

WHAT CARE LEAVERS NEED FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION FROM CARE INTO INDEPENDENT LIVING

*Without becoming homeless or
having to struggle unnecessarily*

INTRODUCTION

Leaving care is a global challenge, one that shapes the lives of countless young people every day. For years, professionals have worked hard to improve the system and processes - but who better to guide the way than those who have lived it themselves?

In November 2025, the village of Orvelte in the Netherlands became a hub of ideas, energy, and lived experience, as Kinderperspectief brought together representatives from six European care leaver networks. Sixteen passionate participants - from Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, Croatia, Germany, and Serbia - gathered to share stories, exchange insights, and dream together about the next steps for supporting young people transitioning out of care. Each participant represented their national network, bringing not just professional knowledge, but also personal understanding of what it truly takes to navigate the journey from care to independence.

Over the course of the week, the seminar became a space for exploration, reflection, and co-creation. Participants revisited the essential conditions for a strong leaving care process while imagining the future of their networks—what they need to grow, connect, and better empower the young people they serve.

Together, participants collaboratively identified three core questions, chosen in a participatory way, that link their work across borders:

1. *How can we strengthen international cooperation?*
2. *How can we create meaningful peer support between our organizations?*
3. *How can we improve the transition to adulthood for care leavers?*

Each group translated their question into a tangible product—a video, a podcast, or a poster. This document focuses on the poster, using its key headings to guide the discussion and capture the creativity, insights, and aspirations of the networks they represent. It is a testament to the power of collaboration, lived experience and the shared vision of young people shaping the future of leaving care.

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(CHALLENGES FROM CARE LEAVERS NETWORKS)

In preparation for the seminar, each national network was invited to reflect on the realities they face in their homecountry. Every country was asked to formulate five key challenges: the obstacles they encounter most within their own organization, and the difficulties they experience in their day-to-day work with care leavers. By bringing these challenges to the table, participants created a shared starting point—one that allowed us to recognize common struggles, understand national differences, exchange insights, and engage in collective reflection and idea-sharing.

1. Underfunding and lack of structural support
2. Emotional/role conflicts within a self-advocacy structure
3. No legal status or political recognition
4. Lack of psychological support during and after leaving care.
5. Lack of community support a safe space for care leavers in which they can gather, spend time together, learn and grow.
6. The social system doesn't "follow" youth that left care.
7. Strengthening inclusion and diversity
8. Finding better language and identity
9. Growing our visibility
10. Homelessness among care leavers
11. Special care system
12. Lack of foster carers
13. Vast differences in the availability of care per region
14. Care leavers often unprepared when leaving the system.
15. The stigma around youngsters that come from youthcare.
16. Lack of office space for the organization
17. Low engagement among youth to participate in organizational activities / work of organization
18. Low motivation among youth to use created service provided by the organization/s (in total)

Taken together, these challenges revealed striking similarities across countries, as well as unique contexts that shape the work of each network. They also highlighted a shared need for practical tools and approaches that can support care leavers more effectively. These insights became the foundation for the poster created during the seminar—a visual roadmap capturing the collective ideas and priorities of the participants. The poster brings structure to the discussion by breaking the themes down into clear headings, each reflecting an area where international collaboration can make a meaningful difference.

INFORMATION



1. INFORMATION FOR CARE LEAVERS AND DIGITAL "HOME BASE"

Information for care leavers, like a care leaving website, can be international, but it should have clear country-specific pages so that every care leaver can select their own country and get accurate local information.

The website should contain:

- ✗ *Written manuals on key areas of life – for example, how to apply for housing support, how to write a CV and cover letter, how to deal with landlords or employers, and practical household tips such as basic budgeting, cleaning and cooking.*
- ✗ *Short PDF versions of the most important information that can be downloaded, printed or shared with professionals.*
- ✗ *Podcasts made by care leavers for care leavers, plus interviews with social workers and other professionals about topics related to leaving care.*
- ✗ *An anonymous question-and-answer service where care leavers can ask anything that comes up during the transition or even years afterwards, without feeling judged.*
- ✗ *A linked care leaving app, similar to the one that already exists in the Netherlands (called Kwikstart), providing country-specific care leaving information, reminders and contacts, addresses for support or help.*
- ✗ *Regularly updated flyers and posts about local, national and international care leaving events, meet-ups and opportunities so that we know what the community is doing.*
- ✗ *Links to social media channels (for example Instagram, TikTok and others) that connect care leavers with each other and with different organisations.*

Ideally, the website and app should be easy to understand, available in several languages, accessible for people with disabilities, and offer alternative contact options such as live chat or a helpline for those who struggle with written information.



2. WORKSHOPS LINKED TO SKILLS AND THE WEBSITE

We want to offer practical workshops for care leavers on everything we need for independent life.

These workshops could include:

- ✘ *Training on how to manage a household (cleaning, cooking, paying bills, dealing with repairs).*
- ✘ *Basic and advanced financial skills, such as budgeting, understanding contracts, and how taxes and benefits work.*
- ✘ *Information about study options, apprenticeships and different career paths.*
- ✘ *Opportunities to learn new skills, including digital skills, job-search skills and how to use online services safely.*

It is important that these workshops are free, repeated regularly (not just once), and available both online and in person so that care leavers with different needs and schedules can attend.



3. SKILLS FOR WORK AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Before leaving care we need solid work skills – for example, a completed apprenticeship, schooling or training – so that it is easier for us to find a job and to change jobs later without being crippled by existential fears about money and housing.

We also need strong life skills, because once we leave care we suddenly have to manage every part of daily life ourselves: shopping, cooking, cleaning, dealing with authorities, time management, and looking after our own health.

Lastly, soft skills are essential: communication, setting boundaries, resolving conflicts, teamwork, asking for help and dealing with discrimination or unfair treatment. Without these soft skills, it is harder to keep a job, maintain relationships or advocate for ourselves with landlords, employers and institutions.



4. COMMUNITY, PEER SUPPORT AND AFTERCARE

Before leaving, and especially afterwards, we need a community of friends and other care leavers. On the poster this appears as peer support “on a need basis” – for example:

- ✕ *Meeting with peers once or twice a week,*
- ✕ *And visits from a trusted carer, key worker or mentor.*

Support should not suddenly stop at a certain birthday. Care leavers should be able to access some form of aftercare for as long as they need it, including:

- ✕ *A consistent person to contact (such as a leaving care worker or mentor),*
- ✕ *Drop-in groups or youth clubs specifically for care leavers,*
- ✕ *Online peer communities that are moderated and safe.*

This ongoing community and aftercare helps to prevent isolation, homelessness and mental-health crises.



STABILITY

5. STABILITY: EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL SAFETY

Another thing we must have before leaving is stability, both emotionally and physically, in the sense of feeling safe.

Physical stability means:

- ✗ *We are looked after and know exactly who we can call for support.*
- ✗ *There is a safe place we can go when we are in crisis or need help.*
- ✗ *We are not left homeless, in dangerous or disastrous living arrangements, or forced back to abusive or addicted parents.*
- ✗ *We have health insurance so that we know we can become ill and still receive medical help.*

Emotional stability means:

- ✗ *Free access to therapy, including both individual and group therapy, without long waiting lists.*
- ✗ *Professionals who understand care experience and trauma.*
- ✗ *A clear plan for what happens if we are struggling – for example, crisis numbers, out-of-hours support and the option to return temporarily to supported accommodation if everything falls apart.*

Having this stability in place makes it possible for us to focus on education, work and building a life, instead of constantly being in survival mode.



HEALTH CARE

6. HEALTH CARE AND SEXUAL HEALTH

Stability is closely connected with health care.

Care leavers need:

- ✗ *Health insurance that is not tied to employment, at least until a minimum age of 26, so that we do not lose access to doctors and medication whenever our job situation changes.*
- ✗ *Proper registration with a GP and other essential health services before leaving care.*
- ✗ *Free health insurance for care leavers.*
- ✗ *Sexual health education, including contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and especially consent and healthy relationships. This is crucial for everyone, but particularly for women and for care leavers who have experienced abuse, because many of us were not taught enough about these topics during care.*
- ✗ *Clear information about where to access free or low-cost sexual health services, pregnancy support and emergency contraception.*

Health care should treat care leavers as a priority group, recognising our higher risk of mental and physical health problems and the need for non-judgemental, trauma-informed services.



HOUSING

LAWS



FINANCES



7. HOUSING, LAWS AND FINANCES ARE ALL LINKED

Laws and rights

We need laws that prohibit discharging young people from care without adequate housing. It should be a punishable offence for institutions or authorities to leave care leavers without a safe plan and support. Just as parents in many countries can be fined for kicking their under-age children out onto the streets, there should be consequences when institutions effectively do the same to care leavers.

Housing

We need secure, affordable housing that we can realistically pay for, where we are not scared 24/7 of losing our home. This could include:

- ✗ *Guaranteed access to supported accommodation or social housing,*
- ✗ *Priority on housing lists for care leavers,*
- ✗ *Longer notice periods and help with deposits and guarantors.*

We should only be allowed to leave care once we have a stable place to live and a clear plan for what happens if that housing fails for any reason.

Finances and the care leaver bonus

To make stable housing possible we also need financial security. Having a job is important but not enough on its own, because life can go wrong: we can be fired, a company can go bankrupt, we may experience sexual harassment or assault at work and feel forced to leave, or we may want to study and cannot work full time. Being confronted with homelessness simply because we want an education or because an employer treats us badly is not acceptable.

Therefore we need laws that oblige the child and youth welfare system to pay some form of financial support, similar to child benefit or maintenance. We call this a “care leaver bonus”, because that is what it is called in Croatia – currently the only country we know that has such a scheme.



HOUSING

LAWS



FINANCES



Every care leaver should be entitled to this bonus. The amount can vary by country, but it should be based on what is realistically needed per month to live safely. It should be paid for at least one year after leaving care, with the option to extend it when necessary (for example while studying, in between jobs, or during illness). Access to this bonus should be simple and automatic when leaving care, not a long, humiliating process.

Alongside direct financial support, we also need financial education – help with budgeting, understanding contracts and avoiding debt – so that we can manage the money we receive.



SOMETHING FULFILLING

8. SOMETHING FULFILLING AND A SENSE OF PURPOSE

Finally, something we all noticed – although it is harder to create on purpose – is the need for something fulfilling in our lives. We need activities and roles that make us happy and give us a sense of meaning, not just survival.

This “something fulfilling” can be:

- ✗ *Our job or chosen career,*
- ✗ *Hobbies and interests such as sport, art, music or gaming,*
- ✗ *Volunteering and helping others,*
- ✗ *Our education – which we should be able to pursue without having to work ourselves to death just to pay rent.*

Opportunities for care leavers to explore different interests, take part in cultural and leisure activities, travel, and join clubs or groups are all part of building a life that feels worth living, not just “getting by”.

Putting all of these elements together – a strong digital “home base”, practical workshops, real skills, community and aftercare, emotional and physical stability, proper health care, fair laws with guaranteed housing and financial support, and space for fulfilment – is what care leavers need for a truly successful transition from care into independent, secure and meaningful adult life.



Stichting Kinderperspectief (The Netherlands)

Stichting Kinderperspectief is a Dutch foundation dedicated to broadening the horizons of children, young people, and youth care professionals. Growing up carefree is not always a given, and difficult life experiences or a lack of a supportive network can limit a young person's ability to move forward. The foundation believes that, despite the commitment of professionals, existing systems and regulations can sometimes hinder effective support. Kinderperspectief is convinced that things can be done differently. Through refreshing, creative, and tailor-made tools, they offer new perspectives and alternative routes from point A to point B. Their innovative methods help children and young people take the next steps in their lives. In addition, they organize meetings and encounters that inspire reflection and learning. These activities also offer professionals new ways of looking at their work. Stichting Kinderperspectief operates both in the Netherlands and in the Balkan region. Their work is driven by the belief that every child deserves opportunities to grow and move forward.



JWB (Youth Welfare Forum – The Netherlands)

JWB is a partner organization working with children and young people in the context of youth care and alternative care. The organization focuses on supporting young people who face barriers in their personal development and transition toward independence. Through collaboration, exchange, and practical support, JWB contributes to improving opportunities for children and youth. Their work emphasizes empowerment, participation, and strengthening young people's skills. JWB supports initiatives that help young people navigate complex care systems. The organization values cooperation with professionals and peer-based approaches. By focusing on real-life experiences, JWB aims to make support more accessible and effective. Their activities encourage learning through practice and engagement. JWB seeks to create sustainable change by working closely with young people and partner organizations. At its core, JWB believes in the potential of every young person.



Moj Krug – (My Circle - Serbia)

Moj Krug (“My Circle”) is a youth association working with young people through peer education, mentoring, and counseling. It was founded by young people with lived experience in the alternative care system. The organization aims to connect and empower those who are currently in, or have previously been part of, alternative care, as well as other young people facing challenges on their path to independence. Peer support is at the heart of their work, as they believe the best learning happens through practice. Their activities often include educational board games they have created themselves. Sports and other hands-on experiences are also key elements of their approach. Moj Krug provides a safe space where young people can share experiences and learn from one another. Beyond peer support, the organization actively contributes to the community through volunteering and humanitarian events. They also connect young people with other organizations offering support and empowerment. Through all their activities, Moj Krug works to strengthen resilience, independence, and a sense of belonging.



Forum for Quality Foster Care for Children – Foster Parents (Croatia)

Forum for Quality Foster Care for Children – Foster Parents is the first official network of foster parents and foster care organizations in Croatia. Today, the Forum consists of eight NGO members, each working directly with foster families. Through this network, Forum represents around 300 foster families and approximately 1,000 children in foster care. The organization focuses on support, education, networking, and cooperation among foster care stakeholders. Direct contact and involvement of foster parents and children are a key priority in their work. Forum also acts as a mediator between foster families and the Ministry responsible for social policy. While the Ministry sets the direction of social policy, foster families are the service providers who keep deinstitutionalization alive. Forum represents the everyday realities, challenges, and needs of foster families in policy discussions. In addition, Forum informs potential foster parents about foster care law and licensing procedures. They offer guidance, advice, and a sense of community to those considering or already engaged in foster care.



EPIC – (Empowering People in Care - Ireland)

EPIC exists because some children and young people need extra help and support due to their experiences in alternative care. The organization is independent and has a clear mandate to advocate for the rights of care-experienced children and young people. EPIC works nationally with children in care, young care leavers, and anyone with experience of the care system up to the age of 26. They provide an independent advocacy service as well as youth engagement and participation programmes. EPIC ensures that young people's voices are heard and considered in decisions that affect their lives. Their work helps shape policy and practice by centering lived experience. The organization also creates safe spaces for young people to connect, upskill, and collaborate. Young people are supported to work on projects and campaigns that matter to them. All of EPIC's work is grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, Article 12—the right to be heard and to participate in decision-making—guides their approach.



Careleaver e.V. (Germany)

Careleaver e.V. represents young people who are about to leave or have already left the social care system in Germany. The organization provides space and opportunities for Care Leavers to connect with one another. Sharing experiences of growing up in foster care or residential care is a central part of their work. Careleaver e.V. also offers information on specific topics such as legal rights and financing everyday life. They organize workshops focused on education, finances, and other key transition issues. In addition, they hold national network meetings twice a year in different cities across Germany. The members have very different, and often difficult, experiences of growing up in care. These lived experiences drive the organization's advocacy work. Careleaver e.V. aims to influence government, law, and professional practice. Their goal is to ensure that future generations of young people in care grow up with better support and opportunities.



Care Leaver Österreich (Austria)

Care Leaver Österreich is a self-representation association founded by young adults with experience in the Austrian child and youth welfare system. The organization supports Care Leavers during their transition out of care and into independent adulthood. Its mission is to promote equal opportunities for Care Leavers in society. Peer-to-peer support plays a central role in all activities. Care Leaver Österreich works directly with Care Leavers through workshops, counseling sessions, and networking events. They support young people in accessing education, housing, and mental health resources. The organization also acts as a coordination hub connecting Care Leavers and professionals. Raising public awareness about the challenges Care Leavers face is an important part of their work. In addition, they organize advocacy campaigns to improve understanding and support. Care Leaver Österreich actively engages with policymakers to push for structural improvements and better aftercare services.