

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise seen through the dark, heavy metal bars of a prison cell. The sun is a bright, glowing orb on the horizon, partially obscured by a layer of clouds. The sky is filled with soft, golden light and wispy clouds. The bars are in the foreground, creating a grid-like pattern that frames the view of the sky.

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**Special edition:
Care Leavers and the Criminal Justice System**

Editorial Comment

This special edition focuses on the people in our prisons who have experience of the care system.

Children in care and care leavers are vastly over-represented in the Criminal Justice System. It is estimated that over 24 per cent of the adult prison population has previously been in care.¹

It is only over recent years that we are starting to understand just how many of those have experience of local authority care and more importantly what these experiences mean to them. Many children are taken into care to protect them from abuse or neglect, and others as a result of bereavement, the inability of their families to look after them for many reasons and family breakdown. These experiences will be traumatic and the impact of them, like all our childhood experiences, will impact them throughout their lives.

The pathways between care and the Criminal Justice System are starting to be explored and there are moves towards diverting children in care away from prison. However, those who do end up in the secure estate are worthy of our attention and support.

*'Care leavers are more likely to have experienced significant trauma and abuse and other disadvantages that can put them more at risk of violence, self-harm and suicide when in prison. Many can come to prison feeling extremely isolated and angry'*²

Since the publication of the Cross Government Strategy for Care Leavers in 2013³ and the creation of the HMPPS led National Care Leavers Forum, there has been greater recognition that care experienced people in our prisons and under probation licence supervision have unique and often complex needs. Furthermore there has been an increased realisation that more needs to be done to support this group of people and improve the outcomes for them both whilst they are in custody and upon release.

In this edition the wide range of contributors offer us a better understanding of the issues facing care experienced people in our prisons. Some present their

academic research, some are practitioners, and some draw from their own life stories. These insights are essential in informing our policy and ensuring that we improve outcomes for this group.

In the opening article, Dr Kate Gooch and her colleagues summarise the findings of their recent research. The article considers the barriers for identification, arguing that this needs to be addressed in order to support these individuals within custody and after release. Furthermore it points out that although there is a greater focus on this group, this hasn't yet filtered down to consistent good practice within the prisons.

In the next article, Dr Katie Hunter draws on the findings of her PhD which explores the over-representation of looked after children and children from black and other ethnic communities in the Youth Justice System. She describes the 'double whammy' of disadvantage experienced by these children examining the relationship between stability and 'difficult' behaviour as well as the possible explanations for over criminalisation for this group. The important topic of stigmatisation both by their ethnicity and their status of being in care is also explored.

It is essential that the differences between care experienced men and women are recognised. Dr Claire Fitzpatrick focuses on three key themes — the complexities of social expectations; damaging staff cultures; and the importance of moving beyond negative labels to raise aspirations for girls and women who have experienced care. Research suggests that children, particularly girls in care, experience negative stereotypes and may therefore be not be perceived as victims but instead be seen as manipulative or difficult. There is evidence that girls in care are more susceptible to this than boys. This is reflected in the attitudes and actions of staff in the institutions they come into contact with, including potentially prisons. This article urges us to understand that is crucial therefore to dig deeper and understand the people behind the labels in order to support them and help them fulfil their aspirations.

1. Berman, G. and Dar, A., 2013. *Prison Population Statistics*. Social and General Statistics. [online] London: House Of Commons Library. Available online: <<http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN04334.pdf>>
2. Evidence of Care Leavers Association to the Lord Farmer Review. See Lord Farmer (2017) *The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Re-offending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime*. London: Ministry of Justice. Available online: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642244/farmer-review-report.pdf. p.73.
3. HM Government (2013) *Care Leavers Strategy: A Cross-Departmental Strategy for Young People leaving Care*. London: HM Government.

Dr Justin Rogers and Ian Thomas reviewed over 400 PPO reports to see where experience of care has been mentioned and if any specific themes have emerged. These included mental health, sentencing and transition including prison / wing moves, challenges and issues with social networks, bullying, support from local authorities, and the lack of enquiry around care experience particularly for older people. They finish by making a number of recommendations for policy and practice.

Dr Michelle Baybutt and Dr Laura Kelly-Corless from the University of Central Lancashire examine arts based creative methods in their article and look at how these can be used to enable positive change in vulnerable populations.

It is important to recognise areas of good practice as our work with care experienced people develops. There are three interviews in this special edition which focus on this. The first follows the work of the Innovations Unit with HMPPS and other partners. The second explores the work of NEPACs in HMYOI Deerbolt. In the final interview we speak to the Leads for Care Experience People in HMPs Lincoln and Preston about the work they are doing within their establishments to improve outcomes for those in their care.

We have reflections from Teresa Clarke, the Care Experienced People Champion for the Prison Service and from Tassie Ghilani, policy advisor for the Prison Leavers Team. Teresa speaks about her 8 year journey in this role with particular emphasis on the people who have helped shaped the direction of travel and her own learning.

Tassie provides an account of her experiences and the support she was given which inspired her to support other care experienced women in the prison. She speaks about the work she did around setting up peer support groups and some of the issues with identification and how they were overcome.

The book reviews in this special edition have been produced by Shannon Trust mentors in HMP Northumberland.

Guest Editors:

Debbie McKay

HMPPS Operational Lead for Care Experienced People in Custody

Dr. Kate Gooch

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