

Don't Move Me

Young people
staying put with
foster carers;
research and
findings



Robert Cann
November 2013

the fostering network
the voice of foster care



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Foreword by Robert Tapsfield Chief Executive of the Fostering Network



This report is written against a backdrop of high youth unemployment across the country, plus an increase in the school leaving age to 18. There is a society-wide trend for young adults now to require emotional and financial support from their parents well into their 20s. As the age at which all young people reach financial independence rises, so a change must follow in the way that the state's children – care leavers – are treated and supported.

Staying with former foster carers beyond 17, known as Staying Put, was successfully piloted in 11 local authorities in England from 2008-2011. The Government has published updated guidance on the subject and believes that, in time, Staying Put will be implemented on a voluntary basis across England. However this voluntary approach is not making a difference fast enough, and does nothing to future-proof provision for the next generation of care leavers. As society's most vulnerable young adults, they deserve a legal right to stay at home beyond 17 if they and their foster carers desire it.

Three recent policy initiatives demonstrate that there is current political will to turn around the lives of children in care and care leavers. I believe Staying Put should play a part in this.

Firstly, the Troubled Families programme is investing £448 million over three years into helping "families that have problems and cause problems to the community around them, putting high costs on the public sector".¹ So it is clear that the current Government is keen to reduce the burden to the state of high social care costs. Staying Put can contribute to solving some of the problems identified by the Troubled Families programme, and it makes sense for it to be considered as part of that same agenda.

Secondly, the Government has recently invested £16 million into adoption recruitment, and upon announcing this funding on 8 August 2013 the children's minister Edward Timpson said "we cannot stand by whilst children's futures hang in the balance".² The futures of many thousands of young people in foster care also hang in the balance, and they are currently subject to a postcode lottery of provision as to whether or not they are left to fend for themselves at 17. So while it is of course important to invest in adoption recruitment, adoption is the right choice for a small minority of children in the care system.³ We must recognise that the vast majority of those we take into care will be in foster care and, like any responsible parent, the state should meet their needs accordingly as they grow up and prepare to enter adulthood.

Thirdly, in late October 2013 the cross-departmental Care Leaver Strategy was launched, setting out the Government's current and planned work to support care leavers in terms of

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-troubled-families-turn-their-lives-around>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/16-million-boost-to-attract-more-adopters>

³ Data from March 2013 show that while 77,790 were in foster care, 7,410 had been placed for adoption. Source: *Children looked after by local authorities in England*, Department for Education (2013).

education, employment, financial support, health, housing, and the justice system. While we welcome its good intentions, the strategy doggedly insists that the current guidance-led approach to Staying Put is working. It is not.

The Fostering Network is supporting an amendment to the Children and Families Bill, currently in the House of Lords. This amendment, tabled by the Earl of Listowel, would give all fostered young people in England the option to remain with their foster carers until the age of 21, if both the young person and foster carer were in agreement. By ensuring that this option is there, we can provide vulnerable young people in care with the stability that is so essential for their future success. It would not require a huge amount of extra investment – especially when compared proportionally to that recently earmarked for adoption – and in fact over time it will not cost the state a penny more than it currently spends on care leavers, because the benefits of Staying Put will lead to significant savings in other departments.

Using evidence from the pilot projects and research into costs of leaving care, this report makes the case that such an amendment to the Bill is necessary because it is the right thing to do for our young people, it fits in with current Government policy, and over time it does not represent an increase in cost to the public purse.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert Tapsfield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Robert Tapsfield
Chief Executive
The Fostering Network

Executive Summary

"As foster carers, we spend a great deal of time helping our children to catch up and to attain the milestones in life they have missed, often due to traumatic experiences. The state then expects them to behave as adults at the magical age of 18 when they are simply not ready. Many become homeless and involved with the criminal justice system. This is such a false economy." Foster carer.

The Children and Families Bill offers a unique opportunity for the law with regard to young people in care in England to catch up with our changing society. The average age of leaving home in the UK is now 24,⁴ but across the country there are vulnerable young people who are in effect being told to leave home at 17 and fend for themselves. For those looked after children who are in foster care, the simple and logical solution should be to allow them to remain with their foster carers to the age of 21, if both young person and foster carer agree: a process known as Staying Put.

Staying Put has been piloted across England with great success, and Government guidance now recommends that it is offered widely.⁵ When the Bill was debated in the House of Commons, and during grand committee in the House of Lords, the Government's response to the proposed Staying Put amendment was that this voluntary, guidance-led approach was sufficient.

However despite the success of the pilots, Staying Put needs to be enshrined in law because there is already pressure to reduce provision in some of the former pilot authorities, and there is a postcode lottery of provision across the country, with practice varying enormously. Many foster carers and young people have to 'fight' their local authority just to enable a Staying Put placement to be approved.

Staying Put represents value for money. We understand that the Government has calculated a figure of £7 million for the first year to roll it out across England. In the long term this modest funding could be found by a smarter use of existing expenditure.

Staying Put also leads to savings in other state-funded services – firstly by reducing pressure on local authority housing departments. For every young person staying put with their former foster carer instead of independent living before they are ready, a one bedroom flat is freed up locally.

Secondly it is very successful in tackling the benefits cycle that young people in care are at risk of entering. The one-to-one support and guidance offered by foster carers to young people in their transition to adulthood is crucial to ensuring they can be helped on the road to becoming net contributors to society as adults, rather than being reliant on the state.

⁴ EU data from 2007 places the average age of leaving the parental home for young people in the UK at around 24, with women leaving on average slightly earlier than men. Eurostat Youth In Europe: A Statistical Portrait (2009).

⁵ Department for Education, the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (2010).

Research by DEMOS discovered an additional cost of over £70,000 for the journey from age 16 to 30 for a young person with a poor experience of the care system who ultimately becomes more or less dependent on the state into early adulthood, compared with someone with a positive experience who is better supported through their education and transition to independent adulthood.⁶

The ethos of Staying Put fits in with current Government priorities on turning around the lives of 120,000 of the most “Troubled Families”, a programme which has just received some £448 million of investment over three years, which dwarfs the annual £7 million required for Staying Put.

⁶ C. Hannon, C. Wood, L. Bazalgette *In Loco Parentis*. DEMOS (2010).

Chapter 1: Why Staying Put is important

All children in care leave care on or before their 18th birthday. What happens next is at the local authority's discretion, and can vary greatly from one authority to the next, but the vast majority end up living independently and heavily subsidised by the taxpayer. With the exception of the small percentage who lose touch with the local authority, all will be offered support from a leaving care team and personal advisor.

While many care leavers do want to become independent as soon as they are legally allowed to, the care planning guidance *Principles for Transition* does state that "no young person should be made to "leave care" before they are ready".⁷

Table 1 sets out the accommodation status of care leavers aged 19 in England in 2012/13:

Total	6,930	%
With parents or relatives	890	13
Community home	310	5
Semi-independent, transitional accommodation	740	11
Supported lodgings	660	10
Ordinary lodgings	140	2
Foyers	140	2
Independent living	2,560	37
Emergency accommodation	40	1
Bed and breakfast	30	-
In custody	210	3
With former foster carers	330	5
Other accommodation	350	5
Not in touch	520	8 ⁸

The figures show that in 2012–13 only 330 young people (5 per cent of care leavers) in England remained with their foster carers by age 19. Therefore every year thousands of society's most vulnerable young people are in effect having to leave home at 17 – if not before – despite the average age for leaving home across the UK being 24.⁹

Research shows that the longer a young person can stay with a foster family, the more successful they are later on. Many young adults who have left the care system struggle to reach the same levels of educational attainment as their peers. In 2011, 40 per cent of the general population was in higher education compared with only 7 per cent of care leavers.

Care leavers are overrepresented in prison populations, and are more likely to be unemployed, single parents, mental health service users or homeless than those who grew

⁷ Department for Education, the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (2010).

⁸ *Children looked after by local authorities in England*, Department for Education (2013).

⁹ EU data from 2007 places the average age of leaving the parental home for young people in the UK at around 24, with women leaving on average slightly earlier than men. *Eurostat Youth In Europe: A Statistical Portrait* (2009).

up within their own families – incurring further cost to the state in supporting and treating these young adults:

- 24 per cent of the adult prison population have been in care¹⁰
- 55 per cent of 15-18 year old female young offenders have spent time in care¹¹
- Around a quarter of those living on the street have a background in care¹²
- Care leavers are four or five times more likely to commit suicide in adulthood¹³
- A quarter of care leavers were pregnant or young parents within a year of leaving care¹⁴
- The number of 19-year-olds who were looked after when aged 16 years and who are now NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) is 36 per cent, double the number of their non-care contemporaries¹⁵
- 11 per cent of care leavers in England live in 'unsuitable accommodation' upon leaving care¹⁶
- Between 45-49 per cent of looked after children aged 5-17 years show signs of psychosocial adversity and psychiatric disorders, which is higher than the most disadvantaged children living in private households. Physical and mental problems increase at the time of leaving care.¹⁷

A birth parent would instinctively approach their own child's move to independence according to their need, rather than their age. Young people in care should be treated no differently and should enjoy a similar approach to their transition to adulthood: they should be allowed to stay with their foster carers until they are ready to leave.

¹⁰ SPCR survey (2005/06) quoted in Ministry of Justice Compendium of re-offending statistics and analysis, *Statistics Bulletin* (2010).

¹¹ HMIP / Youth Justice Board, *Children and Young People in Custody 2010-11: An analysis of the experiences of 15 - 18 year olds in prison* (2011).

¹² Crisis & CRESR, *The Hidden Truth about Homelessness* (2011).

¹³ Department of Health, *Preventing Suicide in England: a cross-government outcomes strategy to save lives* (2012) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-forengland>

¹⁴ J. Dixon *Young people leaving care: health, well-being and outcomes*, Child and Family Social Work 13 (2008).

¹⁵ Department for Education Statistical release, *Children looked after by local authorities in England* (2012).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Rees Centre Seminar presentation by Mike Stein, Research Professor, *Young People's Transitions from Care to Adulthood: Research, Policy and Practice* (April 2013).

Chapter 2: The story from the Staying Put pilots

In 2008, the Government set up the Staying Put pilots to assess the benefits of allowing children in England to stay with foster carers past the age of 18. The pilots, which ended in March 2011, were found to be extremely beneficial to young people and led to their achieving significantly more than those who left care between the ages of 16 and 18.

In August 2013 the Fostering Network conducted interviews with the local authorities that piloted Staying Put throughout England from 2008-11. All are still offering a form of Staying Put, although some of them have had to scale back their schemes since the project funding ran out in 2011 and are therefore unable to offer it as widely as they would like.

That it has managed to survive the cuts, albeit sometimes offering reduced capacity, is proof that Staying Put is now considered an essential part of social care provision in these areas.

During the pilot, the average proportion of young people staying put (over the three year period) across the pilot authorities was just under 23 per cent. This is in line with figures from Northern Ireland, where nearly 25 per cent of young people are part of *Going the Extra Mile* (GEM) schemes.¹⁸

Today, at one in seven (14 per cent), the proportion of young people deciding to stay put in the pilot authorities remains much higher than the national average of one in 20. This is testament to the effectiveness of Staying Put – the approach has been mainstreamed in these authorities despite a reduction in funding. As one manager said:

“Staying Put has made a massive difference to [our local authority]. It has created a feel good factor in children’s services. It is now a flag that we wave, and has even helped with the recruitment of foster carers because they can see that we are committed to the whole journey of a young person in care rather than taking them to 18 and then dumping them.” Leaving Care Manager, Staying Put pilot authority.

One argument often raised against Staying Put is that it increases pressure on local foster care places, at a time when they are in high demand. However those eligible for Staying Put make up a relatively small number of young people: currently 330 each year, out of over 50,000 in foster care.

Indeed, we found that none of the pilot authorities reported significant problems with foster carer provision as a result of offering Staying Put. While a minority said that a Staying Put placement will mean that a former foster bed is in theory no longer available, it is frequently the case that foster carers plan to retire after the placement ends, and would have been retiring at whatever age the young person left, whether or not it was above 18. In addition, foster carer recruitment strategies have simply been amended to suit the new needs of the service:

¹⁸ E. Munro and others *Evaluation of the Staying Put 18 Plus Family Placement Programme: Final Report*. Loughborough University (2012).

“Nowadays we don’t even recruit foster carers who wouldn’t want to offer Staying Put. Indeed, because many of them now want to provide a Staying Put placement, we are keeping them happy and ensuring their future commitment to our service by allowing them to keep young people living with them. They see it as the natural and obvious thing for a professional fostering service to do, and they want to play a part in that.” Leaving Care Manager, Staying Put pilot authority.

The Fostering Network knows that fostering services are very good at recruitment, with the number of foster carers increasing year by year to meet the demand of more and more children coming into care. In 2011–12, more than 7,400 new foster carers were recruited in England compared with an estimated recruitment target of 7,100. With 13 per cent of the workforce leaving each year,¹⁹ recruitment is of course an ongoing activity. The pressure now is not so much on absolute numbers, but rather on getting the right foster carers into the right place. Staying Put is just another part of the recruitment challenge.

Finally, in our interviews we asked about the proposed amendment to the Children and Families Bill. Most of the pilot authorities said that they support a change in legislation that would give all young people in foster care the opportunity to stay with their foster carers until 21.

¹⁹ This figure is an average over three years, sourced from the Ofsted Fostering Agencies and Fostering Services Dataset, available from www.ofsted.gov.uk

Chapter 3: The voluntary approach is not working

In the debate on the second reading of the Children and Families Bill in the House of Commons on 11 June, children's minister Edward Timpson explained that current Government guidance encouraged local authorities to roll out Staying Put across England, but he would consider legislation if it could be shown that this voluntary approach was not effective.²⁰ Similarly, on 14 October during Grand Committee stage of the Bill in the House of Lords, Education Minister Lord Nash stated that issuing revised guidance was sufficient, despite acknowledging that the proportion of young people staying put beyond 18 had not increased in the previous year. Lord Nash explained this apparent stagnation by saying young people staying put between their 18th and 19th birthdays would not be captured by statistics looking at 19 year olds.²¹ This argument is problematic. It implies that even the young person staying with their former foster carer for a mere day beyond their 18th birthday would be considered a success story. It is far better to focus on 19 year olds for year-on-year comparisons, because this provides a more accurate insight into the *ongoing* support that is so important for care leavers.

The guidance²² to which both ministers refer recommends that local authorities draw up Staying Put policies setting out the criteria for extending foster care placements beyond 18, but this guidance does not set out the nature of these criteria, thus leaving it open to different interpretation from one local authority to the next.

This voluntary approach to Staying Put is not working. Department for Education statistics published in September 2013 showed that in 2012–13 only one in 20 care leavers were living with their foster carers at age 19, representing no improvement from 2011–12.²³ Interviews that the Fostering Network conducted with former pilot authorities in August 2013 showed that there is pressure to scale back provision: two have reduced the maximum age from 21 to 19, and four continue to exclude NEETs who are in most need of the support and guidance that could be offered by staying put with their former foster carer.²⁴

There are also signs that the proportion of young people staying put has fallen since the pilots ended. According to the Department for Education's evaluation of the Staying Put pilots, in 2011 between 15 and 56 per cent of young people eligible stayed put with their foster carers: an overall average of 23 per cent across all the pilot authorities.²⁵ Reductions in provision since the end of the pilots suggest that this good work is now at risk of being wasted: data from interviews in 2013 show that between eight and 20 per cent of young

²⁰ www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130627/text/130627w0002.htm#13062777000736

²¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/131014-gc0002.htm>

²² Department for Education, *the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers* (2010).

²³ *Children looked after by local authorities in England*, Department for Education (2013).

²⁴ Data from the Fostering Network's interviews with pilot Staying Put authorities in August 2013.

²⁵ E. Munro and others, *Evaluation of the Staying Put 18 Plus Family Placement Programme: Final Report*. Loughborough University (2012), p. 100.

people in the pilot authorities remained with their foster carer after they turned 18, with an average now of only 12 per cent.²⁶

Government figures from across the country in **table 2** demonstrate significant regional variation:

	19-year-olds living with former foster carers	As percentage of all 19-year-old care leavers²⁷
ENGLAND	320	5
North East	10	3
North West	70	7
Yorkshire & Humber	40	6
East Midlands	20	5
West Midlands	40	5
East of England	20	3
Inner London	20	3
Outer London	10	1
South East	50	5
South West	50	10

Additionally the Fostering Network, as part of the *Don't Move Me* campaign, has been contacted by numerous foster carers who have had to 'fight' their local authority to enable a Staying Put placement to happen, unfortunately often without success. The arbitrary rules for whether or not a young person is eligible to stay put often mean that those who would benefit most end up losing out.

Penalised for not doing A Levels

Alex was in foster care in the south of England, and originally chose to remain at school studying A Levels. However the learning style wasn't suitable for him, so he came to the decision that he could not continue his education at school. He wanted to stay in education and remained keen to go to university, so he applied and was accepted at college to undertake a BTEC two-year course. However, this meant that he was now ineligible to commence his Staying Put placement and was told he had to leave his foster carer.

Things changed for Alex, as they frequently do for all young people, but for those in care the implications form yet another way the system reminds them that they remain different from their peers. A decision that many young people make, namely deciding that sixth form is not for them, raised huge emotional, psychological, financial and practical changes for Alex and his foster carer, solely because he was in care.

²⁶ Data from the Fostering Network's interviews with pilot Staying Put authorities in August 2013.

²⁷ 6,610 as at end March 2012, who were in the care of their local authority aged 16 on 1 April 2009. Source: *Children looked after by local authorities in England*, Department for Education (2012). Regional figures for end March 2013 are due to be published in December 2013.

If there has been no increase in the proportion of 19-year-olds living with former foster carers over the past year, if a smaller proportion of young people now stay put in the pilot authorities than did so during the pilot, if there are such regional discrepancies that the percentage of young people staying put in the south west is 10 times that of outer London, and if young people and foster carers have to fight their local authority – rather than it being offered to them as of right – to enter into a Staying Put arrangement, then the voluntary approach clearly does not work and therefore legislation is necessary.

Chapter 4: Why Staying Put represents value for money

4.1 Initial investment

We understand that the Government has calculated a figure of £7 million for the first year to roll Staying Put out across England, with rising annual costs for years two and three. We believe this to be a reasonable figure.

This relatively small investment can be offset by savings in other areas, and over three years represents a tiny proportion of the £448 million promised to the Troubled Families programme, for example. There needs to be a much smarter use of existing money.

Indeed it was clear from the interviews with pilot authorities that they believe offering Staying Put to everybody is cost-effective for the state both in the short and long term. Staying Put can be used as a means to prevent the next generation being reliant on benefits.

“You can’t put a price on not being in Staying Put. The savings made to the public purse are numerous. If a young person goes into supported lodging at 16, this could cost £400 per week, and they will have two years of stagnating in a benefits culture before they are even 18. Staying Put allows such young people to be ‘saved’ from assuming that a reliance on benefits is the natural way to be.” Leaving Care Manager, Staying Put pilot authority.

Joined-up thinking like this is needed to appreciate that investment from the fostering service will lead to immediate savings for other departments such as housing and the Department for Work and Pensions.

This quote from one local authority’s proposal to adopt Staying Put even demonstrates a zero cost approach:

“There is no specific budget attached to this proposal and a budget will need to be set within an annual budget setting cycle through the realignment of resources with the objective of achieving a zero cost model. This will be achieved through moving away from the current model of using supported accommodation and towards Staying Put placements.” Walsall Borough Council.

4.2 Savings in the short term

In the short term it makes financial sense for young people to remain with their foster carers beyond 17. There are potential savings to be made in three key areas, allowing money to be redistributed towards Staying Put.

a) Accommodation/benefits

The biggest proportion of care leavers – 37 per cent – were living in independent accommodation at the age of 19, according to the Department for Education’s figures for 2012-13. Most of these will be supported by housing benefit.

Where this is council or social housing, this means that young people are taking up one-bedroom properties which are in very short supply across the country. Some will need to be housed within the private sector at high expense.

Even when young people get jobs and start to pay their rent, the Care Leavers Foundation believes that many care leavers who are forced to live independently before they are ready build up huge rent arrears, and that this money is rarely recouped.

With local authority social care and housing budgets firmly split between different services, and in the case of two tier councils split between different authorities, it requires some joined-up thinking to appreciate the value of Staying Put:

“Staying Put offers incredible value for money. We are able to say to housing departments, ‘if it wasn’t for us, you would have a duty to house these young people at 18. We are hanging on to them and giving them an opportunity to develop skills, making them less likely to claim as much housing benefit or require a council house later on’.” Leaving Care Manager, Staying Put pilot authority.

Care leavers living in supported housing, foyers and emergency accommodation (around 13 per cent) may be funded from the Government’s Supporting People funding stream, or via the local authority and housing benefit. All other forms of accommodation will need to be financially supported by the authorities except for those who are not in touch or living with parents or relatives (21 per cent)²⁸, and both these options may incur other costs for the state (see *Troubled Families* section (c)).

“For what Staying Put costs, compared to supported lodging schemes with support staff constantly on hand, and even less intense supported lodgings, it offers great value.” Leaving Care Manager, Staying Put pilot authority.

Evidence from our interviews also suggests that those who stay put are more likely to be working – whether full time or part time while studying – and hence will be making a

²⁸ *Children looked after by local authorities in England*, Department for Education (2013).

contribution towards the Staying Put arrangement rather than just claiming income support and housing benefit.

“Such is the attraction of Staying Put, that we find 17-year-olds tend to “up their game” as they approach their 18th birthday to ensure they are allowed to stay with their foster carers.” Leaving Care Manager, Staying Put pilot authority.

Tackling the benefits culture

Janet had both an 18-year-old son of her own and a young person of the same age staying put. Her son had a Saturday job while studying at college that earned him slightly less than the income support for which the young person staying put was eligible. However Janet was firm but fair and insisted that the young person also found himself a job if he wanted to stay with her. He did so, and appreciated the support and guidance that she provided. If he had not been able to stay put then she has no doubt he would be living in a flat claiming his full housing benefit allowance, plus income support, and probably not in education either – all at great cost to the state.

b) Social care

The evaluation of the Staying Put pilots found that leaving care personal advisers reported higher levels of activity for young people who move to independence, and especially those who experience multiple housing moves. The evaluation also found that only a relatively low level of support was required from fostering/family placement teams for those who stay put.²⁹

This saving in support costs was backed up by our interviews with Staying Put pilot authorities. Those that ran the pilots found that Staying Put foster carers provided spontaneous support that otherwise would be lacking for young people living fully or semi-independently. These foster carers also fulfilled some of the tasks that would have been carried out by a member of the leaving care team, for example one-to-one support for application forms and job interviews, informal counselling, and transport: all things that any “normal” parent would provide for their own child.

Extra support from Staying Put foster carers

Barry stepped in and liaised with the police to prevent a young man who lived with him being taken through the courts on a vandalism charge: he convinced the police not to prosecute, and supervised directly the young man’s reparation to the community’s cricket pitch. This was the best outcome for all parties. If this young man had been living independently without this “father figure” support, the costs of court time would have run into thousands of pounds and he would have started down the road of having a criminal record at an early age.

Andrew is looking after an 18-year-old who has just completed a diploma in plastering and also works part time as a lifeguard. He wants to be a full-time lifeguard and is also thinking of going into sports coaching. If the young man was living on his own Andrew has no doubt this typical late-teenage confusion would lead to stagnation and dropping out. Andrew’s support is essential for him, not least because the only lifeguard job available is in the next town and he needs collecting by car in the evenings. When he got injured and was unable to work, Andrew helped him to complete his benefit forms.

Since the pilot scheme ended, most of the authorities have stopped funding their Staying Put manager post, with a further saving of £1,210 per young person as this activity is taken on by a team manager or equivalent. One pilot authority interviewed estimated that the continued management of Staying Put represented no more than 10–15 per cent of an assistant team manager’s role.

²⁹ E. Munro and others, *Evaluation of the Staying Put 18 Plus Family Placement Programme: Final Report*. Loughborough University (2012), p.97.

c) Troubled Families

According to the Department for Communities and Local Government, troubled families are “those that have problems and cause problems to the community around them, putting high costs on the public sector”.³⁰

The Government has invested £448 million over three years in turning around the lives of the 120,000 of the most troubled families in England. This includes families of children in care, which have often broken down because of drug and alcohol addiction, domestic violence, poverty and debt. The children who come into care have often experienced abuse or neglect.

The vast majority of children come into care through no fault of their own, but owing to abuse, neglect and family dysfunction.

Some 12 per cent of 19-year-old care leavers were living back with their families in 2012 (Government figures from table 1). Anecdotally this could be higher for those aged 20-plus. This is likely to include many of the very same families that are being targeted by the Government under the Troubled Families programme, thus putting them under more strain and costing more from the public purse. There could be considerable savings from offering these young people the opportunity to stay on with foster carers in Staying Put placements.

“I am helping her to hold down her first part time job and to study for a diploma. Now she is an adult, she has a natural desire to re-establish contact with her birth family and this is an emotionally draining and occasionally disruptive experience for her. I am proud to be able to offer her a stable place to call home during this difficult time – without me I fear that her education and work would be compromised by this contact”. Foster carer offering Staying Put, North East England.

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-troubled-families-turn-their-lives-around>

4.3 Long-term savings of Staying Put

“If states adopt a policy of allowing young people to remain in foster care until their 21st birthday...the potential benefits to foster youth and society will more than offset the costs to government.”³¹

While we have demonstrated that Staying Put does not have to cost any more in the short term, the long-term savings are significant. Over time, care leavers are disproportionate users of public services and are more likely to be unemployed than their peers.³² One quarter of the adult prison population have been in care,³³ with a similar proportion of those living on the street also having a background in care.³⁴ Care leavers are four or five times more likely to commit suicide in adulthood,³⁵ and a quarter of care leavers were pregnant or young parents within a year of leaving care.³⁶

Without proper support into adulthood, young care leavers are in danger of creating more “troubled families” and repeating the cycle of care, with their own children entering the care system. However, Staying Put placements provide crucial support and guidance in these transitional years, and can make all the difference to a young person’s future trajectory.

“By supporting children in care into adulthood we are reducing the chances of having to take their own children into care in the future.” Leaving Care Manager, Staying Put pilot authority.

There is substantial evidence that not providing adequate support to care leavers costs the state a significant amount of money in the long term. Research by DEMOS discovered an additional cost of £71,443.89 for the journey from age 16 to 30 for a young person with a poor experience of the care system who ultimately becomes dependent on the state into early adulthood, compared with someone with a positive experience who is better supported through their education and transition to independent adulthood.³⁷ The latter person will also contribute more to the state in terms of income tax and National Insurance contributions: this is not factored into the above figure.

A study in the United States found that allowing young people to remain in care until age 21 was associated with increased post-secondary educational attainment, delayed pregnancy,

³¹ Courtney, Dworsky, & Pollack *When Should the State Cease Parenting? Evidence from the Midwest Study*. University of Chicago (2007).

³² The Centre for Social Justice, *Couldn't Care Less*. CSJ (2008).

³³ SPCR survey (2005/06) quoted in Ministry of Justice Compendium of re-offending statistics and analysis, *Statistics Bulletin* (2010).

³⁴ Crisis & CRESR, *The Hidden Truth about Homelessness* (2011).

³⁵ Department of Health, *Preventing Suicide in England: a cross-government outcomes strategy to save lives* (2012) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-forengland>

³⁶ J. Dixon *Young people leaving care: health, well-being and outcomes*, Child and Family Social Work 13 (2008).

³⁷ C. Hannon, C. Wood, L. Bazalgette *In Loco Parentis*. DEMOS (2010).

and higher earnings.³⁸ A second study concluded that the benefits to care leavers and society of extending care outweigh the costs to government by a factor of at least two to one.³⁹

Living alone too soon

Luke had to leave his foster carers' home at 17 even though he was a good candidate for Staying Put. He had an emerging mental health problem, and the destabilising effect meant he was unable to cope. He lost a secure job, and ended up homeless and in trouble with the police, ultimately trying to commit suicide. He suffered immense hardship and is only just recovering – at considerable cost to the state – aged 24.

Melanie went into care at the age of six, and from 11 lived with a long-term foster family. From the time she was doing her GCSEs her anxiety about having to move out started, as this is when the pressure from social services began. She began to dread her 18th birthday because she knew she would be pushed out of the family. Her foster family were happy for her to stay, but the local authority was not, so she had to move into supported lodgings. She was then moved into a flat by herself, and she couldn't cope. Things started to go wrong and she eventually dropped out of college. It took her years to get her life back on track.

³⁸ Courtney, Dworsky, & Pollack *When Should the State Cease Parenting? Evidence from the Midwest Study*. University of Chicago (2007).

³⁹ M. Courtney, A. Dworsky, C. Peters. *California's Fostering Connections to Success Act and the Costs and Benefits of Extending Foster Care to 21*. Seattle: Partners for Our Children (2009).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

All young people need support as they enter adult life, and those who have been in care need this support at a greater intensity than their peers. We know that both foster carers and young people understand the benefits of Staying Put, and desire the right for young people to stay at home beyond 18.

The Government's belief in the voluntary approach is flawed, not least because very small numbers of eligible young people currently stay put as it is, and there is evidence that even the pilot projects are under pressure to restrict the criteria – for example by reducing the maximum age from 21 and continuing to exclude those who are NEET.

If foster carers have to 'fight' to convince their local authority to allow young people to stay put with them, often without success, this is also a damning assessment of the voluntary approach. It is no wonder that there is a postcode lottery of provision across England. A change in the law is essential to provide a guarantee to our most vulnerable young people that the state cares about their development.

We have argued that a redistribution of existing investment and spending can cover the modest cost of Staying Put, and that the long-term benefits are numerous and will provide even greater savings over the course of each care leaver's life.

Finally, the policy fits with current Government priorities. We know that there is a desire to improve outcomes for care leavers in the recently launched Care Leaver Strategy. More widely, the Troubled Families programme and policy initiatives that aim to break the benefits cycle can use Staying Put to help achieve their aims. Indeed the whole premise of Troubled Families is to invest now in order to save later. Staying Put offers the same approach. When left unsupported and made to live by themselves too soon, care leavers too often make demands on more state resources –not least housing, the NHS (especially mental health services), and the criminal justice system. Moreover they pay less tax and make a less positive contribution to society.

Setting up children to fail is not how any good parent would behave, and fostered children should be treated no differently. The state has a duty to ensure that its children are supported and guided to become useful and productive members of society; the very simple act of allowing them to stay at home beyond 17, if they want to, plays a great part in this. It is time for it to be enshrined in law.