions from what you do.*

Selina Anderson

The day was a huge success and twenty workshops generated substantial material, carefully captured by scribes. An academic strand focused attention on key areas of research interest for care experienced people. **Two detailed reports** were compiled and published in July 2019 and presented to the Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson.

**David Graham described the key messages:**

- > We need more love, including hugs.
- > Healthy, nurturing relationships are everything.
- > By far the biggest issue explored was mental health and wellbeing, and how to cope with what life throws at us.

*An enduring message was that we need to remember no one knows more about what it means to be in care than care experienced people. And people want emotional, social and legal recognition too.*

David Graham

After the reports were published, there was contact from a diverse range of organisations wanting to use the messages. The conference organisers wanted to make materials freely available and to see the conference reports used, so a **'Pledge'** was developed which could be adopted and adapted to improve things for care experienced people.

*There was a real sense of togetherness and community - it was inspirational, powerful and moving! It should happen again. If we could've continued it would've turned into something much more.*

Selina Anderson

## Greater Manchester

**Greater Manchester on adopting the pledge across the city region as part of its focus on youth. The specific impact on the housing offer was outlined.**

***Presented by Chantel Brown, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Nick Whitbread, Manchester City Council, and Noel Sharpe, Bolton at Home.***

The pledge was adopted by all ten Greater Manchester authorities and went on to inform the Greater Manchester Care Leaver Guarantee and the **Local Offer**. Political focus and support is robust, exemplified by a council tax precept to enable free travel on buses for care leavers across the city region.

A local event, 'Doing Things Differently', was held in November 2019 to bring care leavers and professionals together to sign up to the pledge and make it real by deciding what would make a difference, creating the care leaver guarantee and informing the local offer.

The GM Care Leaver Guarantee focuses on life skills - housing, employment and skills and health - but also covers free access to transport, enabling young people to participate in society.

*The local offer is about doing what good parents want to do, help with the basics - travel, decorating, furniture, and more. We also managed a swift response on digital access in the pandemic.*

Nick Whitbread

*It's also about listening to young people about what's important to them. So, for example, we are improving support to access their care records.*

Chantel Brown

You can read the reflections of John-George, a care-experienced adult, on his experiences accessing his care recordings, and what should be considered in chronologies, [here](#).

*We are working on an app with the university so that young people can access information about what's on offer - they've told us that they want this.*

Nick Whitbread

Strong leadership and support is maintained via the Care Leavers' Trust Board, which has representation reflecting the wider system of support, with a focus on improving processes to make the experience of young people better as well as applying resources in a sustainable way.

*The network of care leaver managers has strengthened and, if something good is happening somewhere, the conversation becomes 'Why can't we all do that too?' An example was when Oldham introduced free prescriptions for care leavers. We said why can't we all?'*

Nick Whitbread



[www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/how-collaboration-drives-improvement-for-care-experienced-people-across-greater-manchester](http://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/how-collaboration-drives-improvement-for-care-experienced-people-across-greater-manchester)

*It doesn't stop here - we are ready to ramp it up - looking to develop the workforce, build consistency, develop an app for young people and strengthen reciprocal arrangements.*

Nick Whitbread

Noel Sharpe explained that publication of the pledge made everyone ask what more they could do to offer focused and specialist housing support, so a Greater Manchester Housing Provider Pledge for care experiences people was developed.

*We are moving far beyond transactional housing services to increase the bespoke supply for care leavers, getting people involved in design and homemaking, and providing real support to make and sustain a home, reflecting that setting up home is a critical event in the lives of young people.*

Noel Sharpe

**Housing providers have committed to the local pledge in order to make a real impact in three main areas:**

- > Providing a range of homes.
- > Supporting life skills and mentoring.
- > Providing opportunities for employment and skills.

*An example is a bespoke shared living arrangement developed with a high-quality refurbishment of the derelict property, which has worked really well.*

Noel Sharpe

Outcomes across Greater Manchester are showing early signs of improvement. Things are moving in the right direction for keeping in touch with people who have left care, and them being in suitable accommodation, employment and training. However, there is much further to go.

*We challenge each other to share ideas and to rise to the level of the highest. There is no reason why others can't do this too.*

Nick Whitbread

## Liverpool

**Liverpool City region set out how the pledge is built into their commissioning framework and the difference this is making for commissioners as well as for providers.**

***Presented by Davinder Gill, Wirral Council, Rhian Kilpatrick, Sefton Council, and Rebecca Quigley, Barnardo's.***

Colleagues who had attended the 2019 conference in Liverpool came away keen to adopt its key messages and developed an application of the pledge.

Davinder Gill talked about how the pledge has been incorporated into the Liverpool City region Partner Provider Arrangement (PPA), a dynamic purchasing system used by the six local authorities in the region, which is open to providers of residential and fostering placements in that area only. It is designed to be different, is deliberately small and is the primary route to market, keeping it local. It was launched in December 2020, so it is early days.

### **The four key pillars are:**

- > Small
- > Local
- > Partnerships
- > Quality and outcomes-focused

A shared pledge was developed which translated the key messages from the Care Experienced Conference Pledge into a set of shared values. Both parties must sign the pledge prior to the contract commencing and this is regularly reviewed.

*A social value assessment is also included as part of the approval process. We encourage partners to look at service delivery through the eyes of the child.*

Davinder Gill

Dedicated provider relationship management and regular Partner Forums help increase engagement and two-way communication - it is a different way of thinking which reduces defensiveness.

*From the outset, care experienced trainers were used in the Liverpool City region to ensure that their perspective was central to the approach which was developed.*

*What we're looking to do across the partnership is to work with providers to look at how we can track those outcomes better. So that, again, really putting the child at the heart of what we're doing.*

*They need to have a positive experience and we need to normalise their childhood as much as possible through having outcomes that they've worked up as well. We want to know from them what their interests are in terms of social activity and, you know, leisure, activity and sport and include those outcomes as well, so that wherever they are placed they can be involved in those networks and community initiatives to help them settle in their placement.*

Davinder Gill



[www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/how-liverpool-city-region-put-the-child-at-the-heart-of-their-work](http://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/how-liverpool-city-region-put-the-child-at-the-heart-of-their-work)

Care experienced people have a prominent voice in all the forums. There was input from those involved in the Scottish Care Review at an early Partner Collective Forum to share learning, which led them to work more closely with their providers in order to look at how they could embed that learning into practice and ask the right questions to understand the child's experience. Older adults who were formerly in care are contributing to a future forum debate on the mental health needs of children in care and care leavers.

Joint training is used to raise awareness between social care colleagues and providers, led by care experienced people - for example, focused on improving referral writing and understanding a child's journey into and through care as seen through the child's eyes.

*We are also working on how to ensure we can hold onto knowledge about the child's individual experience.*

Davinder Gill

Rhian Kilpatrick explained the drive for local provision to help young people maintain networks with family and community. Even twenty miles is a long way away for children. Commissioner relationships focus on tackling any issues which arise early, emphasising social value and 'sticking with' children and young people when the going gets tough to reduce placement breakdowns.

*We have examined each part of the process to make it work for children, from referral information all the way through to dealing with issues that might arise in the placement. Care experienced people were involved in the PPA approvals and were very vocal - which was extremely helpful.*

Rhian Kilpatrick

Rhian acknowledged there are challenges.

*Everyone agrees that there should be more love, but staff are cautious of showing positive physical affection. It can feel like the sector almost requires permission to legitimise this.*

Rhian Kilpatrick

They are still working on outcome tracking to measure the stability of the homes provided through the arrangement, and with being better at engaging partners from health in this work. They are in the process of developing a dashboard which will include direct feedback from young people.

Rebecca Quigley reflected that providers see the relationship with Liverpool City Region and their framework as different, but in a good way!

*The tone has been set for different working relationships. For example, the use of language is changing - 'respite' can have negative connotations for the child so is now described as 'short break', as everyone needs a short break sometimes. The concept of love is talked about openly and put back into the equation.*

Rebecca Quigley



[www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/how-language-sets-the-tone-for-different-working-relationships](http://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/how-language-sets-the-tone-for-different-working-relationships)

They are working collaboratively, whilst acknowledging the competitive climate each partner is in.

Shifting commissioning away from a traditional approach to a partnership approach takes time to develop and embed. This is reflected in the creation of longer-term contracts with approved providers, changing from the previous three years to ten years now.

Liverpool City Region is continuing to deliver the messages from the Care Experienced Conference. This will always be a work in progress and require a strong feedback loop with the care experienced community in order to sustain it. The importance of bringing direct voices into the conversation cannot be overstated.

**North Yorkshire and Coram talked about how the synergy between the Coram Bright Spots and the Top Ten Messages and Pledge has influenced their work with care leavers and the New Belongings work.**

***Presented by Ian Stewart-Watson, Coram Voice, Jonny Hoyle, North Yorkshire County Council, and Shannon, Louise, Nicki and Jade from the Leaving Care Service.***

Ian Stewart-Watson explained that indicators developed by young people for the Bright Spots wellbeing indicators go beyond the usual measures, capturing subjective experiences of **wellbeing**. The New Belongings programme involves local authorities in a survey and subsequent work. The survey collects data from children in care, and care leavers, to **show what it's like** to be a young person living in that area. A self-assessment framework is also used, providing the basis for people to look with local partners at the delivery of their services.

*Our findings show, on average, a third of young people are not feeling safe where they are living - which calls into question whether we are measuring the right things when we are looking at leaving care services?*

Ian Stewart-Watson

Many of the findings validate professional anecdotal experience, for example low levels of wellbeing are revealed and the cliff edge of leaving care is exposed.

*Only 51 per cent of care leavers feel settled, yet nearly three-quarters feel settled when they are in care.*

Ian Stewart-Watson

Feedback on the findings are shared with young people in each authority and the work brings about individual and system-level improvements. One example is highlighting the shortfall of provision for mental health support for care leavers, leading to the development of a pathway for transition for all levels of mental health and wellbeing support in that place.



## North Yorkshire

Jonny Hoyle explained how the conference pledge had influenced care leaver support in North Yorkshire.

*Messages from the care experience conference reinforced the approach which has been developed in North Yorkshire - summed up as being 'less corporate and more parent'. It has been our explicit intention to improve people's sense of community, belonging and a sense of family amongst children in care and care leavers.*

Jonny Hoyle



[www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/how-the-care-experience-conference-pledge-has-influenced-care-leaver-support-in-north-yorkshire](http://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/how-the-care-experience-conference-pledge-has-influenced-care-leaver-support-in-north-yorkshire)

Nicki, one of the managers of the care leaver service, talked about the importance of using appropriate language and the **film** that North Yorkshire care experience people had made about this.

The New Belongings analysis pointed towards subjective wellbeing issues, for example picking up on people saying they did not feel safe where they were living. The apprentices were involved in having direct conversations as part of the survey and found they could take the messages back to the caseworker and follow up on them.

Louise, a young apprentice, talked honestly about the variability in how well services were involving young people. The apprentice roles which have been created, and care experienced people working in services, is changing that.

Shannon, also a young apprentice, talked about the importance of the support she received. She had some difficult life events which made lockdown harder and her named mentor gave her close support, to the extent that Shannon now describes her as 'mentor mum' to reflect the importance and the value of that support.

*It was like the parents I never had - so it's lovely.*

Shannon

Nicki also spoke about treating apprentices as colleagues, providing close support but also pushing them hard and having high expectations. Louise went into further detail around North Yorkshire County Council's approach to apprenticeships:

*We are wider than just the leaving care service. We are a huge local authority. So instead of thinking about care-experienced apprenticeships working in the leaving care team, we wanted this to be a principle across the council. So whether that was in youth justice, IT, business support, but also including leaving care too.*

Louise



[www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/the-north-yorkshire-county-council-approach-to-care-experienced-apprenticeships](http://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/the-north-yorkshire-county-council-approach-to-care-experienced-apprenticeships)

A mark of the confidence in the apprentices was that the handling of social media was handed over to them throughout their time and this proved really positive.

Apprentices also develop new ideas for running events and are often more creative with engaging young people. They have also been able to press to adopt the principles of the leaving care apprenticeships for other roles in the council. One of the lessons is that things don't always go smoothly, so there is a need to make sure a back-up is in place.

Jade updated that the next steps will be to secure peer support for this year's apprentices from last year's apprentices, to complete the circle and ensure support for new people coming into the role. A mark of the success was that, when the next round of apprenticeships was advertised, there was a really good level of interest.

*People leaving care will benefit from additional support for apprentices/kickstart opportunities. It was important to identify and remove barriers to entry and provided additional support into work.*

Jade

## Reflections and comments



*So sorry not to be able to join in today but it's been great picking up the key messages. Fabulous work and learning, showing the difference the care experience conference is still making. More to do but, for us in Greater Manchester, this has made a difference.*

Charlotte Ramsden, President of Association of Director of Children's Services ADCS



*The progress made by the GM councils in improving things for care experience folk is heartening to see, credit to Andy Burnham and 10 local councils. They humbly acknowledge they have far to go, but they have gone further than most in reflecting the care experience conference pledge.*

Ian Dickson

A question from Ian Gould asked what young people have to say? Do they feel loved and nurtured?



[www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/do-care-experienced-young-people-feel-loved-and-nurtured](http://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/do-care-experienced-young-people-feel-loved-and-nurtured)



*There is further to go on this. We had a roundtable event which involved young people to start it all off and each team has connections and remains engaged. We've just launched a young reviewers' programme and those people will be involved at programme level. But there is more to do and the challenge will certainly be taken away.*

Nick Whitbread

*The first ask the care experience conference stated clearly that the care experience does not end at 16, 18, 21 or 25, which is a continuous process into adulthood. Until support reflects that experience, care experience people will be failed. This underpins the failure of the care system.*

Ian Dickson

*If we can look at experience beyond 25 years plus that in some ways are harder to understand, we can better understand the needs in care and those up to 21.*

Ian Dickson in conversation with Ian Gould over the break



[www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/we-need-to-understand-the-experience-of-care-experienced-people-who-are-over-25](http://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/we-need-to-understand-the-experience-of-care-experienced-people-who-are-over-25)



*A really good event showcasing some excellent practice and demonstrating the lasting impact of the care experience conference.*

Matthew Brazier

*Ofsted recognised the comments about use of language and it's good to see that was prominent today. Ofsted are speaking about the importance of love, we talk about it to our inspectors and it features as part of our submission to the Care Review.*

*We have set up a forum of care experience people of all ages – to be in the same room as policymakers at all important times – using what we learned from the conference.*

*One challenge is how we can involve young people meaningfully in inspections, we still need to make progress on that.*

Matthew Brazier

*What I like about the Care Experienced Conference is that they distilled some really complex issues down to some really simple messages that everyone can take on board.*

Matthew Brazier



[www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/the-role-of-love-and-our-use-of-language](http://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/videos/the-role-of-love-and-our-use-of-language)

Ian Dickson, the prime mover in making the conference happen, reinforced that the care experience community don't have all of the answers. He has always strongly believed that the care experience community needs to engage with academics and with the social work profession to really make a difference.

*Collaboration is the key to success.*

Ian Dickson

*I applaud what is being done. The involvement of care experienced people is vital. This should be seen as distinct from the involvement of 'experts' – I would like to see care experienced people in each layer of the process.*

Conference participant

*Seeing the child at the centre is so powerful.*

Conference participant

## Conclusion

All the contributors reflected how the power and clarity of messages from the care experience conference form a strong basis for planning action. The messages have been translated into technical specifications, have informed local policy and practice, and generated specific action plans.

More importantly, all described how incorporating the messages changed culture. They described how ‘bringing the child into the room’, or ‘placing the child at the centre of thinking’, changed ways of working to be driven by what children and young people said. This includes changing the use of language and the dialogue between people and the professionals working with them. Ways of working between professionals was also ‘humanised’.

However, it remains a big challenge to ensure the involvement of children in care, care leavers and cared experience people, to act as a constant point of reference. There is further to go with meaningful involvement of older care experienced people, to bring their advice and wisdom to bear on local working arrangements. Without this, there is a risk that the messages from the conference might become lost in process and bureaucracy.

# research in practice

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