




bright spots

What makes life good?

Care leavers views on their well-being

Children and young people as ‘experts’ in their lives



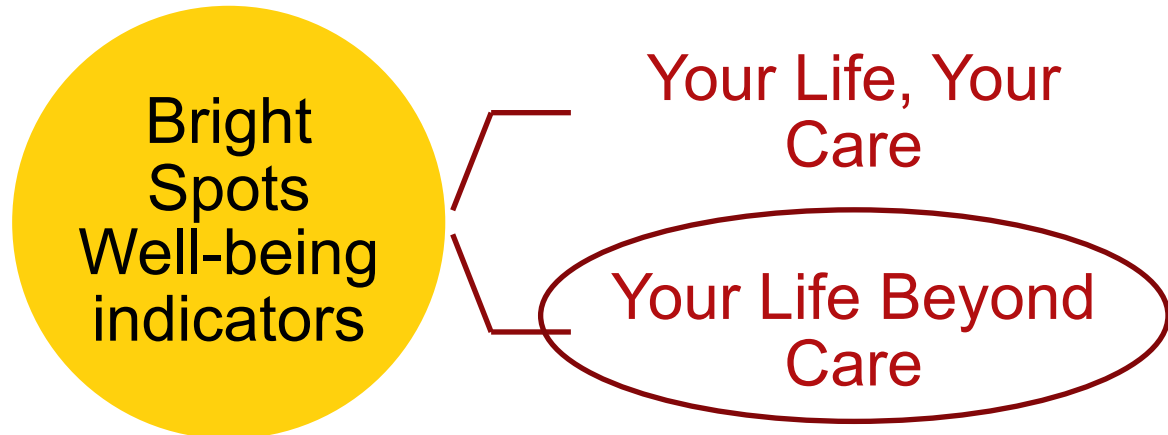
**“Listen to young
people views
and thoughts.
They know
what’s going on,
you don’t!”**

(Care leaver)

Children and young people as 'experts' in their lives



Subjective Well-being:
Feeling good and doing well at both individual and interpersonal levels.



Over the past seven years, we have worked with almost 60 local authorities to collect over 17,000 care experienced voices through our **Your Life, Your Care** and **Your Life Beyond Care** surveys.



Using young people's voices to change the care system



- LAs understand experience of their children & young people (CYP)
- Develop local responses & feedback to CYP

- National understanding of well-being from young people's perspective
- Benchmarking
- Comparisons with general population

Your Life Beyond Care survey

*What
makes
life
good?*

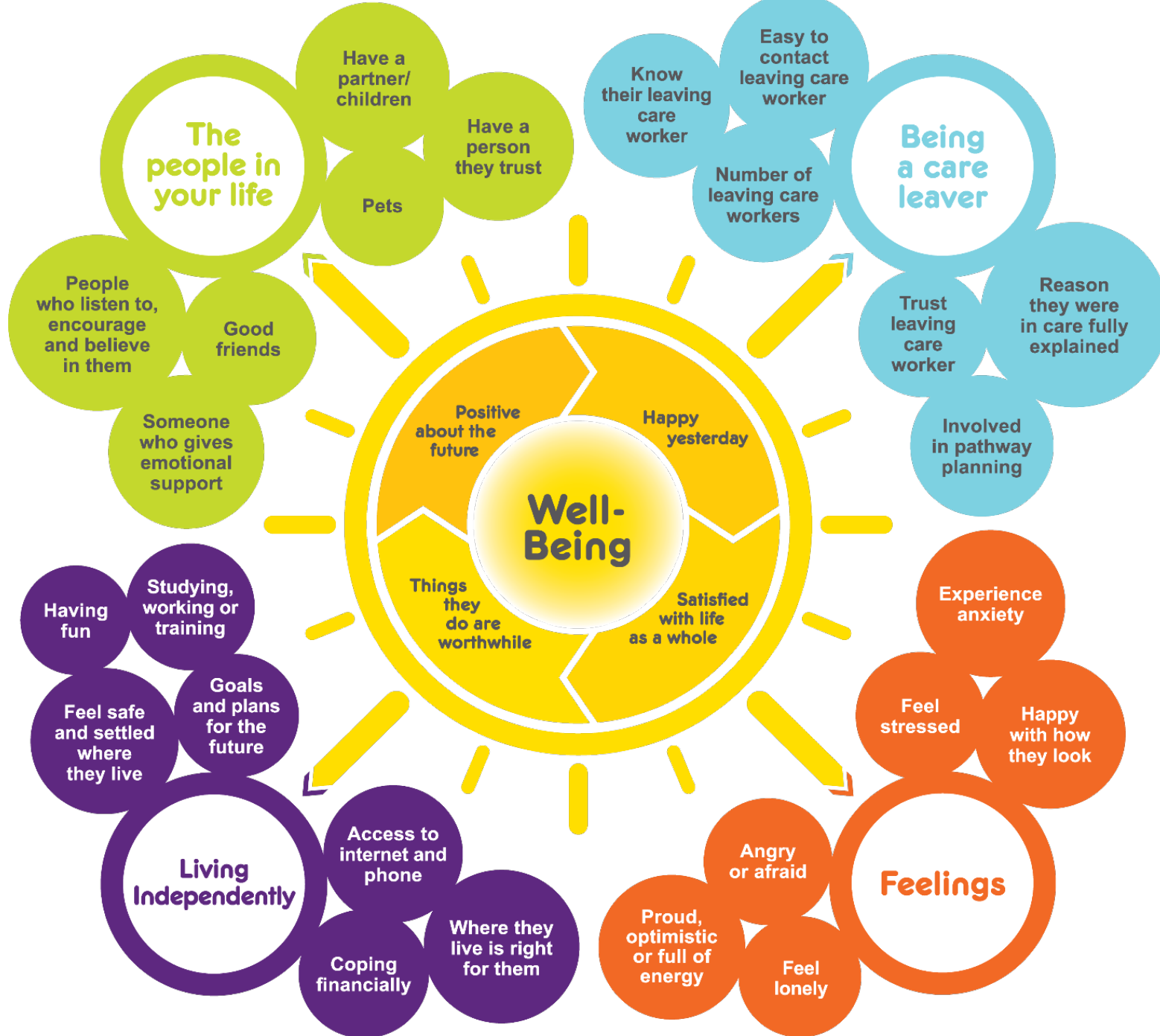
Co-produced with CYP

- Workshops in 2 LAs

Strongly evidence based

- Rapid review of research
- Piloting
- Cognitive interviews
- Survey design specialist
- Comparative to national data

Not about how services are doing but how children in care and care leavers are doing.





What makes life good? Research findings & examples of practice

What makes life good? Care leavers views on their well-being pulls together the findings from the care leavers who participated in the *Your Life Beyond Care* survey.





“Often we require more support and care than the general population because of our experiences though in reality we get much less... please fix that.”

(Care leaver)

Care leavers did worse than the general population on a range of measures.



For example, more care leavers had higher anxiety, lower life satisfaction, felt lonely and were less likely to have trusted supportive people in their lives

There was a steep decline in well-being when young people left care.

“The amount of support drops off massively from being in care and it’s overwhelming.”

(Care leaver)

We found that compared with children in care a higher percentage of care leavers felt unhappy, unsafe and unsettled where they lived.



Very high happiness yesterday



Feel safe where they live



Feel settled

Care leavers who reported that they had a disability or long-term health problem were particularly vulnerable.

They had lower well-being and were lonelier and less likely to have goals and plans for the future. Compared with other care leavers fewer felt safe and settled where they lived and more struggled financially.

“My rights are often ignored because I am very disabled I [am] expected to fit into a system that I can’t fit into.”

(Care leaver)

Care leavers are more likely to report that they have a disability or long-term health problem



Overall, although a majority of care leavers had moderate to high well-being 30% had low well-being.



Our analysis identified the factors associated with high and low well-being.

Care leavers with very high well-being

Felt treated better/same as other young people
Felt proud and strong
Felt safe and settled at home
Did not feel lonely or afraid
Experienced low levels of stress
Bigger support networks, including partners
Felt optimistic about their future
Happy with how they looked

Struggled to cope financially
Hardly ever/never felt proud, excited or strong
Felt unsettled where they live
Felt lonely or afraid or angry
Experienced high levels of stress
Lacked trusting and supportive relationships and good friends
Pessimistic about the future
Unhappy with how they looked

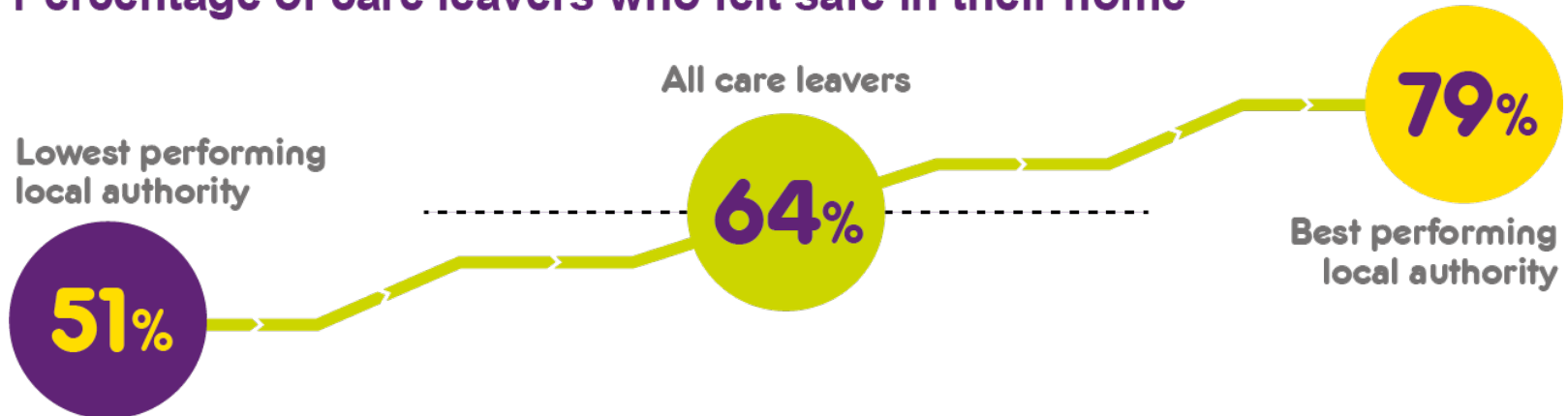
Care leavers with low well-being

The care system can get it right. We can learn from the positive experiences of those with high well-being. We also found that care leavers do better in some local authorities than in others.

Percentage of care leavers with low well-being



Percentage of care leavers who felt safe in their home



Many young people were very positive about the support they received from their leaving care personal advisers (PAs).

Care leavers reported higher levels of trust and more stability of workers compared with children in care.

**“She is amazing!
Always goes
above and beyond
for you, always
makes sure you’re
okay and lets you
know she’s always
around.”**

(Care leaver)

Trust leaving care/social worker all or most of the time



Kept the same worker for 12 months



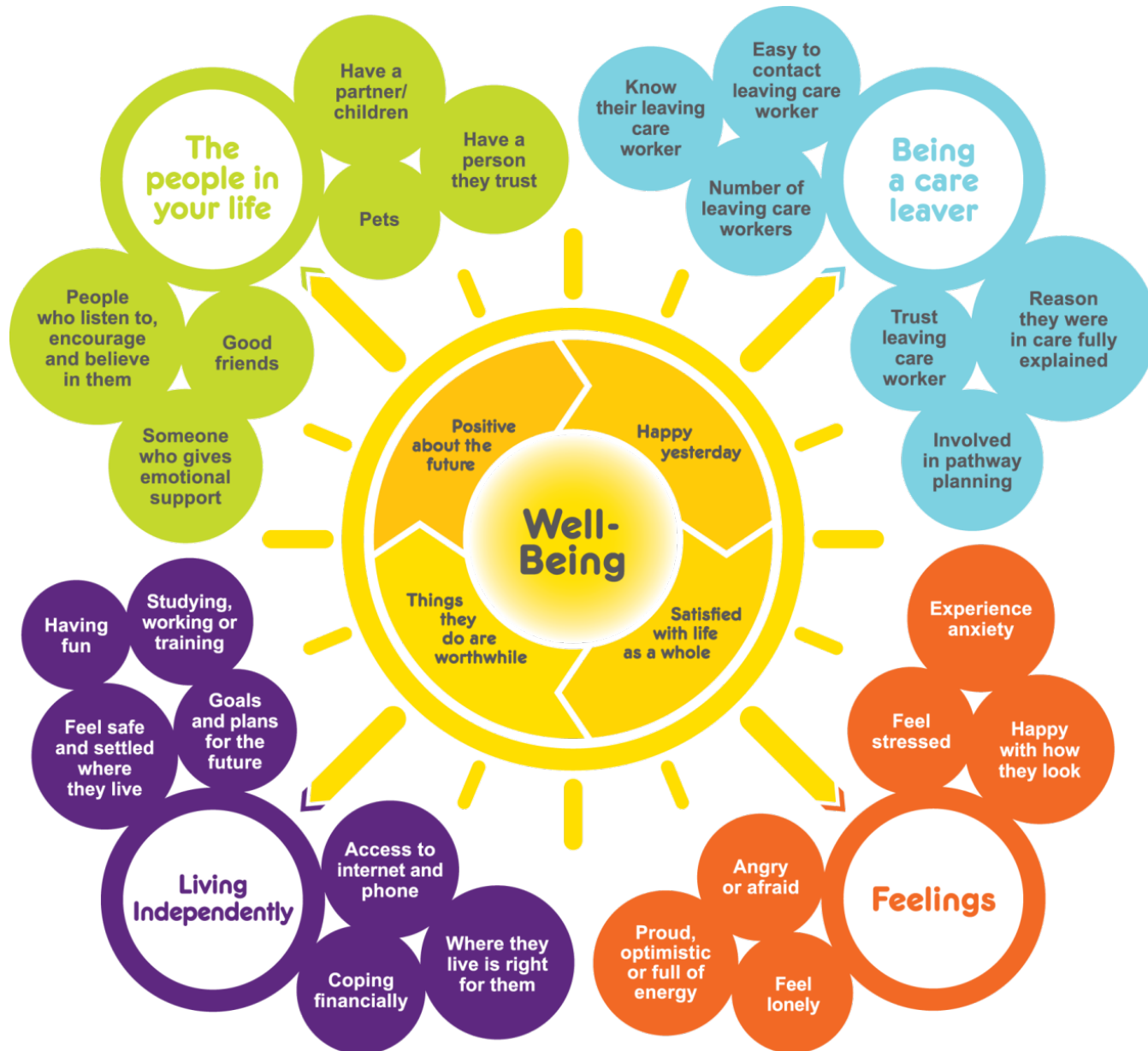
Recommendations



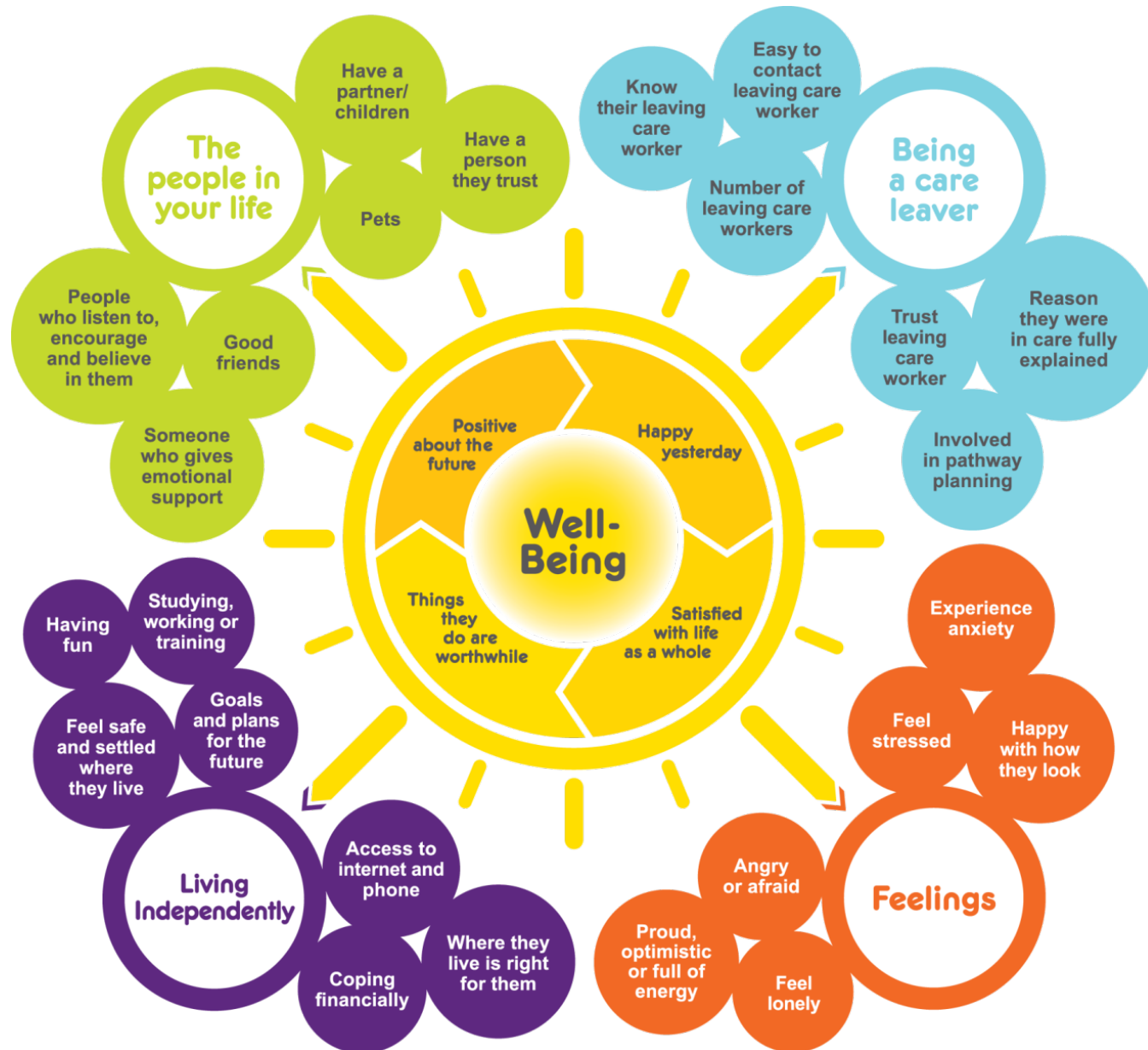
***Will care
leavers feel that
their lives
improved as a
result?***

- Shift in emphasis onto young people's priorities.
- Policy and practice developments need to be measured by whether young people feel that their lives improved as a result of the changes that are put in place.

BRIGHT SPOTS WELL-BEING INDICATORS



The *Your Life Beyond Care* survey was co-produced with young people so the questions that it asks (the **Bright Spots well-being indicators**) do just this.



The indicators should be used by local and national decision makers to understand how care leavers feel about their lives and to design services that better meet their needs.



Improve connections and relationships



**Spotlight
on
practice**

East Riding 5-a-side football team

Why? Care Leavers wanted more activities that they could do as a group. Group activities can combat loneliness & help you feel part of the community.

What?

- 5-a side football team that meets weekly started by staff on a voluntary basis
- *“Kids have to get there themselves but we’ve funded it “(Pathway Team Leader)*

Impact:

- Built a sense of community between young people and allowing them to have fun.
- LA showed that it listened to young people and took action

“How are we going to help this young person to ... develop their own social network or community network?”

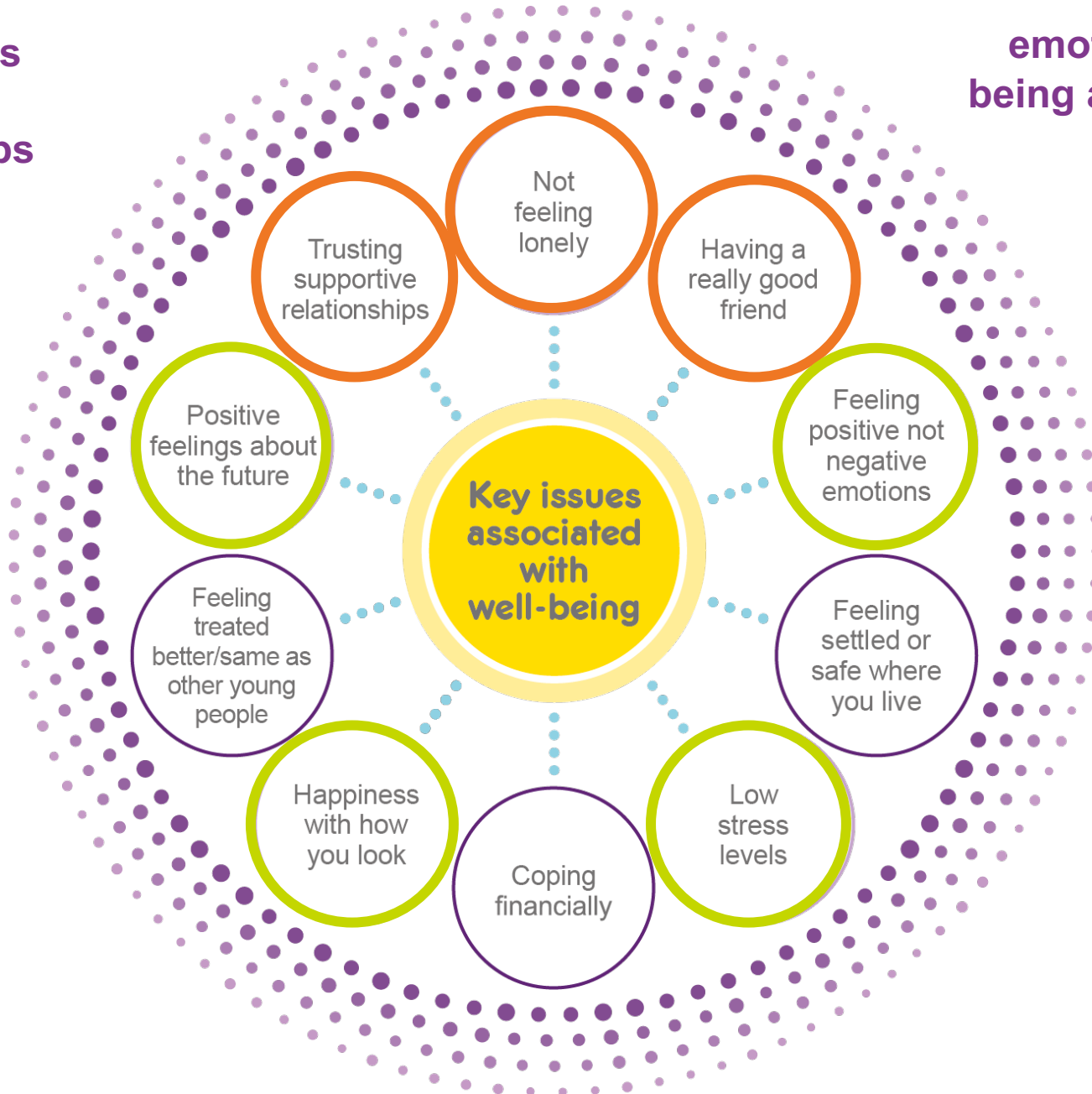
**Pathway Team
Leader**



Next? Aim is for the group to get to a stage where it can continue without the staff there.

Improve
connections
and
relationships

Support
emotional well-
being and mental
health



**Spotlight
on
practice**

Isle of Wight Community allotment



Why? Access to nature + hobbies & activities can reduce stress & improve well-being; gardening beneficial for mental health.

What?

- Can be used by all children in care & care leavers
- Rent free, materials & plants raised through community fundraising
- LA offers award in Horticulture
- Accessible: Raised beds for Wheelchairs.

Impact: *"It's a place to go where you can socialise, you can learn. It's a community allotment, so it offers young people the opportunity to meet other people and learn from them."* (Leaving care team leader)

"It's a lovely space. It's a wonderful place."

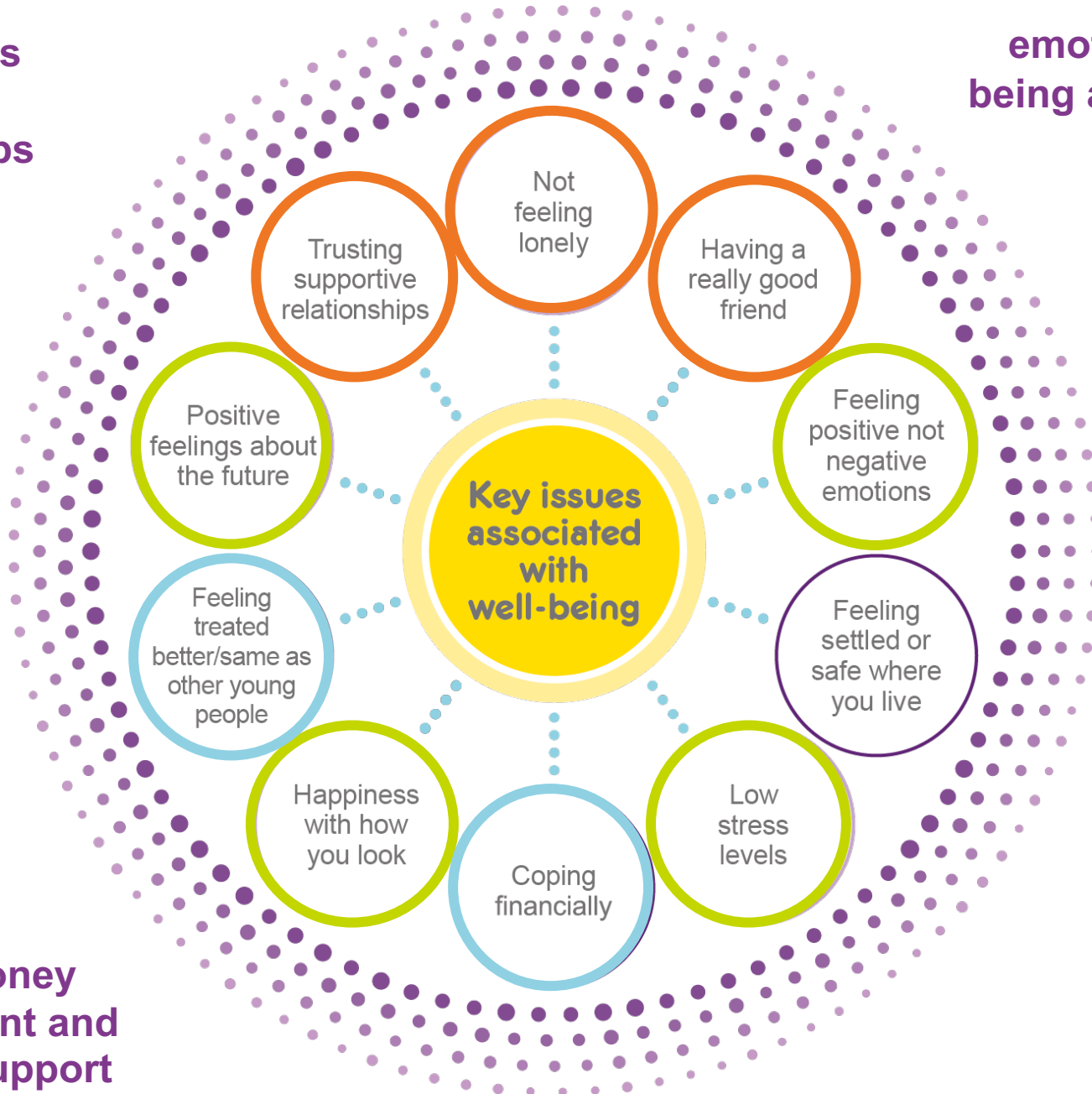
**Leaving care team
leader**

Next?

- therapeutic mental health group
- 'shed project' learn to make things from wood and pallets

**Improve
connections
and
relationships**

**Support
emotional well-
being and mental
health**



**Provide money
management and
financial support**

Stockport (September 2021) Community hubs



Why? 51% of care leavers did not feel settled in their neighbourhood. Universal Credit top up offered during pandemic phased out. A pilot with Stockport Homes' Local pantry scheme looked to address this.

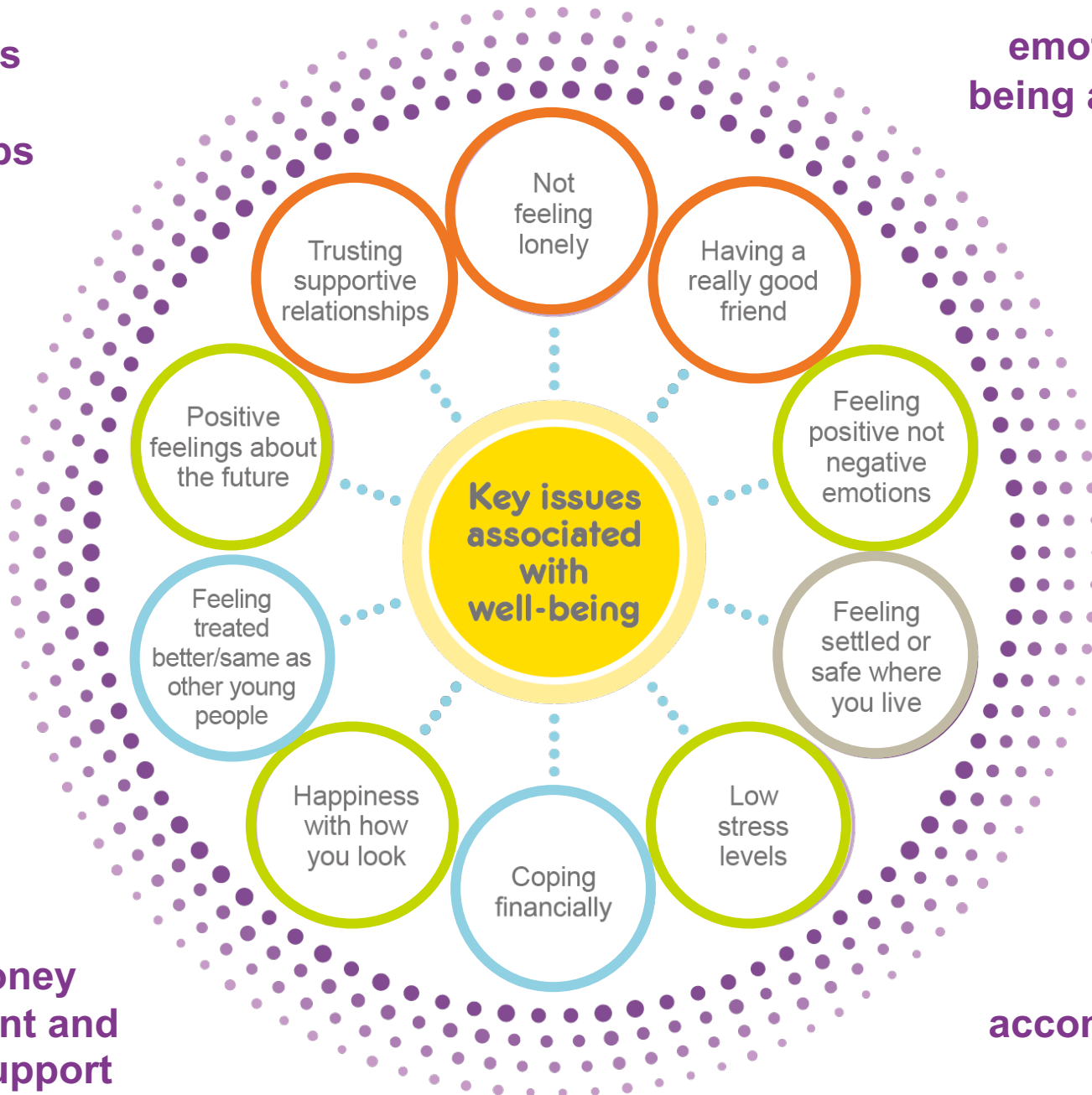
What?

- Community hubs' is a pilot run in conjunction with Stockport Homes which aims to help care leavers increase their network of support.
- 75 young people who lived independently were identified for the scheme & offered to participate by PAs.
- Care leavers were linked with their Local Pantry - enables them to access a range of support including food worth £20/week; volunteer advice and support with cooking, DIY; potential opportunities to volunteer themselves.

Impact: Hope that pilot will: increase young people's links to their neighbourhood, helping them feel more settled and secure; Offset the loss of the £20 Universal Credit top up payment

**Improve
connections
and
relationships**

**Support
emotional well-
being and mental
health**



**Provide money
management and
financial support**

**Improve
accommodation
support**

**Spotlight
on
practice**

Isle of Wight

Involving care leavers in commissioning new supported living accommodation

Why? Some care leavers report they feel unsafe or unsettled where they live & that it is not right for them.

What?

- 1-year process getting care leavers involved in commissioning process & ensure fit for purpose
- Questions included in the tender application form for tender written by young people.
- information session for providers co-hosted by young people
- Young people helped to score applications

Impact: Demonstrates that it is possible to involve young people complex decision-making. For those young people involved they felt listened to and increased confidence.



"It blew their mind that they were able to have an input into something at a strategic level."

Participation worker

Recommendations



“There needs to be a national service that offers all the same services to everyone. It doesn’t make sense for one care leaver to be exceptionally comfortable and another to be destitute.”

(Care leaver)

- In addressing these issues we need a change of culture where corporate parents **step up** to be the best parent that they can be and compensate for the disadvantages that many care leavers experience – by supporting them emotionally, practically and financially.
- We need to **level up** services by identifying and replicating the practice in the areas where young people do well.
- We should build on the positive experience many care leavers report of leaving care PAs and make sure that case loads are protected and PAs are supported to give all young people high quality support, whilst also helping them build supportive relationships in the wider community with friends, family and other networks.

Bright Spot
of
practice

Coventry Building connection and trust with leaving care workers/PAs

Why? When developing *YLBC* survey care leavers stressed importance of leaving care workers being easy to get hold of and someone you can trust.



What?

- Local authority have invested in, and actively encourage, the use of social media: e.g. PAs use WhatsApp, Instagram; Leaving Care service Facebook page; care leaver apprentice develops social media links.
- Catch ups/interactions used as opportunities to check out how young people are feeling.
- PAs act like parent and catch up/spend time as opposed to conduct statutory visit
- PAs have purchase card to pay for e.g. coffee/meal or gift to celebrate success.
- *YLBC* survey in lockdown opportunity to check in/discuss issues raised.

Impact: Higher % of care leavers trusted PA 'all or most of the time' (86% vs 78%) and felt they could easily get in touch with their PAs (79% vs 71%) than in other LAs

Bright Spot
of
practice

OLDHAM

Trust in workers

Why? To ensure that care leavers have trusting relationships with their workers Oldham have developed a range of opportunities for leaving care workers to work creatively with young people

What?

- Case load levels (22) that allow workers to develop relationships.
- Training for workers to tackle difficult issues such as suicide.
- Recognizing the work of the leaving care service
- Providing opportunities for workers to set up different ways to engage with young people - e.g. Thai boxing, spa days and mountain walking

Impact: 90 % of care leavers in Oldham trust their workers all or most of the time, that is higher than the 78% of care leavers who report this nationally.

www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots

"Feels like we're part of something normal.. and it's the social time I don't get otherwise"



"Young people are waiting all week for the sessions, and on the day my phone does not stop ringing to make sure I can take them"

Recommendations



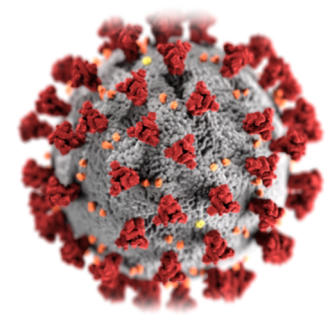
- We need to address the **cliff edge of care** by investing in leaving care support and reviewing and changing both the legal framework and local practice that lead care leavers to experience a sharp drop in support when they turn 18.
- We also need to focus more on the experience of young people with **a disability and long-term health problem** – get to know them and the support that they need and ensure that we measure the extent to which services work for them. Case management systems must identify who these young people are and services should report and scrutinise the outcomes for this group.



Impact & Evaluation

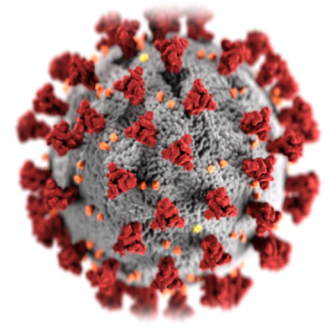
New Belongings Programme: Baseline evaluation report

Care leavers' experience during lockdown – New Belongings baseline report



- 1,258 young people - 50% response rate
- Views gathered during the first national lockdown
- Compared to data gathered 2017-19 - broadly similar demographics in (age, gender, prevalence of disability, being a parent, time in care)
- Caveat
 - Not a direct comparison
 - Mainly 1st lockdown – well-being studies in general population showed that well-being changed over the course of the pandemic

Care leavers' experience during lockdown



Broadly in line with pre-Covid group

- Life satisfaction
- Happiness
- Loneliness
- Anxiety
- Having good friends
- Person who you could trust
- Accommodation is right for you

Did better (> 5% difference)

- Coping financially
- Internet access
- Afford mobile phones
- Emotional support from PAs
- Pets
- Stress (lower average score)
- Ability to handle problems

Relationships

My leaving care worker is ... amazing helps me with everything. And is always there to support me emotionally and physically. Especially during this difficult time due to coronavirus.

[Leaving care worker] is helpful, but due to Covid19, difficult to communicate, No feedback on housing.

Best leaving care worker I've had so far, very trustworthy and understanding



*71% pre-pandemic

- Positive feedback on leaving care workers
- Bright Spot for several local authorities
- Continuity of worker and ease of getting in touch better than average % in half of LAs
- 54% of care leavers said their leaving care workers gave them emotional support (higher than previous LA average: 45%)
- Higher than average % of young people trusted PA in 5 of the 8 LAs

Finances

'I find it difficult to cope financially.'

16%
Care leavers



9%
General
Population
16-24yrs⁴

I don't budget that great. The lockdown has made it slightly easier to avoid spending too much.

Currently on furlough - have applied for Universal Credit - so just getting by at the moment.

Giving the current climate with the COVID pandemic money is something that I am struggling with due to a hit in income through the furlough scheme

- Higher proportion (63%) of care leavers in the 8 local authorities reported that they were coping well financially than in previous Bright Spots surveys (56%)


Surprising findings?



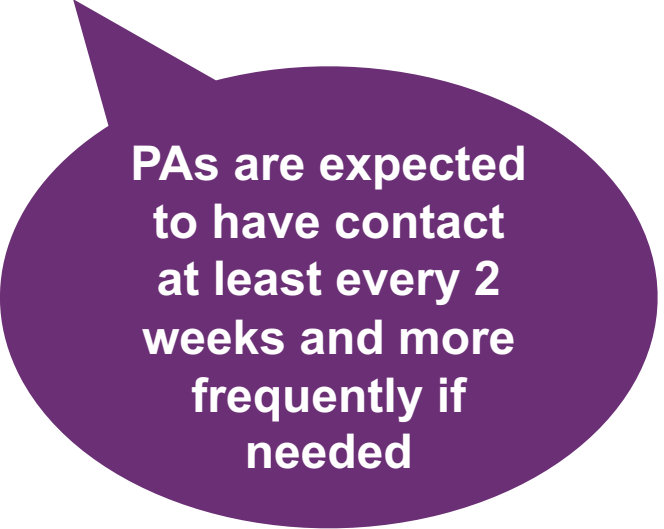
- Initially pandemic did not appear to have worsened care leavers experience in many areas and in several areas improved slightly.
- Protective factor of additional support put in?

Additional support to maintain or replicate?

- Financial support:
Universal Credit uplift,
furlough
- Digital access: Increased
access to internet
- Practical and financial
support from LAs/leaving
care workers.
- Greater focus on care
leavers well-being

A purple speech bubble pointing towards the list item 'Digital access: Increased access to internet'.

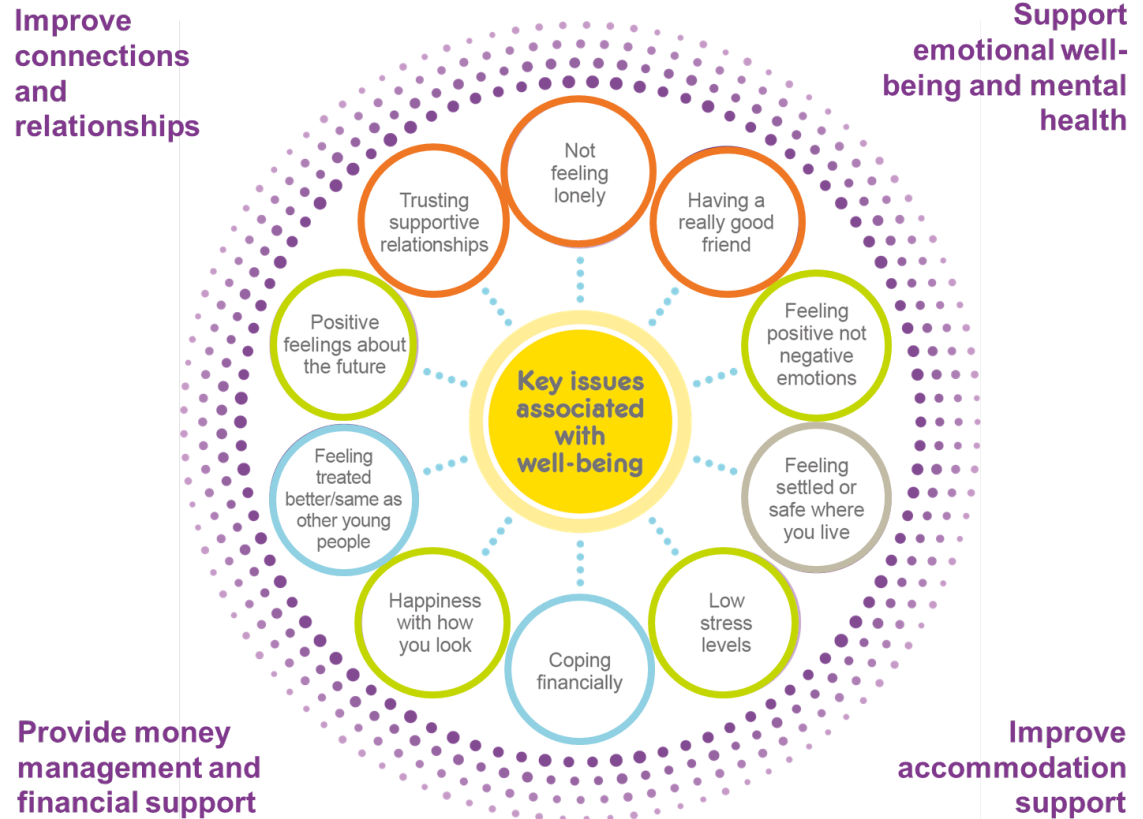
PAs have credit cards so they can do online shopping or more flexible ways to get money to young people

A purple speech bubble pointing towards the list item 'Greater focus on care leavers well-being'.

PAs are expected to have contact at least every 2 weeks and more frequently if needed

What does this mean?

- The work of creating the best support for our care leavers is far from done.
- We need to continue to improve support for care leavers in the areas that are important to them.



Invest in care leavers

- The pandemic may have given us a glimpse of what we could do to make things better.
- Given the level of investment that is made in children whilst they are in care, and the cliff edge in support that we know many care leavers face when they leave care, a relatively small investment in care leavers could make all the difference, e.g.
 - Reducing financial stress of living independently on a low income with a modest contribution each week
 - providing the additional support that many parents give their children when they leave home – buying a computer, a mobile phone and paying for broadband.

Next steps

- Continuing to work with individual local authorities to conduct the YLBC & YLYC surveys
 - email us brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk if you are interested.
- Online practice bank of how local authorities have sought to address children in care and care leavers' well-being – How to make life better?
 - <https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots-2/how-to-make-life-good/>
- Using the findings from the Bright Spots programme to inform the Independent Review for Children's Social Care
- Similar analysis for children in care

bright spots

Find out more about the Bright Spots programme and read the full research report on our website.

www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots

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