The Transition to Adulthood: A Participatory Study of Care Leavers' Experiences with Pathway Planning

Anna Tench

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust
University of Essex

May 2025

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the five young people who were co-researchers in this study. This research would not have been possible without your insights, courage and willingness to share your experiences. I hope that this work does justice to your voices and helps to create meaningful change for others navigating similar journeys.

To my nearest and dearest.

To my best friend Phil, for always making me laugh when I wanted to cry. Thank you for keeping me watered, fed and walked. You are everything to me.

To my family, thank you for your endless love, belief, support - and of course - your proofreading skills, throughout this journey. Thank you for teaching me that anything is possible and for being a constant source of inspiration.

And to my wonderful friends - thank you for always reminding me I've got this. Your encouragement has meant more than you know.

A huge thank you to my research supervisor, Dr Ben Craik, for your continuous guidance, honesty and ever-calming presence. It has been such a pleasure working together.

Finally, to my inspiring trainee cohort, with a special mention to Ellen and Hannah - I would have been lost without you both.

Abstract

Every year, over 13,000 young people in the United Kingdom (UK) transition from care to independence, often facing significant challenges compared to their non-care-experienced peers. Pathway plans are statutory documents designed to support this transition, outline young people's needs, aspirations, and future goals. Although much has been written in the literature about the broader experiences of leaving care, there is limited understanding of the role of pathway planning within this context. Furthermore, while the benefits of involving care-experienced communities in research are known, they remain underexplored.

To address this, this paper explores how care leavers experience pathway plans using a participatory research (PR) approach. Five care leavers, aged 20-23, were actively engaged as co-researchers throughout the research process. Their contributions included selecting data collection methods, designing interview questions, participating in interviews, giving feedback on the analysis and informing decisions about dissemination. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to deepen understanding of their perspectives.

This study provides a unique contribution to understanding pathway planning in the transition from care to adulthood. It argues for the importance of relational working, personalisation and co-production, highlighting the central role care leavers must play in shaping decisions around their future, pathway plans and wider leaving-care processes. Through its design, this paper situates itself within the emerging PR literature involving care-experienced populations, examining the value of PR in promoting inclusion, challenging traditional research hierarchies, and advancing emancipatory principles of empowerment and social justice.

Practical implications for stakeholders, including Educational Psychologists working within the corporate parenting model, are discussed, emphasising the need to increase care leavers' participation in both research and practice, while recognising them as autonomous, competent and capable. Finally, the study's strengths, limitations, and future directions for research are examined.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
List of Tables	10
List of Figures	11
Abbreviations	12
Chapter 1: Introduction	13
1.1 Chapter Overview	13
1.2 Language and Nomenclature	
1.3 Background and Rationale 1.3.1 National Prevalence 1.3.2 Challenges and Outcomes for CEYP 1.3.3 Understanding the Transition to Adulthood	15 16
1.4 Context of the Research: The Leaving Care System and its Legislative Landscape 1.4.1 National Context	18
1.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework 1.5.1 Children's Rights 1.5.2 Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological Systems Theory 1.5.3 Intersectionality Theory, and Impact of Multiple Marginalised Identities	22 22
1.6 Educational Psychologists: Supporting CEYP	23
1.7 Focus of the Present Research and Personal and Professional Motivations	
1.8 Chapter Summary	26
Chapter 2: Literature Review	28
2.1 Chapter Overview	28
2.2 Literature Review Purpose and Questions	28
2.3 Literature Search Strategy 2.3.1 Databases 2.3.2 Search Terms 2.3.3 Literature Selection	29 29
2.4 Literature Overview and Appraisal 2.4.1 Organisation of the Literature Review 2.4.2 Aims and Methodology 2.4.3 Participants	32 33
2.4.4 Sampling and Recruitment	37 39 40
2.7.0 Value of Existing Enterature	4 0

2.5 Literature Review Themes.	41
2.5.1 Emotional and Psychological Dimensions of Transition	
2.6 Support Systems and Social Capital	
2.7 Practical Challenges and Independent Living	48
2.8 Education, Employment and Training (EET)	
2.9 Health and Wellbeing	
2.10 Intersectionality and Marginalised Groups	
2.11 COVID-19 and Transition Experiences	
2.12 Theoretical Frameworks	56
2.13 Conclusions and Implications	
2.13.1 Key Takeaways from the Literature	
2.13.2 Overall Strengths and Limitations	
2.13.3 Broad Implications	60
2.14 Gaps in the Research and Rationale for the Current Study	62
2.15 Reflections on the Literature Review Process	63
2.16 Chapter Summary	64
Chapter 3: Methodology	65
3.1 Chapter Overview	65
3.1.1 A Note on Reflexivity	
3.2 Research Aims and Purpose	66
3.2.1 RQ	67
3.3 Research Paradigm	67
3.3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Position	
3.3.2 Transformative Element	68
3.4 Research Design	69
3.4.1 Overview of PR	
3.4.2 Application of PR	70
3.4.3 PR: Critical Considerations	75
3.5 Co-researchers and Recruitment	76
3.5.1 Introducing the Co-researchers	
3.5.2 Recruitment Procedure	
3.6 The Research Procedure	81
3.6.1 Co-Researcher Workshops	
3.6.2 Designing the Data Collection Method	
3.6.3 Data Collection Procedure	
3.7 Data Analysis	
3.7.1 Overview of RTA	
3.7.2 Application of RTA	
3.7.3 The RTA Process	
3.7.4 The Role of the Co-researchers in RTA	
3.7.5 RTA: Critical Considerations	
3.8 Dissemination of Findings	102
3.9 Ethical Considerations	
3.9.1 Exploring Power Dynamics and the Researcher's Positionality	103

3.9.2 The Interdependency of Protection and Participation Rights	
3.9.3 Informed Consent and Right to Withdraw	
3.9.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity	
3.9.5 Minimisation of Harm	
3.9.6 Data Storage	
3.10 Evaluation of Research Quality	
3.10.1 Research Summary	111
3.11 Chapter Summary	
Chapter 4: Analysis	112
4.1 Chapter Overview	112
4.2 Thematic Overview	112
4.2.1 Overview of Themes and Subthemes	113
4.3 Theme 1: Feeling Let Down by the System	114
4.3.1 Systemic and Structural Issues	
4.3.2 Abandonment	116
4.4 Theme 2: Implementation of Pathway Planning Processes	119
4.4.1 Emotional Experiences and Responses	
4.4.2 Navigating Uncertain Processes in Rigid Systems	
4.4.3 Plans to Practice: Key Sections Explored	125
4.5 Theme 3: Relationships Matter: The Critical Role of Connecting with Others	129
4.5.1 Systems Need to Work Together	
4.5.2 Relationships in a Bureaucratic Context: Consistency and Trust	131
4.6 Theme 4: Identity, Culture and Belonging	
4.6.1 Community and Peer Connections	
4.6.2 Language and Moving Beyond Label	
4.6.3 Understanding and Recognising Intersecting Identities	137
4.7 Theme 5: The Power of Lived Experience in Creating Change	
4.7.1 Navigating Self-Advocacy and Feeling Heard	
4.7.2 'Shaking Up' Pathway Planning	
4.7.3 Embracing Co-Production to Drive Meaningful Change	
4.8 Connections and Contradictions	145
4.9 Chapter Summary	147
Chapter 5: Discussion	149
5.1 Chapter Overview	149
5.2 Statement of Principal Findings	149
5.3 Theme 1: Feeling Let Down by the System	150
5.3.1 Systemic and Structural Issues	150
5.3.2 Abandonment	
5.3.3 Connecting Theory to Theme	
5.4 Theme 2: Implementation of Pathway Planning Processes	
5.4.1 Emotional Experiences and Responses	
5.4.2 Navigating Uncertain Processes in Rigid Systems	
5.4.3 Plan to Practice: Key Sections Explored	159

5.4.4 Connecting Theory to Theme		161
5.5 Theme 3: Relationships Matter: The Critical I 5.5.1 Systems Need to Work Together		
5.5.2 Relationships in a Bureaucratic Context:	Consistency and Trust	164
5.5.3 Connecting Theory to Theme		166
5.6 Theme 4: Identity, Culture and Belonging		
5.6.1 Community and Peer Connections 5.6.2 Language and Moving Beyond Labels		
5.6.3 Understanding and Recognising Intersect		
5.6.4 Connecting Theory to Theme		
5.7 Theme 5: The Power of Lived Experience in	Creating Change	172
5.7.1 Navigating Self-Advocacy and Feeling H	leard	172
5.7.2 'Shaking Up' the Pathway Planning Proc		
5.7.3 Embracing Co-Production to Drive Mean		
5.7.4 Connecting Theory to Theme		
5.8 Strengths and Limitations of Methodology		
5.8.1 Reflection on Research Aims and Unique 5.8.2 Integrity of the Participatory Design		
5.8.3 Recruitment and Participation		
5.8.4 Power Relations		
5.9 Ethical Reflections		184
5.9.1 The Role of Reflexivity		
		186
5.10 Implications for Practice and Contributions.		186
5.10.1 Involving Communities in Research		
5.10.2 The Leaving Care System: A View towa		
5.10.3 Implications for EPs		189
5.11 Dissemination of Findings		192
5.12 Directions for Future Research		193
5.12.1 Enhancing the Participatory Approach		
5.12.2 Designing, Monitoring and Evaluating S		
5.12.3 Research Priorities for Underrepresented	•	
5.13 Concluding Thoughts		
References		
Appendices		224
Appendix A: Summary of Eligible Texts for Title	e and Abstract Screening	224
Appendix B: Articles Identified from the Literatu	re Search	232
Appendix C: The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Analyses) 2020 Flow Chart		234
Appendix D: Data Extraction Table for Identified	Studies	235
Appendix E: The Critical Appraisal Skills Progra	mme (CASP) Qualitative Research Checklis	t
(CASP, 2018)		239

Appendix F: The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Version 2018 applied to Mentoring Young People Leaving Care (Clayden & Stein, 2005)	for 249
Appendix G: The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Version 2018 Applied to Young People Leaving Care: Health, Wellbeing, and Outcomes (Dixon, 2008)	252
Appendix H: Table A5 The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Version 2018 Applied to Goddard and Barrett, 2008.	
Appendix I: Amended TREC Ethical Approval Form (including Appendices), including London Children in Care Council Risk Assessment Process (Corporate and Strategic Implications) (October 2022) and Fieldwork Risk Assessment Audit	
Appendix J: Research Recruitment Poster	283
Appendix K: Information Sheet for the Research	284
Appendix L: Consent Form for the Research	287
Appendix M: Co-researcher Workshops	288
Appendix N: Semi-structured Interview Guide	299
Appendix O: Example Co-research Transcript Excerpt	302
Appendix P: Screenshots of Nvivo Showing Example Thematic Coding for CEYP Narratives	303
Appendix Q: Screenshot of Miro Mind Maps	305
Appendix R: Alternative Approaches to Data Analysis Considered by the Lead Researcher	307
Appendix S: Amendment to Trust Research Ethics Application (received 22.04.24) and Ethical Approval	
Appendix T: Application of Yardley's (2000) Principles	313
Appendix U: Additional Supporting Quotes from Co-researcher Transcripts	315
Appendix V: Practical Steps for Supporting Young People's Self-Determination. Adapted from Hyde and Atkinson (2019)	

List of Tables

Table 1 Search Terms Used in the Literature Review	30
Table 2 Systematic Literature Review Eligibility Criteria	31
Table 3 Qualitative Data Analysis Methods Used in Reviewed Studies	
Table 4 Co-Researcher Key Characteristics	
Table 5 Chronological Overview of the Research Procedure	
Table 6 Application of Yardley's (2000) Principles	

List of Figures

Figure 1 Reflexive Diary Extract: Interest in Participatory Research	26
Figure 2 Key Themes Identified in the Literature Review	41
Figure 3 Reflexive Diary Extract: Reflections on Literature Review Pro	cess63
Figure 4 Anticipated Outcomes for Co-researchers and the CEYP Com	
Figure 5 Vaughn and Jacquez' (2020) Participation 'Choice Points' Fran	nework73
Figure 6 Aldridge's (2016) Participatory Model	74
Figure 7 Reflexive Diary Extract: Reflections on the Sample	79
Figure 8 Key: Application of Aldridge's (2016) Participation Model	82
Figure 9 Overview of Co-Researcher Workshops	86
Figure 10 Reflexive Diary Extract: Reflections Post-Workshop 1	
Figure 11 Reflexive Diary Extract: Title Selection	92
Figure 12 Visual Representation of the Six Stages of Reflexive Themat	c Analysis97
Figure 13 Reflexive Diary Extract: Pre-Data Analysis	98
Figure 14 The Academic Wheel of Power and Privilege	104
Figure 15 Final Themes and Subthemes from the Data Analysis	113
Figure 16 Thematic Map: Connecting Themes and Subthemes	146
Figure 17 'Shaking Up' Pathway Planning: A Summary of Co-Research	ers' Recommendations for
Change	148
Figure 18 Reflexive Diary Extract: Reflections on Language Use in the	Analysis153
Figure 19 Visual Representation of Self-Determination Theory	162
Figure 20 Reflexive Diary Extract: Hope, Change and Responsibility	174
Figure 21 Mapping Findings onto Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems	Theory177
Figure 22 Reflexive Diary Extract: The Absence of Identity	181
Figure 23 Reflexive Diary Extract: Power Relations	183
Figure 24 Reflexive Diary Extract: Reflexivity	186
Figure 25 Reflexive Diary Extract: Personal Implications for Practice	192

Abbreviations

BPS British Psychological Society

CEYP Care Experienced Young People

CEYP's Care Experienced Young People's (possessive, indicating ownership or association)

CiCC Children in Care Council

CL Care Leaver

CLA Children Looked After (sometimes referred to as Looked After Children)

CP Corporate Parent/s

CYP Children and Young People

DfE Department for Education

DoH Department of Health

EET Education, Employment or Training

EHCP Education Health and Care Plan

EP Educational Psychologist

HCPC Health Care and Professions Council

LA Local Authority

LAC Looked After Child / Looked After Children (increasingly replaced with CLA)

NEET Not in Employment, Education or Training

PFA Preparing for Adulthood

PP Pathway Plan

PR Participatory Research

RTA Reflexive Thematic Analysis

SEND Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

TEP Trainee Educational Psychologist

YP Young People

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the study's background, context, and rationale. It begins by explaining the chosen language and terminology, shaped in collaboration with co-researchers. It then examines the legislative, socio-political, and economic landscape of leaving care in the United Kingdom (UK), with pathway plans (PPs) framed within this context.

The research's theoretical and conceptual framework follows, alongside its participatory research (PR) design, discussed as a distinctive methodological contribution within the context of leaving care. The roles of Corporate Parents (CPs) and Educational Psychologists (EPs) are also explored. Finally, the Lead Researcher's (LR) positionality is outlined, reflecting on how personal and professional experiences have shaped the study. The chapter closes by highlighting the need for care leaver-driven research to inform more responsive policy and practice.

1.2 Language and Nomenclature

Language is integral to shaping how we understand and interact with the world. As Watson and Gibson (2005) note, language is not just a communication tool, but a social practice that constructs our social reality. It can unite people, create divisions, and drive change (Starks & Trinidad, 2010).

Language in this study is central to representing the identities and experiences of five young people (YP) who have transitioned out of social care, as both co-researchers and participants. Recognising the personal and community-specific nature of language, the research adopts an affirming approach, using preferred terminology by the communities involved, to ensure accurate representation, inclusivity, and acknowledgment of language's vital role in the research process.

1.2.1 Defining Care-Experienced Young People (CEYP)

Children and young people (CYP) in care cease to be legally looked after by the Local Authority (LA) when they are adopted, return home, or turn 18. The term 'care leaver' (CL) is statutorily defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 as 'a young person who has been in LA care for at least 13 weeks, including their 16th birthday'. Under this definition, CLs aged 16 to 25, are entitled to ongoing support from the LA after leaving care (Department for Education [DfE], 2024).

Across the UK, the term CL is widely used in policy discourse and professional contexts. However, debates about its limitations point to the risk of labelling YP in ways that create stigma and position them outside normative expectations. Jones et al. (2020) argue that this issue goes beyond semantics, challenging how CEYP are often discursively positioned outside typical adolescent identities (Youdell, 2006).

This has resulted in recent shifts in terminology, to reflect a broader understanding of the CL experience. For example, The Care Leavers Association (2025) advocates for a definition that acknowledges not only the time spent in care but also the long-term impact of that experience. Current literature further illustrates that many YP prefer to avoid the term 'CL' in research contexts (Bayfield & Smith, 2024).

In line with this study's participant-led approach, the LR consulted the co-researchers on their preferred identification. They chose 'care-experienced young people' (CEYP), as it better reflects their engagement and identity shaped by lived experiences. While 'care-experienced 'can broadly include children looked after (CLA) and anyone who has spent time in care, this study specifically refers to CEYP aged 18-25. Respecting co-researchers' preferred terminology, 'CEYP' is used throughout the following chapters.

Throughout this study, the term 'LR' was also carefully selected to describe the coordinating role of the lead researcher, while ensuring that the voices and perspectives of co-researchers remained the central focus of the research. In this way, it is acknowledged that using 'LR' can create tension in PR, but the term was chosen to offer clarity on responsibilities, while maintaining a commitment to shared decision-making and collaboration.

1.3 Background and Rationale

1.3.1 National Prevalence

This study explores the experiences of CEYP from across the UK, making it essential to examine the national context. Each year, approximately 13,000 YP in England leave care, a 4% increase since 2020 (Barnardos, 2024a). According to the DfE (2024), in 2022/23, there were 48,050 CEYP in England now aged 17 to 21, with 64% being male. Over the past five years, the care system has also seen a notable rise in CYP aged 16 and over, contributing to the growing older demographic of CEYP, with 19-21-year-olds forming the largest group (DfE, 2024).

Inequalities in care are often worsened when identity and care experience overlap. For example, CYP from mixed ethnic backgrounds are overrepresented in the care system relative to the general population (DfE, 2024), reflecting long-standing racial disparities in child social care (Sacker et al., 2024). While initiatives like Inclusive Britain (Action 28) (Race Disparity Unit, 2024) aim to enhance demographic data collection to address systemic racism, national data remains largely focused on CLA, with limited attention to CEYP.

Another significant trend shaping the national landscape is the growing number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) entering the care system (Peterson et al., 2017). Global displacement, extended care support policies, and transition delays have contributed to this surge (DfE, 2024). For example, in 2024, 27% of CEYP aged 19-21 in England were former UASC

(DfE, 2024). Many arrive during adolescence, navigating complex legal, cultural, and emotional transitions, often with limited support (Gimeno-Monterde et al., 2021). These barriers, alongside broader structural inequalities present significant challenges for CEYP becoming independent.

1.3.2 Challenges and Outcomes for CEYP

It is well known that CEYP are among the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in society (Kilkenny, 2012), with their transition from care widely recognised as challenging and likened to a 'cliff edge' (Starr et al., 2024). Research consistently shows they face significant disadvantages compared to their non-care peers, increasing risk of unemployment, homelessness, low academic achievement, social isolation, substance abuse, and poor physical and mental health (Barnardos, 2024a; Phillips et al., 2024). Notably, the number of CEYP aged 18-20 experiencing homelessness has risen by 54% in five years, now comprising 25% of the homeless population (Department for Levelling Up Housing & Communities, 2023). Moreover, 39% of CEYP aged 19-21 are NEET¹, compared to 13% of their peers (DfE, 2024)².

Other dominant narratives in the literature focus on CEYP's underachievement, social exclusion, and disadvantage, with implications for public services across mental health, employment, education, and justice (National Audit Office, 2015). Significantly, ethnic minority CEYP face a 'double whammy' of disadvantage, increasing their risk of involvement in the youth justice system (Hunter et al., 2023).

This issue extends beyond the UK, with global research revealing similarly troubling patterns, making it an international policy concern. The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened conditions for CEYP (Roberts et al., 2021). While poor outcomes should not be assumed, inadequate preparation for

¹ Not in Employment, Education or Training (DfE, 2024).

² Data is sourced from the annual SSDA903 data collection, gathered from LAs in England. The latest statistics relate to the year ending 31 March 2024 (DfE, 2024).

the complexities of transitioning to adulthood for CEYP is widely recognised as a key factor in long-term challenges (Stubbs et al., 2023).

1.3.3 Understanding the Transition to Adulthood

As a significant life outcome, the transition to adulthood in the UK is formally marked at age 18 (Office for National Statistics, 2019), yet the process remains complex and often misunderstood. Traditionally seen as a period characterised by significant life events and challenges in education, employment, housing, and relationships (Rindfuss et al., 1987), this phase involves the acquisition of new roles and increasing personal autonomy and responsibility (Cohen et al., 2003). Ongoing socioeconomic shifts, such as extended education periods and economic uncertainty, have further complicated this transition (Karagiannaki, 2024).

Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood defines a distinct developmental phase for individuals aged 18-25, marked by identity exploration, growing autonomy, advanced cognitive abilities and self-discovery, without assuming full adult responsibilities (McGhee & Deeley, 2022; Schwartz, 2016). Erikson's (1968) concept of 'prolonged adolescence', combined with emerging adulthood's sociological and psychological aspects (Reifman et al., 2007), offers a lens to explore challenges and delays in role and identity formation. A biological perspective has also emerged, framing this stage as adaptive for extended neurodevelopment (Hochberg & Konner, 2020). This framework is particularly relevant to CEYP, whose transitions may be delayed or disrupted.

1.3.3.1 'Emerging Adulthood' (Arnett, 2000) and Leaving Care. For CEYP, the challenges of 'emerging adulthood' are amplified, shaping a more complex pathway to independence. Upon leaving care, YP are expected to transition into independence, but CEYP face an accelerated shift at a younger age, heightening their challenges (Baker, 2017; Phillips et al., 2024). Unlike their peers, who typically experience a gradual transition shaped by cultural and structural norms, CEYP's transition is

often compressed and accelerated at 18 (López et al., 2013). Many report experiencing 'instant adulthood' (Paulsen & Berg, 2016), confronting adult responsibilities at a much faster pace (Palmer et al., 2022).

While the general transition to adulthood has become more prolonged and personalised, care systems have yet to adapt to these evolving expectations (Goyette, 2019). Often based on outdated chronological milestones and legislative thresholds, these systems can push YP into premature adulthood, overlooking the opportunities and choices that define emerging adulthood (McGhee & Deeley, 2022). Understanding the lived experiences of CEYP during this period is essential for shaping more effective policies and support systems, providing a clear rationale for this study.

1.4 Context of the Research: The Leaving Care System and its Legislative Landscape

1.4.1 National Context

In England, the leaving care system is governed by several legal and policy frameworks designed to support CEYP. Relevant legislation includes the Children Act 1989³, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000⁴, the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, the Children and Families Act 2014⁵, the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (2015), and the Children and Social Work Act 2017⁶. These measures reinforce LAs' responsibilities to safeguard CEYP and uphold their rights, particularly during their transition to independence. Advocacy from children's charities has played a crucial role in shaping these reforms (Van Breda et al., 2020). Notably, while all UK nations follow a corporate parenting model (see Section 1.5.2), the scope and

³ Children Act 1989: Provides the legislative framework for the care system. Sections 22A-F: outline LA' duties toward CLA. Sections 23-24 focus on LA responsibilities for CEYP.

⁴ Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000: Defines the rights and entitlements for young people leaving care.

⁵ Children and Families Act 2014: Introduced additional rights related to court proceedings and introduced the 'Staying Put' initiative.

⁶ Children and Social Work Act 2017: Expanded corporate parenting principles and enhanced duties to young CEYP

implementation of after-care support vary depending on regional policy, funding and legislation (Gilligan & Brady, 2023).

Beyond legislation, various policy initiatives and strategies have been established to address barriers and improve outcomes for CEYP. Notable examples include the DfE's 2016 *Keep on Caring* report, the Care Leaver Strategy (2013), and the Care Leaver Covenant Board (2019). Together, these initiatives emphasise the systemic disadvantages faced by CEYP, as reinforced by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022). While not legally binding, the review outlines these challenges, with Josh MacAlister OBE describing care experience as "the civil rights issue of our time" (Barnardos, 2024b) and advocating for its recognition as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2010). This proposal has sparked debate, receiving strong support from the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum and Care Leavers Association, who argue the system is in crisis, pointing to legislative gaps and the urgent need for reform.

In 2023, the Conservative government published an update on children's social care reform, outlining commitments to CEYP, including strengthening corporate parenting responsibilities, improving education, employment, and training (EET) outcomes, and expanding access to safe and stable accommodation by 2027 (DfE, 2023). The Labour government has since announced that its Spring Statement 2025 and Spending Review will include major reforms to children's social care (HM Treasury, 2024). This highlights ongoing systemic challenges, while reaffirming the government's commitment to improving support for an underserved and marginalised population (Rice & O'Connor, 2023), reinforcing the significance of this study.

1.4.2 The Role of the CP

In the UK, 'CPs' refers to the legal and moral duty of LAs, elected members, employees, and partner agencies to provide the best possible care for CLA and CEYP (Hounslow, 2025). The corporate

parenting model ensures that LAs offer the same level of care and support as a 'good parent', from healthcare to ensuring suitable accommodation (DfE, 2018). The Children and Social Work Act 2017 formally defined this responsibility, introducing seven Corporate Parenting Principles⁷ to ensure that CEYP receive secure, nurturing, and positive experiences. LAs act as CPs for all CLA and CEYP under 25. At an operational level, this duty involves a range of professionals, including EPs, working together to safeguard the education, health, and well-being of CLA and CEYP (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

1.4.2.1 Implications of Corporate Parenting Support for the Transition to Adulthood. As discussed earlier, legislation mandates that CEYP receive support during their transition from care, with LAs required to 'stay in touch' and offer statutory protection to former CLA until the age of 21 (Children and Families Act, 2014). A key element of CP support is the assignment of a Personal Advisor (PA) until the age of 25 (if requested). According to statutory guidance from the DfE, PAs coordinate and deliver essential support, including monitoring, reviewing, and implementing a PP to assist CEYP's transition to independence (DfE, 2024). LAs are also required to publish a 'local offer' detailing legal entitlements and available discretionary support (Children and Social Work Act, 2017). Additional support mechanisms established by LAs include Children in Care Councils (CiCC) and specialist support for UASC.

Understanding CP's responsibilities is crucial to tailoring services to the unique needs of CEYP during the transition, enabling professionals to advocate for their successful navigation through complex care systems. Significantly, within the national legislative context, the Bright Spots Programme (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2022) reinforces the principle that CEYP are experts in their own lives and should play a central role in shaping services. By utilising the 'Your Life, Your Care'

⁷ The seven principles of corporate parenting, as outlined in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, include: acting in the best interests of children, encouraging expression of their views, promoting high aspirations, ensuring safety and stability, and preparing for adulthood. For the full text of these principles, refer to the Children and Social Work Act, 2017.

and 'Your Life Beyond Care' survey data (Coram Voice, 2025), LAs can systematically capture CYP's voices and compare experiences across age groups, ensuring that strategic decisions and service improvements within children's social care reflect the priorities of CLA and CEYP themselves. It is hoped that corporate parents can then fulfil their duties in a way that is both evidence-informed and led by lived experiences. This research builds on that principle by further amplifying the voices of CEYP to inform and improve practice.

1.4.2.2 Defining 'Pathway Plans'. Under this model, PPs⁸ are personalised documents that outline the support and services a young person receives after leaving care, designed to facilitate successful transitions into adulthood (Atkinson & Hyde, 2019). They are a statutory requirement for 'eligible,' 'relevant,' and 'former relevant' CEYP in the UK under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The plan remains in effect until CEYP turn 21 or longer if needed, depending on individual circumstances.

PPs cover key areas such as education⁹, training, employment, accommodation, and health, aiming to support CEYP in achieving independence as part of a holistic assessment (Goddard & Barrett, 2008). They are prepared based on a 'Needs Assessment' conducted before a young person leaves care and must be reviewed regularly in line with The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 ¹⁰. CEYP's participation is fundamental to effective pathway planning (Children Act 1989 guidance and regulation), and plans must be developed in collaboration with a PA. However, as explored in Chapter 2, the lived experiences of CEYP in this process remain under-researched (Devenney, 2017), grounding the purpose and relevance of this study.

⁸ The essentials of the pathway plan are outlined in the Care Planning, Placement, and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (for Eligible Young People), the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 (for Relevant and Former Relevant Young People), and the Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers Guidance, all of which became effective on 1st April 2011.

⁹ Personal Education Plans should feed into the pathway plan (Gateshead Council, 2023).

¹⁰ Section 23B (3), pathway plan preparation, and section 23CA (3), detailing required matters, (Children Act, 1989).

1.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The importance of centralising CYP in research is well established (Lynch et al., 2021). Given the outlined complexities of CEYP's transition to adulthood, this study places their perspectives at its core while examining the systems that shape their experiences, as discussed below.

1.5.1 Children's Rights

This research is grounded in the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989), particularly Articles 12 and 13, which emphasise CYP's right to actively participate in decisions affecting their lives. Adopting this rights-based perspective as a conceptual framework ensures that CEYP remain active participants, allowing them to share their experiences, and influence the generation of knowledge (Beresford & Carr, 2016).

This approach is consistent with the study's PR methodology, which respects CEYP's agency, and creates space for them to shape the research process (Wright et al., 2023). It also reflects Article 3 of the UNCRC (1989), which establishes the best interests of CYP, by ensuring CEYP remain central throughout the study. Additionally, the UNCRC (1989) recognises the rights of children who are deprived of family care, under Article 20, reinforcing the statutory role of the CPs in providing protection and support for CEYP until the age of 25. By drawing on the UNCRC (1989) and upholding the rights to participation, protection, and provision, the study thus aligns with key UK legislation, while also addressing marginalisation and advocating for systemic change.

1.5.2 Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological Systems Theory

This serves as another conceptual framework in this study. The theory examines how multiple layers of influence, from direct relationships (microsystem) to broader societal structures, policies, and advocacy organisations (macrosystem and exosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) shape CEYP's

this framework allows for a comprehensive exploration of the systemic barriers and facilitators that impact CEYP as they leave care, while highlighting the importance of amplifying their voices to cocreate knowledge and drive change with the systems that affect them. The LR chose to adopt this systemic, rights-oriented framework (Pinkerton, 2021) to promote broader consideration of how the research findings can inform change at various levels. This stems from the understanding that meaningful reform requires looking beyond the individual to examine systemic processes (Harder et al., 2020).

1.5.3 Intersectionality Theory, and Impact of Multiple Marginalised Identities

Intersectionality ¹¹ is a theory that highlights how individuals hold multiple identities, which can result in both advantages and forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). This concept is particularly relevant to the current study, given the legislative and socio-political context that discriminates against CEYP in the UK (Kilkenny, 2012). The theory acknowledges that CEYP often face multiple layers of marginalisation, including racial, ethnic, religious, political, gender, or refugee and asylum status (Erikson, 1968). In this study, intersectionality offers a theoretical framework for amplifying diverse CEYP's voices, recognising them as a heterogeneous group whose intersecting identities and backgrounds shape their experience of transitioning to adulthood.

1.6 Educational Psychologists: Supporting CEYP

EP is a protected title, regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (Gledhill, 2023). EPs support CYP aged 0-25 across individual, group and organisational levels (British Psychological Society [BPS], 2022). With their broad remit and systemic perspective, they are

¹¹ Intersectionality theory considers the interaction between different aspects of one's identity that can contribute to experiences of power, privilege, oppression and marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989).

therefore well positioned to support CEYP, and their contribution to corporate parenting has been increasingly recognised (Francis et al., 2021).

EPs work across diverse settings, including the Virtual School¹², with many services now focusing on 'community' in their title to reflect this wider scope (Hill, 2013). The Children and Families Act (2014) also extended the EP role to support vulnerable YP up to the age of 25, creating new opportunities to contribute to transition planning and preparation for adulthood (Atkinson et al., 2015). However, despite their expertise in areas central to transition, EPs are generally not involved in the EET sections of PPs or future planning more widely (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). This study argues that given their specialist knowledge and interactionist approach, they are well-placed to shape and enhance the LA local offer for CEYP, as later explored.

1.7 Focus of the Present Research and Personal and Professional Motivations

The research is grounded in the understanding that effective transition policies and after-care services play a crucial role in supporting CEYP's journey into adulthood and independence (Starr et al., 2024). Specifically, this study explores CEYP's experiences of PPs as key tools in transition planning.

It feels important to discuss the LR's personal motivations and journey towards this research focus. Their interest in supporting CLA and CEYP was initially shaped by a close familial connection to the UK children's social care system. This interest was deepened by professional experiences as a Trainee EP (TEP), working with CEYP and collaboratively with Virtual Schools and Social Workers (SW). During this time, The LR observed limited gaps in awareness, understanding and systemic

¹² Virtual Schools are statutory services which fulfils the Local Authority's duties in promoting the best possible education provision and outcomes for children and young people in care, previously in care and those with a social worker. It is a team that offers advice, support and monitoring for these students, ensuring educational needs are met (Worcestershire City Council, 2025).

support for CEYP within their LA, coupled with considerable discourse in contemporary media pertaining to their poor life outcomes (Become, 2024).

During their training at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, the LR further developed a deep understanding of social justice in EP practice, specifically, the role of EPs in ensuring that CYP are not disadvantaged by their circumstances of birth (Fox, 2015). This felt particularly relevant for CYP in care, given the well-documented impact on their development, identity, and long-term outcomes (Brown, 2023). The LR's growing interest in adopting an approach that centres on listening to CEYP's stories and collaborating with them ultimately shaped the focus of this study.

1.7.1 Interest in Participatory Research

PR is an approach that addresses power dynamics and fosters collaboration, promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010; Aldridge, 2017). However, some argue that epistemological tensions within research methods can still marginalise vulnerable groups (Spencer et al., 2020). Research also highlights the limited participation of CEYP in studies (Van Breda et al., 2020; Warrington et al., 2024), reinforcing the need for more inclusive approaches. This study positions CEYP as active contributors, shaping the research focus and process, while centring their authentic perspectives and challenging traditional power hierarchies (Wallace & Giles, 2019). In this way, the LR viewed the research as more than a piece of academic work, but a platform to empower CEYP through meaningful involvement. The LR's motivations for adopting this approach are reflected in the diary extract (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Reflexive Diary Extract: Interest in Participatory Research

Reflections on Interest in Participatory Research

My interest in PR developed during my time as a Research Assistant, working alongside government departments such as the DfE and DoH. I became increasingly aware of how research agendas and priorities were often shaped by adult stakeholders, with little to no involvement from young people in areas of research and policy that directly affected their lives. This disconnect between adult-led research and the lived experiences of CYP

reinforced, for me, the urgent need for more inclusive, youth-driven research

methodologies.

My first direct introduction of PR came later, when I worked as an Assistant Educational Psychologist in an outer London borough. Co-conducting a participatory action research project, using an appreciative inquiry framework, opened my eyes to the empowering potential of participatory approaches. I saw how it could amplify children's voices, enhance engagement, and build capacity within primary school settings. The experience deepened my commitment to embedding youth-driven principles within EP practice,

recognising CYP as experts in their own experience.

While I remained mindful of the potential challenges associated with PR, particularly given that participatory designs were not historically common among trainees on my course at the Tavistock, my prior experiences motivated me to pursue a research approach that aligned with my broader professional values and contribute to an

emancipatory model of EP practice.

1.8 Chapter Summary

These motivations behind the research have shaped its direction. There is a recognised need

for systems and professionals to drive change in order to promote positive outcomes for CEYP post-

care. This paper positions CEYP as experts in their own lives and within the research domain. Given

that the transition to adulthood for CEYP remains a significant concern for educators and

policymakers, the LR illuminates pathway planning as a process with potential influence yet warrants

further investigation. The research is grounded in Children's Rights, systemic, and intersectional

frameworks, and is guided by a participatory ethos. Chapter 3 discusses the specific aims, design, and methodological approach of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

To build on the context and rationale in Chapter 1, this chapter reviews existing research on CEYPs experiences of leaving care. It begins by outlining the purpose of the literature review and stating the key question it seeks to address. The review methodology is then explained, including the systematic search strategy and the criteria for including and excluding articles. The selected literature is critically appraised, and key findings are synthesised thematically. Finally, the findings are discussed in relation to the review question, highlighting a gap in the current evidence base and providing rationale for the present study.

2.2 Literature Review Purpose and Questions

A literature review analyses and synthesises existing research to address specific questions and establish a foundation for further studies (Hempel et al., 2022). This review focuses on the lived experiences of CEYP transitioning from care, emphasising studies that focus on YP's voices and perspectives. Rather than providing an exhaustive overview, it aims to contextualise what is known about CEYP and leaving care (Braun & Clarke, 2021), thereby justifying the focus of this research. The systematic review aims to answer the following question:

What Does the Existing Literature Tell Us About CEYPs Experiences of the Transition out of Care?

2.3 Literature Search Strategy

A systematic and transparent approach was used to identify relevant literature, synthesise evidence across studies and ensure replicability and thoroughness (Siddaway et al., 2019). This involved a comprehensive, structured search designed to address the literature review question, with clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

2.3.1 Databases

Four electronic databases: PsycINFO, PsycArticles, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, ERIC, Education Source, and SocINDEX, were selected to capture research across a range of disciplines, including psychology, social work, and education. In April 2024, these databases were searched concurrently via The Tavistock and Portman Trust Library's EBSCOhost online research platform.

Acknowledging the limitations of electronic searches (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005), a more dynamic approach was also used to identify relevant literature. This included reference-mining, examining the reference lists of retrieved articles, as an efficient strategy to identify relevant studies already investigated by other authors (Hempel et al., 2022). Given that a single database search often captures only one-third of relevant articles (Bown & Sutton, 2010), a supplementary hand search using Google Scholar was also conducted to ensure comprehensive coverage (Newman & Gough, 2020). Additional searches were carried out in July 2024 and March 2025 to maintain the review's relevance and currency.

2.3.2 Search Terms

The search strategy was designed to capture a broad range of studies relevant to the review question, with refinement guided by the inclusion criteria. Key search terms were developed around core topics relevant to the review question (Hempel et al., 2022) (Table 1), using truncation symbols to capture variations of terms and plurals. Boolean operators "OR" and "AND" were used to combine concepts effectively and locate relevant literature. Terms including 'PP' were included to capture policy-related aspects of transitions, even if not explicitly stated in the review question.

Table 1
Search Terms Used in the Literature Review

Subject Mapping Terms	Key Word Search Terms	Filters Considered	Rationale
1. care leaver AND	Leaving care OR LAC OR previously looked after OR care experience*	TITLE	The LR aimed to review research focused on this population.
2. transition* AND	adulthood OR pathway plan* OR independence OR leaving care	ABSTRACT	The LR sought to explore the transition to adulthood.
3. UK AND	UK OR England OR Wales OR Scotland OR Northern Ireland	ABSTRACT	Terms for each UK country were included to ensure comprehensive coverage.
4. experience*	OR perspective* OR view* OR story OR belief* OR attitude*	ABSTRACT	The LR aimed to explore the lived experiences of CEYP, using search terms reflecting views experiences and perspectives.

2.3.3 Literature Selection

2.3.3.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria. To ensure relevance to the review question and for transparency and trustworthiness, inclusion and exclusion criteria were created before the search (Table 2). These were slightly refined during the initial stages to include additional terms and locations, to broaden the scope and enrich the results (Newman & Gough, 2020). The review focused on original research studies and excluded systematic reviews to allow for in-depth analysis of individual methodologies, findings, and limitations. Although grey literature can be of high-quality, it was

excluded to prioritise peer-reviewed sources. This decision was supported by the substantial body of existing research, which was considered sufficient to establish context (Benzies et al., 2006).

 Table 2

 Systematic Literature Review Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Language: Articles written	Articles not written in	Ensures the LR can accurately critique
in English	English	and summarise studies.
Country: Studies conducted in the United Kingdom (UK)	Studies conducted outside the UK.	The UK has specific legal, social, and cultural frameworks to support CLA and CEYP. Focusing on UK-based studies ensures relevance to this unique context.
Publication: Articles published in peer-reviewed journals	Articles published in non- peer-reviewed journals or sources (e.g., grey literature [theses], books, magazines, essays).	Ensures research quality and credibility by only including studies subject to peer review processes.
Date: Articles between 2000-2025	Articles published before 2000	The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 introduced key changes affecting CEYP, making it a relevant starting point for this research.
Study Focus and Approach: Articles exploring CEYPs' experiences of the transition from care	Articles focusing solely on professional perspectives without including CEYPs' voices.	Ensures the alignment with this research' focus on CEYP lived experiences.
Type of Study: Qualitative studies and mixed methods studies (where a qualitative element explores subjective experiences)	Systematic reviews or quantitative-only studies	Ensures inclusion of original empirical research capturing in-depth, subjective experiences of CEYPs, rather than synthesised or statistical findings.

Only English-language papers were included for accessibility and clarity, as this is the LR's first language. The review focused on UK-based studies due to significant global differences in leaving care legislation, care models, and eligibility criteria (Stubbs et al., 2023). While international literature

was acknowledged, it was excluded to maintain a UK-specific context. Additionally, studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic were included to reflect CEYPs' unique transitional experiences during this time.

2.3.3.2 Selection Process. The initial database search returned 93 articles. After removing duplicates, 61 remained. Of these, 54 met the eligibility criteria and were deemed suitable by the LR for further exploration. Titles and abstracts were then screened for relevance to the review question (see Appendix A for a summary of the assessed texts, including the rationale for inclusion and exclusion), resulting in 36 studies eligible for full-text analysis. The large number of initial articles may reflect a growing body of literature on the lived experiences of CEYP (Ellis & Johnston, 2024).

After full-text review, 21 articles were excluded, leaving 15 for inclusion. An additional 7 articles were identified through hand-searching and snowballing, bringing the total number of studies included in the literature review to 22 (see Appendix B). The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020; Page et al., 2021) (Appendix C) illustrates the study selection, screening and inclusion process, supporting transparency and rigour.

2.4 Literature Overview and Appraisal

2.4.1 Organisation of the Literature Review

A data extraction table was developed during the full-text review to systematically capture key information from each study (Hempel et al., 2022). This included details such as the target population, methodological approach, key findings, and relevant critiques (see Appendix D). In addition, each study was assessed using a critical appraisal tool, as outlined below.

2.4.1.1 A Note on Critical Appraisal. Critical appraisal is a key component of a systematic literature review, used to evaluate the quality, relevance and contribution of included studies (Templier & Paré, 2015). In quantitative research, this involves applying positivist criteria such as validity and

reliability, rooted in the belief that research can uncover objective truths, while acknowledging potential flaws. In contrast, evaluating qualitative research, where universal truths are often rejected, requires different criteria such as credibility, transferability, and dependability (Garside, 2014).

2.4.1.2 Critical Appraisal Tools. The selected studies were critically evaluated using the following tools, based on their respective methodologies:

- The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Research Checklist (CASP, 2018) (Appendix E).
- The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Version 2018 (Hong et al., 2018) (Appendices F, G and H).

These frameworks guided the examination of the cited literature, rather than offering definitive quality assessments, helping the LR evaluate the studies' quality, relevance and strengths and weaknesses (Maeda et al., 2023). Drawing on key aspects of these appraisal tools, an overview of the literature follows.

2.4.2 Aims and Methodology

This literature review examined a diverse range of studies, each with distinct aims and methodologies. While all focused to some extent on CEYPs experiences of transitioning from care, several placed particular emphasis on CEYPs narratives, identities, needs and priorities during this process (Hiles et al., 2014; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019; Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014).

Two studies explored this period through the lens of internal conversations and theories of agency and emerging adulthood (Barratt et al., 2020; Hung & Appleton, 2015). Many highlighted emotional support as a protective factor for CEYP, with some examining this concept directly (Adley

& Jupp Kina, 2017). One study specifically on mentoring relationships and their positive impact on CEYPs' transitions (Clayden & Stein, 2005).

Several studies explored CEYPs experiences of mental health, wellbeing and interactions with health and social care systems during their transition (Butterworth et al., 2017; Dixon, 2008; Goddard & Barrett, 2008; Liabo et al., 2016; Matthews & Sykes, 2012; Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017). Others examined transitions in the context of higher education (HE) and employment (Driscoll, 2013; Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021; Simpson & Murphy, 2022). Research also centred on resilience, exploring the role of identity and relationships in fostering independence beyond care (Driscoll, 2013; Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021; Schofield et al., 2017), with one applying self-determination theory (SDT) (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

Two studies evaluated targeted interventions aimed at supporting CEYP's transitions (Goddard & Barrett, 2008; Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017). Three others examined CEYPs experiences transitioning to independence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022; Kelly et a., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021). Another study (Devenney, 2017) investigated the pathway planning experiences of Unaccompanied Young People (UYP)¹³, offering insights into the unique challenges faced by this subgroup. Finally, Priestley et al. (2003), investigated the experiences of CEYP with SEND, focusing on the 'New Arrangements for Leaving Care' reforms introduced under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The transition to adulthood was identified as a key focus.

To meet these varied aims, 19 of 22 studies employed qualitative methodologies, effectively capturing CEYP's perspectives and lived experiences through different research designs. Three studies

¹³ An unaccompanied asylum-seeking child, as defined by the UK Border Agency (UKBA), is a person under 18 years old (or appears to be if age cannot be verified) who is seeking asylum independently, without an adult relative or guardian to provide care in the country (Home Office, 2002).

adopted mixed methods approaches (Clayden & Stein, 2005; Dixon, 2008; Goddard & Barrett, 2008), as explored below.

2.4.3 Participants

The included studies focused on CEYP in the UK, encompassing diverse care experiences such as residential, foster, and kinship care. This ensured findings captured the complex, individual pathways CEYP navigate during their transition from care. The research consistently outlined the importance of including CEYP in transition studies, given their limited control over decisions affecting their lives and the expectation to achieve independence earlier than their peers (Driscoll, 2013; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). While some studies also examined the perspectives of professionals supporting CEYP, this review prioritised findings on CEYP's experiences to align with its objectives.

Demographic characteristics varied across the included research. Participants were aged 16 or older, with some studies focusing on 16-17-year-olds still in care during transition planning (Liabo et al., 2016; Matthews & Sykes, 2012). Gender representation also differed, with higher proportions of female participants in some studies (Goddard & Barrett, 2008; Kelly et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021), gender balance in others (Driscoll, 2013; Pert et al., 2017), and a predominance of males in a few (Schofield et al., 2017). Notably, one study focused exclusively on male participants (Hiles et al., 2014).

Importantly, ethnic diversity within the samples was generally limited, with several studies focusing on White British participants, despite the over-representation of minoritised ethnic groups within the social care system (Sacker et al., 2024). The literature called for future research to engage with diverse populations and examine how intersecting aspects of identity shape CEYP's experiences (Schofield et al., 2017). That said, one study exclusively explored the perspectives of UYP (Devenney, 2017), defined as former UASC. While the term UYP is specific to this paper, it aligns with the broader term UASC used throughout this study.

2.4.4 Sampling and Recruitment

The quality of studies reviewed was generally strong but varied in sample selection and size. Engaging CEYP, a historically 'hard-to-reach' (Aldridge, 2016) population, presented challenges for sampling and recruitment. Most studies employed purposive or convenience sampling, often characterised as opportunistic in nature (Barratt et al., 2020; Butterworth et al., 2017; Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022; Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021; Hiles et al., 2014; Hung & Appleton, 2015; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019; Kelly et al., 2021; Pert, Diaz, & Thomas, 2017; Priestley et al., 2003; Roberts, Mannay, et al., 2021; Schofield et al., 2017). Snowball sampling was used in one study (Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014), while random sampling was applied in others, either through questionnaires distributed to eligible CEYP within a LA (Goddard & Barrett, 2008) or within a stratified sample from a project database (Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017).

A recurring limitation across studies was the narrow scope of recruitment, often restricted to one or a small number of LAs, where researchers had pre-existing networks. Only one study expanded recruitment across six LAs (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). Recruitment frequently replied on LA networks, including CiCCs and CL services (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; Butterworth et al., 2017; Driscoll, 2013; Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021), independent CEYP charities or organisations (Hung & Appleton, 2015; Kelly et al., 2021), or a combination of sources (Roberts et al., 2021). While these approaches were effective in securing participation and insight, they may limit the generalisability of the findings due to small, geographically constrained samples (Liabo et al., 2016; Matthews & Sykes, 2012).

Additionally, sampling often favoured more engaged CEYP, potentially excluding the most marginalised. While some studies provided clear inclusion criteria, such as time living in care or living arrangements (Driscoll, 2013; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019), others lacked explicit criteria but still aligned with the research focus (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). Notably, CEYP with SEND were

underrepresented, despite their overrepresentation in the care population, highlighting the need for future research to ensure greater inclusivity (Priestley et al., 2003).

2.4.5 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

2.4.5.1 Data Collection. Most studies employed qualitative methodologies to explore CEYP's lived experiences. These studies favoured data collection methods that allowed for in-depth investigation, including semi-structured and open-ended interviews (Barratt et al., 2020; Devenney, 2017; Goddard & Barrett, 2008; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019; Matthews & Sykes, 2012; Pert, Diaz, & Thomas, 2017; Priestley et al., 2003; Schofield et al., 2017; Simpson & Murphy, 2022; Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017), biographical interviews (Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014) and focus groups (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022; Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021; Hiles et al., 2014). One study combined qualitative surveys with focus groups (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022).

Creative, person-centred approaches were also common. These included pictorial exercises (Liabo et al., 2016), Social Network Mapping (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; Tracy & Whittaker, 1990), art-based methods (Roberts et al., 2021), and visual techniques in interviews, amplifying CEYP's voices and fostering their agency in the research process (Matthews & Sykes, 2012).

Three mixed-methods studies incorporated quantitative data collection tools. Clayden and Stein (2005) conducted statistical analysis on 181 mentoring relationships, while (Dixon, 2008) utilised the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), the Lancashire Quality of Life Profile, and Cantril's Ladder (Cantril, 1965)¹⁴, to examine mental and physical health outcomes. Goddard and Barrett (2008) highlighted the advantages of using questionnaires, noting their ability to elicit honest responses and their utility in guiding subsequent interviews.

_

¹⁴ Adapted from Lehman's Quality of Life Interview (Lehman, 1988)

Some studies triangulated data from CEYP with information from key stakeholders including PAs, leaving care workers and healthcare professionals (Dixon, 2008; Hiles et al., 2014; Liabo et al., 2016). Others employed documentary analysis of organisational data to contextualise CEYP's narratives (Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017) or used auto-ethnographical data for self-reflection and critical examination of participation (Hiles et al., 2014).

The growing recognition of participatory methodologies was evident in the literature. Five studies demonstrated this by actively involving CEYP in steering groups, piloting interview questions, designing questionnaire items, and collaborating with advisory groups to validate findings and shape research agendas (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022; Goddard & Barrett, 2008; Liabo et al., 2016; Matthews & Sykes, 2012; Priestley et al., 2003). These approaches reflect co-production practices, positioning CEYP as active co-researchers rather than passive participants (Dixon et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the need for more emancipatory research to empower CEYP was consistently referenced, reinforcing the value of this study's participatory approach.

2.4.5.2 Data Analysis. A range of qualitative data analysis methods were used, described to varying extents (Table 3).

Table 3 *Qualitative Data Analysis Methods Used in Reviewed Studies*

Qualitative Method	Studies
Thematic Analysis	Adley & Jupp Kina (2017); Butterworth et al., (2017); Dadswell and O'Brien (2022); Furey and Harris-Evans (2021); Hiles et al., 2014; Hyde and Atkinson (2019); Kelly et al., (2021); Liabo et al., (2016); Matthews and Sykes, (2012); Roberts et al., (2021); Simpson and Murphy, (2022)
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	Barratt et al., (2020); Hung and Appleton (2015)
Grounded Theory Approaches	Driscoll (2013); Priestley et al., (2003)
Narrative Methods	Pinkerton and Rooney (2014); Schofield et al., (2017)

Some studies demonstrated methodological strength by offering detailed descriptions of their analysis processes and supporting their themes with illustrative participant quotes (Devenney, 2017; Hiles et al., 2014). However, others provided limited detail on their analysis procedure, reducing transparency.

Mixed-method studies effectively integrated qualitative and quantitative findings, which provided a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (Clayden & Stein, 2005; Goddard & Barrett, 2008) and inferential statistics with effect sizes reported (Dixon, 2008).

2.4.6 Reflexivity

While most of the 22 reviewed studies acknowledged their philosophical positions, only one (Hiles et al., 2014) explicitly addressed reflexivity, a critical component when researching vulnerable populations like CEYP. In that study, the author reflected on their identity as a White British male in

their 30s and considered how this may have shaped the research process. Reflexivity, defined as the researcher's ongoing self-examination of their assumptions, biases, and impact on the research (Jamieson et al., 2023), is essential when working with CEYP, whose lived experiences are often marked by trauma, disrupted attachments and systemic disadvantage (Yousuf, 2024). The general absence of reflexivity across the literature highlights a methodological gap that this research seeks to address.

2.4.7 Ethics

Ethical considerations were addressed across the reviewed studies, each obtaining the necessary ethical approval. This included gaining informed consent from YP and ensuring confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms (Simpson & Murphy, 2022). Furthermore, the vulnerability of this group was consistently acknowledged, with studies demonstrating sensitivity in how participants' experiences and personal information were managed. However, the depth of ethical engagement varied, with some offering more limited reflection on how ethical processes shaped the study.

2.4.8 Value of Existing Literature

A key strength of the existing literature is its focus on CEYP, an under-researched population, offering valuable insights into their experiences during the transition from care. These studies are strengthened by their efforts to amplify the voices of CEYP, highlighting their unique perspectives and the complexities they face in transitioning to adulthood (Staples et al., 2019). Furthermore, the literature provides important recommendations for supporting CEYP and guiding CPs, including PAs, SWs, educators, and policymakers.

Despite this, a notable gap remains in understanding the specific statutory processes supporting CEYP during this transition (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019), particularly regarding how CEYP perceive and

experience transition processes. The current study address this by examining CEYP's perspectives on the role of PPs in the transition to adulthood.

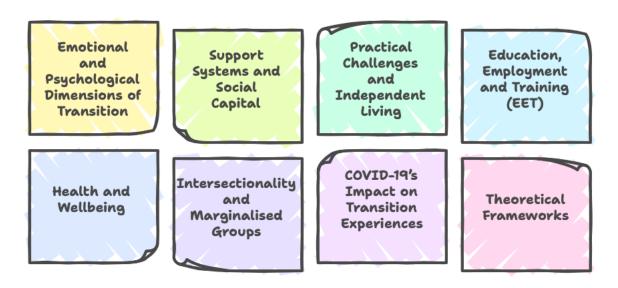
2.5 Literature Review Themes.

To better understand CEYPs' experiences in the UK, the included studies were thematically analysed (Hempel et al., 2022). Key findings were grouped into common themes to identify core factors and capture CEYPs' perspectives (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This process produced eight main themes (Figure 2), most with subthemes, closely aligned with the reviewed literature. Where applicable, themes were weighted based on their relevance to YP's lived experiences, aligning with the study's participatory focus and centring CEYP's voices.

Quotes from participants were not included in the thematic synthesis of qualitative studies as the focus was on synthesising and interpreting authors' analyses rather than re-presenting raw data. This approach ensures consistency across the reviewed studies, many of which provided limited or selectively chosen participant quotations and avoids the risk of misrepresenting participants' voices out of context.

Figure 2

Key Themes Identified in the Literature Review



Note. These are the key themes that emerged from the literature review, highlighting core factors shaping CEYP's experiences of transitioning to independence.

2.5.1 Emotional and Psychological Dimensions of Transition

2.5.1.1 Accelerated Transitions to Adulthood. A recurring theme was that CEYP experience accelerated and compressed transitions to adulthood, often being pushed into independence earlier than their peers (Butterworth et al., 2017; Hiles et al., 2014; Stein, 2008). Independence was frequently described as a shock, with the reality differing from expectations (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). This shift led to identity confusion, with some CEYP reporting finding themselves in a state of limbo; on the one hand 'leaving care' but still relying on professional support for up to 8 years (Hiles et al., 2014). Notably, CEYP emphasised the importance of balancing this support with autonomy (Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014). Overall, the literature illustrated that positive transitions from care were perceived by CEYP as early, graduated, individual, co-produced, consistent and planned, facilitating YP to make informed planning decisions (Liabo et al., 2016).

2.5.1.2 Emotional Impact. Across all studies, the emotional journey of leaving care was very individual. A lack of emotional readiness for independence was cited. Gaps in emotional support when

Atkinson, 2019). This was marked by a stark contrast between the initial excitement around leaving care and the reality of facing unpreparedness for adult responsibilities (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). Many voiced struggles with adapting to being on their own, exacerbated by the absence of a parental figure, which contributed to feelings of powerlessness, instability, and a lack of belonging (Butterworth et al., 2017).

The mixed emotions associated with this transition often included excitement about newfound freedom, alongside the pressures of navigating adulthood without sufficient support (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021). YP aged 16-17 generally look forward to the autonomy of independent living, such as having their own flat, a driving license, or a job, however, this eagerness also led to social isolation and anxiety after leaving placements, particularly foster care (Liabo et al., 2016).

The transition from dependence to independence thus presented a polarised situation: while those in care benefitted from a more sheltered environment, those who left care often faced significant challenges (Matthews & Sykes, 2012). As such, CEYP expressed conflicting feelings about their identity and responsibilities, torn between feeling like a child and being expected to act as an adult (Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014). This illustrates the need for a more nuanced approach to support - one that fosters independence, a developing sense of self, and prioritises emotional wellbeing during this critical life stage.

2.6 Support Systems and Social Capital

Emotional support emerged as critical for a successful transition to independence (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021). Across the literature CEYP emphasised the transformative power of strong support networks and meaningful relationships in shaping positive outcomes after leaving care (Roberts et al., 2021).

2.6.1 Informal Support Networks. Studies emphasised that an extensive social network was vital to CEYP. However, the long-term benefits of positive relationships were frequently overlooked (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; Hiles et al., 2014). Diminishing or lost support networks was also noted as undermining readiness for independence (Butterworth et al., 2017; Matthews & Sykes, 2012).

CEYP actively negotiated meaningful support within personal relationships, with their social networks evolving to meet their changing needs and contexts. For some, romantic partners played a crucial role by providing emotional support, encouragement, and modelling independence skills (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021; Hiles et al., 2014). A few CEYP also viewed re-established connections with their families as offering them a 'safety net' and motivation for their transition to independent living (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). However, many did not view their immediate birth families as supportive in making decisions about their future, often due to perceived disinterest, mental health issues, or harmful influences (Driscoll, 2013). Over time, relationships with foster carers also tended to become more distant, reflecting the transient nature of familial connections (Hiles et al., 2014).

Interestingly, social media and online networks played a supportive role for some CEYP, although this was not a widely discussed theme in the research (Hiles et al., 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the critical role of informal support networks, as CEYP faced increased loneliness and social disconnection due to the absence of formal support structures (Kelly et al., 2021).

Yet these relationships also revealed vulnerabilities. Some CEYP were reluctant to trust others, feeling abandoned by their families, foster care, and wider health and social care systems (Butterworth et al., 2017; Goddard & Barrett, 2008). This mistrust often led CEYPs to distance themselves from both close relationships and support services, making it harder to build to build trusting relationships (Butterworth et al., 2017). This reinforces the essential role that professionals can play in providing emotional containment and building trust-based connections.

2.6.2 Formal Support and CPs. Participants mentioned the value of connectedness and relationship-based practice in interactions with professionals including SWs and PAs (Kelly et al., 2021). CEYP were more likely to engage with support perceived that was perceived as personalised, genuine, and caring, as it fostered autonomy and competence (Driscoll, 2013; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019; Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014). In residential care, forming 'family-like' bonds with carers also provided a sense of permanence and belonging (Schofield et al., 2017).

Ongoing support beyond formal transition points was crucial, as CEYP felt their transition journey extended beyond an official cut-off. To avoid the 'care cliff' they valued proactive professionals who identified gaps in support before leaving care (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; Hiles et al., 2014). Professionals who maintained consistent engagement, offering emotional stability, fostering agency and providing someone to talk to, were appreciated by CEYP, as these helped shift their narratives towards greater resilience (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021; Schofield et al., 2017; Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017). Support workers in semi-independent living arrangements were also valued for modelling life skills, such as applying for passports and adapted housing applications, while providing emotional support (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019; Liabo et al., 2016).

Mentoring was another valuable support mechanism, offering a flexible, personalised alternative to formal interactions with PAs. CEYP reported that mentors helped them achieve their goals and develop independent living skills (Clayden & Stein, 2005; Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014). While the roles of mentors were sometimes unclear, their emotional guidance and consistency were crucial, especially for CEYP who had experienced placement instability (Clayden & Stein, 2005). This aligns with research showing that CEYP value having a consistent, trustworthy figure in their lives, regardless of their role (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021).

However, some CEYP felt professional intervention were structured to set them up for failure, with support often limited to a minimum and only offered when critical (Sims-Schouten & Hayden,

2017). Many reported a decline in assistance from SWs and other professionals once they reached adulthood, leaving them feeling unsupported (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021; Hiles et al., 2014). Such disparities in support quality led to mistrust and withdrawal, with some SWs seen as lacking insight into CEYP's experiences (Goddard & Barrett, 2008; Liabo et al., 2016). These findings highlight the need for a revision of transition support structures and greater sustained contact between professionals and CEYP for smooth transitions (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022).

2.6.3 Corporate Parenting Processes. CEYPs generally reported feeling unprepared and misunderstood, citing impersonal corporate parenting and systemic barriers within the leaving care process (Goddard & Barrett, 2008).

2.6.3.1 Navigating Transition Planning: Challenges in Decision-Making and Building Autonomy. The literature highlighted significant issues in decision-making processes, particularly the limited involvement of CEYP. Transition planning was often described as predominantly adult-led, with CEYPs' input treated as secondary. This led to feelings of exclusion and perceptions that decisions were made about them rather than with them, resulting in support being viewed as inappropriate or forced (Butterworth et al., 2017; Hiles et al., 2014; Liabo et al., 2016). CEYP also wanted extended support from post-16 social care services earlier in their post-care transition (Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014).

Active involvement in decision-making was identified as crucial for fostering autonomy and competence (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). Although opportunities for formal participation existed, such as in the recruitment of SWs, CEYP often felt their input was limited and undervalued (Liabo et al., 2016). Many also felt unprepared for care-related meetings, limiting their ability to influence outcomes and contributing to a sense of powerlessness (Butterworth et al., 2017). Driscoll (2013) further observed that interactions with social services felt impersonal, leading some CEYPs to reject support and adopt self-reliance as a coping mechanism.

Striking a balance between protection and participation was considered critical; without it, CEYP often struggled to receive adequate support as they transitioned to independent decision-making upon turning 18. Liabo et al. (2016) argued that meaningful involvement in transition planning must promote both autonomy and wellbeing.

2.6.3.2 Pathway Planning as a Formal Support Mechanism. Few studies explicitly explored CEYP's experiences of pathway planning. Where research was available, the process was described as a bureaucratic, "tick-box" exercise, lacking meaningful engagement and tailored support for the preparation for adulthood or future planning (Butterworth et al., 2017; Driscoll, 2013; Matthews & Sykes, 2012). Some in Butterworth's (2017) study reported that those overseeing pathway planning seemed to be fulfilling a contractual obligation over offering genuine interest.

PPs were also reported to be outdated, incomplete, or missing key information, for some, only initiated when they were about to leave care (Butterworth et al., 2017; Matthews & Sykes, 2012). This resulted in participants reporting that their plans did not align with their aspirations or setting long-term goals, contributing to marginalisation and disengagement (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). CEYP further identified key barriers to successful future planning and engagement including having their voices overlooked, their accommodation and identity needs unrecognised and feeling excluded from the planning process (Butterworth et al., 2017; Devenney, 2017). Ofsted (2024) echoed these findings, reporting that 23% of CEYP felt disengaged and excluded from their PPs, perceiving them as unlikely to lead to meaningful change.

Inconsistent implementation of PPs was cited by CEYP, despite statutory guidelines mandating regular reviews. Participants called for more frequent and sustained PP meetings, rather than isolated or tokenistic events (Butterworth et al., 2017). Flexibility and timing were also valued, with some CEYP declining limited, single session offers of budgeting or cooking support. Instead, they preferred ongoing, practical opportunities to develop independence, such as managing their own medical

appointments, prior to leaving care (Butterworth et al., 2017; Matthews & Sykes, 2012). PPs were received more positively when they incorporated CEYP's future aspirations and personal narratives (Devenney, 2017). Mentors, collaborating with PAs, were also seen as valuable in goal setting and transition planning, particularly when relationships were strong, and the process was collaborative (Clayden & Stein, 2005).

Lastly, pathway planning was identified as particularly complex for UASC due to uncertainties surrounding their asylum claims. To address this, the 'triple planning' strategy was proposed, preparing YP for three possible outcomes: asylum refusal, granted status, or prolonged waiting periods (Devenney, 2017).

While existing research highlights key issues, focused exploration of pathway planning, remains limited, making this study particularly timely.

2.7 Practical Challenges and Independent Living

Housing, financial support, and education consistently emerged as top priorities for YP during their transition out of care (Dixon, 2008; Liabo et al., 2016). CEYP expressed a preference for graduated models of independence that allowed them to build life skills development and gain autonomy gradually within a supportive environment. Key indicators of independence included tasks such as cooking, making phone calls, using public transport, and paying bills (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

2.7.1 Housing Stability. Poor accommodation or a lack of stable housing emerged as critically impacting CEYP's health and wellbeing (Goddard & Barrett, 2008). For many, housing instability forced them to prioritise immediate housing needs over other aspects of their life during the transition from care (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021). Hyde and Atkinson (2019) found that participants reported feeling insecure in semi-independent housing, anxious about securing long-term accommodation, and

feeling isolated from social networks after moving. Other barriers to independent living were noted, including the pressure to demonstrate tenancy management skills or comply with conditions such as drug testing in supported housing (Hiles et al., 2014). Moreover, CEYP with additional needs were disproportionately affected by homelessness, highlighting the critical role of appropriate housing in supporting a successful transition (Priestley et al., 2003).

These barriers reaffirmed the need for proactive support systems. For example, PAs consistently played a key role in ensuring that post-care housing needs met the specific needs of CEYP, emphasising the importance of stable housing as a foundation for independence (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021). Furthermore, exercising choice in post-16 living arrangements, alongside supportive relationships with key workers in semi-independent accommodations, fostered CEYP's sense of control, encouraging them to engage in independent living (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

2.7.2 Financial Strain. The literature spoke of CEYP's legacy of financial limitations (Simpson & Murphy, 2022). Financial concerns were a significant priority for YP transitioning out of the care system, with money management being a critical aspect of their independence (Matthews & Sykes, 2012). Many CEYP reported that inadequate money management skills negatively impacted their ability to live independently, leading to varying levels of dependence on others for financial support (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). Although PAs offered guidance on managing finances, some YP perceived this advice as too directive or patronising, which led to its rejection (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). Additionally, there were notable uncertainties surrounding financial support, as it was often only available to those who remained in education or under the care system. Those who did not qualify for such support had to rely on statutory adult services, adding to their financial challenges (Hiles et al., 2014).

During the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, financial support from family, local charities, and leaving care services became especially valuable and greatly appreciated by YP transitioning out of care (Kelly et al., 2021).

2.7.3 Parenthood. The literature identified pregnancy as a turning point for CEYP, fostering greater autonomy alongside new responsibilities (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). While parenthood brought a sense of pride and marker of adulthood, it also exposed care-experienced parents to heightened stigma, blame, and scrutiny over their parenting practices compared to their non-care peers (Roberts et al., 2021).

Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, statutory support for care-experienced parents, shifted toward monitoring rather than providing meaningful support, leading to the perception of statutory processes as "mechanisms of surveillance" (Roberts et al., 2021, p. 11). Despite these challenges, many care-experienced parents expressed aspirations to return to education once their children were older, reflecting ongoing aspirations for personal development (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

2.8 Education, Employment and Training (EET)

2.8.1 Education Experiences. Educational qualifications were often seen as 'turning points' in shaping CEYP's futures, providing pathways for personal growth and independence (Driscoll, 2013). Early support from school staff was viewed as playing a critical role in helping CEYP build resilience for success and second-chances in education (Driscoll, 2013). Hyde and Atkinson (2019) further demonstrated how personalised teacher support positively influenced GCSE outcomes and post-16 goals.

HE was frequently seen as a transformative stage in CEYP's transition to adulthood, helping CEYP secure a positive future. Devenney (2017) found that for UASC, HE significantly improved life

outcomes for both individual and their families. Simpson and Murphy (2022) further emphasised that HE success for CEYP was often dependent on the support they receive; when universities acted as 'CPs' offering tailored support, HE was perceived as more accessible and viable.

However, CEYP encountered significant challenges compared to their peers when engaging with formal education (Simpson & Murphy, 2022). Loss, frequent moves, and impermanence in both education and social care created a cycle where CEYP rejected professional help, in turn negatively affecting their educational engagement (Driscoll, 2013). Moreover, CEYP cited the need for more assistance from CPs and education providers, showing how stable accommodation, financial and practical support facilitated success in HE (Simpson & Murphy, 2022). Barriers, such as limited knowledge of HE options, and career pathways, also hindered future aspirations and positive post-care plans; nevertheless, those who pursued HE often demonstrated strong motivation and commitment (Driscoll, 2013). Collectively, this presents a case for education provision that deeply engages with CEYP's lived experiences, beyond the legacy of care (Simpson & Murphy, 2022).

2.8.2 Employment Experiences. Barriers to employment during the transition to adulthood were frequently identified in the literature. Many CEYP experienced a 'yo-yo' phase after leaving school, shifting between jobs, education and unemployment. These challenges were often compounded by pre-care disadvantages, instability in care placements, limited support post-care and broader socioeconomic factors (Dixon, 2008; Goddard & Barrett, 2008; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

Despite these challenges, employment was consistently viewed as a key source of self-worth. Furey and Harris-Evans (2021) demonstrated how recognition from colleagues for CEYP's contributions fostered a sense of accomplishment, belonging, and motivation to succeed in the workplace. In addition, the study demonstrated the importance of professional networks and work environments as emotional support systems, fostering resilience in the transition to independence.

Continuous support from a trusted adult, including work colleagues, was also associated with successful work-related outcomes.

2.9 Health and Wellbeing

Significant and often unmet health needs, including substance abuse, physical illness, and mental health issues, were identified in the literature as ongoing challenges for CEYP, which often persisted long after leaving care (Matthews & Sykes, 2012; Driscoll, 2013). These health challenges negatively impacted overall wellbeing and hindered post-care outcomes in education, employment and independence (Dixon, 2008). Many CEYP reported a decline in mental health post-care, with anxiety and depression affecting daily functioning (Butterworth et al., 2017; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). The legacy of childhood trauma was also mentioned as contributing to enduring emotional wellbeing challenges, such as low self-esteem, low confidence and anxiety (Simpson & Murphy, 2022). Despite this, evidence suggested that CEYP often prioritised housing, finances and education over their health during the transition (Liabo et al., 2016). Significantly, stigma surrounding mental and physical health, often framed as "difficult behaviour", discouraged CEYP from seeking help, leading to disengagement from services (Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017).

Research also revealed structural challenges contributing to poor health outcomes, including housing instability, homelessness, and NEET during the first year after leaving care (Goddard & Barrett, 2008; Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017). This was exacerbated by feelings of distrust, isolation, and abandonment, often linked to inconsistent or inadequate professional support (Kelly et al., 2022; Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). The need for increased support and a more genuine approach to health and wellbeing was evident (Goddard & Barrett, 2008).

Despite struggles in disclosing health concerns, particularly mental health, CEYP expressed a strong desire for these issues to be meaningfully included into transition planning (Butterworth et al.,

2017). Collectively, the evidence called for better-coordinated healthcare services tailored to the specific needs of CEYP.

2.9.1 Transitioning to Adult Services. Being unprepared for adult services emerged as a common theme. Many CEYP shared a deep mistrust of professional involvement or intervention during this transition (Driscoll, 2013). For some, reluctance to engage was tied to identity, pride, and prior negative experiences within the care system (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). Moreover, for CEYP with SEND, particularly those with communication needs, transitioning to adult services often meant the loss of familiar contacts and friends who had acted as interpreters and advocates (Priestley et al., 2003).

A lack of integration between Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS) was frequently reported, despite its importance for a successful transition to independence (Goddard & Barrett, 2008; Hiles et al., 2014). While CLA Teams were valued for providing comprehensive health histories on leaving care, CEYP described these not being used by adult services due to differing eligibility criteria and more rigid engagement protocols (Liabo et al., 2016). This reveals a key gap in support, with CEYP calling for better interagency collaboration and consistent pathways from child to adult services (Hiles et al., 2014). Additionally, it was felt that professionals working in adult services required more training to better understand and support CEYP, with emphasis on a non-judgemental, empathetic approach (Kelly et al., 2021; Liabo et al., 2016).

2.9.2 Coordination of Services. While service transitions were identified as a core challenge, the literature also pointed to a broader need for improved coordination between services and agencies (Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017). For example, fragmentation between Family Support Teams and CLA services was seen to weaken professional relationships and delay access to early intervention (Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014).

CEYP consistently emphasised the importance of integrated, multi-agency collaboration that reflects their diverse and intersecting needs, including mental health, social care, SEND and education (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022; Priestley et al., 2003). In particular, they called for more effective joint working between PAs and specialist services, such as healthcare providers and education staff, to facilitate smoother and more coherent transitions (Liabo et al., 2016). Practical recommendations included joint visits and shared planning meetings involving care coordinators, PAs and leaving care professionals (Butterworth et al., 2017).

2.10 Intersectionality and Marginalised Groups

Notably, some studies focused on the experiences of subgroups within the care-leaving population.

2.10.1 UASC. Although the voices of UASC in leaving care were underrepresented in the literature, Devenney (2017) highlighted the profound challenges they face in the transition to adulthood, particularly around unresolved immigration status. For many, the threat of deportation created fear and hopelessness, overshadowing any aspirations or future goals. This uncertainty often resulted in 'planning drift', characterised by a lack of direction, and an inability to connect past experiences with future ambitions. As a result, UASC faced fragmented narratives, confusion, and mistrust in relationships and support systems (Devenney, 2017).

In contrast, UASC with secure immigration status navigated their transition more successfully, engaging in personal and professional development. These differential experiences emphasise the need for tailored strategies to support UASC through the transition from care. Specifically, participants highlighted that pathway planning must integrate their past experiences, current realities, and potential future to help them reconstruct their narratives and build a stable, independent future (Devenney, 2017).

2.10.2 Disability. YP with SEND were found to be significantly overrepresented among CEYP, facing distinct challenges compared to their non-SEND peers (Dixon, 2008). Priestley et al., (2003) explored the perspectives of SEND CEYP and identified additional barriers they face during transitions, including difficulties accessing information, making informed choices and navigating complex policies and planning frameworks. Further, SEND CEYP are known to experience less linear and more fragmented pathways to adulthood, raising concerns about an increased risk of social exclusion (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1999).

A lack of direct consultation with SEND CEYP often led to disengagement from transition planning, with some unaware of review meetings or excluded from key decisions, particularly around adult placements that prioritised care over autonomy. Poor pathway planning and limited PA support thus left many feeling unprepared, especially those without family support. Despite this, CEYP expressed a strong desire for independence and called for strength-based, goal-oriented planning with meaningful involvement in decisions affecting their future (Priestley et al., 2003).

2.11 COVID-19 and Transition Experiences

The COVID-19 pandemic seemingly exacerbated already challenging transitions to adulthood for CEYP. Three studies reported heightened difficulties during this period, including financial strain, limited access to technology, unstable home environments, and frequent relocations (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022; Kelly et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021). The literature revealed stark disparities in corporate parenting support, with some YP describing their transitions as a "constant battle" amid the crisis (Roberts et al., 2021). Despite this, charities and youth involvement teams were crucial in maintaining support through digital contact (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022). However, the shift to remote communication during the pandemic yielded mixed outcomes. While some reported improved connection with PAs via platforms like WhatsApp, others found digital support impersonal and

insufficient, with the absence of face-to-face interactions negatively affecting relationship quality (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022; Kelly et al., 2021).

Support varied significantly across regions and professionals, with CEYP viewing relationships with PAs and SWs as crucial for their wellbeing (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022). However, the constraints of the pandemic made it challenging to sustain a relationship-based approach, and many CEYP described feeling excluded from transition planning and decision-making. Several expressed a desire for more creative, participatory approaches that adapted to their evolving needs (Kelly et al., 2021), which informs the design of the current study.

2.12 Theoretical Frameworks

2.12.1 Attachment Theory (AT). AT was widely used to understand CEYP's transitions to independence, emphasising the importance of a "secure base" (Bowlby, 2008) and stable relationships in navigating the challenges of leaving care (Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

Adley and Jupp Kina (2017) found that participants often reported feeling unaware and confused about the reasons for their placement in care, which disrupted their attachments with birth families and caregivers. Despite this, participants frequently viewed foster carers and SWs as key attachment figures, seeing them as maternal or paternal influences. These relationships were crucial in supporting their transition, though their impact varied; while some CEYP thrived with such support, others struggled to accept and benefit from these professional relationships (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017).

Additionally, while CEYP reported a sense of pride as they moved towards independence, early attachment histories significantly influenced the formation of attachment within new relationships (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; Hiles et al., 2014). For example, CEYP with disrupted early relationships often struggled with trust, insecurity and establishing stable relationships later in life (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; Hiles et al., 2014). For those with positive attachment figures in the care system, the forced

separation at 18 triggered strong emotional responses including abandonment, compounded by the uncertainties of their futures (Butterworth et al., 2017). This highlights the need for care practices that prioritise building and maintaining supportive connections, while recognising that social and developmental readiness, rather than a fixed age, is a key factor in successful transitions (Liabo et al., 2016; Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014).

2.12.2 Resilience Theory (RT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). RT also was frequently referenced in the literature as a lens for understanding CEYP's ability to navigate adversity during and after their time in care (Rutter, 2006), as shaped by internal factors such as agency and self-worth, and external influences, including stable relationships and supportive environments (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021).

A key manifestation of resilience among CEYP is self-reliance, often developed as a coping strategy in response to a perceived lack of care or emotional support during early life (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017; Butterworth et al., 2017). The research suggested that the abrupt transition to instant adulthood can reignite self-reliance, enabling CEYP to assert control over their circumstances and further strengthen their independence (Driscoll, 2013; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019; Simpson & Murphy, 2022).

Positive relationships and enriched educational experiences were widely viewed as critical to fostering CEYPs' resilience. For example, supportive connections with trusted adults significantly impacted decision-making and provide stability during transitions (Driscoll, 2013; Schofield et al., 2017). Emotional and relational support in EET settings was also identified as key to effective transition planning, harnessing resilience and independence (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021).

SDT deepens understanding of resilience by addressing the core psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Hyde and Atkinson (2019) found relatedness to be the most influential domain for CEYP, highlighting the importance of supportive

relationships in building resilience and providing stability during transitions. SDT's emphasis on autonomy and competence further aligns closely with resilience, encouraging CEYP's active participation in their own transition planning.

While RT has been criticised for placing responsibility on individuals despite systemic disadvantages (Ellis & Johnston, 2024), the evidence base confirmed it remains a valuable framework for understanding CEYP's transition experiences. Sims-Schouten and Hayden (2017) thus called for leaving care interventions that focus on building resilience.

2.12.3 Subjectivity in Transitions: Personal Pathways to Independence. The need for individualised support was frequently explored, recognising that each CEYP experiences transition differently (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). Pinkerton and Rooney (2014) introduced the concept of 'subjective pathways', describing the transition to independence as a process shaped by personal perceptions, emotions, and experiences. These pathways are not linear, often progressing through stages such as 'loss of security' and 'finding stability' before achieving 'self-actualisation' (Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014). This aligns with participants' narratives of transitions from care as being deeply personal and shaped by unique emotional responses (Liabo et al., 2016).

2.12.4 Reflexivity and Internal Conversations. Building on this, Archer's model of reflexivity (2000, 2007) provides a deeper understanding of how CEYP navigate their transition through internal conversations, self-reflective dialogues that guide personal agency, decision-making and behaviour. Studies by Hung and Appleton (2015) and Barratt et al. (2020) applied this model to the experiences of CEYP, finding that trauma often heavily often disrupted these dialogues, contributing to poor engagement with planning for the future and a sense of powerlessness. Positioning theory 15 further enriches this understanding by highlighting how CEYP construct and reframe their

¹⁵ Positioning theory examines the normative frameworks through which individuals live their lives, and how perceptions of their character, competence, and skills are shaped within these social narratives (Harré, R., & Langenhove, L. v. (1999). Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action. (*No Title*).

identities through personal narratives. Sims-Schouten and Hayden (2017) found that trusted relationships (e.g., with care workers) were key in supporting CEYP to reposition themselves emotionally and shift from past care-based identities towards more empowered, independent roles.

Together, these frameworks highlight the importance of personalised transitional support that acknowledges the emotional experiences (subjectivity) and internal self-reflection (reflexivity), alongside the evolving narratives and identities CEYP construct through social positioning.

2.13 Conclusions and Implications

2.13.1 Key Takeaways from the Literature

This chapter critically addresses the central review question: What Does the Existing Literature Tell Us About CEYP' Experiences of the Transition out of Care? It identified key, interconnecting themes central to orientate CEYP's experiences of leaving care: the emotional and psychological dimensions of transition, support systems and social capital (including corporate parenting processes), practical challenges and independent living, EET, health and wellbeing, intersectionality and marginalised groups and the impact of COVID-19. Theoretical frameworks contextualised these findings, which are further explored in Chapter 5, to understand CEYPs' transition experiences.

The literature review discussed the importance of CEYP's perspectives across these themes, demonstrating the interrelated factors that shape transitions from care. Despite a robust evidence base, the literature reveals inherent challenges within the UK's systemic care structures for CLA and CEYP, the significant changes CEYP experience, and the subjective nature of their transition to adulthood. Ultimately, this Chapter offers a contemporary understanding of CEYP transitions, laying the foundation for this study, which centres perspectives and amplifies voice.

2.13.2 Overall Strengths and Limitations

Overall, the literature offers a rich and varied evidence base that illuminates CEYP's transition experiences, with notable strengths such as the use of diverse qualitative methodologies that foreground young people's voices. The adoption of mixed methods approaches, and the emerging use of inclusive, participatory research also enhances understanding by capturing lived experiences in more nuanced ways, though this remains an area requiring further focus.

However, the evidence base remains fragmented, with methodological inconsistencies, small or localised samples, and limited inclusion of marginalised groups (e.g., UASC or CEYP with SEND) restricting the generalisability of findings (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019; Devenney, 2017). Moreover, studies often prioritise certain aspects of the transition to adulthood, such as education or employment, while overlooking the role of corporate parents and the broader processes that shape CEYP's agency and capabilities. A further limitation is the lack of author reflexivity, with limited critical engagement around researcher positionality or power dynamics, which may influence how CEYP's voices are represented. These limitations underscore the need for more robust, co-produced research that can generate actionable insights and drive meaningful improvements in corporate parenting and transition support.

2.13.3 Broad Implications

The findings from the review point to key implications for CPs and broader support networks in facilitating successful transitions from care to independence. While the evidence provides critical insights, it does not account for context-specific recommendations based on individual experiences (e.g., different care settings or needs such as SEND). As such, these recommendations should be viewed as general guidelines and adapted to suit the individual circumstances of CEYP.

A central theme across the literature is the need for CEYP to actively participate in their transition planning. The studies showed that meaningful participation fosters autonomy and better

prepares CEYP for adulthood (Barratt et al., 2020; Liabo et al., 2016). However, despite long-standing calls for reform (Goddard & Barrett, 2008), CEYP transitions remain problematic. The literature thus strongly advocates for government, LAs, and services to embed CEYP's voices at the core of policy and practice, ensuring engagement is not tokenistic (Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017).

The literature also highlights the importance of corporate parenting processes being both personalised and consistent. CEYP often voiced frustrations regarding irregular communications from professionals and impersonal pathway planning (Driscoll, 2013). Addressing these concerns requires equitable access to professional support across key life domains, including education, employment, health, housing, finances, and parenthood. Further, consistent communication among professionals was essential for maintaining continuity in transition planning support and advice (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019; Schofield et al., 2017). Integrating mentoring into CEYP process could provide an opportunity for professional support in a more relational capacity (Clayden & Stein, 2005).

Linking to this, relationships play a pivotal role. Relational support, both formal and informal, built on care and trust is vital for CEYP to navigate the challenges of transitioning to independence (Driscoll, 2013). Strengthening these support networks before, during, and after the transition is therefore critical (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021). Fostering CEYP's planning skills and adopting a resilience framework are equally important. The literature advocates for personalised transition planning, reflecting CEYP's individual pathways, maturity, and skill development, rather than being solely age-dependent (Hung & Appleton, 2015; Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014).

To conclude, leaving care processes' central focus must be empowering CEYP. Professionals and services should ensure CEYP remain at the centre of planning and decision-making, facilitating a transition to relationally supported, personalised, and collaborative independence.

2.14 Gaps in the Research and Rationale for the Current Study

As outlined in this review, while qualitative methodologies have provided valuable insights into CEYP's experiences, significant gaps remain, particularly regarding their perspectives on leaving care planning tools. Participatory approaches, though emerging (Lynch et al., 2024), remain underutilised in CEYP research. This reinforces the need for studies that meaningfully involve CEYP in shaping the processes and decisions that affect their transition to adulthood. Responding to Liabo et al.'s (2016) call for more authentic youth participation, this study centres CEYP's voices by engaging them as co-researchers.

Additionally, the existing literature has given little attention to how specific leaving care processes may disadvantage CEYP within the corporate parenting model. For example, while statutory requirements mandate that CEYP have a PP, there is limited research into their lived experiences, their involvement in its design, and what they perceive as most meaningful during the transition process (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). Where literature does exist, it points to an inequitable system that fails to address CEYP's needs (Devenney, 2017).

By adopting a participatory approach, this study addresses existing gaps by foregrounding CEYP's perspectives and ensuring they are active contributors rather than passive subjects. By enabling CEYP to shape the research, co-produce findings, and contribute to policy and practice around pathway planning, it seeks to generate meaningful insights into their lived experiences and contribute to more inclusive and practical support.

The aim is to empower CEYP and identify support that promotes positive change that is aligned with their post-care needs. Specifically, the study examines these issues within the context of EPs working in community psychology and corporate parenting domains. This systematic literature review has presented the rationale and context for this transformative study, advocating for inclusive research that centres the voices of CEYP's in understanding transition processes.

63

2.15 Reflections on the Literature Review Process

Reflecting on the limitations of this review, future researchers might consider refining the

inclusion and exclusion criteria to broaden the scope of relevant evidence. This could include

incorporating grey literature or expanding the search to studies conducted outside the UK, thereby

enriching the evidence base.

Recognising potential biases in literature review processes (Haddaway et al., 2020), the LR

also reflected on alternative search strategies that could have been employed to further strengthen the

empirical grounding of this study. The reflexive diary in Figure 3 illustrates the decision-making

processes involved.

Figure 3

Reflexive Diary Extract: Reflections on Literature Review Process

Reflections on Literature Review Process and Selection of Databases

When I started scoping the literature, I was surprised by the substantial body of research examining CEYP' experiences of leaving care. However, I noticed that much of the existing literature seemed fixated on the systems surrounding CEYP' rather than on the

explicit processes they undergo, such as pathway planning. This realisation led me to reflect on the gaps in the literature and the potential areas where my research could

contribute.

Additionally, I noted that while EPs work extensively with CEYP, many of the journal articles I came across were rooted more firmly in a social care context than an

educational one. This raised questions about the intersection between these two

domains and how my position as a TEP could inform and be informed by literature from both perspectives. During the search process, I thus made deliberate choices about the

databases I used, aiming to balance my EP focus with the broader social care context. This required careful reflection on my professional identity as a TEP and how this shaped

my approach to the search. I was mindful of the need to remain open to diverse perspectives while also ensuring that the literature I selected aligned with the scope of

my study.

2.16 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the systematic literature review process, highlighting key themes in CEYP's experiences of transitioning from care to adulthood. It also identified methodological limitations within the existing literature. The following chapter builds on these insights by presenting the study's methodology, with particular attention on the role of co-production in exploring transition experiences and pathway planning for CEYP.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

Following the systematic review of literature in Chapter 2, this chapter outlines the study's

methodological design. It begins by detailing the research aims, purpose, and question, alongside the

study's research paradigm, ontological, and epistemological positions. These underpin its

transformative orientation, providing a lens for understanding CEYP's narratives.

With a focus on children's rights, voice and the operation of power, a rationale is provided for

adopting a qualitative PR approach. The transformative perspective is explored through the

engagement of CEYP as co-researchers. The chapter also details the implementation of the PR process,

including key models and critiques of the approach, and examines the extent of co-researcher

involvement throughout the study.

The data collection process is outlined, followed by an overview of Reflexive Thematic

Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The rationale for choosing RTA and its application to the

study are discussed, along with a critique of its use. Ethical considerations, reflexivity, and the LR's

positionality are addressed, with the study's quality evaluated using Yardley's (2000) principles of

qualitative research.

3.1.1 A Note on Reflexivity

Journaling is a crucial tool in RTA for fostering reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Nadin &

Cassell, 2006). To support this process, the LR maintained a reflexive diary to critically examine how

their identity, experiences, and assumptions influenced their interpretation throughout the study.

Reflections captured at each stage were recorded in the reflexive diary, with excerpts incorporated into

the chapters to provide transparency and insight into the LR's perspective.

Acknowledging their outsider status in the 'leaving care' ecosystem, the LR actively examined preconceptions and biases, ensuring openness with readers (Ahern, 1999; Rolls & Relf, 2006; Hiles et al., 2014). The LR also reflected on their motivations and values underpinning the research, as detailed in Chapter 1.

3.2 Research Aims and Purpose

This research responds to the UK government's recognition of the urgent need to improve support for CEYP transitioning out of care, particularly in identifying effective interventions and processes (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019; Kirby et al., 2017). It acknowledges the importance of incorporating CEYPs' perspectives in decision-making during this transition, advocating for a co-production approach to achieve better outcomes.

The specific aims of the study were to:

- Empower CEYP by involving them as co-researchers, ensuring their lived experiences shaped the research process and findings.
- Explore CEYP's lived experiences of transitioning to adulthood, focusing on the role of PPs in supporting this process.
- Contribute to knowledge on pathway planning by addressing existing research gaps.

Adopting an exploratory and emancipatory approach, the study positioned co-researchers as narrators of their own experiences, minimising the risk of misrepresentation (Aldridge, 2017). The overarching aim and research question (RQ) were informed by the literature gaps identified in Chapter 2, while the participatory methodology was adopted to enhance CEYP's wellbeing through mutual learning and shared decision-making (Emke et al., 2024).

By centring CEYP's perspectives, the study challenges traditional research hierarchies and upholds emancipatory principles that prioritise empowerment and social justice (Stone & Priestley,

1996). Beyond academic contribution, it sought to equip CEYP with research skills and practical tools to drive meaningful change in their lives and communities (Gal, 2017).

Furthermore, the study encourages critical reflection among EPs working within the corporate parenting model. It aims to provide actionable insights for improving pathway planning and policymaking, while identifying strategies to ensure that corporate parenting delivers sustained, coordinated support as CEYP transition into adulthood.

3.2.1 RQ

The primary RQ was designed to amplify CEYP's voices and address gaps in understanding their perspectives, as demonstrated through the systematic literature review (Maxwell, 2022).

The RQ posed was:

'What are CEYP's Experiences of Pathway Plans in the Transition to Adulthood?'

A key strength of PR lies in its ability to authentically capture participants' lived experiences, while fostering genuine co-production (Duea et al., 2022; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). The RQ was intentionally broad and adaptable, enabling co-researchers to actively shape data collection. This aligns with Braun et al. (2023), who argue that flexible RQs enhance RTA by incorporating participants' perspectives. This ensured that the study's methodology evolved with co-researchers' input, maintaining relevance and reflexivity, while authentically representing CEYP's voices. Further details on how the RQ was addressed are provided in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.3 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm forms the foundation of any study, shaping how reality is understood, and how knowledge is constructed (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). It is typically defined by a researcher's ontological (the nature of reality), epistemological (how we know about reality), and methodological (how we acquire knowledge) assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Clearly defining these assumptions

is essential, as they influence both the philosophical stance and the overall research process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Moore (2005) further argues that researchers, particularly EPs, have an ethical responsibility to critically examine the philosophical foundations underpinning their practice and methodology.

3.3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Position

Ontology, the study of existence and being (Crotty, 1998), informs the current research through a relativist ontological stance, which posits that facts are subjective and shaped by the observer's perspective. People interpret reality in differently, meaning that the PP process is experienced uniquely by each CEYP, depending on their context (Ormston et al., 2014). This aligns with the exploratory nature of the study.

Epistemology, the study of knowledge (Crotty, 1998), is aligned with the research's relativist ontology and adopts a social constructionist stance. This approach recognises that reality is socially constructed, influenced by culture, history, and language (Kawulich, 2012). The goal is to understand how individuals interpret the world and co-construct meaning through social interactions. Knowledge is therefore shaped by shared values, relationships and social contexts of researchers and participants (Byrne, 2022). This orientation aligns with the study's participatory agenda and RTA, highlighting the collaborative nature of knowledge creation and the importance of reflexivity in understanding how knowledge is constructed (Braun & Clarke, 2016, 2019).

3.3.2 Transformative Element

This research also adopts a transformative paradigm (TP) as its guiding framework, recognising that knowledge is not neutral, but is shaped by power dynamics and social relationships within society (Creswell & Poth, 2016). TP is particularly suited to emancipatory, participatory, and inclusive research approaches that link inquiry to action and advance a social justice agenda (Hurtado, 2022).

Grounded in this philosophical foundation, TP addresses inequality and amplifies the voices of marginalised groups, acknowledging multiple realities influenced by race, gender, political, ethnic, social, and disability values (Mertens, 2017).

The TP aligns well with the social constructionist epistemological position, emphasising the role of social context, power dynamics and meaning making in shaping knowledge. By actively involving CEYP in the research process, this study ensures their voices are central, while honouring the diversity of their lived experiences and worldviews. It fosters inclusion and shared decision-making, creating a collaborative space where CEYP can critically reflect on and analyse PPs within the context of leaving care.

In summary, the study adopts a transformative paradigm, grounded in a relativist ontological stance and social constructionist epistemological position, with a commitment to reflexivity.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Overview of PR

PR is a methodology that actively involves participants throughout the research process, from design and data collection to analysis and dissemination (Bourke, 2009, p. 458). Unlike traditional research, where participants are often passive subjects, PR transforms them into co-researchers, fostering a collaborative and democratic research environment (Khawaja et al., 2024). This approach prioritises shared decision-making and amplifies the voices of marginalised or vulnerable groups in shaping research outcomes (Crane et al., 2019; Lynch et al., 2021).

By recognising participants as experts in their own lives, PR avoids tokenism, ensuring research reflects real-world experiences and genuine needs of the community (Reason & Torbert,

2001). Its adaptability further allows researchers and participants to co-design methods suited specific contexts, strengthening its practical value (Rodiguez et al., 2021).

While well-established in social research (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015), the application of PR in educational psychology remains limited. Expanding its use in this field can amplify underrepresented voices, influence policy, and improve support systems (Dixon et al., 2019), making PR an ideal framework for prioritising CEYP in this study.

3.4.2 Application of PR

The LR chose a participatory qualitative methodology based on the view that CYP should have a say in decisions affecting them (UNCRC, 1989). This approach aimed to explore CEYP's lived experiences of pathway planning in their transition from care, fostering collaboration with those directly impacted (Yardley, 2000).

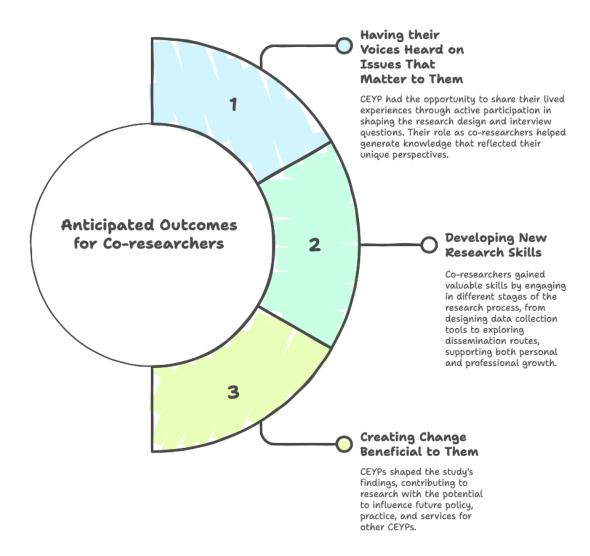
PR is defined not by a specific design, but by the active involvement of participants (Aldridge, 2017). Therefore, in this study, CEYP acted as both co-researchers and participants, helping to shape the research process and ensure their perspectives were authentically represented (Aldridge, 2016). This aligns with calls for greater youth involvement across all research stages and in addressing power imbalances between researchers and participants (Purtell, 2023). PR also positions CYP as active, informed participants, challenging dominant discourses (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015) and is particularly relevant for engaging groups historically marginalised in research, such as CEYP (McCusker et al., 2025).

Significantly, this study aimed to meet the first three criteria for emancipatory research outlined by Chappell (2000): involving CEYP as co-researchers, maintaining researcher reflexivity, and ensuring that co-researchers benefit from their participation. Anticipated outcomes included having their voices heard, gaining research skills, and contributing to change (Figure 4). Finally, transparency

about levels of participation was explicitly addressed, building on reflections about the depth and authenticity of CEYP involvement, as discussed below.

Figure 4

Anticipated Outcomes for Co-researchers and the CEYP Community



Note. This Figure illustrates the potential benefits for CEYP involved in the research process as coresearchers, including personal growth, empowerment, influence on services, and wider community impact.

3.4.2.1 Levels of Participant Involvement in PR. It is important to note that co-researcher involvement in PR exists along a continuum and can vary in depth and scope. A range of different

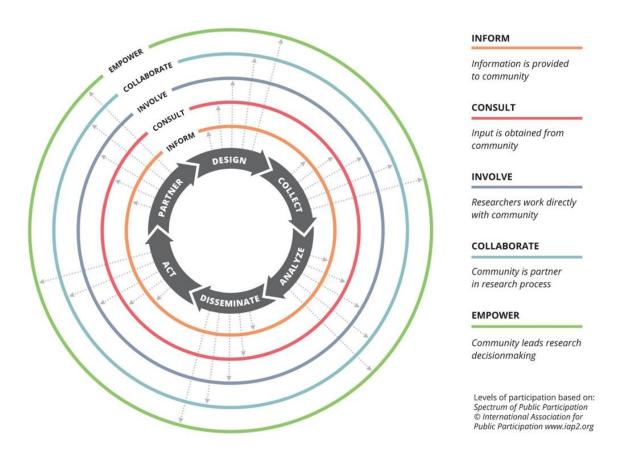
participatory frameworks exist (Aldridge, 2016), with models by Hart (1992), Biggs (1989), Shier (2001), Thomas (2001) and Lundy (2007), offering insights into varying levels of CYP engagement in research. For this study, the LR applied the framework of Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) and Aldridge's (2016) Participatory Model (PM) to define and structure levels of co-researcher participation. While the LR guided the overall process, co-researchers actively contributed at various stages, supporting a collaborative partnership in decision-making and data interpretation.

3.4.2.1.1 'Choice Points'. Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) developed the 'Choice Points' framework to guide decisions about research methods and co-researcher involvement at each stage of the research process (Figure 5). The framework spans a continuum, from full community decision-making ('empower'), to researcher-led approaches ('inform' and 'consult'), with shared decision-making ('collaborate' and 'involve') in between. Its flexibility allows participation to be tailored based on the aims and context of the research.

Throughout this study, the model enabled the LR to adjust co-researcher involvement. During the design phase, co-researchers helped shape the interview questions and methods ('empower' and 'collaborate'). In other phases, such as data analysis, the LR adopted an 'involve' approach, working with co-researchers to explore the LR' interpretations of the data. At later stages, such as writing up the findings, the LR took a more 'inform' approach, with the LR leading but keeping co-researchers updated. This flexibility allowed the LR to adapt participation levels as needed, ensuring the research remained responsive while maintaining clear leadership.

Figure 5

Vaughn and Jacquez' (2020) Participation 'Choice Points' Framework



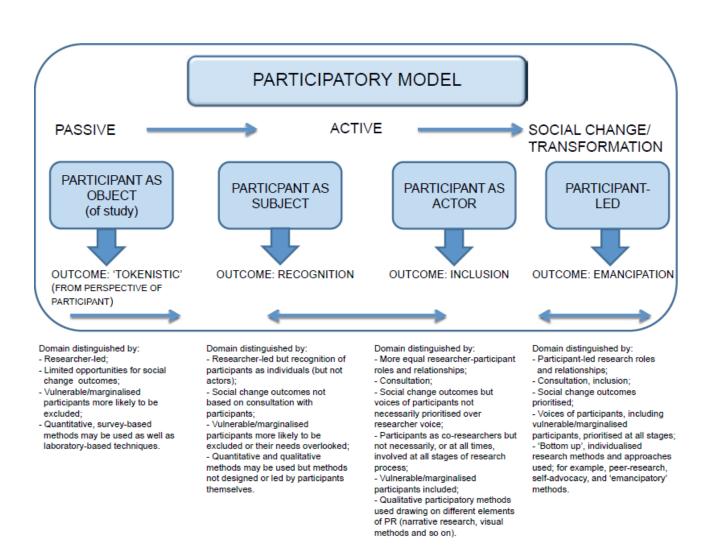
Note. Reprinted from Vaughn and Jacquez (2020). The Figure outlines participation choice points within research. At each stage, researchers can decide the degree of participation, which in turn informs the selection of methods and tools. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods*. Copyright by the authors 2020.

3.4.2.1.2 Aldridge's (2016) Participatory Model (PM). The LR also adopted Aldridge's (2016) PM (Figure 6) due to its alignment with the study's emancipatory goals and emphasis on transformative participation. Designed for use with vulnerable or marginalised groups (Aldridge, 2016), the model felt suited to the CEYP in this research, shaping co-researcher involvement and guiding a participant-led approach where possible.

This model fostered a dynamic, flexible relationship, allowing co-researchers to take the lead in some areas while receiving support in others. The aim was to balance the practical demands of maintaining the study's feasibility and rigour with the co-researchers' agency (Giles & Rowley, 2020). This enabled varied levels of co-researcher involvement across different stages and promoted multiple opportunities for shared decision-making.

Figure 6

Aldridge's (2016) Participatory Model



Note. This model illustrates varying levels of participant involvement in research, ranging from passive roles to active, transformative engagement. It highlights how increasing participant agency can lead to

more inclusive and emancipatory outcomes. *Adapted from Participatory Research: Working with Vulnerable Groups in Research and Practice*, by J. Aldridge, 2016, Policy Press.

Vaughn and Jacquez's (2020) 'Choice Points' Framework and Aldridge's (2016) PM complement each other by offering a flexible, layered approach to participant involvement in research. While Vaughn and Jacquez's (2020) framework provided clear, structured stages for adjusting coresearcher engagement, from consultation to full empowerment, Aldridge's (2016) model ensured that, regardless of the level of involvement, participation remained meaningful and empowering, grounded in ethical principles. Together, they offered a practical framework for adapting co-researcher involvement and an ethical foundation to uphold the integrity and depth of this research. Drawing on both frameworks flexibly, the LR could balance the study within the doctoral timeline and the preagreed time commitments with co-researchers, as discussed in the ethical approval process (Appendix I), while still promoting autonomy, agency, and empowerment.

3.4.3 PR: Critical Considerations

PR with CYP is often met with concerns about reliability, particularly regarding participants' capacity and the need for adaption (Nind, 2011), alongside assumptions that PR is inherently effective (Khawaja et al., 2024). This study, however, was grounded in the belief that CEYP are capable researchers, driven by a curiosity to understand their world (Lundy et al., 2011). From the outset, coresearchers' competence was thus assumed, and their lived experience was seen as a strength that enhanced the validity of the findings (Bissell et al., 2018).

PR aims to prioritise empowerment and participant benefit, alongside research outcomes (Kellett, 2005). The LR maintained transparency regarding the study's emancipatory aims and adopted a flexible approach to support meaningful participation within the time constraints. This aligns with

growing calls for rigour and transparency in PR to ensure both credibility and relevance to policy and practice (Aldridge, 2016).

Another challenge is ensuring all voices are heard, particularly within diverse groups where age, emotional capacity and confidence vary (Spencer et al., 2020). While PR is often viewed as more ethical due to its inclusive ethos (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998), it requires ongoing ethical reflexivity regarding power dynamics, the right to withdraw, and potential risks. These were carefully addressed, with co-researchers' protection and risk management outlined in the ethics application (Appendix I) and discussed later in the chapter. The LR also engaged in regular supervision to reflect on methodological tensions and enhance co-researcher inclusion.

The next section outlines the full research procedure, including recruitment and co-researcher involvement.

3.5 Co-researchers and Recruitment

3.5.1 Introducing the Co-researchers

3.5.1.1 Composition and Size of Data Set. Aligned with the participatory approach, participants in this study also served as co-researchers. The LR initially aimed to recruit 4-6 co-researchers, following Braun and Clarke's (2013) guidelines for small-to-medium-sized RTA projects. However, as the approach to RTA has evolved, Braun and Clarke (2022) have clarified that the depth and richness of analysis are not contingent on a fixed dataset size, or the volume of data collected. They note that principles of data saturation are no longer the primary mechanism for determining sample size in RTA (Smith et al., 2022). Instead, the focus lies on uncovering nuanced insights within the data.

Drawing on both guidelines, this study determined that five co-researchers were sufficient for an exploratory analysis of the experience of pathway planning during the transition from care. The goal was to identify specific patterns relevant to the project's aims rather than exhaustively exploring all dimensions of the phenomenon (Malterud et al., 2016).

3.5.1.2 Co-researcher Inclusion Criteria and Key Characteristics. Co-researchers were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

- 1. Recognised as a 'CL' by a LA, as defined in section 2(7) of the Children and Social Work Act (2017)¹⁶.
- 2. A 'CL' aged 18-25.
- 3. Experience of pathway planning in the UK.

All co-researchers met these criteria and had engaged with transition processes, including a current or previous professional relationship with a PA.

The group consisted of two males and three females, aged between 20 and 23. While not all co-researchers completed the emailed characteristics form (Table 4), information shared through initial conversations, interviews and workshops indicated none were NEET at the time of the study. Four were engaged in further education or HE. To ensure anonymity, each co-researcher selected their own pseudonym.

¹⁶ For the purposes of the study, 'CEYPs' were defined under section 2(7) of the Children and Social Work Act as young people aged 18-25 who have been in care in England for at least 14 weeks since their 14th birthday (The Children and Social Work Act, 2017)

Table 4Co-Researcher Key Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age (as of August 2024)	Current Status (i.e., employed, in education/ Higher Education etc.)	Gender	Location (as of August 2024)	Ethnicity
Lucy	21	Higher Education	Female	Stirling (Scotland)	White
Nala	23	PhD/Employed	Female	West Midlands (England)	Mixed heritage - Black Caribbean and White English
Matilda	20	Higher Education student and Employed	Male	London (England)	Mixed heritage – White and Arab
Truman	[Not provided]	[Not provided]	Male presenting	[Not provided]	[Not provided]
Jasmine	[Not provided]	[Not provided]	Female presenting	[Not provided]	[Not provided]

Note. Some demographic information was not provided by all co-researchers. Self-selected pseudonyms are used to preserve anonymity.

While identity factors including gender, race, ethnicity, ability, and age were not explicit inclusion criteria, the co-researcher group reflected diversity across these areas. These factors are examined further in Chapter 5 through the lens of intersectionality theory. The LR's reflexive diary entry (Figure 7) explores reflections on the co-researcher sample.

Figure 7

Reflexive Diary Extract: Reflections on the Sample

Reflections on the Sample

As I reflect on the sample of five co-researchers, I feel pleased with the diversity represented in the group. The ages of the participants range from 19 to 23, which presents a valuable opportunity to explore different perspectives and experiences within this cohort. There is also diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, religion, geography, and ability, enriching the research with a range of viewpoints. However, a significant challenge for me as a researcher has been ensuring that every voice is heard and valued, especially given the intersection of multiple aspects of identity. It's essential to be mindful of how these intersecting identities - both mine and those of the co-researchers - might influence the research process, particularly in terms of how experiences are shared and understood.

As a White British female researcher, I am conscious of how our shared, visible aspects of identity - such as gender and ethnicity - might be perceived by the co-researchers. While this may facilitate familiarity and a sense of common ground for some participants, I also recognise the risk of overlooking less familiar perspectives or assuming shared understanding. This could potentially lead to blind spots, where I might unintentionally overlook or misinterpret certain experiences.

I am increasingly aware that my own experiences and positionality shape how I interpret the data. I must remain reflective about how these intersecting identities influence my approach to the research, as well as the data collection and analysis processes. I recognise that it is crucial to continuously reflect on my position, ensuring that I remain open to the diverse perspectives of the co-researchers while being mindful of my own influence on the research.

3.5.2 Recruitment Procedure

Co-researchers were recruited through purposive sampling, selected for their lived experience of leaving care and involvement in pathway planning. This approach aimed to include CEYP who could provide in-depth, 'information-rich' insights relevant to the research focus (Smith et al., 2022).

To support recruitment, the LR directly engaged with local care-leaving networks and was transparent about the role and expectations of co-researchers. This helped build trust and encourage

participation among a group often perceived as difficult-to-reach due to recruitment barriers (Aldridge, 2016). Recruitment occurred in two phases, outlined below.

3.5.2.1 Phase 1: Initial Collaboration and Outreach. Recruitment started through collaboration with the Pan-London CiCC, part of the regional Pan-London Offer, a City of London Corporation initiative supporting CEYPs. The pan-London CiCC includes CEYP, aged 18-25, who regularly meet to share experiences, voice concerns, and contribute to service development.

Initial contact with a CiCC Development Officer was made in January 2024, and recruitment strategies commenced. In April 2024, the LR presented the project plan at a CiCC meeting attended by members. Following the presentation, a recruitment poster was circulated via email, along with were detailed information sheets and consent forms for interested individuals (Appendix J, K, L).

Building on this outreach momentum, the LR' also attended the CiCC Participation Network Meeting on 24th of April 2024. This meeting, involving Participation Officers and professionals connected to the Pan-London Offer, included a 10-minute presentation about the study's aims and methodology. The recruitment poster was shared again, generating further interest. Two co-researchers were recruited through this phase.

3.5.2.2 Phase 2: Snowballing Strategy and Ethical Considerations. Following supervision discussions in June 2024, a second phase of recruitment was launched due to a shortfall in confirmed co-researchers. As this phase involved expanding recruitment beyond the initial network, an amendment to the ethical application was submitted and approved on 18th of July 2024, to ensure continued compliance with ethical standards.

A snowballing strategy was then implemented, enabling Pan-London CiCC members, Participation Officers, and other professionals under the Pan-London Offer to share study details with peers nationally, who met the eligibility criteria. This approach generated three additional expressions

of interest between June and August 2024, subsequently leading to participation sign-up and involvement.

3.6 The Research Procedure

Table 5 below presents the research process chronologically, from November 2023 to April 2025, outlining the level of involvement and participation of the research team at each stage, following Vaughn and Jacquez's (2020) framework. This demonstrates how collaboration and empowerment were prioritised, recognising co-researchers as experts throughout the study's design, data collection, analysis and dissemination. While levels of participation varied across stages, from consultation to empowerment, deliberate efforts were made to promote shared decision-making wherever possible.

Table 5, together with the mapped Key (Figure 8), also illustrates the alignment between Aldridge's (2016) PM and Vaughn and Jacquez's (2020) framework. The blue and purple statements represent stages where co-researchers assumed a more passive role. This emphasises that, although the research aimed to be participant-led, there were moments when participation was categorised as that of an 'actor' or 'subject' (Aldridge, 2016).

Key: Application of Aldridge's (2016) Participation Model

Key: Co-researcher Level of Participation

Green statements = 'participant-led'

Purple statements = 'participant as actor'

Blue statements = 'participant as subject'

Table 5

Chronological Overview of the Research Procedure

Action/Task	Preliminary Actions (Lead Researcher)	Action/task list (Co-researchers)	Degree of participation from co-researchers (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020)
Research Design: Initial research protocol/proposal	 Developed and submitted by LR 	[Not applicable]	[Not applicable]
Research Design: Ethics submission	 Developed and submitted by LR 	[Not applicable]	[Not applicable]
Research Design: Coresearcher recruitment	 Attendance at a range of meetings run by the Pan-London CiCC (Introduction PowerPoint in Appendix I) Obtain consent from coresearchers 	Google Forms - to establish dates and times for co-research sessions	Consult

Research Design: Workshop 1: What is Research? (29.08.24)	Email Workshop agenda, clarify any accessibility needs	 Discussing the research aims and purpose Co-researchers attended training on research methods, participatory research and ethical considerations in research 	Collaborate/Empower
Post Workshop 1	 Email update to co-researchers Email 'introducing participatory research' document 	Co-researchers could provide feedback on the workshop via Mentimeter	Collaborate
Data Collection Tools: Workshop 2: Data Collection & Devising Research Questions (05.09.24)	Email Workshop agenda, clarify any accessibility needs	 Co-researchers developed exploratory focus questions for the semi-structured interview schedule Co-researchers discussed data collection tools and decided on how Photovoice would be used as a data collection tool 	Collaborate/Empower
Data Collection Tools: Post Workshop 2	 Email update to co-researchers LR collated responses from co-researchers to develop finalised interview schedule 	 Co-researchers could provide feedback on the workshop via Mentimeter Co-researchers could use Mentimeter to add key research topics/research questions for the interview schedule. This remained open for one-week postworkshop. 	Collaborate/ Empower
Data Collection	• Conduct interviews	• Data collection – co-researchers participated in interviews	Consult
Data Collection: Post-data collection	• £20 high street voucher sent to co-researchers' post-data collection	Co-researchers' chose their pseudonyms	Involve
Data Analysis: RTA	 Email Workshop agenda, clarify any accessibility needs Type up and transcribe interviews 		

		• RTA – organising, coding and drawing patterns from the data		
Research	Title	• Developed two titles – shared with co-researchers via email	• Co-researchers emailed their preferred title selection to the LR – majority vote	Involve/Collaborate
& Explor	p 3: Analysis	LR's data analysis feedback to co-researchers	• Co-researchers provided their interpretations of the LR' analysis	Involve
Data Ana Workshop	alysis: Post p 3	 Presentation shared with coresearchers 	Co-researchers could provide feedback on the workshop via Mentimeter	Consult
Dissemin Workshop Dissemin (16.04.25	p 4: Shaping ation	• Facilitate an open forum where co-researchers share and discuss ideas for disseminating the research findings	• Co-researchers participate in the open forum, sharing their ideas and exploring potential dissemination paths	Collaborate/Empower
Dissemin Workshop	nation: Post p 4	 LR write-up The LR may be involved in disseminating the findings in future academic publications 	• Potential avenues for co-researchers to be involved in dissemination materials and post-workshop actions	Consult/Involve

Note. The table provides an overview of the research procedure, from January 2024 to April 2025, with actions for the LR and co-researchers. It maps Aldridge's (2016) Participation Model (PM) with Vaughn and Jacquez's (2020) framework, showing a range of co-researcher participation. Rows shaded in green indicate 'participant led'; purple indicates 'participant as actor' and blue indicates 'participant as a subject'.

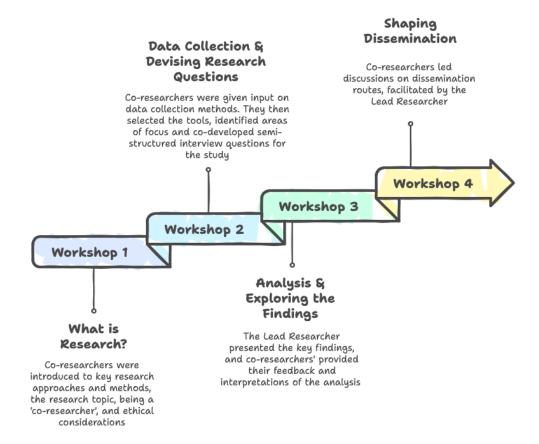
3.6.1 Co-Researcher Workshops

Four co-researcher workshops were held between August 2024 and April 2025 at times convenient for most co-researchers, scheduled based on a Google Forms survey.

A detailed overview of the workshops is provided in Table 5 and Figure 9. Workshops allowed co-researchers to share their experiences and engage collaboratively across research stages. They included training on research ethics, methods (including PR), tools, and data analysis, with a focus on amplifying the voices of the CEYP community. Each session was guided by a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix M), shared with co-researchers postworkshops. By fostering transparency and building research skills, the workshops aimed to promote equity and empower co-researchers to actively contribute to data collection, analysis and dissemination.

Figure 9

Overview of Co-Researcher Workshops



3.6.1.1 Organisation and Scheduling. The workshop structure was discussed with the LR's research supervisor and a Participatory Officer. Scheduling the first two workshops one week apart was carefully considered to increase co-researchers' engagement, wellbeing, and learning capacity, while allowing for iterative feedback and later-stage participation. Further, participation was flexible; co-researchers could attend as many workshops as they chose, with the voluntary nature of involvement clearly communicated. Offering choice in participation is known to be an effective way to mitigate trauma (Purtell, 2023), which was an importance consideration the co-researchers' potential vulnerabilities and previous experiences in the care system (Montserrat & Llosada-Gistau, 2024).

3.6.1.2 Initial Meeting: Establishing a Foundation for Safe and Collaborative Participation. Workshop 1 was designed with a trauma-informed approach to create a safe, inclusive, and empowering environment. Strategies including icebreakers and co-creating a group agreement were key to building trust, reducing distress, and promoting a sense of fun (Emke et al., 2024). The group agreement encouraged psychological contracting, allowing co-researchers to shape the workshop environment and establish shared values and expectations, to foster mutual respect (Williams et al., 2024).

Tools like Zoom's chat function and Mentimeter further supported participation, and the group agreement was revisited at the start of each workshop, promoting psychological safety and empowerment. They also aligned with principles of participant choice and control, ensuring transparency within the group and between the LR and co-researchers. Recognising the inherent unpredictability of PR, the workshops balanced structure with flexibility, allowing for evolving group dynamics and a space for questions, enhancing co-researchers' understanding of the research purpose (see slides in Appendix M). By addressing these elements early on, the workshop established a foundation for meaningful collaboration and adherence to best practices in PR (see Figure 10 for the LR' reflections) (Duea et al., 2022; Warrington et al., 2024).

Figure 10

Reflexive Diary Extract: Reflections Post-Workshop 1

Initial Meeting: Reflections Post-Workshop 1

During the first workshop, there were three attendees, which brought up mixed feelings for me. On one hand, I felt a sense of anticipation, excited to begin the collaborative process, but on the other hand, I felt a strong sense of responsibility in my facilitation role. I was constantly aware of the need to create an environment where the young people felt comfortable sharing their perspectives and experiences. One participant chose not to turn on their camera, which prompted me to reflect on the potential reasons for this: Was it a sign of discomfort, resistance, or just a personal choice? This moment reminded me of how important it is to establish an inclusive space where everyone feels safe to participate, regardless of their level of comfort.

As the workshop progressed, I also became conscious of the varying experience levels within the group. Some of the young people had more experience with research than others, and I made a conscious effort to ensure that those with less experience were encouraged to contribute, so they didn't feel overshadowed. I also had to navigate the dynamic created by one participant who had a high-level research background. I wondered how their previous experience in research might impact the group's discussions and how I could ensure that their input didn't overpower the others. This raised questions for me about who had the most "voice" in the space, and whether this was related to their educational or life experiences.

To address potential power differentials, we worked collaboratively to create a group agreement, which felt like an important step toward reducing hierarchical dynamics. However, upon reflection, I wondered if the process was truly inclusive. Not all participants had the opportunity to contribute to the agreement, and this raised further questions for me about the nature of the group - was it open or closed, and how does that affect the power dynamics within the research? It made me consider how to adapt the process to ensure that every participant has equal influence in shaping the research journey.

3.6.2 Designing the Data Collection Method

Due to time constraints, the LR led certain aspects of the study design, including selecting the data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews and Photovoice¹⁷ were offered as the primary methods, based on their effectiveness in engaging CEYP and addressing power dynamics within this population (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were selected for their ability to capture open-ended data, allowing participants to share their personal experiences, perspectives, and insights (Smith et al., 2022). The flexibility of this method also enabled the LR to explore hidden aspects of behaviour and adapt to emergent themes (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Photovoice was also selected for its capacity to empower individuals by allowing them to express themselves visually and creatively (Fincham, 2015).

Co-researchers were trained on both methods during Workshop 2, where the LR explained the rationale behind their selection. In alignment with the broad RQ, the co-researchers then collaboratively generated the questions and key topic areas in the interview schedule, ensuring familiarity and accessibility. Through extensive discussions, they further decided on the scope of the Photovoice tool, with co-researchers given the option to choose whether to use it during their individual interviews. Again, this aligns with the participatory nature of the project, empowering co-researchers to take a leading role in the research process (Emke et al., 2024).

3.6.3 Data Collection Procedure

3.6.3.1 Timeline and Process of Data Collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on the 17th, 27th, and 28th of September 2024. The LR coordinated with each coresearcher individually to schedule one-hour interviews, ensuring equal access and opportunity

¹⁷ Photovoice is a technique using photographs to convey stories, fostering critical dialogue on a particular topic (Wang & Burris, 1997).

for all. Since the co-researchers were located across the UK, interviews were held via Zoom. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, allowing for open and fluid discussions.

3.6.3.2 Developing the Semi-Structured Interview Schedule. In Workshop 2, coresearchers actively contributed to identifying key focus areas and developing the interview questions, ensuring their priorities were embedded in the research design (Kellett, 2005). This collaboration aimed to foster a participatory dynamic and co-researcher ownership of the research.

Co-researchers expressed a preference for open-ended questions to reflect the diversity of their experiences. Key topics included their experiences with PPs, the purpose and impact of these plans, and their relationships with PAs. To support inclusive participation, an open-ended Mentimeter forum was used, allowing co-researchers to submit ideas anonymously during and after the session if they preferred not to contribute verbally during the workshop. The forum remained open for a week, offering additional time for reflection and input.

The LR then reviewed all contributions, prioritising those that aligned with both the research aims and co-researcher interests. Using this input, the final interview schedule (Appendix N) was developed and reviewed with the LR's research supervisor to ensure methodological rigour (Smith et al., 2022).

The schedule was informed by a social-constructionist framework and included openended prompts like "Could you tell me more?", "Why do you think that?", and "What is your view on this?" to elicit detailed responses. This approach aligned with participatory values and the principles of naïve interviewing, where the LR adopts a non-expert stance to promote open dialogue (Burr & Dick, 2017). As emphasised by Qu and Dumay (2011) and Braun and Clarke (2022), the LR's role in building rapport, actively listening, and facilitating meaningful conversations was central to the process.

3.6.3.3 Photovoice¹⁸. Also introduced during Workshop 2, photovoice is a PR method that uses photographs to tell stories and spark critical dialogue (Wang & Burris, 1997). It empowers marginalised CYP to share their experiences and visions for change in research (Irby et al., 2018), and is widely used in youth-focused research (Charles & Felton, 2020; Vélez-Grau, 2019). Photovoice often amplifies voices and supports alternative narrative storytelling (Fincham, 2015), with particular value for CEYP in accessing emotional expression (Wright & Collings, 2025).

During the workshop, co-researchers discussed ethical considerations (Appendix M, Workshop 1) and agreed that while images (e.g., photographs or drawings) could supplement interview data, they would not be included in primary analysis. For equitable participation, photovoice materials were shared via email with two co-researchers who missed the session, and they had the opportunity to contribute through a live Mentimeter poll within a week. In the interviews, co-researchers could then share photovoice contributions; however, interestingly, all opted to provide verbal feedback instead.

3.6.3.4 Selecting the Title. The LR proposed two study titles to the co-researchers via email and asked for their preference. Co-researchers were given one week to respond, based on the understanding that the title selected by the majority would be chosen. Their decision is reflected in the final title of this research. The LR's reflections on this process are discussed in Figure 11.

1

¹⁸ Photovoice is a participatory qualitative research methodology that involves several stages: the identification of an issue with community importance, participant recruitment, photovoice training, identification of photo assignments, discussion of photo assignments, data analysis and a forum to share with policy makers and influential advocates (Hergenrather et al., 2009).

Figure 11

Reflexive Diary Extract: Title Selection

Reflections on Selecting the Research Title

Of the two options to that I proposed to the co-researchers, I noticed that I had a

personal preference for the title that centred around "promoting the voices of CEYP," as it felt more inclusive, empowering, and closely aligned with the participatory ethos of

the study. However, the co-researchers collectively selected the current title, which I

perceived as more formal and academically framed.

This experience prompted me to reflect on the possible dynamics at play. I wondered

whether the preference for a more academic-sounding title reflected a desire to be taken

seriously within academic and professional spaces - spaces where CEYP's voices may have been muted or undervalued. Recognising this tension made me realise that PR is

more complicated than I first though; while aiming to focus on empowerment and

authenticity, co-researchers must also think about how to be seen as legitimate and

taken seriously.

3.6.3.5 Online Considerations. All co-researcher workshops and interviews were

conducted online via Zoom. The remote format presented advantages including enhancing

accessibility by enabling co-researchers from across the UK to participate without travelling.

This flexibility aimed to reduce anxiety and facilitated equitable participation by allowing co-

researchers to join from environments familiar to them. Zoom's recording and transcription

features also helped the LR to focus on the discussions, while automatically documenting this

for later analysis.

However, remote research also presents challenges, including assumptions about

device access and digital literacy. Evidence suggests that CEYP face further barriers including

borrowing devices or relying on mobile data (Kelly et al., 2021), reinforcing the need for

improved digital support and resources. The LR took steps to address these concerns, as outlined below.

During the online sessions, technical difficulties, such as unstable internet connections, occasionally disrupted conversations, leading to issues like freezing or disjointed speech, which affected the flow of conversation and overall group dynamics. Pauses and overlapping speech in workshops were also at risk of being inaccurately recorded or omitted, potentially impacting the dataset (Bailey, 2008). Moreover, being online risked engagement fatigue and made it harder for the LR to observe potential non-verbal cues, which are essential for interpreting communication (Schilling & Kauffeld, 2024). While these challenges raised concerns about inclusivity, the remote format successfully maintained participation and the collection and analysis of verbal information.

3.6.3.6 Accessibility and Adjustments. To promote equity and accessibility, the LR informed co-researchers that they could pause for a break or stop the interview at any time. Additionally, all interview questions were typed into the Zoom chat at the co-researchers' request, giving them time and space to process. The LR offered to repeat questions for clarity, supporting individuals with additional needs. For co-researchers who experienced challenges with digital literacy, the LR also made one-to-one support available to help them navigate Zoom prior to the workshops, although it was not taken up.

3.6.3.7 Transcription. Interviews were transcribed using Zoom's transcription feature. All audio files and transcripts were securely stored in encrypted, password-protected files, with identifiable information removed during the transcription process. To protect confidentiality, transcripts were stored separately from identifiable data and will be deleted in accordance with GDPR regulations outlined by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust upon the study's conclusion.

To ensure accuracy, the Zoom-generated transcripts were cross-checked against the original recordings. Reflexive practices were also employed to mitigate potential biases or inaccuracies introduced by Zoom's transcription feature, safeguarding the integrity of the data. Due to time constraints, co-researchers did not participate in this stage of the research, adopting a more passive role during transcription. An example of a transcript is included in Appendix O.

3.6.3.8 Remuneration for Participation: Ethical Considerations and Justification.

Properly compensating CYP involved in research is essential to recognise their time, commitment, and expertise, while also maintaining ethical standards. Remuneration ensures the ethical integrity of research practices (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015). In accordance with National Institute for Health and Care Research guidelines and Pan-London CiCC policies, £20 high street vouchers were selected as the most appropriate form of compensation for CEYP in this study. Co-researchers received the voucher upon completing the data collection phase, with the incentive clearly communicated as contingent on interview completion. This ensured fairness, transparency, and appropriate recognition of co-researchers' valuable contributions, as outlined in the ethics application.

3.7 Data Analysis

3.7.1 Overview of RTA

RTA was selected for its suitability in qualitative research, emphasising the LR's active role in identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within the data. This method allows for the construction of themes that capture shared meanings, directly addressing the RQ (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Unlike rigid procedural approaches, RTA acknowledges the LR's subjectivity and encourages ongoing critical self-reflection throughout the process, rejecting positivist

notions of researcher bias (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This perspective aligns with the current study's epistemological stance and its commitment to reflexivity as a means of generating meaningful, contextually grounded insights (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.7.1.2 RTA and PR: A Complementary Approach. Many PR studies use methods within the Thematic Analysis framework, with varying levels of participant involvement, such as sorting, ranking, coding, highlighting, member checking and discussions to explore the interpretation of the researcher's findings (Vallianatos et al., 2015). However, akin to this study, the LR typically retains responsibility for the final analysis and writing, as often influenced by context, time, and resources (Rix et al., 2021).

Together, RTA and PR form a complementary approach that enhances qualitative research by prioritising participants' voices. This combination provides a flexible, structured framework for data analysis, deepening the understanding of complex social issues while balancing rigour with respect for participants' expertise through critical reflexivity and powersharing (Emke et al., 2024).

3.7.2 Application of RTA

3.7.2.1 Reflexivity in the Analysis Process. The LR conducted the analysis in line with RTA principles, incorporating reflexivity as a core practice. Reflexivity involves acknowledging how the researcher's positionality, experiences, and biases shape the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure transparency, the LR reflected on her dual role as a theorist (epistemological reflexivity) and an individual (personal reflexivity) (Willig, 2013), considering how these roles influenced the PR process, the data generated, and group dynamics (Emke et al., 2024). As a White, middle-class female and TEP with no prior care experience, the LR documented key decisions, challenges, and insights throughout the analysis

process in their reflexive diary (Figure 13) (Finlay, 2021). This meets Braun and Clarke's (2022) emphasis on researcher's transparency and thoughtful engagement with the data.

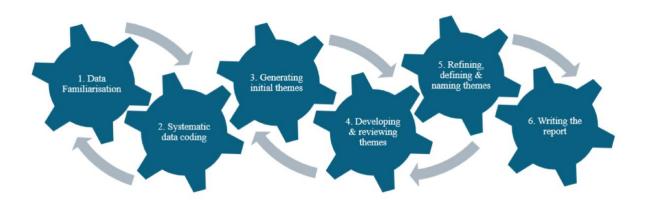
3.7.3 The RTA Process

The RTA process, outlined below, aimed to uncover the nuances, complexities, and contradictions within the data to enrich the research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This supports the relativist and social constructionist orientation of the study, rejecting the notion of absolute truths and emphasising the LR's active role in co-creating meaning and knowledge (Finlay, 2021). Key features of RTA in this study included:

- Application of Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase framework: Although presented sequentially, the phases were applied recursively and iteratively (Braun & Clarke, 2022). These phases were used flexibly to suit the data and RQ, conceptualised as interconnected cogs that allowed for continuous theme refinement (Figure 12).
- NVivo (Lumivero, 2025) software was employed to organise the data, identify patterns,
 and synthesise codes and themes (Finlay, 2021).
- Research supervision played a crucial role in reflecting on the data, codes, and themes throughout the analysis process.
- While the LR led the thematic analysis, co-researchers contributed their interpretations of the final themes during Workshop 3, committing to the collaborative approach.
- Defining co-researchers' roles and acknowledging the LR's subjectivity enhanced the
 depth, richness, and authenticity of the analysis, strengthening methodological rigour
 and ensuring findings were contextually relevant (Finlay, 2021; Levitt et al., 2017).

Figure 12

Visual Representation of the Six Stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis



Note. Adapted from Reflexive Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide (Chapter 2) by Braun and Clarke (2022), in Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Volume 1: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches, Springer. Adapted version.

3.7.3.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Dataset. The LR began by reviewing each interview recording and cross-checking it against the autogenerated Zoom transcription for accuracy. This process involved pausing, rewinding, and replaying audio to ensure precision. While objectivity was the aim, transcription is acknowledged to be inherently subjective, requiring decisions about the level of detail to include (Bailey, 2008). These included choices around how to represent non-verbal cues, represent pauses, apply punctuation, and handle verbal fillers like 'um' and 'like' (Jackson, 2008). Although adding punctuation can introduce an element of interpretation that may influence meaning (Poland, 2003), it was deemed necessary for clarity.

After transcription, each recording was revisited to verify accuracy, with brief notes taken to highlight key points and form an initial understanding of the data. This process was

98

repeated for all participants, resulting in comprehensive notes summarising the dataset. By the

end of this phase, the LR had developed a thorough familiarity with the data, preparing the

foundation for the next stages of analysis.

Figure 13

Reflexive Diary Extract: Pre-Data Analysis

Reflections Pre-Data Analysis: Running Before I Can Walk

A comment from a research tutor struck a chord with me: "You've often already written the research before you embark on it, based on your own values and life experiences." This observation has made me reflect on the potential biases I might bring to the data analysis process. I need to be cautious about allowing my personal and professional experiences, especially as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, to shape the themes I

identify.

I am feeling somewhat apprehensive about the systematic nature of data analysis. It seems like a time-consuming and, at times, tedious task. However, I recognise that it's a crucial step to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. I tend to focus on the bigger picture and sometimes overlook the finer details, so I'll need to consciously slow down

and approach the coding process more meticulously.

Supervision will be key in helping me navigate this. My supervisor can provide a critical and objective perspective, encouraging me to explore data points I may be naturally drawn to while ensuring I stay grounded and avoid confirming my own assumptions. This

will be an important part of maintaining rigour throughout the analysis.

3.7.3.2 Phase 2: Data Coding. The LR developed a comprehensive set of codes across

the dataset, ranging from descriptive, semantic codes to deeper, conceptual, or latent ones

(Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2021). Coding was primarily inductive, emerging organically

from co-researchers' responses. However, the LR's position as a TEP meant that complete

inductive neutrality was unattainable (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This professional perspective

inevitably shaped the interpretation of meaning, highlighting the need for reflexivity

throughout the coding process. The LR's reflexive journal and regular supervision supported this, enabling the exploration of multiple interpretations of the data.

Recognising that RTA is not entirely theory-free, a deductive element was incorporated to ensure alignment with the RQ (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2021). Pre-existing concepts and frameworks identified in the literature review informed the LR's understanding and interpretation of the data.

To ensure a systematic and organised coding process, and for a clear audit trail, the LR used NVivo software (Appendix P). This tool supported the dynamic, iterative coding process described by Braun and Clarke (2022), where codes evolve as analytical insights deepen. After generating initial codes, the LR took deliberate breaks from the data to return with fresh perspectives. During this iterative process, codes were revised, removed, expanded, renamed, or newly added.

3.7.3.3 Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes. The LR employed a hands-on approach to theme development, using Miro to visually organise and sort codes, fostering deeper engagement with the data. This interactive process supported the active and immersive construction of initial, or 'candidate' themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This visual mapping technique allowed the LR to explore relationships between potential themes and subthemes, enhancing clarity and coherence in the thematic framework (see Appendix Q).

Aware of the pressures associated with the thesis deadline, the LR recognised the potential for overcommitting to certain themes prematurely. To address this, intentional reflective breaks were incorporated into the analysis process. This enabled the LR to revisit the data with a refreshed perspective, reducing bias and enhancing the quality of theme development. This iterative and reflexive approach ensured that emerging themes were

critically examined and aligned with interpretive research practices, emphasising rigour and thoughtful analysis.

3.7.3.4 Phase 4: Developing and Reviewing Themes. In this phase, codes were manually reorganised to ensure better alignment with emerging themes, resulting in adjustments and refinements of the initial themes. The LR carefully examined and repositioned codes to construct cohesive themes that effectively addressed the RQ. This process was particularly challenging due to the interconnected nature of the dataset, requiring thoughtful consideration to maintain the integrity of the data. To navigate these complexities, visual mapping techniques were employed to conceptualise and illustrate relationships within the data, supporting a clearer understanding of the thematic structure (Appendix Q).

3.7.3.5 Phase 5: Refining, Defining and Naming Themes. Following Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidance, the LR avoided using one-word labels and instead created short, descriptive phrases that captured the essence of each theme. Once the themes and subthemes were named, another visual map was produced to illustrate how these components contributed to the overall narrative and understanding of the dataset (Figure 15, Chapter 4). This stage was particularly rewarding for the LR, as their efforts culminated in cohesive themes and subthemes that conveyed a comprehensive story of the data.

3.7.3.6 Phase 6: Writing Up. The writing phase was approached with care to effectively present and substantiate the findings (Finlay, 2021). With feedback from the LR's supervisor, the thesis evolved through multiple drafts to refine clarity and coherence. While Braun and Clarke (2022) advocate for first-person writing to highlight the researcher's role, they also recognise the value of a formal academic style for critical audiences. Striking a balance between these perspectives, the LR chose a third-person narrative to align with conventions in educational psychology literature while creating a tone of professional

neutrality. This provided insights into the LR's decision-making and analysis processes, promoting transparency and reflection throughout the theses. It also shifted attention away from the LR's personal voice, allowing space for co-researchers – an essential aspect of PR in amplifying their perspectives.

3.7.4 The Role of the Co-researchers in RTA

The LR acknowledges the limitation that CEYP did not directly engage in data analysis due to time and resource constraints. While multiple coders can enhance analysis through cross-checking and member-checking, RTA does not require consensus on codes or themes (Finlay, 2021). Therefore, although co-researchers were not involved in coding or theme development, their feedback on the LR's analysis enriched the findings and supported the study's integrity.

Feedback included: "the themes feel thoughtfully approached", "the themes and subthemes make sense", "I didn't expect to be so shocked at how different everyone's experiences are", "it contributes to this feeling of muteness that a lot of us seem to have" and "this work feels so important - it makes me want to do more research". These excerpts are anonymous to protect confidentiality.

Their input, while separate from the coding process, aligned with the social constructionist perspective by contributing to knowledge co-creation and ensuring contextual relevance. This reflects the 'inform/consult' level of participation (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). These contributions are explored in Chapter 5.

3.7.5 RTA: Critical Considerations

RTA is one of the most widely used qualitative data analysis methods due to its accessibility and theoretical flexibility (Byrne, 2022). However, many researchers continue to

apply Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach without fully accounting for its evolution (Smith et al., 2022). As Braun and Clarke (2022) argue, comparing RTA to alternative methods that were not chosen for a study is unproductive, especially given the significant advancements in RTA itself.

While alternative approaches, such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Grounded Theory, and Content Analysis, were therefore carefully considered during the planning phase of this study, they are not discussed in detail here. For academic transparency they are included in Appendix R. RTA was ultimately selected as it best aligned with the primary RQ, study objectives, and overall design. Specifically, RTA is well-suited to PR frameworks (Kara, 2017), making it an ideal fit for this study's aims and methodology.

During Workshop 2, co-researchers raised questions about the choice of data analysis method, specifically suggesting IPA as an alternative. In response, the LR explained the rationale for selecting RTA, emphasising its ability to generate broader, more generalised conclusions while maintaining a reflexive and inclusive approach (Finlay, 2021). This discussion reinforced the transparency of the research process and highlighted the study's thoughtful consideration of analytical methods.

3.8 Dissemination of Findings

Bucknall (2010) emphasises that CYP involved in PR should also be actively engaged in the dissemination and feedback stages. To uphold this principle, although the LR took responsibility for the final write up, co-researchers played an active role in shaping key elements, such as selecting appropriate terminology to describe CEYP and co-agreeing the study title. During the final co-researcher workshop in April 2025, the group were invited to share their ideas for dissemination. Together with the LR, an action plan was agreed for how the findings would be used. This ensured that the dissemination process reflected co-

researchers' perspectives and preferences, reinforcing their agency and ensuring their voices in the study' outcomes.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were embedded throughout this research, from topic selection to the study's core objectives and motivations. The research adhered to the BPS's Code of Human Research Ethics (2021) and received initial ethical approval from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust's Research and Ethics Committee in May 2024 (Appendix I). A subsequent amendment to the recruitment process was approved in July 2024 (Appendix S).

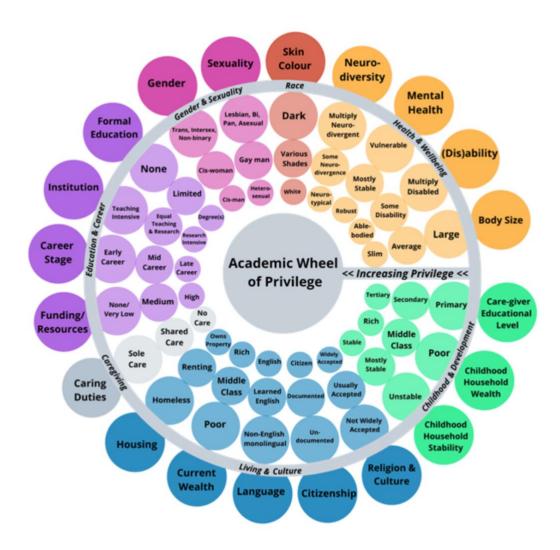
Ethical standards were rigorously upheld, with particular attention to ongoing consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and continuous transparency. All co-researchers provided informed consent prior to the initial workshop and were clearly informed of their right to choose how and when they participated (Kirby, 1999). At the start of each workshop, the LR reiterated that participation was voluntary and flexible, allowing co-researchers to negotiate their level of involvement. This approach reflected the dynamic nature of PR (Birch & Miller, 2002; Gal, 2017). and supported ethical engagement with CEYP throughout the study.

3.9.1 Exploring Power Dynamics and the Researcher's Positionality

A core principle of PR is the ethical responsibility to address power imbalances while safeguarding participant rights. To explore how intersecting power dynamics shaped the research process, the LR used the 'Academic Wheel of Power and Privilege' (Elsherif et al., 2022) (Figure 14), adapted from the 'Wheel of Power/Privilege' (Duckworth, 2020). This framework supported their reflexivity and highlighted the role of power and oppression in knowledge production, ensuring that CEYPs actively participated in shaping research that authentically reflected their experiences.

Figure 14

The Academic Wheel of Power and Privilege



Note. The Figure illustrates how various intersecting factors can influence levels of privilege within academic spaces. The model highlights how privilege is not fixed but shaped by identity, context, and organisational structures. Reprinted from *Bridging Neurodiversity and Open Scholarship: How Shared Values Can Guide Best Practices for Research Integrity, Social Justice, and Principled Education*, by Elsherif et al., (2022).

The participatory approach positioned co-researchers as experts of their own lives. However, while the process empowered individuals, the LR remained mindful of inherent power imbalances, particularly due to their academic position and the marginalisation of CEYPs in society (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). Reflexivity and transparency were essential in addressing these imbalances, and efforts were made to give co-researchers control over aspects of the research, such as formulating interview questions and determining dissemination strategies.

The LR recognised that their positionality included a personal preference for approaches that prioritise voice and empowerment, which was reflected in decisions such as the initial selection of potential study titles. This preference likely stems from a commitment to ensuring marginalised perspectives are heard and valued within research processes. However, it was important to balance this with the perspectives of the co-researchers, who ultimately chose a different title that better represented their own experiences and priorities. This reflexive awareness helped ensure the research authentically reflected co-researchers' lived realities rather than being shaped predominantly by the LR's own assumptions or values.

Furthermore, the LR was aware that their psychological perspective likely guided the selection of theoretical lenses, such as attachment theory, to analyse and interpret the data, helping to illuminate relational and developmental factors relevant to co-researchers' experiences. Significantly, this demonstrates how the LR's values and disciplinary background directly influenced the framing and interpretation of findings.

Finally, given the potential for YP to feel pressured to participate, ongoing informed consent was obtained throughout the study to safeguard autonomy. Power relationships between co-researcher members were also carefully managed, as the LR was aware voice in

workshops may have unintentionally or intentionally excluded those who felt less articulate (Spencer et al., 2020; Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2024). These dynamics are reflected on in Chapter 5 (Figure 23) and, through thoughtful data collection choices, ensured that all coresearchers had an equal opportunity to share their experiences in individual interviews. This approach helped balance power dynamics and amplify diverse voices within the group.

3.9.2 The Interdependency of Protection and Participation Rights

In PR involving CEYP, the interdependence of protection and participation rights is significant. Historically, CEYP have often been excluded from research due to safeguarding concerns and assumptions about their vulnerability (Aldridge, 2016). While protective measures are important, over-prioritising them can marginalise YP and silence voices that could meaningfully inform policy and practice (Warrington & Larkin, 2019). This framing overlooks how active participation can foster empowerment and resilience (Warrington et al., 2024).

Recognising that protection and participation support each other calls for a cultural shift in research practices. Involving CEYP as active contributors ensures research outcomes align closely with lived experiences (Mitchell et al., 2023), reflecting the principle that CYP should be included in decisions affecting them (UNCRC, 1989). Meaningful engagement can thus build agency, trust, enhance ethical standards and challenge risk-averse norms (Lefevre et al., 2019). Accordingly, this study adopted ethical practices that balanced co-researchers' autonomy with safeguarding, recognising their individual capacity, strengths, and social contexts to mitigate vulnerability (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2024).

3.9.3 Informed Consent and Right to Withdraw

When co-researchers expressed interest in participating, they received an information sheet and consent form (Appendix K and L), detailing the study's purpose, the use of their information, and measures in place to protect their data. They were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw at any stage prior to data analysis. Additionally, co-researchers were given the contact details for the LR and their research supervisor and encouraged to reach out with any questions.

To participate, co-researchers were required to sign and return the consent form via email, confirming their understanding and agreement to the terms of participation. Verbal consent and the right to withdraw were reiterated at the start and end of all workshops and interviews. Recognising that co-researchers may have varying levels of fluency in written and verbal communication, the LR clarified that informed consent could be given either in writing or orally. The principle of ongoing consent was revisited regularly throughout the study.

3.9.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity

The limits of confidentiality were clearly outlined in the information and consent sheets. Co-researchers were informed that any concerns about the safety of themselves or others would need to be reported through the appropriate safeguarding channels. Due to the small sample size, there was a risk that co-researchers could be identified through quotes in the study. To mitigate this, they were given the option to choose their own pseudonyms, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

All workshops and interviews were conducted remotely, and co-researchers were asked to be in a confidential space during discussions. The LR also ensured privacy by conducting the sessions from a private room.

Confidentiality was not only a core ethical requirement but also a key principle raised and upheld by co-researchers themselves. During the first workshop, co-researchers co-created a working group agreement that emphasised confidentiality, non-judgment, and mutual respect. This process gave them an active role in shaping group norms and fostering a safe environment for open dialogue. The agreement was revisited at the start of each workshop, with opportunities to amend it, reinforcing shared responsibility for maintaining a respectful and secure space.

3.9.5 Minimisation of Harm

Recognising that discussing lived experiences could be emotional and challenging for CEYP, the LR was sensitive to the co-researchers' emotional states throughout workshops and interviews. Some co-researchers might also experience frustration and resentment towards certain systems, services, or professionals (Children's Commissioner, 2021). To mitigate this, the LR adopted an appreciative, compassionate approach, offering emotional support when needed. Moreover, co-researchers were regularly reminded they could take breaks and withdraw from the discussion at any time.

At the end of individual interviews, the LR provided space for debriefing, allowing coresearchers' to reflect on their experiences. If necessary, they were signposted to appropriate support services. The LR also checked in with them to assess any signs of distress and encouraged them to access professional support if required. Ongoing check-ins continued through subsequent workshops into 2025, ensuring co-researchers felt supported and valued even after the formal research process concluded.

Finally, the study's participatory approach actively sought input from the CEYPs on the design and key topics, encouraging them to shape the study and fostering a sense of ownership and agency aimed at reducing vulnerability and promoting engagement (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2024).

3.9.6 Data Storage

Co-researchers were provided with an information sheet and asked to electronically sign a consent form (Appendix L), confirming their understanding of how their data would be anonymised, stored, and securely. All research data were stored in digital files on a password-protected laptop and/or University OneDrive, with personal information kept separate. Identifiable data, including recordings, were deleted once they had been transcribed, and consent forms were securely stored in an encrypted folder. Data protection procedures were explained both in the information sheet and verbally during the first workshop. A risk assessment was also completed as part of the ethical approval process (Appendix I).

3.10 Evaluation of Research Quality

The quality of this research was evaluated using Yardley's (2000) four principles: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. These principles were selected for their flexibility in assessing qualitative research, enabling an evaluation of trustworthiness, reliability, and validity while accounting for methodological complexity. Their application to the current study ensured a context-sensitive, rigorous, and transparent evaluation process, as outlined in Table 6, and referred to in more depth in the Appendix T.

Table 6

Application of Yardley's (2000) Principles

Yardley's (2000) Criteria	Description & Examples
Sensitivity to Context	• Maintained awareness of relevant literature, theoretical frameworks, and the socio-cultural context surrounding CEYP.
	 Attended a conference to deepen understanding of CEYP-related issues and the socio-political landscape.
	 Participatory approach to incorporate co-researchers' unique perspectives.
	 Embedded ethical reflexivity throughout the research process.
	 Engaged in critical reflection on the LR's positionality and power dynamics in working with CEYP.
Commitment and Rigour	 Promoted co-researchers' voices by involving them in meaningful decision-making throughout the project.
	 Provided co-researchers with ethics and research methods training.
	 Applied updated guidance for RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022).
	• Maintained a detailed audit trail documenting key decisions across research design, data collections and analysis phases.
Transparency and	• Ensured alignment between the research paradigm, methodological approach, and research aims.
Coherence	 Maintained open communication with co-researchers about the nature and scope of their participation.
	• Provided a transparent rationale for methodological choices, including limitations and alternatives considered (Appendix R)
	• The LR fostered trust through sharing relevant personal experiences, enhancing relational transparency.
Impact and Importance	 Generated new insights into CEYP's lived experiences.
	• Enabled CEYP to engage meaningfully in doctoral-level research, with co-researchers reporting benefits from participation.
	 Produced findings with clear implications for policy, practice and future research involving CEYP.

Note. This table outlines Yardley's (2000) criteria as applied in this study, using practical examples that align with the study's objectives and demonstrate methodological quality and ethical engagement.

3.10.1 Research Summary

In line with Yardley (2000), this study demonstrated strengths in transparency, coherence, and responsiveness to both theoretical and socio-cultural contexts, ensuring methodological rigour and upholding ethical integrity throughout. The participatory approach further enhanced the research by empowering participants, thereby enriching both the process and outcomes. While time constraints limited the depth of engagement with data analysis, these challenges were mitigated through thoughtful planning and ongoing reflexivity. Finally, although the full impact and significance are still being evaluated, the study suggests strong levels of validity and reliability, with the potential for continued relevance and influence in future research and policy development.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology, beginning with an explanation of the study's purpose and aims. It outlined the ontological, epistemological and transformative foundations, followed by a detailed discussion of the PR design and justifications for the LR's decisions. The data collection process was detailed, and an overview of the data analysis was presented. Key ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of the study were also addressed. The following chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the data and outlines the research findings.

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the key research findings, structured around the main themes and subthemes developed in response to the RQ. These themes reflect core concepts and demonstrate how the data addresses the RQ. As discussed in Chapter 3, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using RTA by the LR, with levels of coresearcher contribution integrated throughout this write-up. Extracts from co-researchers are used to support the analysis and illustrate the themes, following Braun and Clarke's (2022) framework. Additional supporting extracts are included in Appendix U.

4.2 Thematic Overview

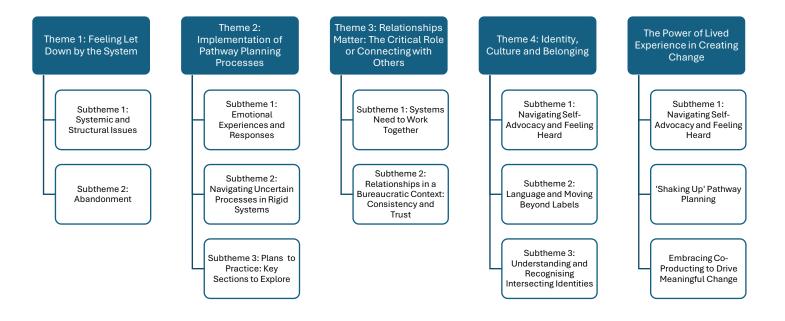
The LR identified five overarching themes and 13 subthemes, providing specificity and depth to the analysis. These themes, varying in complexity, reflect key patterns and insights within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Although discussed separately for clarity, together they offer a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of CEYP's experiences of pathway planning during the transition to adulthood.

Given that pathway planning is part of the broader, systemic leaving care process, some subthemes may appear interconnected, or, at times, contradictory. This reflects the complexity of both the transition to adulthood and the statutory frameworks that shape CEYP's experiences, offering deeper insight into the challenges faced by this unique group of YP. Connections and contradictions are outlined at the end of this chapter.

4.2.1 Overview of Themes and Subthemes

The LR used Miro to create thematic maps illustrating the relationships between codes, initial subthemes, and overarching themes, following the iterative and deductive process of RTA (Appendix Q). Figure 15 provides an overview of the finalised themes and corresponding subthemes. Data extracts were carefully selected to describe some theme names (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2014, 2020).

Figure 15
Final Themes and Subthemes from the Data Analysis



Themes in this chapter are discussed sequentially. Significantly, although presented in a linear order, they are interconnected in addressing the RQ, as illustrated by the connecting lines in the thematic map (Figure 16). Moreover, the LR chose to order the themes to reflect an ecological perspective, starting with systemic issues, moving through relational and individual experiences, and concluding with the potential of lived experience in driving change.

The co-researchers are referred to by their chosen pseudonyms: Jasmine, Lucy, Matilda, Nala and Truman. For consistency throughout the write-up, they are referred to as 'co-researchers'. The LR was aware of the power of language and carefully considered its impact when constructing themes and subthemes, as well as in the decision to use 'co-researchers' over 'participants'. The language used in the analysis is further explored in the reflexive diary extract (Figure 18, Chapter 5).

4.3 Theme 1: Feeling Let Down by the System

This theme explores the challenges CEYP face during the transition to adulthood, highlighting how these issues often stem from broader systemic problems in service delivery and organisational cultures. Co-researchers' narratives revealed feelings of distrust, frustration, and disappointment with leaving care systems, which were often seen as insufficient, inconsistent, and unresponsive. Feelings of abandonment and neglect intensified the challenges of leaving care, while increasing concerns around the so-called 'care cliff'.

4.3.1 Systemic and Structural Issues

This subtheme highlights structural barriers within the LC system, particularly the tension between LA statutory obligations and providing meaningful, person-centred care. Co-researchers described how limited resources, and bureaucratic processes often hindered the quality and quantity of relational support, leading to feelings of depersonalisation and objectification.

4.3.1.1 Instability and Competing Priorities in an Overburdened System. Coresearchers described the leaving care system as stretched and overworked, noting its impact on the quality of support and professional relationships with CEYP. Jasmine highlighted that both professionals and CEYP experienced burnout, affecting emotional availability and the effectiveness of working relationships: "Why would you give them [PAs] 50 caseloads? [...].

They seemed incredibly burnt out, and I think they could see I was burnt out too - from work and everything else" (Jasmine).

They expressed frustration that LA bureaucratic demands often overshadowed genuine support, leading to impersonal treatment. Repeated administrative errors in statutory documents also eroded trust in CLA and CEYP services, fostering a sense of resignation where mistakes felt expected: "It's like 'oh they got another thing wrong', so I think I had kind of become so used to it. I was just like ah here we go again like more wrong information" (Jasmine).

For Nala, this reinforced the perception that her identity and experiences were not valued: "It makes you feel so small when people get the basic details about you wrong, details you've shared with them in confidence because they asked you to, it feels like a betrayal".

Further, Matilda questioned the authenticity of pathway planning, perceiving it more as a bureaucratic checklist (Appendix U, Matilda A1) used to hold LAs accountable rather than a tool genuinely designed to support their needs.

It [the PP] is less helpful in that it can be used as a sort of 'we've done what we need to' by local councils and PAs. [...]. Don't just do it [the PP] to tick a box. We often realise when we're being treated like service users or just numbers, and we're very sensitive to that (Matilda).

For Jasmine, discovering their PP aged 23 reinforced feelings of powerlessness and a lack of agency in their post-care transition. This experience deepened their sense of instability and displacement, highlighting how their feelings were overlooked by leaving care services.

Not having contact with my PA for so many years and also not having any input into what I wanted [in pathway planning], it just felt like I was just moved around with no input or care for me (Jasmine).

4.3.2 Abandonment

This subtheme highlights co-researchers' feelings of abandonment, neglect, and distrust toward CPs during their transition from care. Central to this is the concept of the 'care cliff', which reflects experiences of sudden withdrawal or a gap in support, often forcing premature independence and leaving young people to navigate adulthood without adequate preparation or guidance.

4.3.2.1 Systemic Neglect. The relational and structural dimensions of abandonment by CPs was made. Jasmine's metaphor of a "storage unit" seems to reflect more than housing instability: "It just seemed very much like your kind of placed in, like, I don't know, a storage unit in a sense, and then just moved around last minute. So, it's like, yeah, it felt dehumanising not knowing" (Jasmine).

Mistrust in CPs was also influenced by negative early experiences as a CLA, which carried into adulthood. Nala described being repeatedly letdown from an early age, making it difficult to trust professionals into adulthood.

I appreciate that I have maybe quite a negative view of the system, [...], but I know it's very much influenced by my earlier experiences with all services. When they needed to step in, it took a really long time. By the time I was 13, it felt like it was already too late (Nala).

Truman's experience further exemplifies how a challenging relationship with his PA shaped his perception of professionals as oppositional, reinforcing a sense of isolation from the

system. "And the way I started to view the LA and the people around me; I started to view it as a very negative thing that was constantly at odds with me and fighting against me" (Truman).

Nala also commented on post-care services as lacking trauma-informed practice, indicating intrusive questioning and inadequate professional training.

They're constantly prodding and wanting to know all this personal information, but they're not trained for it. [...]. Like not to be rude, but I just feel like the whole way that services are set up is just not trauma-informed at all (Nala).

Beyond this, she reported instances where her racial identity was overlooked by key stakeholders, describing the emotional impact of this on her perception of and engagement with CPs.

Like in my notes, [...] someone had written that my ethnicity was 'unknown', and that felt horrible. Because they have no understanding of identity, no understanding of like race, you know, what it means to be somebody of mixed heritage. [...] And to have this person, [...] this service that was meant to be looking after me. And they're meant to be a CP and they don't know my identity, it is all rubbish (Nala).

4.3.2.2 The 'Care Cliff' and Accelerated Adulthood. Co-researchers shared common experiences of feeling unprepared for leaving care, attributed to a lack of sustained guidance and LA support. The sudden withdrawal of care and support services at 18 contributed to feelings of being accelerated into adulthood. Lucy referenced the "care cliff" (Appendix U, Lucy A1), a concept that reinforced feels of premature maturity. Jasmine echoed this, describing the pressure to be "out and gone by 20" (Appendix U, Jasmine A1).

A significant concern across narratives was securing stable housing post-care. Nala and Jasmine described experiences of homelessness (Appendix U, Nala A9) or the fear of eviction after being vocal about unsafe social housing living conditions.

Then she was making it clear, that, if I continue saying that something's not safe to live in then I won't be able to live here anymore. And I was like, well I can't be homeless. So, I guess I stopped pushing on it earlier this year, because I genuinely felt the threat of them taking away the flat; they would evict me (Jasmine).

For Lucy, the transition to independent living intensified the feelings of being alone: "I was, like, really, like, baffled by living on my own. Because I'd always been so used to people, like, sleeping right next to me. I think this just reinforced [...] about, like, secure housing" (Lucy).

Financial independence was another area where co-researchers felt unprepared. For Lucy, navigating complex financial systems, including Personal Independence Payments (PIP), reinforced her sense of post-care unpreparedness and accelerated adulthood.

And then they're like, right, go and do this really complicated thing [PIP]. You've never seen or done it before in your life. And if like, you've only really heard about it from the news, like what it is. I'm not that much of an adult yet. I'm 21 now, I think, like, it forced me to mature so much faster (Lucy).

Despite these challenges, education was seen as a protective factor for fostering identity, success and independence. Nala emphasised how education provided her with a space to manage her own future, despite limited support from professionals: "I think the way I've coped with things has definitely been through education. That's something I've managed on my own - they haven't really played a role in that" (Nala).

4.4 Theme 2: Implementation of Pathway Planning Processes

This theme builds on the systemic context, to highlight disparities in the perception, use, and implementation of PPs nationally, as well as between CEYP and professionals. These issues were brought up by the co-researchers and considered in the collaborative development of interview questions, which examined the intended purpose of PPs and its impact on helping CEYP achieve their goals. The theme is shaped by recurring references to emotional responses to PPs, varied experiences of the process, and a gap between expectations and the reality of how PPs affect life outcomes. Co-researchers emphasised that positive professional relationships were key to improving PP outcomes, with genuine engagement making the process feel more meaningful, as later discussed.

4.4.1 Emotional Experiences and Responses

Co-researchers' experiences with pathway planning felt emotionally charged, with a duality in how the plan is perceived. While some found it reassuring, most felt monitored, objectified, dehumanised, and patronised, as though they were part of a larger, impersonal system. The need for personalised provision within pathway planning was clear as crucial to addressing these concerns.

4.4.1.1 Navigating Difficult Conversations and Balancing Support. Co-researchers perceived the PP as generally invasive and overly personal. For example, Lucy felt unprepared for the intensity of conversations with her PA, highlighting the emotional challenge of confronting past experiences through pathway planning, which lacked sufficient consideration.

I think like talking about like certain experiences that I didn't want to face myself. There was some things that I wasn't mentally ready to face. [...]. I felt quite overwhelmed at the time. And like, they don't give you time to think about this stuff, they just dive straight into it (Lucy).

Matilda questioned the inclusion of family contact in the PP, describing it as "puzzling". Discussions about family contact often evoked strong emotions, particularly when coresearchers were uncertain about reconnecting or were actively trying to do so. Matilda recalled that the family-contact section was also often addressed last by their PA, which created a sense of dread around the conversation.

Parts of the form that were particularly challenging were, like the family stuff [...]. At the time of designing the plan it was a time in which I was struggling between wanting to reach back out to family or not, you know making my decision. So just because the feelings around family were quite heightened at the time, it felt a bit derailing (Matilda).

Nala referred to the PP as intrusive, prompting them to question their identity and sense of self. The formal, impersonal nature of the PP triggered deep emotional responses, disrupting their stability: "When I have this form [PP] sent to me, it just feels like it shakes all of those foundations and makes me question everything about who I am. And that really frustrates me" (Nala).

For some, pathway planning was also perceived as a form of monitoring, leading to their withdrawal from the process. This sense of surveillance was reinforced by viewing the plan as an "outcome measure", where services observed rather than engaged in an individualised process: "I mean, it feels like monitoring. But I know that's probably not, it's not their intention. Maybe partly because it does feel like an outcome measure, that you would have in like a service evaluation, massively" (Nala).

Nala further shared that a sudden, in-depth inquiry into her personal life after long periods of no contact heightened these feelings, which contradicted the perceived role of leaving care services.

They're prodding me for information. Then won't have any contact for six months. And then suddenly they want to know everything about my life. [.....]. It feels like I'm under surveillance. It's just the complete opposite of what I feel like they should be doing (Nala).

Matilda instead viewed their PP as a source of reassurance; a process offering stability during challenging transition periods.

Once at uni, it just gave me some sort of reassurance and that's what I needed at the time when I was designing the PP. Just some reassurance and something to acknowledge that the help wouldn't just be stripped away once I turned 18 (Matilda).

4.4.1.2 The Need for Personalisation. Frustrations with the impersonal nature of PPs were consistently expressed. Truman's experience illustrates how his personal needs were reduced to numbers without explanation, leaving him feeling misunderstood and disconnected from the process.

I feel like it felt challenging for me because when you rate something from one to ten, I need an explanation as to why you've done that. It just leaves it open to interpretation, and it doesn't give you like a conclusive answer as to why I've put that number down or why I do agree to x, y and z (Truman).

PPs were also described as "patronising" (Appendix U, Nala A12), with co-researchers feeling objectified, rather than a person to be seen or understood for who they are: "They [PA] didn't really know me as a person either. Even though it [PP] was about me, it wasn't really me, if that makes sense" (Truman).

This perception contributed to disengagement with the process, as the focus seemed to be on ticking boxes instead of genuinely addressing their needs: "I feel like an object, like I'm

just something to be sorted out. They fill out my paperwork, get it done, and then move on to the next" (Jasmine).

Truman further compared the pathway planning process to a "levelling up system" in a role-playing game (RPG)¹⁹: "The way I saw the PP initially was just like, oh, it's like a levelling up system, like an RPG. So, it's just like this small game system, side-quest, side-quest" (Truman). This metaphor emphasises how the process felt detached and procedural, rather than a meaningful tool to guide his transition post-care.

4.4.2 Navigating Uncertain Processes in Rigid Systems

Co-researchers often viewed the PP as just a procedural step within the scope of LC services. This subtheme highlights ambiguity surrounding the implementation, content and review of PPs, with particular attention given to how language contributes to oppressive discourses around CEYP.

4.4.2.1 Ambiguity in Implementation. Inconsistent implementation of PPs was a recurring issue, leading to confusion and feelings of exclusion for some co-researchers. For example, Jasmine was unaware of their PP until she turned 23, discovering it had been mismanaged since 2018. This led to incorrect information, such as the claim that she lived with her family (Appendix U, Jasmine A5), highlighting a lack of inclusion, transparency and collaboration between CPs.

I entered the care system when I was around 15. And then like, I never actually knew of my PP until earlier this year. So, like I was 23. I had my PA when I was 18. But no one ever mentioned to me a PP" [...]. "And then there is this big document [PP] that I can't even see. Like yeah how can they not let me see it let alone not involve me for years! (Jasmine).

-

¹⁹ A computer game in which players control the actions of characters in an imaginary world (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025).

Regional variations in the implementation and frequency of PPs were also noted, with Matilda expressing concern over the inequity of these differences, which impacted their sense of self-worth and their belief that they deserved equal support.

Like different councils in different cities, I wasn't aware that was a thing until recently.

[...]. So, I'm not sort of like oh, why have I got less frequent? Is it because of my specific case? That doesn't mean I need less help or deserve less help (Matilda).

Differences in implementation extended to the PP review process. The extracts highlighted inconsistencies, with differences in resources, professional capacity, and PA's roles affecting co-researchers' experiences. Some reported themselves/peers as being excluded from the review process altogether.

Truman instead valued the review process as an opportunity for self-reflection, recognising personal growth and achievements. He explained that having the PP review served as an opportunity to acknowledge progress and reassess his goals, contributing to a stronger sense of self and identity.

I'm very much someone who doesn't really acknowledge their own achievements and the goals that they've set for themselves and also surpassed what I did well in. So, it was like good and refreshing to have those types of reminders (Truman).

For others, the frequency of reviews (e.g., every six months) was seen as appropriate, especially when they felt more stable, such as during their time at university. Lucy emphasised the importance of regular PP reviews to adapt to changing life circumstances, recognising that CEYP's needs and feelings evolve significantly over time: "Yeah, because feelings shift so much. I don't think today, I'd fill out that in the same way" (Lucy).

For Matilda, the value of PP reviews lay more in the reassurance they provided, and knowing there would be a dedicated time for reflection: "Like not the content of it or the results of it, but just by knowing that, you know, in a few months' time [it will be reviewed]" (Matilda). This suggests that continuity and predictability of support are crucial.

While reviews were seen as valuable, Truman highlighted that they often felt formulaic and rushed, lacking meaningful discussion.

In those review meetings, it feels very quick, so it's just like, 'Are you on track to do this?'... 'Are you on course to do that?' If you're not, there's just a little nudge to actually do it. If you are, it's just a good pat on the back and that's it (Truman).

4.4.2.2 Words Matter: The Complexity of Language. The language and structure of PPs were another key factor shaping co-researchers' engagement. Lucy described the way PAs wrote about CEYP in the PPs as "dehumanising": "Because it's just like, the person, or whatever, the PA has decided to write, can be really dehumanising". Because you're just reading the form and you're thinking, I feel like an object" (Lucy). This highlights the power PAs hold in shaping how young people are represented. The lack of collaboration in decision-making was evident, as the language used often failed to reflect the voices or lived experiences of CEYP themselves.

The complex language used in PPs including titles and descriptions, also made it difficult for CEYP to understand and process the information. Lucy shared the challenges of expressing her own ideas within the plan due to complicated terminology, creating a communication barrier that limited her ability to contribute meaningfully: "And I think it's just quite like a lot of the technical terminology on there was just like a bit much for me at the age of like 18" (Lucy). Two co-researchers also mentioned how their neurodiversity further complicated their ability to process language in PPs.

Matilda and Truman, on the other hand, highlighted the value of PPs when they had agency in developing and writing the plan: "But it was like later down the line when my PA sat me down and really got me to think about what I wanted out of it. That's when there was some substance to it" (Truman). This suggests that when PPs are created through a collaborative process with a PA, they can have a meaningful impact: "It felt collaborative because I was given the option [...]. She sort of gave me the option, like, "Do you want to write some stuff down?" [...]. Yeah, so the process was good for me" (Matilda).

4.4.3 Plans to Practice: Key Sections Explored

This subtheme captures co-researchers' experiences with different sections of PPs and how these sections translate into real-life outcomes. Housing and finances were most frequently highlighted for providing practical advice and useful guidance. Co-researchers further discussed the gap between expectations set in the plan and the reality of their lived experiences.

4.4.3.1 Expectations vs Reality. There was often a clear disconnect between the goals set in PPs and the lived experiences or outcomes faced by CEYP: "I see it is literally just a piece of paper that's meant to represent the goals that I want to achieve, but it doesn't necessarily speak to the actual goals that I have achieved" (Truman).

While co-researchers acknowledged the intended purpose of PPs as a "document" to "inform" and "guide" (Matilda), all felt that in practice, it often didn't impact their lives or provide direct support in transitioning out of care: "There is a disconnect in terms of what's happening on your PP and in reality" (Lucy).

Truman felt the support intended by the PP was also rarely applied in daily life and only revisited during reviews: "I never really get asked about my PP until it's the month to actually

do it" (Truman). This reinforces the idea that often the plan is a procedural task imposed by their PA, rather than something CEYP are motivated to engage with.

Co-researchers highlighted a gap between the expectations and reality of pathway planning, particularly concerning personal relationships and the section exploring family connections.

I had that written down as like one of my things that I was supposed to be working, my relationships with my siblings. And then even though I wanted to contact them, they don't want to have that relationship. That was quite frustrating because that was one of the things I was really looking forward to, as part of my PP (Lucy).

For Lucy, the plan and conversations with their PA also failed to address the stigma and stereotypes associated with the label of 'CL'. Lucy felt unprepared for how society perceives CEYP and the impact on their identity and sense of self as outlined: "I think it's just like really nothing on that PP, prepared me for that kind of side of things" (Lucy).

4.4.3.2 Navigating Independence, and Life Skills. Co-researchers emphasised the role of the PP in fostering financial literacy and independence. Specific sections detailing rights, entitlements, money management, benefits access, and financial planning were viewed as particularly useful. Lucy's extract demonstrates how these elements helped her overcome some barriers to independence: "I think it helped me become independent. In like, learning how to do like the basic stuff, like set up bank accounts, organising finances. I think that's why I felt more comfortable around the care cliff thing" (Lucy).

For Matilda, the PP provided structure, especially around financial support options like bursaries and student loans. The plan served as a guide for navigating bureaucratic processes and engaging with necessary support. I just kept going back to it in my brain, like bits that I could remember, you know, look for this, apply for Student Finance England (SFE) on time, how to fill out an independent sort of care leaver form and whether you need to get something from your local authority to get student loans [...] that was useful (Matilda).

However, a tension emerged in how the PP functioned. While it provided guidance, its effectiveness was hindered by a lack of proactive engagement from professionals. Matilda's experience highlights this gap: when seeking help to verify their 'CL' status for SFE, they were referred to the PP instead of receiving direct support from their PA. This left the process feeling "useless" (Appendix U, Matilda A10), reinforcing the perception that PPs are more bureaucratic than supportive.

4.4.3.3 Health, Wellbeing and Education. The health and wellbeing section was also valued. Truman and Lucy noted that it motivated them to take steps such as joining a gym, registering with a GP or therapist, attending dental appointments and discussing mental health: "It got me advocating for my health, because I do struggle with that. [...]. I've got a dentist appointment booked, which is a big thing for me" (Lucy).

One of those areas was my mental health, and we isolated and acknowledged that in the PP. And through that I ended up having reoccurring counselling sessions. I still do now, with a clinical practitioner not too far away from here (Truman).

However, Matilda felt the PP lacked sufficient prompts for discussing mental health and wellbeing. Cultural barriers, such as the stigma surrounding mental health and help-seeking in their culture, made these conversations difficult and less integrated into the plan, particularly given the shared cultural background between them and their PA.

One area where I felt there was less support was mental health. Coming from a background where talking about mental health isn't as common - like in Arab culture -

made it harder for me. I felt like my PA might not have realised I needed support in that area because it wasn't something we talked about much (Matilda).

Additionally, this section of the plan was viewed as a tool for identifying risks, particularly related to substance abuse and addiction. While Matilda found it helpful in informing professionals about their past struggles, Nala found it challenging (Appendix U, Nala A16), due to a lack of integrated support and perceived assumptions about CEYP needing intensive mental health intervention.

It's to inform not just me but also whoever's concerned with the PP, like my PA, about the risks to - I don't know - my safety. There was a section on, like, if you've had problems with addiction? What support is in place if you should need it? (Matilda).

Turning to education, Truman saw the PP as central to setting and reviewing his educational goals. He described how having clear targets in the plan helped him re-engage with his studies after initial setbacks and provided guidance for his journey into HE.

We also talked about what I wanted to do about university, applying for uni, and all that kind of stuff. At the time, I didn't really realise how important it [the PP] would be for me later on. [...]. I think it did have a big impact (Truman).

However, Nala expressed frustration with the wording around challenges in education, feeling the PP assumed low expectations of CEYP and overlooked her achievements, such as being a PhD candidate. This highlighted a broader issue: the PP may underestimate the capabilities of CEYP in HE.

When I got sent this questionnaire [PP], one of the biggest things that jumped out to me, I mean all of it, but I was like what the heck, the education bit. Considering I'm doing a PhD. And you know I'm capable, and I'm getting asked on a scale of one to ten how much I'm struggling with education... (Nala).

4.5 Theme 3: Relationships Matter: The Critical Role of Connecting with Others

This theme highlights the significance of professional relationships in the effectiveness of PPs and in ensuring successful transitions into adulthood. Co-researchers emphasised that positive, collaborative interactions with professionals, both within the LA and externally, were crucial. Trust, rapport, and strong connections with PAs were key, while barriers to support were acknowledged when these relationships were strained or absent.

4.5.1 Systems Need to Work Together

Co-researchers emphasised the need for better communication and collaboration between professionals across education, healthcare, LAs, and third-sector organisations. Effective joint working was seen as essential for ensuring CEYP's needs are understood without requiring them to repeatedly share their stories. However, a lack of coordination was described, which inhibited meaningful support. The data extracts across this subtheme highlight a range of stakeholders and the complexity of coordinating post-care decisions.

4.5.1.1 Joint Working Matters. Nala and Truman highlighted a disconnect between care services, leading to frustration and fatigue from engaging with multiple professionals over time. Nala recalled feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of SWs assigned to her across CLA and CEYP services, which made it difficult to build stable relationships (Appendix U, Nala A19). Truman also noted how pathway planning revealed gaps in service coordination between the LA and other professionals, reinforcing the need for clearer signposting to available support: "I feel like if you do want something like the PP, there must be other programmes that [they] can direct you towards, if that makes sense" (Truman).

Limited collaboration between LAs and HE institutions also created challenges, particularly around housing and financial support. For example, Lucy described how she had

to advocate for herself when transitioning to university, managing accommodation issues, chasing professionals and navigating complex systems alone.

They [uni] organised for me to have a care leaver special internship programme, which they set up for a group of us. But they sort of didn't realise [they] never sorted accommodation for over the summer, until, like, the next academic year when everyone else was moving in in August. So, then that's how I ended up with, like, chasing them... (Lucy).

Matilda and Lucy faced further challenges when relocating to different regions for university and identified a lack of coordinated support between LAs and universities nationally: "Because I was in Scotland as well. When I was struggling to find accommodation for my next uni year. They [PA] were just like, we don't know what to do for you because we're here in Scotland" (Lucy). For Matilda, this led to withdrawing from LA support and relying more heavily on university services:

They're [PA] in a different city. I know it's only Manchester to London, but I just feel like what's the point. Something about them being in Manchester is like - should I even bother reaching out? Should I just stick with the uni? (Matilda).

4.5.1.2 Community Support Beyond PPs. Across co-researchers' narratives, charity and third-sector organisations emerged as key catalysts for successful transitions from care. Organisations such as 'Say Yes Mentoring,' the 'United Foundation,' 'Become,' and 'Who Cares' were often seen as more effective than formal LA support in providing stability, a genuine relationship, and direct assistance. For example, Jasmine described how mentoring provided space for reflection and to explore future goals, while Lucy credited the 'United Foundation' with helping her secure a job opportunity.

And then helping shape my perspective and being like one of the first people to ask about what I want to be like in life. Helping me reflect on my values and the things I'm passionate about - it really helped I think having that mentor (Jasmine).

I was really fortunate in that last year when [United Foundation] gave me that job. [...].

I needed that kind of support there, I really felt grateful in having that bit of security and just a little bit coming in every month (Lucy).

Jasmine also felt that third-sector organisations, rather than LAs, will play a crucial role in helping CEYP achieve positive life outcomes after care in the future: "In my opinion, it's really the organisations, not the LAs, that are better at providing support. But I didn't know that at the time" (Jasmine).

Her extract went on to mention that having a mentor who genuinely listened and cared for them was a transformative experience.

I was so shocked when this person [volunteer mentor] actually wanted to talk to me. I was so sad that after that many years of life, it's like, wow, this person is one of the first people in my life who actually wants to talk to me (Jasmine).

Additionally, Jasmine criticised LAs for failing to collaborate with community and charity groups, indicating the need for reform in this area: "Maybe some LAs are able to provide adequate support, but I think very few are actually willing to signpost and say, 'Here are other organisations that can also support you" (Jasmine).

4.5.2 Relationships in a Bureaucratic Context: Consistency and Trust

This subtheme explores the relationship between co-researchers and PAs within the constraints of rigid, bureaucratic LA systems. Across accounts, co-researchers stressed that an engaged, reliable and genuinely attuned PA was fundamental to effective pathway planning. However, frequent PA turnover, inconsistent support, and systemic barriers often influenced this, with co-researchers left feeling unheard and disconnected from the process.

4.5.2.1 Relationships with PAs. Co-researchers viewed PAs as vital to meaningful pathway planning. They found the process more engaging when PAs encouraged open dialogue in a non-judgmental space: "I think it's so much more than just the questionnaire or the form. It's the actual people. I guess in everything, the therapeutic relationship [between PA and CEYP] needs to be genuine" (Nala). PAs characterised as "vibrant and positive" (Matilda) and demonstrated genuine investment in co-researchers' wellbeing, fostered greater trust.

Beyond relational support, PAs who offered practical guidance were viewed positively. Matilda highlighted the significance of having a supportive adult figure, describing how their PA offered guidance while maintaining professionalism. They valued this balance, as it fostered both trust and personal growth.

I don't know, I feel like I had an adult in my life - and I think we always need an adult to guide us - and my PA felt like that sometimes, like having a wise old owl to talk to.

Yeah, it always felt like she was doing her job as well, if I'm being honest (Matilda).

However, barriers to engagement were described, particularly the exhaustion caused by frequent PA turnover. Being repeatedly assigned new PAs left co-researchers feeling frustrated and emotionally drained. As Lucy shares, retelling their stories to unfamiliar professionals can be challenging:

And then like the new person had to be brought up with speed. Like I had to explain a lot of stuff. It's just like somebody that doesn't know you all that well. It's just more hassle than it was worth (Lucy).

For Jasmine, gaps in PA support and prolonged periods without an assigned PA reinforced feelings of detachment from pathway planning.

I'm unassigned, because a PA left. So, I'm still waiting to get a new PA. [...] My first PA I didn't see for three years. They had never seen me. So, I guess in that sense, they wouldn't be doing the PP (Jasmine).

Truman instead described how a 'directive' PA, who dismissed his input and failed to collaborate, led him to disengage from his PP, as it did not reflect his aspirations or needs. This raises concerns about the extent to which CEYP have agency within the process.

The first one [PP] was directed. So it felt like I was chasing something that didn't really represent me, if that makes sense. She didn't listen to anything that I wanted to do. She completely changed my PP after I specifically asked to write it in myself (Truman).

For Nala, distrust toward their PA extended beyond the individual, as a reflection of the entire corporate parenting system. Negative past experiences shaped their view of PAs as extensions of the LA rather than genuine sources of support, describing their relationship as "artificial" and in reluctancy sharing personal information.

I didn't want to talk to her and because I didn't want to tell her about everything, because I don't trust that they're actually going to do anything with that information. I'm like what is the point of this? (Nala).

4.6 Theme 4: Identity, Culture and Belonging

This theme highlights the importance of recognising CEYP as individuals, while also addressing the impact of stereotypes, stigma, and shame tied to the 'CL' label. Co-researchers shared the need for thoughtful language and a more nuanced understanding of identity. The theme further explores the role of peer connections and community as key protective factors in a successful transition to adulthood. Additionally, it discusses the significance of acknowledging cultural backgrounds and intersecting identities in leaving care processes, such as pathway planning, to provide more meaningful, holistic support.

4.6.1 Community and Peer Connections

In this subtheme co-researchers discussed the vital role of peer relationships and community interactions in shaping identity, fostering empowerment and for successful post-care outcomes.

Engagement with the charity sector, played a crucial role in providing practical support and creating a sense of belonging for co-researchers, especially during major life transitions such as moving for university.

I did have to seek help from 'Who Cares'. Who were very helpful in supporting me". They're a really great organisation and they managed to help me out in sorting out my accommodation and then organising financial support so I could move back to Scotland. That was great (Lucy).

Beyond practical help, co-researchers found that engaging with peer networks and advocacy groups was valuable in exploring and understanding their identity. Lucy's extract also highlights how supporting other CEYP with similar lived experiences through her involvement with the United Foundation was both empowering and affirming.

Like the identity of being care experienced. I didn't really have the chance to support that or understand it fully until I got that job with the United Foundation supporting care experienced people. [...]. That was quite liberating because I was able to support care experienced people while also exploring my own care experienced identity. It was really helpful because I could think there are other people who are going through these judgments too (Lucy).

Jasmine recalled feeling like they had missed out on connecting with peer networks earlier, highlighting the need for better signposting to organisations that advocate for CEYP: "If I had found the right resources or organisations earlier, it could have made a big difference. There are other advocates out there, but it feels like I missed the chance to connect with them sooner" (Jasmine).

Moreover, Nala emphasised the significant impact of support, encouragement, and understanding from friendships, while noting the perceived expectation that they would lack social capital as a CEYP. "Because it's like I have friends, but they're treating me as though I don't have any other support or expecting me to not" (Nala).

4.6.2 Language and Moving Beyond Label

The power of language and labels in shaping CEYP's identities, internalised narratives, and stereotypes was evident in this subtheme, with coresearchers discussing how the 'CL' label affects their engagement with pathway planning. The emotional impacts of labels, including shame, isolation, and feeling judged, are explored, along with how language can empower individuals and address power imbalances.

All co-researchers felt that the term 'CL' reduces CEYP to a single narrative. They viewed the stereotypes as dehumanising, portraying them as coming from a "lower social class" (Appendix U, Lucy A11) and reinforcing negative assumptions: "And like some of the

judgements, the stereotypes it's just mental like what informs people. Do I look like a criminal to you?" (Nala). Specifically, Lucy felt that in a health context, the label led to misdiagnosis and oversimplified their experience: "I know it's so challenging, and like especially when you're a care leaver, they [healthcare professionals] just see that they're like yeah "definitely anxiety" (Lucy).

The 'CL' identity was also described as reinforcing feelings of exclusion, influenced by cultural and societal biases. Lucy felt that care-experienced individuals were not accepted in her community due to her family's socio-economic status, making her feel like an 'outsider': "I think because I was brought up with a class. Well, I say middle class. In a rural village. Being care experienced just wasn't accepted. Suddenly you're an outsider" (Lucy). Similarly, Matilda described feelings of discomfort when accepting CP help, influenced by cultural expectations and stigma.

Nala's experiences also suggests that recognition from the LA as a 'CL' seemed to be tied more to her academic achievements after leaving care, rather than her ongoing needs.

So I probably wasn't their ideal young person. Until now, which is very ironic, because now that I'm doing this, that they're actually all over it. They want me to come to an awards night. [...]. When I graduated last year and started this programme, it was suddenly, "Oh my God, wow! (Nala).

A frustrating contradiction also emerged: while accepting the 'CL' label provided access to support services, it also led to feeling reduced to that identity. However, Lucy noted that in some contexts, such as advocating for herself or accessing opportunities, the label was helpful, allowing her to explain her background or family context more easily.

I think it's like it's great when you want to get you know get your point across that you don't have to say I've been through this business you can just say I'm a care leaver and so labels can be helpful with that side of things...(Lucy).

Lastly, Matilda highlighted that YP estranged from their parents, despite facing similar challenges, are excluded from CEYP support due to not meeting the statutory definition, creating a sense of unfairness.

And it's just really annoying - the irony of it, you know? You've been affected the same by the system, but one single definition of a word means you don't get the same support as everyone else. I think that's just really frustrating (Matilda).

4.6.3 Understanding and Recognising Intersecting Identities

This subtheme acknowledges the intersecting identities of CEYP during their transition from care, including factors such as culture, race, religion, ability, class, and geography. Co-researchers highlighted how these factors influence their engagement with pathway planning and interactions with key CEYP stakeholders.

Nala shared powerful experiences of cultural neglect and racial discrimination, highlighting how the system failed to equip her with basic life skills, such as caring for afro hair: "I had no clue how to look after my hair, like so many basic things I had no idea how to approach" (Nala). She expressed feeling unprepared and lacking the knowledge to manage her natural hair, suggesting failings in corporate parenting in nurturing CEYP's identity, self-sufficiency, and independence skills.

Jasmine further described feeling that aspects of their identity, including religion, seemed unimportant to CPs. Despite valuing their faith, they questioned why professionals

would "care" about it. This reflects a broader issue of LC services failing to explicitly acknowledge and celebrate the diverse identities of CEYP through their interactions.

Religion is very important to me, but if they don't even know me as a person, why would they care about what my religion is? I think not knowing like the things I'm interested or passionate about or like aspirations or goals (Jasmine).

As a result, Truman's extract highlights how PPs that fail to reflect a young person's identity can feel irrelevant, making them difficult to engage with or follow.

It felt as though it didn't capture the full essence of who I was as a person at the time, and I couldn't really relate to it. So there was always this juxtaposition in terms of like actually sticking towards it (Truman).

Truman also described how his autism diagnosis was invalidated and removed by his second PA in his PP, leaving him to repeatedly advocate for his needs, question his own needs and trust in the wider care system.

In my initial PP, I was just recently coming into care. I didn't even know that I was autistic. So, with my first SW, we were trying to get me to, you know, get the diagnosis for it. And then when I moved on to my first PA, she would go out of her way to deny that I actually had a diagnosis, when I had an actual written diagnosis of my autism. And it made me feel like this world couldn't really be real, like nothing, nothing made sense because it was in one PP and now it's no longer there in the other (Truman).

Matilda further reflected on class identity and the complex effects of financial changes brought about by CEYP funding and access to HE. Their mention of "class guilt" possibly reveals an internal conflict shaped by their care-experienced background and shared upward socio-economic mobility: "And now I have more money than I had or could have

thought I would have had from funding. A lot of class guilt, I guess. It makes me feel itchy as I speak about it" (Matilda).

4.7 Theme 5: The Power of Lived Experience in Creating Change

This theme shows how co-researchers used self-advocacy to navigate their transition from care. They called for greater clarity and co-production in pathway planning, stressing the importance of professionals listening to and acting on CEYP insights. A key tension emerged between being consulted and being truly included in decision-making processes.

4.7.1 Navigating Self-Advocacy and Feeling Heard

Co-researchers expressed feeling unheard, with professionals often controlling the narratives and decisions about their lives. Many felt their perspectives were overlooked, particularly in formal documentation, where their experiences were misrepresented or rewritten. This dynamic points to the emotional toll of self-advocacy, with CEYP feeling forced to fight for their voices to be recognised.

Nala's experience illustrates this issue. She shared how her personal decision to stop attending church was wrongly framed by professionals as radicalisation, which deeply affected her sense of identity and misrepresented her.

At one point, they were saying that I was radicalised because I wasn't going to church anymore. And I wasn't being radicalised, I just didn't want to go to church anymore. It kind of makes me feel sick, like how much of other people's narratives are in this file that has my name on it (Nala).

This extract highlights the emotional harm caused when CEYP's voices are distorted or disregarded, leading to feelings of powerlessness and frustration.

Truman also discussed the emotional challenges of advocating for himself within bureaucratic systems, particularly when his PP did not accurately reflect his needs and feelings. He shared the struggle of feeling unable to speak up for himself:

You can ask to see it or make amendments to it [PP reviews], because sometimes there are amendments that I do want to make to it. But because I wasn't vocal enough, I didn't say anything and then I was just like 'I should have said that! (Truman).

When personal self-advocacy felt insufficient, external support became crucial in amplifying co-researchers' voices. Both Truman and Jasmine highlighted how advocacy groups helped them share their experiences and feel supported. These platforms enabled them to reclaim control over their personal narratives and advocate for meaningful change on behalf of others: "I think the best way to describe 'speaker box' would be a children in care council, where YP come to advocate for other YP. And so that their voices are elevated. And heard overall. It is really great" (Truman).

It was only until, I think, I raised the alarm bells and got in contact with a few advocacy groups that I had that PA moved on. I think it was outside, but you could call them up or ask them to advocate for you. Just to help you out if you felt like misrepresented or unheard (Jasmine).

Self-advocacy was particularly crucial for securing mental health support, as Lucy's experience highlights: "I feel like that experience has very much taught me that if I don't tell people how I feel, then nothing will get going or nothing will move forward" (Lucy). She expressed frustration at having to repeatedly justify her needs within a system that often-lacked proactive support, highlighting her reliance on self-advocacy when professional help felt inconsistent.

Some co-researchers, like Nala, found themselves acting as intermediaries between services, bridging communication gaps and seeking out specialised support independently. This added responsibility illustrates the potential emotional burden of navigating a disjointed care system.

And like I'm the bridge between these two services. [...]. In the areas where I do struggle, I'm able to identify those myself. I have the capacity to recognise them, and I'm already being supported by a specialist team (Nala).

For Truman, becoming more vocal over time allowed him to communicate his needs more effectively. This shift demonstrates emotional growth and the positive impact of self-advocacy, yet it also reveals the challenges that CEYP face in finding their voice in leaving care systems that can exclude their input.

It's working well now because I'm much more vocal about what I would want from my PA. When I was younger, I wasn't as outspoken. I'd be very quiet about the things that I would want. I'd wait for someone else to speak up about it, rather than making my voice heard myself (Truman).

4.7.2 'Shaking Up' Pathway Planning

The need for reform and change was evident throughout the co-researchers' accounts and experiences, pointing to systemic limitations in current transition planning approaches.

Co-researchers called for a comprehensive 'shake-up' (Appendix U, Matilda A19) of pathway planning. They described wanting a system that is more collaborative, transparent, consistent and that actively listens to and empowers CEYPs in decision-making. Figure 17 illustrates the co-researchers' key recommendations for reforming PPs, mapped onto Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model.

Matilda and Nala advocated for a fundamental overhaul of the current approach: "I think the whole system needs to change, and I know that's a massive..." (Nala).

Co-researchers commented on the need for more personalised, person-centred support in PPs, expressing a lack of flexibility and personalisation, arguing that PPs should be tailored to each individual CEYP's needs: "You need to personalise the PP to the person you're working with. Try to be as flexible as you can for the person you're making the PP for" (Matilda).

Additionally, they pointed out dissatisfaction with the deficit-based language and complex terminology used in PPs, which was experienced as inaccessible.

I would love to if there is any like possibility of actually changing it. Like I would love to do that and input into it like a new one if it was made. Because I mean the questions are phrased as though they expect you to be struggling (Nala).

The form itself could be more explanatory. I didn't really understand what I could have put in the plan as well as I could have done probably. It's just one of the major problems that I faced because I just didn't understand what they were on about at the time really (Lucy).

Lucy also suggested providing accessible resources, such as a dictionary or a toolkit, to help CEYP navigate the language of pathway planning (Appendix U, Lucy A18).

Co-researchers further emphasised the need for more frequent reviews of the PP during key life transitions, such as turning 18, moving to university, or transitioning to semi-independent living. They argued that this would provide better support in navigating changing circumstances and plan for contingencies.

When I just started uni, I sort of just wanted an excuse to review different parts of my life with my PA. [...] Because it's just scary, and I feel a review of all the help and my feelings would have helped (Matilda).

I think especially like that year of being 18 would have helped a lot because I moved into like different semi-independent accommodation. And for me, the biggest fear was like, I don't know what's next. So, a PP would have helped (Jasmine).

Truman also suggested that regular reviews could have supported his return to education, illustrating the importance of ongoing reflection and collaboration within the process.

When I was 19 and thinking about going back into education, I think around that time. If I had, like, a frequent review on my PP and everything was, you know, in order to make sure that I actually achieved my goal, I think that would've really helped me (Truman).

Significantly, co-researchers discussed the need for clearer explanations of their statutory rights and entitlements, such as the legal entitlement to a PP.

One thing that could have helped is like having some, like, rights or entitlements information. Like when transitioning or like having a conversation or some, like, paperwork to say, oh, okay, so 'when you're 18, you get a PP... (Jasmine).

Accountability was another key issue. Jasmine suggested mechanism, such as signed documents, to confirm that YP had read, understood, and contributed to their PP, ensuring their involvement in the process.

Having a way that like YP have to actually like sign a document to say I've read this and received it...and inputted into it. And it is their signature. [...]. To me, I should be able to hold them account for not having been given one [a PP] (Jasmine).

The need for greater clarity regarding the steps that follow the creation of their PPs was also cited. Co-researchers wanted a clearer understanding of who would be involved, what actions to take, and how to address any issues that may arise. "I almost wanted more of a debrief of like... and this is what's going to happen after, and this is what the PP will do, because even I would struggle to put it into words" (Matilda). This extract highlights the uncertainty that many CEYP face post-pathway planning, as well as their desire for accessible, transparent information about the next steps in the process.

Lastly, co-researchers called for national consistency in pathway planning, arguing that differences across LAs created an uneven experience for CEYP. In keeping with expected practise, standardising the frequency and quality of support could ensure equitable access to resources and guidance: "I'd change how, again, how standardised the frequency and level of support is across different councils" (Matilda).

4.7.3 Embracing Co-Production to Drive Meaningful Change

This subtheme focused on involving CEYP in shaping processes like pathway planning to enhance engagement, foster empowerment, and support positive transitions from care. Co-researchers emphasised that consultation and co-production are essential for creating meaningful change and building systems that reflect CEYP' needs, values and voices.

Co-researchers strongly advocated for incorporating a wide range of perspectives in the development and processes surrounding PPs. For example, when asked what changes they would make, Nala responded: "In terms of advice, I would definitely say include YP. But I would say include YP from as broad a background as you can" (Nala). This emphasises that CEYP should be recognised as individuals with unique experiences and identities, rather than being treated as a homogeneous group. Their involvement in decision-making processes should reflect this diversity.

Two co-researchers expressed frustration with the lack of genuine consultation, advocating for greater direct involvement of CEYP in designing PPs. This could include giving them opportunities to facilitate discussions or even take the lead in creating new plans: "I would love to if there is any like possibility of actually changing it. Like I would love to do that and input into it like a new one if it was made" (Nala).

Um, consult care-experienced people more. When designing these things [PP], I felt like they were being created by a group of older people who believed they had enough empathy to design them [...]. I think it's not enough to just do your job (Matilda).

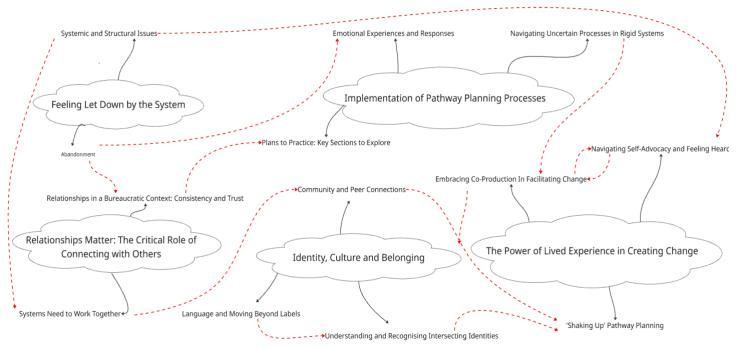
In his reflection, Truman discussed collaborating with other CEYP to amend PPs at a systemic level. This highlights the importance of group discussion, reflection, and idea exchange in driving meaningful change within the statutory process, helping CEYP feel respected and confident in voicing their opinions.

I believe that there's a lot of revisions that need to be made with the PP. Those revisions should be made with the young person involved, so like a group of YP. Like what we've been doing here, it would very much be enlightening to them and would be helpful to exchange ideas and discuss what should be involved and what shouldn't (Truman).

4.8 Connections and Contradictions

Figure 16

Thematic Map: Connecting Themes and Subthemes



Note. This thematic map is an illustrative representation of the interconnections between key themes identified in the study. It offers a visual overview of how concepts may relate to one another but does not represent an exhaustive or fixed model. The complexity reflects the multifaceted nature of the topic.

The analysis reveals a complex and layered picture of CEYP's experiences with PPs during their transition to adulthood; therefore, it feels important to acknowledge both the interconnections and tensions across themes (Figure 16). A central thread running throughout the data was the disconnect between statutory processes and lived experiences. While PPs are designed to promote autonomy, many co-researchers felt unsupported or excluded from meaningful decision-making, often navigating rigid, disjointed systems and inconsistent professional relationships.

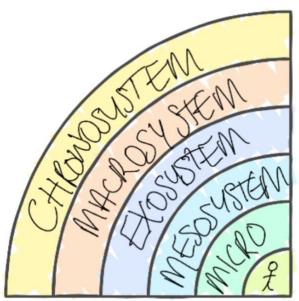
Trusting relationships, identity, and having a voice emerged as critical components of effective pathway planning. Yet, a central contradiction was evident, with CEYP expected to demonstrate independence within systems that often failed to adequately support or enable it. The emotional burden of fighting to be heard emerged as a recurring frustration, suggesting the challenges of self-advocacy in the absence of consistent support.

The need for systemic change was also clear, with co-researchers emphasising the importance of being active contributors in decision-making processes. While their participation was empowering, it also exposed a gap between policy intentions and everyday practice, revealing the persistence of tokenistic engagement rather than genuine co-production. Overall, the findings reaffirm the value of supportive relationships, structural reform and authentic participation in ensuring PPs truly meet the needs and goals of those it is intended to help.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented five main themes and their subthemes, illustrating the complex and sometimes contradictory experiences of CEYP in relation to pathway planning. Figure 17 refers to both the individual needs and broader systemic challenges discussed in this chapter, which are further explored in Chapter 5, where co-researchers' desire for change in the process is addressed. The findings reaffirm the systemic, relational, and personal dynamics involved in transitioning to adulthood. The next chapter will interpret these findings through key theoretical lenses and existing literature, considering their implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Figure 17
'Shaking Up' Pathway Planning: A Summary of Co-Researchers' Recommendations for Change



Frequent reviews of plans to reflect the dynamic process of transitioning from care

National consistency in implementation and societal shifts towards genuine co-production with CEYP

Policy reform ensuring pathway plans are clear, accessible plans and meaningfully shaped by CEYP

Enhanced multi-agency collaboration with shared understanding of the purpose of pathway plans

Relational and person-centred support forming the foundation of pathway planning support

Pathway plans actively guided by the individuals' needs, goals & aspirations

Note. This Figure summarises the co-researchers' calls for change to the pathway planning process, mapped onto Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. It links to the framework presented in Figure 21, Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

Building on the findings outlined in Chapter 4, this chapter critically examines CEYP's experiences of transitioning to adulthood, focusing on the role of PPs in that process. It explores key themes and situates them within the broader systemic context of leaving care in the UK. In response to the RQ, 'What are Care Leavers' Experiences of Pathway Plans in the Transition to Adulthood?', the chapter analyses the implementation of PPs and their impact on CEYP's transition journeys.

The discussion is structured around five overarching themes, each examined in relation to existing literature. Key theoretical frameworks are used to interpret the findings, with attention to the complex systems shaping CEYP's needs and outcomes during this transition. The chapter draws on four key theories: Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1979), Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, and Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989). These are applied flexibly, acknowledging their intersections and relevance across themes, while recognising that other theoretical perspectives may also offer valuable insight into pathway planning experiences.

The chapter concludes by reflecting on the study's aims and outlining key implications for CPs and EPs in supporting CEYP through this critical transition. It also discusses the study's limitations and identifies areas for future research and dissemination, as co-developed with the co-researchers, to inform policy, practice, and the broader leaving care system.

5.2 Statement of Principal Findings

RTA was used to analyse the data, identifying five overarching themes and thirteen subthemes, as illustrated in Figure 15 (Chapter 4). As discussed in Chapter 3, these findings

were shared with co-researchers during Workshop 3, accompanied by supporting data extracts. The findings reveal that the broader social care system plays a significant role in shaping CEYP's transition to adulthood. A central finding is the need to frame leaving care as a systemic issue, raising questions about responsibility within the system and the importance of person-centred, trauma-informed approaches. In doing so, this study exposes ongoing challenges in pathway planning and advocates for structural reform to better support CEYP through this critical life stage.

The essential role of meaningful relationships was also emphasised, particularly the importance of stable and supportive PAs in fostering safety, autonomy, identity, and motivation for future planning. Emotional support, positive relationships, and collaborative working between professionals were seen as essential for effective transitions from care.

Additionally, the study advocates for recognising CEYP as individuals beyond their care experience, highlighting the importance of an intersectional approach, accessibility and inclusivity in pathway planning, to promote respect. The final theme reaffirms that CEYP must be actively involved in decisions affecting their lives. Co-production and advocacy are, therefore, crucial to ensuring that CEYP's voices are not only heard but actively integrated into decision-making, fostering a shared understanding and creating an empowering environment for planning a successful transition to adulthood.

5.3 Theme 1: Feeling Let Down by the System

5.3.1 Systemic and Structural Issues

5.3.1.1 Instability and Competing Priorities in an Overburdened System. The findings revealed systemic barriers within the leaving care system, hindering effective support for CEYP. Limited resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and heavy workloads were cited as

leading to inconsistent and inadequate care. Co-researchers noted that professionals and services felt overstretched, resulting in fatigue and discontinuity in support. This is consistent with existing literature, which links staff shortages, inconsistent staffing, and funding cuts to diminished CEYP support (Gaskell, 2010; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

These challenges are further exacerbated by rising demands on public sector organisations, with social care services stretched by high referral volumes, heavy caseloads, and paperwork (Liabo et al., 2016). As a result, procedural tasks, such as statutory documentation, often take priority over meaningful engagement with CEYP. This leads to lower involvement, as described by co-researchers, where CEYP are informed, but not actively part of decisions about their futures (Shier, 2001). Despite calls for greater participation, their voices often remain overlooked in processes such as CLA Reviews, from an early age (Pert et al., 2017).

Moreover, co-researchers reported errors in statutory documents across CLA and CEYP systems, which contributed to feelings of depersonalisation. Similar issues arose in pathway planning, where PPs were viewed as tools for professional accountability rather than genuine support. For example, Jasmine only discovered her PP at age 23, which led to feelings of instability, being silenced and disengagement. This raises concerns about how CEYP's data is accessed and handled (Information Commissioner's Office, 2024), and where CEYP's voice is within these processes.

5.3.2 Abandonment

Co-researchers' early experiences as CLA reflect broader challenges within the care system, which significantly shaped their perceptions of leaving care processes. Feelings of abandonment, discomfort, and neglect emerged through language such as Jasmine's

description of the "dehumanising" experience of being "stored". A lack of control over housing placements reinforced her sense of disposability, displacement, and systemic neglect, where support was perceived as transactional rather than relational. This is echoed by DfE (2022) data, which shows that 10% of children in care experience high levels of placement instability.

Co-researchers also shared deep mistrust toward professionals, shaped by negative early interactions and a lack of recognition of their individual histories or identities (Glynn & Mayock, 2019). They implied this impacted their long-term engagement with services. Such institutional neglect and emotional abandonment closely mirror the experiences described in *My Name is Why* (Sissay, 2019). One of the most striking aspects of Sissay's memoir is his depiction of systemic cruelty, including racism, which resonates with Nala's experiences (Appendix U, Nala A25). Like Sissay, co-researchers described feeling unseen, unheard, and treated as 'cases' rather than individuals. The LR's reflections on the use of thematic language are included below.

Figure 18

Reflexive Diary Extract: Reflections on Language Use in the Analysis

Reflections on Language Use in the Analysis

In reflecting on the language used in the analysis, I became aware of my decision to label a subtheme as "Abandonment" and how this might shape both my understanding and

the co-researchers' perceptions. As a TEP, I recognise how my professional lens and

application of psychological theory may have influenced my interpretation of the data.

When reflecting this back to the co-researchers they shared how it felt validating but

also somewhat unsettling, contributing to a sense of being "muted". Seeing their

experiences written in black and white under this theme was cited as being both

powerful and strange.

This highlighted the tension between accurately representing their experiences and the

risk of imposing my own interpretation of their narrative. This led me to reflect on the ongoing challenge of balancing the role of the researcher, with my desire to facilitate co-

researcher-led analysis, while also fulfilling my practitioner role. I was mindful of not

overstepping by framing their experiences in ways that may not fully capture their

realities. My reflections on my use of the term "abandonment" reinforced just how crucial it is to be cautious and intentional in how I represent their experiences and ensure

that their voices are not only heard but also respected and represented authentically.

5.3.2.1 The 'Care Cliff' and Accelerated Adulthood. The 'care cliff' is a widely

recognised challenge for CEYP, with co-researchers echoing concerns found in existing

research, about leaving care too early (Starr et al., 2024). Despite statutory guidance promoting

gradual transitions (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019), research consistently describes leaving care as a

sudden shift into uncertainty (Palmer et al., 2022).

This transition brings major emotional and practical challenges, particularly around

finances, housing, and independence (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). Financial instability and

housing insecurity emerged as the most urgent concerns, with co-researchers sharing powerful

²⁰ Every year, thousands of young people aged 18 or younger face a care cliff when leaving the care system, where vital support and relationships fall away, and they are expected to become 'independent' overnight (Become, 2024)

accounts of homelessness or risk of it. Jasmine's story illustrates the concept of 'double trauma': leaving care before feeling ready and being pressured into unsafe housing (Become, 2024). She felt silenced by the threat of eviction, and forced to accept cold, damp housing conditions, to avoid homelessness. This highlights a power imbalance, where CEYP often lack agency to challenge decisions affecting their wellbeing. Such experiences deepen emotional distress, reinforcing the need for person-centred planning and access to secure, appropriate housing (Rogers et al., 2025).

The abrupt transition to adulthood further accelerates CEYP's responsibilities, leaving little space for identity exploration. As discussed in Chapter 1, Arnett's (2000) Theory of Emerging Adulthood suggests such premature shifts can lead to instability and role confusion. For Nala, HE helped her overcome this, providing a sense of stability, purpose, and self-identity. This is supported by evidence showing the value of structured planning that promotes CEYP's agency, and the protective role of education during this transition (Verhoeven et al., 2019).

5.3.3 Connecting Theory to Theme

The findings in this theme align closely with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, highlighting how CEYP's development and transition experiences are shaped by policies, funding and institutional cultures at the macrosystem level. Co-researchers' experiences, including housing insecurity, inconsistent professional support, and administrative errors, demonstrate how systemic issues in the care system, beyond the individual, often influence their transitions to adulthood (Butterworth et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2016).

It is equally important to examine the findings through Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1979). Disrupted attachment, common among CEYP, affects their relationships with professionals. Research shows that early neglect and abuse can contribute to the development of disorganised attachment styles, often marked by distrust and difficulty forming secure emotional bonds (Hiller et al., 2020; Pickreign Stronach et al., 2011). This internal working model (Bowlby, 1979) may lead CEYP to internalise adults as rejecting, neglectful, or untrustworthy. Consequently, they may perceive professional relationships as ineffective or even harmful, explaining why some co-researchers found navigating interpersonal relationships with their PA challenging. This has been characterised by avoidance (Woodall et al., 2023) or dissociation from the care system (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017), strategies also described as protective factors by co-researchers.

Together, these findings suggest that CEYP's experiences cannot be understood in isolation. Instead, they must be viewed within the broader context of a fragmented care system, which may amplify the emotional challenges of leaving care, disrupt transition processes like pathway planning, and contribute to feelings of abandonment.

5.4 Theme 2: Implementation of Pathway Planning Processes

A key finding in exploring the implementation of PPs was the urgent need for reform.

Co-researchers' recommendations for change are discussed later in this chapter.

5.4.1 Emotional Experiences and Responses

Co-researchers shared strong emotions regarding pathway planning, particularly in relation to family contact. These sections were often perceived as insensitive, failing to capture the nuanced and complex dynamics of family relationships. Discussions around family were

described as destabilising, with the formal, procedural nature of PPs clashing with the depth and individuality of lived experiences.

Research supports this, highlighting the complex dynamics CEYP have with their families (Sulimani-Aidan, 2017). Recalling such relationships can evoke painful emotions such as sadness, anger, and trauma (Kaasinen, 2025). The NICE guidelines (2021) note that entering care can be a traumatic experience, marked by loss, yet care planning tends to overlook this. Developmental Trauma Theory (Van der Kolk et al., 2005) further explains why CEYP, who frequently experience adverse childhood events, may have strong emotional reactions when discussing family relationships (Devine et al., 2020).

The findings thus highlight the need for professionals to adopt trauma-informed approaches when addressing sensitive topics like family in pathway planning. Grounded in trauma-awareness and attachment-focused care, such approaches could reduce distress and better support CEYP (Sharma, 2025). Notably, one co-researcher, Nala, advocated for this approach (Appendix U, Nala A7) while others suggested that more thoughtful handling of pathway planning might help engage with and process difficult past experiences more effectively.

Additionally, co-researchers reported feeling a sense of being monitored, accompanied by anxiety about how their shared information might be used in pathway planning (Appendix U, Nala A8). This resonates with research by Eldridge et al., (2020), which found that CEYP frequently hesitate to disclose personal experiences due to fears of judgment or potential misuse of their information. For some, disengaging from pathway planning may thus function as a self-protective mechanism, helping them avoid further feelings of rejection by the care system.

Despite these challenges, several co-researchers valued the predictability of pathway planning, finding stability in its structure. For example, Matilda found that having a PP eased

their anxiety about the 'care cliff'. This reinforces the critical role of stability for CEYP (Yousuf, 2024), while also raising questions about how pathway planning could better support them during critical transitions.

5.4.1.1 The Need for Personalisation. Akin to other CLA/CEYP statutory processes, pathway planning was viewed as a bureaucratic, tick-box exercise, leading to co-researchers' disengagement. This aligns with research suggesting that CEYP avoid services they perceive as transactional and inauthentic (Butterworth et al., 2017; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). A key concern was the use of scaling measures, which co-researchers saw as reductionist and inadequate for capturing their experiences. Truman's extract illustrates how numerical scales can prevent CEYP from fully expressing their experiences, as without adequate context, their thoughts and feelings are reduced to figures, making the process feel more about compliance than understanding their experiences.

As a result, the process was often perceived as patronising and irrelevant, contributing to disengagement (Kelly et al., 2016). Literature highlights how the absence of CYP voices in official care records can hinder identity development; however, when meaningfully included, such documents can serve as catalysts for 'therapeutic reflection' (Hoyle et al., 2020). This reaffirms the need for more personalised, individual-centred PPs that genuinely listen to CEYP's needs and experiences.

5.4.2 Navigating Uncertain Processes in Rigid Systems

5.4.2.1 Ambiguity in Implementation. The findings also revealed inconsistencies in the implementation of PPs, with co-researchers reporting unclear communication and, in some cases, a lack of awareness about their own plans. For example, Jasmine's experience of not being informed about her PP reflects a systemic issue where CEYP are often unaware of the support available to them (Malvaso et al., 2016; Kaasinen et al., 2022). Similarly, Butterworth

et al. (2017) found that inconsistencies and incompleteness in PPs leads to disengagement, as CEYP lose trust in services they perceive as unreliable (Rogers, 2015).

Notably, co-researchers observed significant variation in PP implementation across LAs, regions and PAs. These inconsistencies can be seen as influenced by systemic issues and professional discretion. Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory (Lipsky, 1981, 2010) can explain how frontline workers, like PAs, must navigate the tension between policy requirements and the individual needs of CEYP, often while managing heavy caseloads and limited resources (Križ & Skivenes, 2014). Their actions, shaped by organisational constraints, may result in varying levels of support and can undermine the goal of providing person-centred care (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012).

Inconsistencies in the frequency and format of PP reviews was also referenced, which are crucial for holding professionals accountable and ensuring that CEYP's goals are actioned. Co-researchers valued regular opportunities to reflect on their progress, fostering commitment to future goals. However, consistent with the literature (Gov, 2022), they shared that PPs were often not reviewed regularly, or reviews were inadequate. This supports calls for more frequent and ongoing review meetings, rather than treating reviews as isolated events (Butterworth et al., 2017; Pert et al., 2017).

5.4.2.2 Words Matter: The Complexity of Language. Significantly, the formal and impersonal tone of PP documentation impacted how co-researchers perceived their involvement. Through the analysis, it was recognised that PPs are often seen as adult-led and lacking CEYP's voices, aligning with lower levels of participation in Shier's (2001) participation model and suggesting a tokenistic approach. Research also suggests that when PAs are overly directive, CEYP's independence and engagement with support processes is hindered (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). Additionally, contrasting with the principles of the Rights

of the Child (UNCRC, 1989)²¹, co-researchers described frustrations with having their narratives defined by processionals to fulfil a statutory requirement. This highlights the power of language, and the need for pathway planning to evolve toward higher levels of participation, with more meaningful involvement and control in the decision-making process.

5.4.3 Plan to Practice: Key Sections Explored

5.4.3.1 Expectations vs Reality. A key concern raised was the disconnect between what is documented in PPs and the realities of leaving care. Co-researchers often described how their PPs failed to reflect their lived experiences. While having hope for the future is important for CEYP to plan their next steps (Stein & Munro, 2008), pathway planning must provide meaningful, realistic, and flexible support that aligns with their individual needs and aspirations.

As mentioned, family contact was a particularly challenging area. Co-researchers shared the emotional complexity of re-establishing relationships as difficult to capture in a written document. Lucy, for example, felt frustration, distress, and rejection when her PP failed to reflect the reality of reconnecting with her siblings. Others felt unprepared for the stigma and societal perceptions of being a 'CL', stressing the need for greater emotional support in navigating this. These findings highlight the need for more personalised, emotionally responsive PPs, that better equip CEYP for the realities of leaving care.

5.4.3.2 Navigating Independence, and Life Skills. Co-researchers discussed the pressure of suddenly transitioning to independence at 18, often prioritising PP sections related to housing and finances. This aligns with broader research identifying housing instability as a

_

²¹ The Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2010), state children have the right to express their opinion and for adults to listen.

significant stressor for CEYP, often affecting their engagement with transition planning (Glynn & Mayock, 2019).

Co-researchers raised concerns about risks such as homelessness and difficulties in meeting basic needs independently after leaving care, reinforcing the need for practical support aligned with Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. With 17% of CEYP eligible for aftercare making a homeless application (Social Institute for Excellence, 2019), it is vital to establish clear post-16 pathways and life skills preparation. Such support not only addresses immediate risks but also encourages engagement in decision-making processes (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). PAs must prioritise these needs in pathway planning, to ensure CEYP are equipped to navigate independence successfully.

5.4.3.3 Health, Wellbeing and Education. Discussions with PAs about mental health and wellbeing were valued by co-researchers, which helped address concerns and set health goals. These conversations promoted self-advocacy, ownership of personal health and proactive lifestyle choices, highlighting the importance of supportive relationships with PAs (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

However, unmet mental health needs remain a significant barrier. Consistent with research, co-researchers shared that stigma, embarrassment, insecurity, and practical barriers, like long waiting lists and geographical restrictions often prevented them from seeking support (Fargas-Malet & McSherry, 2018). While some suggest delaying formal pathway planning if a young person is in crisis (Kelly et al., 2016), this risks disengagement. The findings thus advocate the need to maintain health and wellbeing discussions as a core aspect of pathway planning to prevent further marginalisation.

Next, although co-researchers were engaged in EET pathways, education²² generally did not appear to be prioritised in their PP. That said, Truman's positive experience of setting educational goals through his plan shows how PPs can foster autonomy and future focus, supporting research that views education as a key turning point for CEYP (Driscoll, 2017). This also suggests the value of integrating Personal Education Plans (PEPs) with PPs for continuity between support systems (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

In contrast, Nala's experience illustrates how the framing of education in PPs can impact CEYP's engagement. Despite her success in HE, she felt her PP invited deficit-based conversations around potential struggles, rather than recognising her achievements. This emphasis on barriers over accomplishments risks discouraging ambition and undermining long-term EET planning (Kools, 1997; Stein, 2005; Sulimani-Aidan, 2017). As HE is known to promote social mobility and economic stability (Lee et al., 2012), pathway planning conversations must therefore treat education as a central priority.

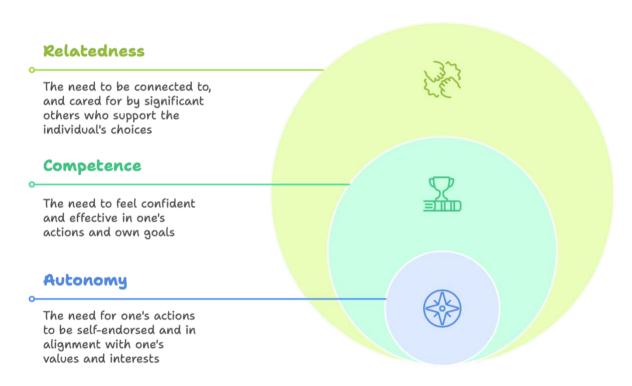
5.4.4 Connecting Theory to Theme

SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) (Figure 19) offers a useful framework for understanding coresearchers' experiences of pathway planning, particularly regarding autonomy, motivation, and engagement. While the process is intended to support independence, co-researchers often described it as being an imposition of decisions rather than a facilitation of genuine choice. However, when given the opportunity to set their own goals, particularly in education, co-researchers demonstrated greater engagement and ownership, reflecting SDT's emphasis on the importance of autonomy in fostering intrinsic motivation.

-

²² In the education section of a Pathway Plan, the focus is on supporting their continued learning and development, building on their Personal Education Plan (PEP) and ensuring they have access to high-quality information, advice, and guidance for further education, training, or employment (Newcastle Children's Social Care, 2020).

Figure 19
Visual Representation of Self-Determination Theory



Note. Adapted from Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and wellbeing, by Deci and Ryan (2000).

Practical support within the plan, including areas such as financial management, housing, and mental health, further helped CEYP develop life skills, reinforcing their sense of competence. SDT suggests that feeling competent is crucial for maintaining motivation (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019), and co-researchers highlighted how aspects of pathway planning that offered direct support and skill development acted as protective mechanisms. Again, this supports SDT's assertion that individuals are more likely to engage in activities that foster both autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

From a systemic perspective, the lack of person-centred feedback often made pathway planning feel procedural rather than personalised, leaving co-researchers' feeling disconnected

from the process. This highlights the need for reform at the macrosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), as discussed further in the chapter. At the same time, co-researchers' called for more individualised, transparent and consistent PPs. Such changes could enhance CEYP's sense of control and better support their autonomy and competence (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019), key foundations for successful adulthood transitions.

5.5 Theme 3: Relationships Matter: The Critical Role of Connecting with Others

5.5.1 Systems Need to Work Together

Effective collaboration across systems is known to be crucial for consistent support and smooth transitions from care (Sharma, 2025), yet co-researchers' identified significant gaps in joint working across local and national systems, particularly in health, education, and social care. They noted the burden of this in repeatedly sharing personal histories with various professionals, known to increase the risk of re-traumatisation (Mendes & Purtell, 2021). Other research also points to CEYP reporting feelings of abandonment when there is poor communication between children's and adult services (Butterworth et al., 2017).

Poor coordination between social care and HE emerged as a critical issue, causing uncertainty around accommodation and leading to housing instability between school and university holidays. Co-researchers described the emotional distress this caused and its impact on their ability to transition successfully. Despite government guidance emphasising support for CEYP in HE transitions (Department for Education, 2019), fragmented communication and role confusion between education providers and social care continue to hinder post-care support. Growing evidence thus points to the need for collaboration between LAs and HE institutions to improve access and participation (Bayfield & Smith, 2024). This study argues PPs must be part of these discussions to ensure continuity of support for CEYP.

Mentoring through external organisations was also found to play a crucial role in supporting CEYP's transitions, with co-researchers emphasising the value of mentors for emotional support, guidance, and goal setting (Clayden & Stein, 2005). This echoes findings in Chapter 2 (Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014), highlighting the importance of shared experiences, genuine support and long-term commitment in effective mentoring (Lohmeyer et al., 2024). Such relationships can also foster resilience by creating stable, growth-orientated environments (Stein, 2012).

However, mentoring provision for CEYP remains inconsistent. Structural barriers, including the absence of a formal framework under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, mean that while some LAs embed mentoring within specialist teams, others offer limited to no support. Appointing a designated coordinator could enhance accountability and improve the integration of mentoring into broader leaving care services.

Lastly, external organisations played a pivotal role in helping CEYP identify employment opportunities. Lucy's experience of paid work through a charity network illustrates how such opportunities can build social capital, independence, and self-worth, supporting existing research (Dinisman & Zeira, 2011). This confirms the need for stronger collaboration between PAs, mentors, and EET providers to make pathway planning more relevant and impactful. Enhanced coordination could offer more comprehensive wraparound support, better preparing CEYP for a successful transition to independence.

5.5.2 Relationships in a Bureaucratic Context: Consistency and Trust

Relational support from PAs emerged as a key protective factor, reinforcing findings from the literature (Driscoll, 2013; Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021). Co-researchers emphasised the value of trust and emotional connection in shaping their leaving care experiences. Nala

described her relationship with her PA as a "genuine therapeutic relationship," supporting evidence that authentic, passionate, and flexible support builds trust (Butterworth et al., 2017). In turn, trust facilitates open communication, informed decision-making, and greater long-term stability (Hiles et al., 2014; Sulimani-Aidan, 2017). Feeling heard and valued also increases CEYP's willingness to engage with professionals (Kaasinen et al., 2022).

The quality of PA relationships thus can be seen to have directly influenced coresearchers' engagement with pathway planning, aligning with Glynn and Maycock's (2019) findings that being understood by professionals promotes participation. However, trust cannot be assumed, as many CEYP have experienced repeated rejection, fostering scepticism and reducing their engagement with services (Driscoll, 2013). In this context, disengagement from pathway planning may reflect dissatisfaction rather than disinterest (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2014). The findings argue that for the process to be meaningful, CEYP must feel genuinely supported, not just bureaucratically managed.

Consistency in PA relationships also proved critical. Co-researchers who experienced frequent PA changes reported frustration and emotional instability, echoing concerns around high staff turnover in leaving care services (Liabo et al., 2016). Inconsistent support led to co-researchers' perceptions of transactional, procedural relationships rather than meaningful care (Goddard, 2006; Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). This is significant as when emotional needs go unmet, CEYP are less likely to communicate openly, leading to disengagement from key decision-making processes like pathway planning (Hiles et al., 2014; Baker, 2017; Glynn & Mayock, 2019).

5.5.3 Connecting Theory to Theme

The findings strongly suggest that the effectiveness of leaving care support is shaped by CEYP's immediate environments, microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). They do not develop in isolation; instead, CEYP's transitions are influenced by the quality of their relationships with key adults, including PAs, SWs and mentors (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Moorehouse, 2022).

SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) offers another lens to examine the findings, identifying how supportive relationships impact motivation. Co-researchers described greater motivation and engagement when pathway planning involved meaningful conversations, goal-setting, and consistent support. This reflects Hyde and Atkinson's (2019) findings that supportive relationships build confidence and autonomy, particularly in education and future planning. When CEYP feel involved in decision-making and supported in developing practical skills, pathway planning thus becomes more purposeful and less procedural.

Jasmine's experience of feeling heard by her mentor also points to the importance of secure relationships with professionals for CEYP's independence, as explained through Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1979; Fylkesnes et al., 2021). For CEYP, gaps in professional support can exacerbate the absence of a parental figure, hindering their ability to thrive (Butterworth et al., 2017). For CEYP who have experienced childhood trauma, consistent and meaningful support is essential, as early attachment disruptions make forming secure relationships in adulthood more challenging (Rodriguez & Dobler, 2021).

Linking to the RQ, fostering stable, trusting relationships with PAs is thus critical for effective pathway planning and post-care transitions. In contrast, inconsistent or transactional

support leads to disengagement, reaffirming the need for a trust-based, relationship-centred approach.

5.6 Theme 4: Identity, Culture and Belonging

5.6.1 Community and Peer Connections

Research suggests that CEYP often face stigma related to their care experience, leading some to conceal this aspect of their identity (Eldridge et al., 2020). Additionally, the lack of stable familial and peer support networks can exacerbate feelings of isolation, as social connections often shift during the transition to adulthood (Singer et al., 2013).

This theme emphasises the pivotal role of social networks in mitigating transition-related challenges faced by CEYP. Informal support systems, particularly friendships, are known to counter stigma and promote emotional wellbeing (Pinkney & Walker, 2020), and are closely associated with positive post-care outcomes (Roberts et al., 2021). However, co-researchers noted that friendships were often overlooked in transition planning. For example, Nala viewed friendships as crucial but suggested that professionals failed to recognise their role in pathway planning. This echoes research indicating that professionals often undervalue friendships in post-care transitions (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017), suggesting the need for a shift in practice.

Furthermore, participation in advocacy and peer support networks was found to be a source of self-esteem, enhancing confidence and social skills (Webb et al., 2017). Such spaces can be particularly powerful for CEYP who may lack social capital through familial connections (Evans, 2024). However, co-researchers mentioned a lack of signposting to such opportunities, illustrating the need for greater professional support in facilitating access to peer support networks.

5.6.2 Language and Moving Beyond Labels

The findings that language plays a significant role in perpetuating exclusion, particularly through the 'CL' label. Co-researchers described the damaging impact of this label, including feelings of shame, isolation, and judgement. Some compared being labelled as a 'CL' to being from a "lower social class" (Lucy) or being seen as "criminals" (Nala). They felt that services often prioritised their 'care-experience' over other aspects of their identity, and this view persisted even after their transition to adulthood. This may reflect how LAs assess CEYP based on life outcomes rather than acknowledging their ongoing needs. Such stereotypes, reinforced by societal structures, can further create barriers to meaningful social connections, perpetuate stigma and sustain power hierarchies (Eldridge et al., 2020).

Research supports this, revealing that CEYP frequently face societal stigma, with dominant narratives positioning them as vulnerable or deviant (Horn, 2020). A Coram survey found that public attitudes still associate CEYP with negative traits such as being "sad" or "lonely" (Taylor, 2021). These labels reduce CEYP to one-dimensional identities, limiting their ability to be seen as complex individuals (Morgan, 2000). Negative stereotypes also contribute to lower self-esteem, poorer long-term wellbeing and increase the risk of harmful behaviours like criminal activity, substance misuse, and self-harm (Brady et al., 2019).

From a social constructionist perspective, the 'CL' label thus reflects a socially constructed identity shaped by dominant discourses that associate CEYP with disadvantage and marginality. This framing limits CEYP's ability to define themselves and creates barriers to empowerment. Shifting this narrative is essential, and this study advocates for challenging harmful stereotypes and providing space for CEYP to redefine themselves on their terms. Matilda raises another crucial point about services identifying individuals as 'care-

experienced' even when they don't meet formal criteria, pointing to the potential unmet support needs for some CYP, such as those who are 'estranged' (Barnardos, 2019).

5.6.3 Understanding and Recognising Intersecting Identities

Identity is a key component of PPs (Gateshead Council, 2023). However, coresearchers noted that they were often not seen as unique individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and intersecting identities, stating the need to more actively recognise aspects of identity including religion, culture, race, ability and socioeconomic status. This aligns with the literature, which stresses that CEYP are not a homogenous group, and their transitions from care vary significantly (Glynn & Mayock, 2019). Simply having been in care does not create a shared identity (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017). Professionals must acknowledge the multiple dimensions of CEYP's identity, beyond their care experience, to provide personalised transition support (Pals, 2006; Willis & Holland, 2009). Erikson's (1959) model of identity development further highlights the importance of individuality, as a stable sense of identity is critical for navigating transitions and building resilience.

The findings also argue that the transition to adulthood is particularly challenging for CEYP with SEND, who often face compounded barriers when navigating multiple systems (social care, education, and health) without coordinated support (Cheatham et al., 2020). Truman's experience illustrates this struggle, as he faced difficulties self-advocating after his PA dismissed his autism diagnosis. This not only undermined his confidence but also caused him to withdraw from pathway planning and his relationship with his PA. This reflects a broader issue of exclusion, where CEYP with neurodiversity must explain their needs or depend on others to advocate on their behalf.

These challenges can exacerbate feelings of mistrust, invisibility, and disempowerment (Butterworth et al., 2017; Gaskell, 2010). The findings therefore call for more inclusive and accessible pathway planning that is aligned with the individual needs of CEYP, while also supporting them to navigate their intersecting identities (Mapaku et al., 2021).

5.6.4 Connecting Theory to Theme

This research suggests the vital role of belonging in supporting CEYP's transition from care, through the lens of relatedness in SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Relatedness emerged as the most salient psychological need when it came to decision-making and engagement with pathway planning, serving as a catalyst for autonomy and competence. While professional relationships were critical, this theme discussed the importance of peer networks and advocacy groups (e.g., CiCCs and charities) in fostering identity formation, solidarity, and empowerment. For example, Lucy shared how peer-led spaces helped her feel seen and supported, strengthening her sense of self.

This aligns with Resilience Theory (Rutter, 2006), emphasising the protective role of community connections and meaningful relationships (McMurray et al., 2011). The findings show that these relationships offered more than emotional support; they empowered CEYP to advocate for themselves, make informed decisions, and reframe their care experience as a source of strength. Significantly, integrating such peer systems into pathway planning could improve CEYP's motivation to engage, its relevance and long-term outcomes.

The importance of applying an intersectional lens to understand the complex experiences of CEYP is also essential. Intersectionality Theory, initially conceptualised by (Crenshaw, 1989) explores how various aspects of identity intersect to create layers of advantage or disadvantage. This perspective is particularly valuable in this study, aligning with

a social constructionist paradigm that acknowledges multiple socially constructed realities. Furthermore, the transformative element of this study highlights how these realities are shaped by power structures, which can contribute to oppression.

One co-researcher who identified as mixed-race Black Caribbean and White English, shared experiences of their Afro hair needs being overlooked by social care services and their name being repeatedly recorded incorrectly. These experiences may explain their sense of neglect from services meant to address their basic needs. The perceived discrimination this co-researcher faced, coming from a minoritised ethnic background, can also be understood through Critical Race Theory²³ (Crenshaw et al., 1995), which suggests that racial bias is embedded in many UK institutions. These encounters with institutional racism and unconscious bias may have contributed to her negative view of leaving care services.

Further, for CEYP from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, the absence of a stable family or community can enhance feelings of disconnection and uncertainty about belonging, often intensified by the influence of racialised systems. These findings emphasise the need for professionals to actively affirm and support CEYP's racial and ethnic identities, which are vital for fostering positive identity development and adulthood transitions (Barn, 2010). Nala's experience illustrates the significance of corporate parenting practices grounded in culturally responsiveness and anti-racism, alongside the need to challenge inequalities and power imbalances within the care system (Fenton, 2022). Pathway planning must reflect these principles, ensuring that CEYP's diverse needs are not only recognised by supported throughout post-care transitions.

_

²³ Critical Race Theory examines how race, racism, and power intersect within legal, social, and political systems, arguing that racism is not just individual prejudice but an institutionalised force shaping society. It challenges dominant narratives of neutrality and highlights the lived experiences of marginalised groups, advocating for social justice and the dismantling of systems that perpetuate inequality (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

5.7 Theme 5: The Power of Lived Experience in Creating Change

The final theme acknowledges the centrality of CEYP within their ecosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), with co-researchers consistently sharing that their voices should be at the heart of all decision-making processes related to future planning.

5.7.1 Navigating Self-Advocacy and Feeling Heard

Despite government commitments to prioritise CEYP's voices in decision-making (Children Act, 1989; UNCRC, 1989), this study reveals a gap between policy and practice. Coresearchers expressed frustration that their voices were often misrepresented, both verbally and written in PPs. Importantly, when CEYP struggled to advocate for themselves, PPs failed to reflect their actual needs and aspirations. The emotional toll of this was particularly evident in Truman's experience, as he reflected on his missed opportunity to voice his needs in his first PP. This highlights power imbalances in leaving care processes, where the ability to challenge authority often depends on the quality of the PA-CEYP relationship (McLeod, 2007).

Advocacy spaces (e.g., CiCCs) (ANV, 2011) were praised as supportive in amplifying CEYP voices. However, poor joint working between professionals often left co-researchers without support, forcing them into exhausting cycles of self-advocacy. Lucy's experience exemplifies this, as she repeatedly fought for her health needs in the absence of effective coordination between health and social care services.

The findings therefore argue that CEYP are most empowered when their experiences are validated, and their voices shape decision-making. To support this, institutional policies must actively embed participatory decision-making (Grace et al., 2024), reducing the burden of advocacy on YP and ensuring they do not have to fight to be heard.

5.7.2 'Shaking Up' the Pathway Planning Process

As highlighted throughout Chapters 4 and 5, the need for significant improvements in pathway planning is clear. Co-researchers emphasised the importance of personalised plans, clearer communication, regular reviews, and national consistency. These recommendations are located in Figure 21. They also called for greater CEYP involvement. Although research on PPs in leaving care is limited, existing literature reaffirms the need for reform, advocating for more collaborative and clearly defined plans (Butterworth et al., 2017; Pert et al., 2017).

Co-researchers also called for a broader reform of the entire leaving care system. This perspective was echoed by several presenters at a professional conference in July 2024 (Public Policy Exchange, 2024), with the LR's reflections from the event included in the diary extract (Figure 20).

Figure 20

Reflexive Diary Extract: Hope, Change and Responsibility

Hope, Change, and Responsibility: Reflexive Insights from the 'Improving Outcomes for Care Leavers: Can the New Government Break the Care Ceiling' Conference

I attended this conference in July 2024, run by the Public Policy Exchange, and found it to be a moment of both reflection and motivation. Discussions centred on how the new Labour government could mobilise meaningful change for CEYP, with a palpable sense of hope in the room - hope that this leadership shift could bring systemic reform so urgently needed. One key question stood out: What can care-experienced people bring to this new era of policymaking? It was a call to action, urging ministers to listen and actively engage with the voices of those who have lived through the system.

I left the conference both inspired and acutely aware of my own role, power, and privilege as the Lead Researcher in this study. The stories shared by CEYP feel like more than research data; they are lived realities that demand recognition and action. This reinforced my responsibility to fully commit to amplifying their voices. I also reflected on how, when disseminating findings, drawing on co-researchers' ideas could help share this research more widely and meaningfully.

One of the most striking ideas was the need to embrace the diversity of care experiences, particularly for those the system has failed. These are the voices that must be centred in imagining radical change. Discussions also touched on the importance of formal and informal opportunities for CEYP to shape policy, and the potential influence of the new minister's own social care background. Could this government finally bring a stronger commitment to children's rights and youth voice?

There is still much uncertainty, but this feels like a rare window of opportunity. That said, I also began to reflect on my own political orientation and how it might shape my position as the Lead Researcher. As someone passionate about social justice and change, I wonder how these values influence my perspectives on the care system and the experiences of CEYP. While I strive for objectivity, I recognise that my beliefs about systemic reform, the importance of children's rights, and the need for more inclusive policies could subtly shape how I interpret the data and engage with the participants' voices. This raises important questions about my role as a researcher in advocating for change while remaining mindful of potential biases in my interpretations and actions.

The themes of 'Shaking Up Pathway Planning' and 'Embracing Co-Production to Drive Meaningful Change' are interconnected in co-researchers' calls for a more effective, personcentred pathway planning system. Co-production, which involves those affected in decision-making, planning, and evaluation is central to this vision (Park et al., 2022). However, as this study highlights, CEYP often feel their involvement in transition decision-making processes is tokenistic (Glynn & Mayock, 2019).

Co-researchers thus called for a shift beyond mere consultation (Dixon et al., 2019), advocating for a co-production model that actively involves CEYP in developing and reviewing policies, services, and pathway planning processes. They argued that CEYP should lead decision-making shaping PPs from initial development to ongoing evaluation. Research supports this view, showing that when CEYP are engaged in transition planning, it enhances their engagement and satisfaction (Park et al., 2022).

In response to the RQ, this study calls for pathway planning reform. Co-production offers a mechanism to rethink not only PPs but also the policies and structures underpinning the process. Achieving this requires a cultural shift toward shared responsibility, accountability, and power. As Nala advocated, CEYP's voices must be genuinely heard and meaningfully integrated into service delivery.

5.7.4 Connecting Theory to Theme

The findings related to self-advocacy can be meaningfully linked to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Co-researchers' accounts reflected their efforts to assert autonomy through self-advocacy, yet inconsistent support, bureaucratic barriers, and poor inter-agency collaboration often undermined these. The findings argue that while narratives of resilience and self-determination emerged in their stories, these should not overshadow the need for a whole-

system approach to sustain such autonomy effectively (Pepe et al., 2024). This theme, therefore, reveals the interplay between structure and agency in care transitions, emphasising that CEYP should not be expected to 'speak up'; their voices must drive meaningful responses and systemic change.

Advocacy spaces were also seen as empowering, aligning with SDT's emphasis on competence and relatedness, enabling co-researchers to feel capable and connected. However, the burden of constant self-advocacy placed excessive pressure on them, often without the emotional support required to sustain their wellbeing. This aligns with broader literature showing that CEYP often develop independence as a survival mechanism in the face of inconsistent emotional care and unmet needs (Butterworth et al., 2017; Adley & Jupp Kina, 2017).

Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) adapted ecological framework (Figure 21) offers a valuable lens for understanding the final two subthemes. It contextualises how changes to pathway planning affect multiple levels of the social ecology, from individual experiences to broader systemic influences (Harder et al., 2020). This framework highlights the need for reform across interconnected systems to facilitate effective pathway planning and transitions to adulthood.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that CEYP's participation in pathway planning is crucial, and the development and delivery of support must reflect their needs, goals, and lived experiences. Achieving this requires a shift towards practitioners sharing power with CEYP (Pepe et al., 2024). Figure 21 presents co-researchers' key recommendations for reforming the PP process, spanning several thematic areas discussed in this chapter. Co-researchers called for amplifying CEYP voices, fostering more relational working with PAs, promoting joint working, ensuring consistent access to support, providing accessible resources, conducting

regular reviews, personalising plans and implementing policy amendments. Collectively, these findings reaffirm the need for structural change within the leaving care system (Roberts et al., 2020).

Figure 21

Mapping Findings onto Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

		Related
System Level	Key Recommendations	Literature/Concept
Individual	 CEYP should be at the core of pathway planning, guiding the process. Pathway planning must foster participation, recognise intersecting identities, align support with individual needs/goals/aspirations 	 Participation and CYP at the centre of decision- making processes (UNCRC, 1989)
Microsystem	 Relationships between CEYP and Corporate Parents (e.g., PAs) must be prioritised for effective pathway planning Recognition of the role of pathway plans among Corporate Parents 	 Person-centred approach (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019) Relational support (Butterworth et a., 2017)
Mesosystem	 Clearer communication and coordination between social services, education, health, charity sector and personal networks (e.g., community groups) Clarity in the purpose of plans is clearly communicated between systems. 	 Joint working Enhanced collaboration between systems (Kaasinen Salokekkilä, & Häggman- Laitila, 2022)
Exosystem	 Need for policy and organisational reform for consistency, clearer roles and responsibilites and better coordination in pathway planning. More accessible and clearer language in pathway plans, along with easier-to-understand resources CEYP to have meaningful input into service delivery 	 Policy changes Changes to organisational practice Strengths-based language
Macrosystem	 National consistency in services and pathway plan implementation to reduce inequalities. CEYP should have oversight and accountability of their plans 	Cultural and societal attitudes towards genuine co-production, transition planning, CEYP' voice values CEYP-led (Murray, 2014)
Chronosystem	 Regular reviews and flexibility are needed to ensure a dynamic process and plans that adapt as circumstances change; they should be regularly updated to reflect evolving needs. National-level shifts to leaving care systems 	The dynamic process of transitioning from care (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021) Future aspirations

Note. This Figure maps the study's findings onto Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory to highlight key areas for reform in pathway planning. It was developed by the LR based on co-researchers' recommendations for change to the system.

5.8 Strengths and Limitations of Methodology

5.8.1 Reflection on Research Aims and Unique Contribution

This study employed a PR approach, empowering CEYP as co-researchers, guided by participatory frameworks (Aldridge, 2016; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). Co-researchers were involved at various stages, from refining the research focus to designing interview questions and selecting dissemination routes, aiming to be as co-researcher led as possible within the scope of the doctorate project. This involvement fulfilled the first aim of empowering CEYP as co-researchers and the second aim of exploring their lived experiences of PPs. Their active participation directly shaped this study, ensuring alignment with educational psychology's values and legislative context (Fox, 2015). While the transition of CEYP to adulthood is well-documented, as discussed in Chapter 2, their specific experiences with pathway planning have received less attention. This study also addresses that gap, fulfilling the third aim of exploring PPs within the broader understanding of leaving care.

Reflecting on the study's emancipatory purpose, co-researchers provided feedback after each workshop, often expressing feelings of validation and being heard. For example, Truman highlighted the project's symbolic significance, suggesting that it could influence how he approaches future PPs reviews. His reflection reaffirms the value of inclusive research in facilitating personal reflection and change.

Thinking about it now, at my next [PP] review, I probably will try, just for the sake of something symbolic about making a change. You know, because I don't think it should still start with the 16-year-old version of me (Truman).

While involving CEYP in research carries ethical risks, excluding them would further silence an already marginalised group (Kilkenny, 2012). By adopting a PR approach, this study

contributes to the growing body of literature that challenges adult-centric research, policy, and practice related to CYP. Yardley (2000) argues that offering a novel perspective on an issue enhances the trustworthiness of research, and this study achieved that by providing a platform for the voices of CEYP. Although PR with CEYP is still in its early stages, this study thus contributes to the evidence base on the impact of co-researcher participation, addressing power imbalances and advocating for authentic participation that empowers YP in research (Rix et al., 2021).

5.8.2 Integrity of the Participatory Design

While the findings offer a novel perspective on PPs through genuine co-researcher involvement, the integrity of the PR approach faced several challenges. The research was limited to four workshops (60-90 minutes each) and one 60-minute individual interview, constraining the time available to introduce research concepts and facilitate in-depth discussions. This may have impacted the co-researchers' full engagement, particularly given their diverse academic backgrounds. Therefore, while the format allowed for participation, the depth of engagement needed for true co-production may have been compromised (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2024).

Moreover, the LR reflected on group dynamics and power relations between coresearchers influencing the participatory process (Wallace & Giles, 2019). Despite efforts to promote shared power, inconsistent attendance and varying engagement levels led to a smaller, more cohesive group as the study progressed. By the final two workshops, only three coresearchers consistently attended (one or both), potentially limiting the range of perspectives. However, these shifting dynamics also reflect the organic nature of PR, where trust-building and shared power evolve gradually (Eldridge et al., 2020). For those who attended regularly,

trust development likely fostered openness and meaningful contributions (Steenbakkers et al., 2016).

Finally, while photovoice was offered as an optional data collection tool, co-researchers opted not to use it, reaffirming the study's commitment to participant autonomy and flexibility within the participatory design.

5.8.3 Recruitment and Participation

The valuable insights of this study must also be considered within the context of the sample's limitations. Recruitment of CEYP was challenging, resulting in an opportunistic sample that may have been influenced by specific biases or underlying motivations for participation. Additionally, the co-researchers were already engaged in CEYP groups, organisations, or networks such as a CiCC, suggesting they may have had stronger social support than other CEYP. As a result, the perspectives of more disengaged CEYP, who may face greater challenges, are underrepresented, contributing to the broader issue of a 'paradox in participation' (Lynch et al., 2021).

The study's sample size of five co-researchers (aged 20-23) limits its scope, as it does not fully capture the experiences of younger (16-19) or older CEYP (over 23), who may have different needs and priorities at various stages of their transition to adulthood (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). However, the research remains credible, aligning with existing literature, and data saturation was achieved (Smith et al., 2022). By situating the discussion within current practice and using theoretical frameworks to interpret the data, the findings are expected to be widely applicable to both systems supporting CEYP and to CEYP. Moreover, as a historically 'hard-to-reach' population (Aldridge, 2016), the relevance of these findings is further strengthened (see Figure 22).

Reflexive Diary Extract: The Absence of Identity

The Absence of Identity - Who is Really 'Hard to Reach?'

Reflecting on the notion of 'hard to reach' (Aldridge, 2016) within participatory research, I became increasingly aware of how CEYP are often framed as disengaged or unwilling to

participate. This framing shifts responsibility onto young people rather than prompting professionals to reflect on whether services or systems themselves, including research,

are inaccessible or difficult to navigate. Attending the Public Policy Exchange Conference

(July 2024) reinforced the urgency of more co-production and the need to centralise CEYP's voices in decision-making. I continue to hold in mind the critical question posed

by Wallace and Giles (2019): Who is the research for? This reflection challenges me to

consider how research can be more inclusive and genuinely accessible to those it seeks

to represent.

Moreover, engagement issues arguably impacted the study, with co-researchers'

fluctuating attendance over the eight-month period. This variability meant that key aspects of

the research process, such as interview question development and the dissemination plan, were

shaped by two to three co-researchers, limiting the breadth of the participatory approach.

However, PR's core tenet is flexibility in participation (Duea et al., 2022). To address this,

ongoing informed consent was maintained, and the LR ensured continuous engagement

through regular email updates on presentations and key decisions (e.g., title selection). Tools

like Mentimeter further enabled asynchronous contributions, and check-ins during workshops

provided co-researchers with opportunities to reassess their participation.

5.8.4 Power Relations

Another core principle of PR is promoting equity in researcher-co-researcher

relationships, reducing the risk of gatekeeping by researchers (Wallace & Giles, 2019). In this

study, however, there was a risk that CEYP co-researchers might have felt their voices were less prominent than the LR's due to the academic nature of the project. Mindful of power being multilayered (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2024), and with a view to giving co-researchers' agency, the LR drew on the 'Academic Wheel of Power and Privilege' (Figure 14) (Elsherif et al., 2022), to consider any unequal power dynamics. This framework also prompted reflections on how co-researchers' intersectional identities, such as race, ethnicity, cultural background, gender and ability may have shaped experiences of power, inclusion and participation (Figure 23).

Reflexive Diary Extract: Power Relations

Reflections on Power Relations

One of the key aims of this project was to promote more equal relationships between myself and the CEYP co-researchers, in line with PR principles. However, I became increasingly aware that the academic structure of the project - and my own position within it - might have unintentionally reinforced traditional power dynamics. As a White, British woman with no lived experience of the care system, currently undertaking a doctoral qualification, I recognised that I occupied a position of relative privilege. Even with the best intentions to create a collaborative environment, there were layers of power at play that could not be ignored.

Drawing on Elsherif et al.'s (2022) 'Academic Wheel of Power and Privilege' pushed me to think more deeply about how different forms of privilege and marginalisation can exist simultaneously within research. It reminded me that the co-researchers were not only participating as young people with care experience but were also bringing with them a range of intersecting identities, including race, ethnicity, cultural background, gender, socioeconomic and ability status, all of which could influence how they experienced power, inclusion, and voice within the study.

This became particularly salient when co-researchers shared experiences of marginalisation - not only based on their care experience but also, for example, due to their gender within the healthcare system, or when they described facing microaggressions and racism from professionals operating under the corporate parenting umbrella. These reflections reaffirmed that power imbalances were not experienced in isolation but were layered and compounded through multiple aspects of identity and through interactions with systems meant to support them.

This deepened my awareness that I had to remain attuned to broader social and institutional factors that might continue to privilege some voices over others, even within a participatory framework.

The LR also noted how their dual role as both facilitator and researcher posed challenges, particularly in redirecting discussions without appearing paternalistic (Godfrey-Faussett, 2022). This duality was openly acknowledged at the beginning of the workshops to

build reflexivity and trust. Additionally, the tension between engaging co-researchers and meeting the thesis deadlines highlighted the complexities of negotiating power in PR (Houghton, 2015).

5.9 Ethical Reflections

While core ethical procedures were outlined in Chapter 3, the research process raised ongoing ethical tensions that merit reflection. For example, although co-researchers were regularly reminded of their right to choose what to share within workshops, the LR considered whether some disclosed personal experiences after hearing others speak in the workshop, raising questions about implicit pressure and the limits of informed consent in groups (Williams, 2020). The LR also noted the emotional impact of revisiting past experiences in a group setting, particularly for those who may use avoidance as a coping strategy (Colbridge et al., 2017). While this may have been empowering for some, it risked emotional retraumatisation. It highlighted the LR's role in offering space for co-researchers to speak with them individually, signposting to external support and providing clear workshop boundaries.

Ending the workshops was another source of ethical reflection. The LR was mindful that the longitudinal nature of the research and prolonged engagement with co-researchers over the eight-month period may have encouraged a degree of openness, with discussions extending beyond the study's intended scope (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2024). Careful attention was given to this dynamic, including seeking feedback, negotiating follow-up opportunities (if requested), and sharing a thank-you email to mark the project's conclusion formally. These reflections reaffirm that ethics in PR with CEYP is an ongoing, relational commitment that requires researcher reflexivity, attentiveness, flexibility and humility.

5.9.1 The Role of Reflexivity

As discussed throughout this study, reflexivity is integral to the research process, particularly RTA, where researchers' interpretations are shaped by their identities, values and experiences (Braun et al., 2023). As an embodied practitioner, the LR acknowledged that their background inevitably influenced theme development and interpretation, highlighting the subjective nature of qualitative research and the necessity of contextual sensitivity when applying findings to practice.

An ongoing reflexive relationship between the LR, co-researchers, and the research topic (Probst, 2015) was therefore maintained throughout the study. For example, the LR recognised that co-researchers' involvement during the analysis stage mirrored the 'co-researcher as actor' space (Aldridge, 2017). Although the co-researchers did not explicitly analyse or member-check themes, the analysis workshop facilitated their interpretations of the LR's findings, facilitating voice and empowerment. Their reflections on the themes further supported the co-construction of knowledge, reinforcing the study's social constructionist stance.

The LR's reflexive diary (Figure 24) (Braun & Clarke, 2022) helped to surface blind spots, navigate ethical dilemmas, and strengthen epistemological rigour (Probst, 2015). Reflexivity, therefore, contributed to the ethical integrity and analytic depth of the research while ensuring the research findings were meaningful and respecting co-researchers' perspectives.

Reflexive Diary Extract: Reflexivity

Reflections on Reflexivity

Throughout the study, I became increasingly aware of how my own experiences and professional lens as a TEP may have shaped my interpretations and engagement with the data. I approached the work as an embodied practitioner, recognising that my thoughts, emotions, values, and personal histories were inseparable from how I made sense of the research process. I was also mindful that my training, particularly my focus on systemic thinking, may have attuned me to broader patterns and structures within the leaving care system, but also risked filtering the co-researchers' narratives through a particular lens.

This prompted me to stay curious and reflexive, questioning my assumptions and checking that interpretations remained grounded in the co-researchers' intended meanings. I continually asked myself whether I was privileging systemic explanations over individual stories, and whether my own position might shape what was seen as significant. Holding this tension openly felt important in respecting the authenticity of the voices shared with me. Further, engaging reflexively in this way allowed me to remain closer to the lived realities of the co-researchers, rather than unconsciously centring professional or academic frameworks. Reflexivity is something I will be advocating for in future research studies.

5.10 Implications for Practice and Contributions

The following implications are structured to reflect the study's core aims, as outlined in Chapter 3.

5.10.1 Involving Communities in Research

PR involving CEYP is still emerging (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022), with care-experienced voices remaining notably absent in research (Warwick, 2023). This study demonstrates the value of involving YP throughout the research process. Grounded in the concept of autonomy and YP as 'capable agents' (Arciprete et al., 2024), CEYP's role as co-researchers arguably enabled more meaningful engagement, with their input enriching the

process. Their feedback on the themes also illustrates the value of their contributions across all phases including analysis.

The benefits of PR with vulnerable groups, such as those with SEN are also growing, as an approach that can empower, foster reflection, and promote inclusivity and power balance. PR further aligns with the values of social justice, beneficence, and autonomy, central to the profession's ethos. As increasing participation is a core tenet of EP practice (Boswell et al., 2021), participatory methodologies should be more widely advocated for. It is hoped that EPs will engage more with this approach, contributing to research that holds real meaning and value for its service users (Wallace & Giles, 2019).

5.10.2 The Leaving Care System: A View towards Organisational Change

While acknowledging strengths in corporate parenting, the findings highlight the need to challenge systemic structures. Incorporating trauma-informed practices into leaving care services is essential to ensure stability, trust, empowerment and to prevent re-traumatisation (Kaasinen et al., 2022). This includes adopting trauma-informed language and terminology (Turnbull et al., 2024). Supporting CEYP's self-determination (Appendix V) should also centre on building strong, supportive corporate parenting relationships (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

Another key issue at both national and local levels is the definition of 'CL'. In this study, the term CEYP was used, reflecting co-researchers' preference for 'care-experienced', as they do not want their experience to define them (Barnardos, 2023). The study advocates for CEYP to be included in future discussions around language and for 'CL' to be recognised as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2010).

5.10.2.1 Redefining PPs. Organisational change requires the right conditions (Kotter, 2012). Creating urgency and a strong vision among key leaders, policymakers, and

professionals is essential to ensuring PPs are valued as a meaningful transition tool. While some charities such as Catch22 have begun addressing knowledge gaps through initiatives such as LA pathway planning workshops, this remains limited (Catch22, 2024). Ongoing training for key stakeholders will be essential to establish a shared, coherent, and consistent understanding of pathway planning. This ensures PPs are not just administrative exercises but central to a young person's transition from care.

Hyde and Atkinson (2019) further call for strengthening the relational dimensions of PPs by incorporating a 'key people section', clearly outlining who is responsible for providing support, in agreement with the young person. It can also be empowering to promote CEYP's ownership and accountability (Murray, 2014), including signing off their plan and PPs having (Gateshead Council, 2023). This shift copy moves from tokenism towards genuine participation, individualisation, and person-centred care (Mendes & Purtell, 2021).

At the ecosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), co-production must be integrated into policy and practice. Building on the statutory guidance from The Care Act (2014) and SCIE's recommendations (2022), CEYP should be recognised as active contributors in shaping broader policies (Hart, 1992). This approach ensures that PPs are co-developed with CEYP, not just for them, prioritising their ownership and agency (Hoyle et al., 2020). Participatory tools with CEYP are emerging (UCL, 2023). Future efforts should build on this by embedding meaningful consultation throughout, enabling YP to shape both their individual plans and the broader pathway planning framework.

5.10.2.2 Enhanced Joint Working between Internal and External Organisations. Next, the need for sustained collaborative relationships between professionals, beyond crisis situations, in transitioning from care is addressed. This is essential for effective planning, and

professionals must take joint responsibility in ensuring CEYP actively engage with it (Kaasinen et al., 2022). For example, EET providers should have a clearer understanding of the pathway planning process, which would help contextualise CEYP's needs and aspirations while enhancing joint working across education, employment, virtual schools, health, and social care systems. Furthermore, cross-disciplinary collaboration could help identify and support care-experienced CYP who are at risk of being overlooked, such as UASC, SEND, and homeless CYP.

The importance of external organisations, including charities, in facilitating positive transitions to adulthood outside of the LA system must also be recognised (House of Commons, 2024). This is crucial given the current strain on public sector resources (Ofsted, 2024). This study reaffirms that many CEYP view external support as critical in building independence, accessing positive role models, and receiving necessary guidance. Thus, authentic joint working between LAs, HE institutions, and external organisations, including the sharing and reviewing of PPs, can result in more equitable support and empower CEYP in their future planning (Evans, 2024).

5.10.3 Implications for EPs

EPs play a key role in supporting CEYP through consultation, assessment, intervention, and training (Fallon et al., 2010; Scottish Executive Education Department, 2002). With increasing collaboration across LA services, EPs are frequently commissioned by Virtual Schools and CLA services, with 18% specialising in work with CLA and CEYP (Lee & Woods, 2017). As CPs, EPs are therefore well-placed to provide direct and systemic support; however, their role in implementing corporate parenting practices remains underused (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019).

On an individual level, EPs must adopt an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989), recognising how various aspects of a CEYP's identity interact with their care experience, creating potential barriers to self-expression. EPs must also reflect on their own identity and unconscious biases, using the social GGRRAAACCEEESSS framework (Burnham, 2012) to identify potential blind spots and areas of familiarity (Sandeen et al., 2018). This self-awareness should inform their approach to casework with CEYP.

Next, the findings highlight the need for person-centred pathway planning to facilitate successful transitions from care. This is particularly relevant when considering how PPs could be better integrated with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for CEYP with SEND. Given the rising number of CEYP receiving SEND support or with an EHCP (Ofsted, 2024), a more coordinated approach is essential. Ensuring that EHCPs, PPs, and PEPs work in partnership could create greater coherence in transition support. To achieve this, practical strategies such as joint outcome writing should be adopted, where goals from each plan are collaboratively developed to ensure alignment and avoid conflicting priorities. Multi-agency meetings involving health, education and social care professionals and the young person could facilitate the creation of more integrated plans that reflect shared objectives across different life domains. Additionally, establishing shared monitoring and review processes could support more coordinated tracking of progress, reducing duplication and administrative burden.

Furthermore, incorporating the plan-do-review cycle (DfE, 2014) into pathway planning could enhance accountability and address concerns about vague target setting and review processes (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). EPs, with their expertise in the Preparing for Adulthood (2013) agenda, are thus well-placed to advocate for and facilitate a more personcentred and collaborative approach for successful post-16 transition planning for CEYP with SEND.

Interestingly, the study reaffirms the importance of professionals taking a proactive role in ensuring CEYP have a voice in post-care planning. Person-centred planning tools presents a promising approach, such as Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) (Pearpoint et al., 1993). Research suggests the PATH enhances CYP' preparedness for the future and their independence in goal setting (Wood et al., 2019). EPs could also incorporate narrative-based approaches, such as life story work and the 'Tree of Life' (Ncube, 2006) into statutory pathway planning. While still emerging with CEYP, the ToL could offer a powerful, personalised, strengths-based, and holistic approach to transition planning (Tobin, 2023).

Lastly, EPs increasingly engage in multi-disciplinary work within health and social care services. An article from the BPS Division of Educational and Child Psychology highlights their expertise in systemic practice, child development, trauma, and attachment, positioning them well to deliver trauma and attachment-informed training for schools and LA teams (Warwick, 2023). Given the inconsistent support reported by CEYP from PAs (Ofsted, 2012; The Centre for Social Justice, 2015), EPs should play a key role in upskilling CPs, fostering empathy, relational practice, and social justice for CEYP as a marginalised group.

Reflexive Diary Extract: Personal Implications for Practice

Reflections on Personal Implications for Practice

Engaging in this research has had a profound impact on how I intend to work with CLA and CEYP in my practice moving forward. I will be consciously considering how I engage with these young people, ensuring that their voices remain central to any assessment, planning, or intervention. This project reinforced my commitment to advocating for person-centred approaches and the use of narrative techniques, recognising the importance of supporting CEYP to share their experiences in meaningful ways, have ownership over their narratives.

Moreover, the research has prompted me to think more critically about how tools like pathway plans could be meaningfully integrated into EHCP PFA outcome writing. I plan to explore this further with social care teams, aiming for a more joined-up, collaborative approach that better supports young people's transitions. I will also be mindful about my use of language, always allowing CYP to guide how they wish to be described and referred to.

Ultimately, this experience has powerfully confirmed for me the importance of placing children and young people at the heart of all decision-making processes. It has strengthened my resolve to continue advocating for groups whose voices are too often marginalised, and to promote participatory, empowering practices within educational psychology and beyond.

5.11 Dissemination of Findings

The dissemination strategy for this research was co-developed with co-researchers. In the final workshop, the LR invited an open, unstructured discussion to explore dissemination ideas, to minimise researcher influence. This aligns with Aldridge's (2016) model of co-researcher-led research, ensuring the dissemination process reflected CEYP's priorities.

The LR aims to share the findings across multiple platforms, responding to the question: "What impact does voice have if no one is listening?" (Alexandra, 2016, p. 43). The research will be shared with the LR's wider TEP/EP community and presented to their doctorate course and EP Service at a team meeting. Opportunities are also being explored to present findings to their LA leaving care team, with the potential to inform the design, monitoring, and evaluation of pathway planning support.

In May 2025, the LR will present at the Participatory Action Research Special Interest Group (PARSIG), hosted by EPs at the University of East London, to promote a wider understanding of PR methods. Plans are also in place to submit elements of the research to a professional journal. Ethical discussions occurred with co-researchers about the permanence of published work and the limited control over its future use, in line with concerns about power dynamics.

Lastly, the LR aims to share findings with organisations that supported recruitment, such as LA and networks including the Pan-London CiCC. Finally, co-researchers echoed sentiments of going "beyond the academic article" (Mannay et al., 2019, p.659). Creative, accessible formats, such as a blog, social media posts, or a short film, are thus being considered to support broader engagement and impact.

5.12 Directions for Future Research

The need for further research was reinforced during the LR's attendance at a conference in July 2024 (Public Policy Exchange, 2024), where stakeholders highlighted national gaps in the leaving care system's evidence base. Their discussions stressed the importance of ongoing research to inform policies and practices that more effectively support CEYP.

5.12.1 Enhancing the Participatory Approach

This study empowered CEYP aged 20-23 as co-researchers. Aldridge (2017) emphasises the need to expand knowledge on PR methods, and this study offers insight into how CEYP can be meaningfully included, aligning with the growing emphasis on youth participation (Lynch et al., 2024). However, co-researchers were not involved in all research phases, and the study was conducted entirely online. Future studies could support more inperson collaboration and explore how co-researcher roles are negotiated and sustained. Including younger CEYP could also broaden the understanding of the transition to adulthood.

5.12.2 Designing, Monitoring and Evaluating Services in Planning to Leave Care

The findings also suggest that CEYP seek greater autonomy in planning and decision-making processes as they transition from care. This aligns with legislation, such as the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which advocates for their active participation in decisions affecting their lives. Future research could explore how CEYP co-design their PPs, shifting from passive recipients to active contributors in shaping their support. A PR approach could enhance the inclusivity and relevance of such service design, while centring CEYP's voices in evaluating of PPs could ensure that support systems evolve in response to their lived experiences and needs (UCL, 2023).

5.12.3 Research Priorities for Underrepresented CEYP Groups

The CEYP population is far from homogeneous; their experiences are shaped by various intersecting factors, including care history, family background, and the degree of agency afforded in decision-making (Prendergast et al., 2024). Grounded in an intersectionality framework, this study recognises that such overlapping identities can compound disadvantage and shape transition from care experiences. While this research acknowledged aspects of

identity, future studies should centre the experiences of underrepresented and minoritised groups to inform more equitable policy and practice, including:

- CYP with SEND. Many SEND CEYP lack essential support (Coram Voice, 2024).
 Research should explore their specific challenges, particularly the interaction between
 PPs and EHCPs, to promote inclusive service provision.
- UASC and Refugees. These CYP face dual transitions, adapting to adulthood while
 navigating migration experiences and complex legal frameworks. Research on their
 trauma and transition experiences remains scarce, highlighting a critical gap (Bolaji,
 2025; Söderqvist, 2014).
- Homelessness and CEYP Identification. Basic needs (e.g., food, safety, health) are
 essential for CEYP's transitions. However, more research is warranted to understand
 how homelessness impacts CEYP's access to support and participation in decisionmaking (Pescod, 2024).

5.13 Concluding Thoughts

Ultimately, this study does not claim to capture the universal experience of all CEYP with PPs in their transition to adulthood. However, it highlights key challenges within the UK's leaving care system and urges CPs to reflect on a critical question: if statutory support is not implemented in a relational and meaningful way, then for whom and for what purpose is it serving?

The areas for change identified in this research offer valuable contributions to policy and practice, particularly in enhancing pathway planning. CEYP emphasised the need for more personalised support, grounded in positive relationships with PAs. This research serves as a starting point for LAs, policymakers, social care professionals, and EPs to reconsider the purpose and function of PPs, encouraging further research and discussion on this critical

transition process. Future research must focus on further refining the pathway planning process, identifying facilitators and barriers, and exploring the transition experiences of CEYP from minoritised groups.

Furthermore, the adoption of a PR approach in this study offers a unique contribution by prioritising CEYP's perspectives. Despite challenges in fully enabling co-researcher-led participation, this methodology sought to empower CEYP's voices and paves the way for more inclusive research practices involving marginalised groups.

That said, this study advocates for the centrality of CEYP's voices in the development, implementation, and review of PPs. At a systems level, it calls for reform rooted in the lived experiences of CEYP themselves, with co-production and the active inclusion of those affected by the system being essential to successful post-care transitions. Finally, in promoting social justice within EP practice, this research positions CEYP as competent and autonomous decision-makers, capable of shaping their own futures.

References

- Adley, N., & Jupp Kina, V. (2017). Getting behind the closed door of care leavers: understanding the role of emotional support for young people leaving care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(1), 97-105.
- Aldridge, J. (2016). Participatory research: Working with vulnerable groups in research and practice. Policy Press.
- Aldridge, J. (2017). Introduction to the issue:" promoting children's participation in research, policy and practice". *Social Inclusion*, *5*(3), 89-92.
- ANV. (2011). CiCCs across England: mapping performance and function.

 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachme

 nt data/file/190631/cicc mapping project november 2011.pdf
- Arciprete, C., Biggeri, M., & Fattacciu, I. (2024). Empowering youth in care: the case of emancipatory research with care leavers. *Journal de Ciencias Sociales*, 12, 0-0.
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American psychologist*, 55(5), 469.
- Atkinson, C., Dunsmuir, S., Lang, J., & Wright, S. (2015). Developing a competency framework for the initial training of educational psychologists working with young people aged 16–25. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 31(2), 159-173.
- Atkinson, C., & Hyde, R. (2019). Care leavers' views about transition: a literature review. *Journal of Children's Services*, 14(1), 42-58.
- Bailey, J. (2008). First steps in qualitative data analysis: transcribing. *Family practice*, 25(2), 127-131.
- Baker, C. (2017). Care leavers' views on their transition to adulthood: A rapid review of the evidence. *Pribavljeno*, *2*, 2020.

- Barn, R. (2010). Care leavers and social capital: understanding and negotiating racial and ethnic identity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *33*(5), 832-850. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870903318896
- Barnardos. (2019). *Toolkit for Supporting Care Leavers in Custody*. H. P. P. Service. https://www.nicco.org.uk/userfiles/downloads/5d356df6f345a-toolkit-for-supporting-care-leavers-in-custody.pdf
- Barnardos. (2023). What needs to change in the care system according to young people.

 <a href="https://www.barnardos.org.uk/blog/changes-needed-care-system-according-to-young-people#:~:text=The%20experience%20of%20being%20in%20care%20shouldn't%20define%20who%20you%20are&text=Children%20and%20young%20people%20who%20have%20been%20in%20care%20do,the%20term%20'care%20leaver'.
- Barnardos. (2024a). *Improving Cross-Government Support for Care Leavers*https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Improving%20Cross-Government%20Support%20for%20Care%20Leavers.pdf
- Barnardos. (2024b). We are family: Young people leaving care need the love and support others may take for granted. https://www.barnardos.org.uk/blog/we-are-family-young-people-leaving-care-need-love-and-support-others-may-take-granted
- Barratt et al., C. (2020). Exploring internal conversations to understand the experience of young adults transitioning out of care. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(7), 869-885.
- Bayfield, H., & Smith, L. (2024). "The bridge between school and uni, that'? s the bit that's missing": improving access to higher education for care-experienced students.

 Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 26(1), 191-200.
- Become. (2024). Shocking new figures show over 4,300 young care leavers facing homelessness, an increase of 54% in the last five years

 https://becomecharity.org.uk/content/uploads/2024/10/Homelessness-stats Oct-24.pdf

- Benzies, K. M., Premji, S., Hayden, K. A., & Serrett, K. (2006). State-of-the-evidence reviews: advantages and challenges of including grey literature. *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing*, 3(2), 55-61.
- Beresford, P., & Carr, S. (2016). Social care, service users and user involvement. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 28(2), 95-95.
- Biggs, J. B. (1989). Approaches to the enhancement of tertiary teaching. *Higher education* research and development, 8(1), 7-25.
- Birch, M., & Miller, T. (2002). Encouraging participation: Ethics and responsibilities. *Ethics* in qualitative research, 91-106.
- Bissell, V., Robertson, D. P., McCurry, C. W., & McAleer, J. P. (2018). Evaluating major curriculum change: the effect on student confidence. *British dental journal*, 224(7), 529-534.
- Bolaji, W. (2025). Trauma and transition into adulthood: African refugee and asylum-seeking care leavers in London. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2025.2449634
- Boswell, N., Douglas-Osborn, E., Halkyard, T., & Woods, K. (2021). Listening to children and young people: an educational psychology service co-production journey. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 37(4), 396-412.
- Bowlby, J. (1979). The bowlby-ainsworth attachment theory. *Behavioral and brain sciences*, 2(4), 637-638.
- Bowlby, J. (2008). A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development.

 Basic books.
- Bown, M. J., & Sutton, A. J. (2010). Quality control in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. European journal of vascular and endovascular surgery, 40(5), 669-677.

- Bradbury-Jones, C., & Taylor, J. (2015). Engaging with children as co-researchers: challenges, counter-challenges and solutions. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 18(2), 161-173.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative research in psychology*, 18(3), 328-352.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be (com) ing a knowing researcher. *International journal of transgender health*, 24(1), 1-6.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., Davey, L., & Jenkinson, E. (2023). Doing reflexive thematic analysis. In *Supporting research in counselling and psychotherapy:*Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research (pp. 19-38). Springer.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Harvard university press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development. Sage.
- Brown, D. (2023). Childhood experiences, growing up "in care," and trust: A quantitative analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *144*, 106734.
- Bucknall, S. (2010). Children as researchers in English primary schools: developing a model for good practice.
- Burnham. (2012). Developments in Social GRRRAAACCEEESSS: Visible-invisible and voiced-unvoiced. (K. Books, Ed.). Culture and reflexivity in systemic psychotherapy:

 Mutual perspectives.
- Burr, V., & Dick, P. (2017). Social constructionism. Springer.

- Butterworth, S., Singh, S. P., Birchwood, M., Islam, Z., Munro, E. R., Vostanis, P., Paul, M., Khan, A., & Simkiss, D. (2017). Transitioning care-leavers with mental health needs: 'they set you up to fail!'. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 22(3), 138-147.
- Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & quantity*, 56(3), 1391-1412.
- Cantril, H. (1965). The pattern of human concerns. In: NJ: Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick.
- Catch22. (2024). The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum Annual Report 2023-2024.
- Charles, A., & Felton, A. (2020). Exploring young people's experiences and perceptions of mental health and well-being using photography. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 25(1), 13-20.
- Cheatham, L. P., Randolph, K. A., & Boltz, L. D. (2020). Youth with disabilities transitioning from foster care: Examining prevalence and predicting positive outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 110, 104777.
- Children and Social Work Act 2017. (2017). Children and Social Work Act 2017. (c. 16.).
- Children's Commissioner. (2021). Conversations with care leavers: the importance of trusting relationships. https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/blog/conversations-with-care-leavers-the-importance-of-trusting-relationships/
- Clayden, J., & Stein, M. (2005). Mentoring young people leaving care. *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*. *York*.
- Cohen, P., Kasen, S., Chen, H., Hartmark, C., & Gordon, K. (2003). Variations in patterns of developmental transmissions in the emerging adulthood period. *Developmental psychology*, 39(4), 657.

- Coram Voice. (2025). The wellbeing of children in care and care leavers learning from the Bright Spots programme: Strategic briefing. Coram Voice.

 https://www.coram.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/learning_from_the_bright_spots_programme_sb_web.pdf
- Crane, L., Adams, F., Harper, G., Welch, J., & Pellicano, E. (2019). 'Something needs to change': Mental health experiences of young autistic adults in England. *Autism*, 23(2), 477-493.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine (pp. 139–168). University of Chicago legal forum,
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Crotty, M. J. (1998). The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.
- Dadswell, A., & O'Brien, N. (2022). Participatory research with care leavers to explore their support experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 52(6), 3639-3657.
- Department for Education. (2015). Special educational needs and disability code of practice:

 0 to 25 years. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25
- Department for Education. (2019). Principles to guide higher education providers on improving care leavers access and participation in HE.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/principles-to-guide-he-providers-on-improving-care-leavers-access-and-participation-in-he/principles-to-guide-higher-education-providers-on-improving-care-leavers-access-and-participation-in-

- he#:~:text=Outreach%20and%20local%20authority%20relationships,homework%20c lubs%20and%20summer%20schools
- Department for Education. (2023). *Children's social care: reform statement*. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-reform-statement
- Department for Education. (2024). Children looked-after by local authorities in England.

 Retrieved from

 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67ee564ae9c76fa33048c702/Children_1
- Department for Levelling Up Housing & Communities. (2023). Statutory homelessness in England. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2022-23/statutory-homelessness-in-england-financial-year-2022-23

ooked-after by LAs in England 2024-25 Guide Version 1 3.pdf

- Devenney, K. (2017). Pathway planning with unaccompanied young people leaving care: Biographical narratives of past, present, and future. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(3), 1313-1321.
- Devine, S. L., Walker, S. C., Makdani, A., Stockton, E. R., McFarquhar, M. J., McGlone, F.
 P., & Trotter, P. D. (2020). Childhood adversity and affective touch perception: a comparison of United Kingdom care leavers and non-care leavers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 557171.
- Dixon, J. (2008). Young people leaving care: health, well-being and outcomes. *Child & Family Social Work*, 13(2), 207-217.
- Driscoll, J. (2013). Supporting care leavers to fulfil their educational aspirations: Resilience, relationships and resistance to help. *Children & Society*, 27(2), 139-149.

- Duckworth, S. (2020). Wheel of power/privilege [Infographic]. In (pp. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.): Flickr. https://flic.kr/p/2jWxeGG.
- Duea, S. R., Zimmerman, E. B., Vaughn, L. M., Dias, S., & Harris, J. (2022). A guide to selecting participatory research methods based on project and partnership goals. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods*, 3(1).
- Ellis, K., & Johnston, C. (2024). Resilience, higher education and widening participation: generating change for care experienced students. *Higher Education*, 87(1), 1-16.
- Elsherif, M. M., Middleton, S., Phan, J. M., Azevedo, F., Iley, B., Grose-Hodge, M., Tyler, S., Kapp, S., Gourdon-Kanhukamwe, A., & Grafton-Clarke, D. (2022). Bridging neurodiversity and open scholarship: How shared values can guide best practices for research integrity, social justice, and principled education.
- Emke, H., Vandendriessche, A., Chinapaw, M., Deforche, B., Verloigne, M., Altenburg, T., & Anselma, M. (2024). Facilitating co-research: lessons learned from reflection forms within three participatory action research projects. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 22(1), 117. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-024-01210-x
- (2010). https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity youth and crisis*. WW Norton & company.
- Evans, C. (2024). Care experienced students' transitions to university: learning identities, prior educational experiences and socio-cultural contexts. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 45(7-8), 1059-1073.
- Fargas-Malet, M., & McSherry, D. (2018). The mental health and help-seeking behaviour of children and young people in care in Northern Ireland: Making services accessible and engaging. *British Journal of Social Work*, 48(3), 578-595.
- Fenton, J. (2022). Radical Challenges for Social Work Education. Routledge.

- Fincham, E. N. (2015). Words and bodies: Reimagining narrative data in a toddler classroom.

 In *Disrupting Early Childhood Education Research* (pp. 86-101). Routledge.
- Finlay, L. (2021). Thematic analysis:: the 'good', the 'bad' and the 'ugly'. *European Journal* for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy, 11, 103-116.
- Fox, M. (2015). "What sort of person ought I to be?"—Repositioning EPs in light of the Children and Families Bill (2013). *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *31*(4), 382-396.
- Francis, Y. J., Rowland, L., Humrich, S., & Taylor, S. (2021). Are you listening? Echoing the voices of looked after children about their transition to secondary school. *Adoption & Fostering*, 45(1), 37-55.
- Furey, R., & Harris-Evans, J. (2021). Work and resilience: Care leavers' experiences of navigating towards employment and independence. *Child & Family Social Work*, 26(3), 404-414.
- Fylkesnes, M., Larsen, M., Havnen, K., Christiansen, Ø., & Lehmann, S. (2021). Listening to advice from young people in foster care—from participation to belonging. *British Journal of Social Work*, *51*(6), 1983-2000.
- Gal, T. (2017). An ecological model of child and youth participation. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 79, 57-64.
- Garside, R. (2014). Should we appraise the quality of qualitative research reports for systematic reviews, and if so, how? *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 27(1), 67-79. https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2013.777270
- Gaskell, C. (2010). 'If the Social Worker had Called at Least it Would Show they Cared'.

 Young Care Leaver's Perspectives on the Importance of Care. *Children & Society*,

 24(2), 136-147.

- Gateshead Council. (2023). *Gateshead Children's Services Procedures Manual, Pathway*Plan Guidance. https://gatesheadcs.trixonline.co.uk/chapter/pathway-plan-guidance
- Giles, P., & Rowley, J. (2020). Educational psychologists' responses to a post-16 service user film on their practice: a participatory research project. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *36*(1), 78-92.
- Gilligan, R., & Brady, E. (2023). What helps adult care leavers return to education? exploring the relevance of learner identity and the life course perspective. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 26(10), 1373-1386.
- Gledhill, R. (2023). Understanding the Regulation of Psychologists. In: HCPC-UK. https://www.hcpc-uk.org/news-and-events/blog/2023/understanding...
- Glynn, N., & Mayock, P. (2019). "I've changed so much within a year": care leavers' perspectives on the aftercare planning process. *Child care in practice*, 25(1), 79-98.
- Goddard, J., & Barrett, S. (2008). Guidance, policy and practice and the health needs of young people leaving care. *Journal of social welfare & family law*, 30(1), 31-47.
- Goddard, J. I. M. (2006). J. Dixon and M. Stein (2005), Leaving Care: Throughcare and Aftercare in Scotland, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishing, 191 pp., £19.99 pbk.

 Journal of Social Policy J SOC POLICY, 35.

 https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279406320272
- Godfrey-Faussett, T. (2022). Participatory research and the ethics of anonymisation. *Education Sciences*, 12(4), 260.
- Gov. (2022). 'Ready or not': care leavers' views of preparing to leave care.

 <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ready-or-not-care-leavers-views-of-preparing-to-leave-care/ready-or-not-care-leavers-views-of-preparing-to-leave-care/being-involved-in-decisions-and-plans-about-their-future."
 </p>

- Goyette, M. (2019). Leaving care and the transition to adulthood. Leaving Care and the Transition to Adulthood: International Contributions to Theory, Research, and Practice, 329-345.
- Grace, R., Shier, H., Michail, S., Fattore, T., McClean, T., Ng, J., Baird, K., Wise, S., & Kemp, L. (2024). Supporting child and youth participation in service design and decision-making: the ReSPECT approach. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 163, 107769.
- Greenhalgh, T., & Peacock, R. (2005). Effectiveness and efficiency of search methods in systematic reviews of complex evidence: audit of primary sources. *Bmj*, 331(7524), 1064-1065. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.38636.593461.68
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research.

 Handbook of qualitative research, 2(163-194), 105.
- Haddaway, N. R., Bethel, A., Dicks, L. V., Koricheva, J., Macura, B., Petrokofsky, G., Pullin, A. S., Savilaakso, S., & Stewart, G. B. (2020). Eight problems with literature reviews and how to fix them. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 4(12), 1582-1589.
- Harder, A. T., Mann-Feder, V., Oterholm, I., & Refaeli, T. (2020). Supporting transitions to adulthood for youth leaving care: Consensus based principles. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 116, 105260.
- Harré, R., & Langenhove, L. v. (1999). Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action. (*No Title*).
- Hempel, S., Bolshakova, M., Turner, B. J., Dinalo, J., Rose, D., Motala, A., Fu, N., Clemesha,
 C. G., Rubenstein, L., & Stockdale, S. (2022). Evidence-based quality improvement: a
 scoping review of the literature. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 37(16), 4257-4267.

- Hiles, D., Moss, D., Thorne, L., Wright, J., & Dallos, R. (2014). "So what am I?"—Multiple perspectives on young people's experience of leaving care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 41, 1-15.
- HM Treasury. (2024). *Autumn Budget 2024*. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-budget-2024
- Hochberg, Z. e., & Konner, M. (2020). Emerging adulthood, a pre-adult life-history stage. Frontiers in endocrinology, 10, 918.
- Horn, J. P. (2020). What will I be and how will I get there?: Examining the transition to adulthood among care leavers Boston University].
- Houghton, C. (2015). Young people's perspectives on participatory ethics: Agency, power and impact in domestic abuse research and policy-making. *Child abuse review*, 24(4), 235-248.
- Hounslow, L. B. o. (2025). *Corporate parenting*. Retrieved 18th February 2025 from https://www.hounslow.gov.uk/info/20141/services_for_looked_after_children_and_ca re leavers/1701/corporate parenting/2
- House of Commons. (2024). *Support for care leavers*. https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8429/CBP-8429.pdf
- Hoyle, V., Shepherd, E., Lomas, E., & Flinn, A. (2020). Recordkeeping and the life-long memory and identity needs of care-experienced children and young people. *Child & Family Social Work*, 25(4), 935-945.
- Hung, I., & Appleton, P. (2015). To plan or not to plan: The internal conversations of young people leaving care. *Qualitative Social Work*, 15(1), 35-54. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325015577408
- Hunter, K., Francis, B., & Fitzpatrick, C. (2023). Care experience, ethnicity and youth justice involvement: key trends and policy implications.

- Hurtado, S. (2022). The Transformative Paradigm: An Evolving Journey in Methods and Social Justice Aims 1. In *Advancing Culturally Responsive Research and Researchers* (pp. 15-29). Routledge.
- Hyde, R., & Atkinson, C. (2019). Care leavers' priorities and the corporate parent role: A self-determination theory perspective. *Educational & Child Psychology*, *36*(1), 40-57.
- Information Commissioner's Office. (2024). *ICO calls for people to share experiences*accessing care records as it vows to improve support. https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/media-centre/news-and-blogs/2024/02/ico-calls-for-people-to-share-experiences-accessing-care-records-as-it-vows-to-improve-support/
- Irby, M. B., Hamlin, D., Rhoades, L., Freeman, N. R., Summers, P., Rhodes, S. D., & Daniel,
 S. (2018). Violence as a health disparity: Adolescents' perceptions of violence
 depicted through photovoice. *Journal of community psychology*, 46(8), 1026-1044.
- Jackson, S. F. (2008). A participatory group process to analyze qualitative data. *Progress in community health partnerships: research, education, and action*, 2(2), 161-170.
- Jamieson, M. K., Govaart, G. H., & Pownall, M. (2023). Reflexivity in quantitative research:

 A rationale and beginner's guide. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *17*(4), e12735.
- Johnson, R. B. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education*, 118(2).
- Kara, H. (2017). Methodologies, approaches, and theories. In *Research and Evaluation for Busy Students and Practitioners* (pp. 41-60). Policy Press.
- Karagiannaki. (2024). Young people taking longer to leave home and find work and a partner.

 https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/blog/2024/07/10/major-life-events-delayed/
- Kawulich, B. (2012). Collecting data through observation. *Doing social research: A global context*, 6(12), 150-160.

- Kellett, M. (2005). Children as active researchers: a new research paradigm for the 21st century?
- Kelly, B., Davidson, G., Pinkerton, J., & Gilligan, E. (2016). The views and experiences of care leavers with mental health and/or intellectual disabilities: Case study report.

 *Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.
- Kelly, B., Walsh, C., Pinkerton, J., & Toal, A. (2021). "I got into a very dark place": addressing the needs of young people leaving care during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Children's Services*, 16(4), 332-345.
- Kilkenny, M. (2012). The transition to adulthood and independence: A study of young people leaving residential care.
- Kirby, P. (1999). *Involving young researchers: How to enable young people to design and conduct research*. University of Sussex.
- Kotter, J. (2012). The 8-step process for leading change. Kotter International.
- Lee, K., & Woods, K. (2017). Exploration of the developing role of the educational psychologist within the context of "traded" psychological services. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 33(2), 111-125.
- Lefevre, M., Hickle, K., & Luckock, B. (2019). 'Both/and'not 'either/or': reconciling rights to protection and participation in working with child sexual exploitation. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 49(7), 1837-1855.
- Lehman, A. F. (1988). A quality of life interview for the chronically mentally ill. *Evaluation* and program planning, 11(1), 51-62.
- Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2017).

 Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology:

 Promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative psychology*, 4(1), 2.

- Liabo, K., McKenna, C., Ingold, A., & Roberts, H. (2016). Leaving foster or residential care: a participatory study of care leavers' experiences of health and social care transitions: Experiences of health and social care transitions. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 43. https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12426
- López, M., Santos, I., Bravo, A., & Del Valle, J. F. (2013). El proceso de transición a la vida adulta de jóvenes acogidos en el sistema de protección infantil. Revisión de la investigación y respuestas. *Anales de Psicología/Annals of Psychology*, 29(1), 187-196.
- Lumivero. (2025). *Nvivo Software*. https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/
- Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice'is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations

 Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6),
 927-942.
- Lynch, A., Alderson, H., Kerridge, G., Johnson, R., McGovern, R., Newlands, F., Smart, D., Harrop, C., & Currie, G. (2021). An inter-disciplinary perspective on evaluation of innovation to support care leavers' transition. *Journal of Children's Services*, 16(3), 214-232. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/JCS-12-2020-0082
- Lynch, A., Friel, S., Munro, E. R., Sultana, M., Hamilton, C., Kerridge, G., Oswick, R., Pillay Mitchell, T., Alderson, H., & Harrop, C. (2024). Developing care experienced young peoples' participation as peer researchers in an inter-disciplinary study: applying the 'Ability-Motivation-Opportunity' framework. *European Journal of Social Work*, 1-16.
- Maeda, Y., Caskurlu, S., Kozan, K., & Kenney, R. H. (2023). Development of a critical appraisal tool for assessing the reporting quality of qualitative studies: a worked example. *Quality & quantity*, *57*(2), 1011-1031.
- Mannay, D., Roberts, L., & Staples, E. (2019). Lights, camera, action: Translating research findings into policy and practice impacts with music, film and artwork.

- Matthews, S., & Sykes, S. (2012). Exploring Health Priorities for Young People Leaving

 Care. *Child care in practice*, 18(4), 393-407.

 https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2012.717913
- Maxwell, J. A. (2022). Interactive approaches to qualitative research design. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research design*, 41-54.
- Maynard-Moody, S., & Musheno, M. (2012). Social Equities and Social Inequities in

 Practice: Street-level Workers as Agents and Pragmatists. *Am. Pub. Admin. Rev*, 72,

 17.
- McCusker, P., McMellon, C., Roesch-Marsh, A., & Bartlett, T. (2025). Feeling well, feeling cared for? Using participatory and arts-engaged research to improve understanding and professional responses to the mental health needs of care-experienced young people. *Educational Action Research*, 33(1), 153-171.
- McGhee, K., & Deeley, S. (2022). Emerging Adulthood: Exploring the implications for care experienced young people and those who care for them. *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, 21(1).
- McLeod, A. (2007). Whose agenda? Issues of power and relationship when listening to looked-after young people. *Child & Family Social Work*, 12(3), 278-286.
- Mendes, P., & Purtell, J. (2021). Relationship-based models for supporting young people transitioning from out-of-home care: Two case studies from Victoria, Australia.

 *Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond, 8(1), 120-132.
- Mertens, D. M. (2017). Transformative research: Personal and societal. *International Journal* for Transformative Research, 4(1), 18-24.
- Mitchell, M., Lundy, L., & Hill, L. (2023). Children's Human Rights to 'Participation' and 'Protection': Rethinking the relationship using Barnahus as a case example. *Child abuse review*, 32(6), e2820.

- Montserrat, C., & Llosada-Gistau, J. (2024). Trajectories of care leavers according to indicators of psychosocial adjustment: A cohort analysis. *Child Protection and Practice*, *1*, 100003.
- Moore, J. (2005). Recognising and questioning the epistemological basis of educational psychology practice. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 21(2), 103-116.
- Moorehouse, N. R. (2022). Supporting the emotional wellbeing and mental health of looked after children and young people: multiple perspectives within one London borough UCL (University College London)].
- Murray, S. (2014). Compassion and compliance: releasing records to Care-Leavers under privacy and freedom of information legislation. *Social Policy and Society*, *13*(4), 493-503.
- National Audit Office. (2015). *Care leavers' transitions to adulthood* 9781904219996).

 https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/care-leavers-transitions-to-adulthood/#publication-details
- Ncube, N. (2006). The tree of life project. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy & Community Work*, 2006(1), 3-16.
- Newman, M., & Gough, D. (2020). Systematic reviews in educational research:

 Methodology, perspectives and application. Systematic reviews in educational research: Methodology, perspectives and application, 3-22.
- Nind, M. (2011). Participatory data analysis: a step too far? *Qualitative Research*, 11(4), 349-363.
- Office for National Statistics. (2019). *Milestones: journeying into adulthood*.

 <a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/milestonesjourneyingintoadulthood/2019-02-18#:~:text=Age%2018%3A%20Legally%20an%20adult</p>

- Ofsted. (2024). Preparation for adulthood arrangements in local areas: a thematic review.

 <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas-a-thematic-review/preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-arrange
- Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., & Brennan, S. E. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *Bmj*, *372*.
- Park, S., Powers, J., Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2022). Co-production of care leavers' transition planning as young adults: An analysis of young people in California foster care. *The British Journal of Social Work*, *52*(6), 3385-3405.
- Paulsen, V., & Berg, B. (2016). Social support and interdependency in transition to adulthood from child welfare services. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 68, 125-131.
- Pepe, A., Biffi, E., Carla Montà, C., Arciprete, C., & Biggeri, M. (2024). Agency, participation in decision making and wellbeing among care leavers in care system: A quantitative mediation study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *160*, 107500. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107500
- Pert, H., Diaz, C., & Thomas, N. (2017). Children's participation in LAC reviews: a study in one English local authority. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(S2), 1-10. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12194
- Pescod, M. (2024). Understanding motivation towards education through exploring the educational experiences of young homeless people. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 41(3), 55-66.
- Peterson, A., Meehan, C., Ali, Z., & Durrant, I. (2017). What are the educational needs and experiences of asylum-seeking and refugee children, including those who are unaccompanied, with a particular focus on inclusion?-A literature review.

- Phillips, A. R., Halligan, S. L., Lavi, I., Macleod, J. A., Robinson, S., Wilkins, D., & Hiller,
 R. M. (2024). A scoping review of factors associated with the mental health of young
 people who have "aged out" of the child welfare system. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*,
 25(3), 1780-1798.
- Pinkerton, J. (2021). Exploring history in the social ecology of care leaving: Northern Ireland as illustration. *Child & Family Social Work*, *26*, 270-279. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12804
- Pinkerton, J., & Rooney, C. (2014). Care leavers' experiences of transition and turning points: Findings from a biographical narrative study. *Social Work & Society*, *12*(1).
- Pinkney, S., & Walker, G. (2020). 'It was me, but it was them that helped me': Exploring the issues for care experienced young people within higher education. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 108, 104576.
- Priestley et al., M. (2003). Young disabled people and the 'new arrangements' for leaving care in England and Wales. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 25(11), 863-890.
- Probst, B. (2015). The eye regards itself: Benefits and challenges of reflexivity in qualitative social work research. *Social Work Research*, *39*(1), 37-48.
- Public Policy Exchange. (2024). Improving Outcomes for Care Leavers: Can a New Government Break the Care Ceiling?

 https://publicpolicyexchange.co.uk/event.php?eventUID=OG23-PPE
- Purtell, J. (2023). Trauma-informed research with young people transitioning from care: balancing methodological rigour with participatory and empowering practice. In *Living on the edge* (pp. 129-147). Policy Press.
- Qu, S. Q., & Dumay, J. (2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative research in accounting & management*, 8(3), 238-264.

- Race Disparity Unit. (2024). Inclusive Britain action plan: updates.

 https://www.gov.uk/guidance/inclusive-britain-action-plan-updates
- Reason, P., & Torbert, W. (2001). The action turn: Toward a transformational social science.

 Concepts and transformation, 6(1), 1-37.
- Rehman, A. A., & Alharthi, K. (2016). An introduction to research paradigms. *International journal of educational investigations*, 3(8), 51-59.
- Rice, E., & O'Connor, S. (2023). The effect of provisions on the mental health of young adult care leavers. A systematic review. *Journal of Children's Services*, 18(2), 81-103.
- Rindfuss, R. R., Swicegood, C. G., & Rosenfeld, R. A. (1987). Disorder in the life course:

 How common and does it matter? *American sociological review*, 785-801.
- Rix, J., Garcia-Carrizosa, H., Hayhoe, S., Seale, J., & Sheehy, K. (2021). Emergent analysis and dissemination within participatory research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 44(3), 287-302.
- Roberts, L., Mannay, D., Rees, A., Bayfield, H., Corliss, C., Diaz, C., & Vaughan, R. (2021). 'It's been a massive struggle': Exploring the experiences of young people leaving care during COVID-19. *Young*, 29(4_suppl), S81-S99.
- Roberts, L., Rees, A., Mannay, D., Bayfield, H., Corliss, C., Diaz, C., & Vaughan, R. (2021).

 Corporate parenting in a pandemic: Considering the delivery and receipt of support to care leavers in Wales during Covid-19. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 128, 106155. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2021.106155
- Rodriguez Espinosa, P., & Verney, S. P. (2021). The underutilization of community-based participatory research in psychology: A systematic review. *American journal of community psychology*, 67(3-4), 312-326.

- Rogers, R. (2015). Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing, and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care. *Australian Social Work*, 68(1), 99-114. https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2013.868013
- Rutter, M. (2006). Implications of resilience concepts for scientific understanding. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1094(1), 1-12.
- Sacker, A., Murray, E. T., Maughan, B., & Lacey, R. E. (2024). Social care in childhood and adult outcomes: double whammy for minority children? *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*, 15(2), 139-162. https://doi.org/10.1332/17579597y2023d000000008
- Sandeen, E., Moore, K. M., & Swanda, R. M. (2018). Reflective local practice: A pragmatic framework for improving culturally competent practice in psychology. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 49(2), 142.
- Schilling, H., & Kauffeld, S. (2024). Building empathy and trust in online environments. *The Digital and AI Coaches' Handbook: The Complete Guide to the Use of Online, AI, and Technology in Coaching.*
- Schofield et al., G. (2017). Risk, resilience and identity construction in the life narratives of young people leaving residential care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(2), 782-791.
- Schwartz, S. J. (2016). Turning point for a turning point: Advancing emerging adulthood theory and research. *Emerging Adulthood*, 4(5), 307-317.
- Selwyn, J., & Briheim-Crookall, L. (2022). 10,000 Voices: The views of children in care on their well-being. *Coram Voice https://coramvoice.org. uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2410-CV-YLYC-2021-Report-new3-lo-10.10*, 10.
- Sharma, G. (2025). Every Life Matters: Empowering Care Leavers on Their Path to Independence: The Caregivers' Perspectives. *Asian Social Work and Policy Review*, 19(1), e70003.

- Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations. *Children & Society*, 15(2), 107-117.
- Simpson, D., & Murphy, S. F. (2022). 'So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past': legacy, care leavers and university study. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 25(2), 259-274. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1865527
- Sims-Schouten, W., & Hayden, C. (2017). Mental health and wellbeing of care leavers:

 Making sense of their perspectives. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(4), 1480-1487.

 Sissay, L. (2019). *My name is why*. Canongate Books.
- Smith, B. G., Whiffin, C. J., Esene, I. N., Karekezi, C., Bashford, T., Mukhtar Khan, M., Fontoura Solla, D. J., Indira Devi, B., Paiva, W. S., & Servadei, F. (2022).

 Neurotrauma clinicians' perspectives on the contextual challenges associated with traumatic brain injury follow up in low-income and middle-income countries: A reflexive thematic analysis. *Plos one*, *17*(9), e0274922.
- Social Institute for Excellence. (2019). Homelessness and Care Experience, Beyond the

 Headlines.

 https://www.celcis.org/application/files/7215/5835/3996/Beyond_The_Headlines_H

 omelessness May 2019.pdf
- Söderqvist, Å. (2014). Leaving care with "cultural baggage": The development of an identity within a transnational space. *Australian Social Work*, 67(1), 39-54.
- Staples, E., Roberts, L., Lyttleton-Smith, J., & Hallett, S. (2019). 15| Enabling care-experienced young people's participation in research. *Children and Young People Looked After?: Education, Intervention and the Everyday Culture of Care in Wales*, 196.
- Starr, M., Cordier, R., Pakpahan, E., Robinson, M., Speyer, R., & Chung, D. (2024).

 Understanding how young people transitioning from out-of-home care acquire and

- develop independent living skills and knowledge: A systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Plos one*, *19*(6), e0304965. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0304965
- Stein, M. (2008). Transitions from care to adulthood. Young people's transitions from care to adulthood: International research and practice, 289.
- Stein, M. (2012). Young people leaving care: Supporting pathways to adulthood.
- Stein, M., & Munro, E. R. (2008). The transition to adulthood for young people leaving public care: international comparisons and perspectives. Care matters: transforming lives–improving outcomes conference (incorporating the 8th International Looking After Children Conference),
- Stubbs, A., Baidawi, S., & Mendes, P. (2023). Young people transitioning from out-of-home care: their experience of informal support. A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *144*, 106735.

 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2022.106735
- Sulimani-Aidan, Y. (2017). 'She was like a mother and a father to me': searching for the ideal mentor for youth in care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(2), 862-870.
- Taylor, S. (2021). Public attitudes to children in
- care and care leavers. Coram. https://www.coram.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/migrated/resource_files/Public%20attitudes%20to%20children%20in%20care%20leavers%20Coram.pdf
- Templier, M., & Paré, G. (2015). A framework for guiding and evaluating literature reviews.

 Communications of the Association for Information Systems, 37(1), 6.
- The Care Leavers Association. (2025). *What is a Care Leaver?* Retrieved 28th February from https://www.careleavers.com/what-is-a-care-leaver/

- Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8(1), 45.

 https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45
- Thomas, L. (2001). Power, assumptions and prescriptions: a critique of widening participation policy-making. *Higher Education Policy*, *14*(4), 361-376.
- Tobin, L. (2023). "Thinking about what makes you you": An exploration of the experience of care leavers in engaging with collective narrative practice through the Tree of Life

 Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust/University of Essex].
- Tracy, E. M., & Whittaker, J. K. (1990). The social network map: Assessing social support in clinical practice. *Families in society*, 71(8), 461-470.
- Turnbull, L., Morris, S., Mendes, P., & Baidawi, S. (2024). Older Care Leavers Entering the Aged Care System: A Narrative Review. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 1-12.
- UCL. (2023). Promoting the Achievement of Care Leavers (PACL) in Islington, A case study of pathways into education, employment and training for care leavers in Islington. https://portaltrust.org/uploads/images/Islington.pdf
- United Nations. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child.

 https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child
- Van Breda, A. D., Munro, E. R., Gilligan, R., Anghel, R., Harder, A., Incarnato, M., Mann-Feder, V., Refaeli, T., Stohler, R., & Storø, J. (2020). Extended care: Global dialogue on policy, practice and research. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 119, 105596.
- Vaughn, L. M., & Jacquez, F. (2020). Participatory research methods-choice points in the research process. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods*, 1(1).

- Vélez-Grau, C. (2019). Using photovoice to examine adolescents' experiences receiving mental health services in the United States. *Health Promotion International*, 34(5), 912-920.
- Wallace, F., & Giles, P. (2019). Participatory research approaches in educational psychology training and practice. *Educational psychology research and practice*, 5(1), 1-9.
- Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3), 369-387. https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819702400309
- Warrington, C., Benchekroun, R., Millar, H., Whittington, E., Bradley, L., Elizabeth, M., Hamilton, C. J., Howard, K., Poingdestre, E., & Walker, K. (2024). Participation for protection: New perspectives on the value of young people's involvement in research addressing sexual violence. *Childhood*, 31(3), 349-368.
 https://doi.org/10.1177/09075682241269720
- Warwick, R. (2023). Perspectives of the educational psychologist's role in a multi-agency children's social care team: A cultural-historical activity theory framework.

 Educational and child Psychology, 40(2), 54-82.
- Watson, D., & Gibson, E. (2005). Intonational phrasing and constituency in language production and comprehension. *Studia linguistica*, 59(2-3), 279-300.
- Webb, L., Nigel, C., Holly, C., Susanne, M., Emma, G., & and Duale, M. (2017). Personal resilience and identity capital among young people leaving care: enhancing identity formation and life chances through involvement in volunteering and social action.

 Journal of Youth Studies, 20(7), 889-903.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1273519

- Wilkinson, C., & Wilkinson, S. (2024). Principles of participatory research. In *Being*Participatory: Researching with Children and Young People: Co-constructing

 Knowledge Using Creative, Digital and Innovative Techniques (pp. 15-37). Springer.
- Williams, P. (2020). 'It all sounds very interesting, but we're just too busy!': exploring why 'gatekeepers' decline access to potential research participants with learning disabilities. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 35(1), 1-14.
- Williams, P., Shepherd, E., Sexton, A., & Lomas, E. (2024). Working with care leavers and young people still in care: ethical issues in the co-development of a participatory recordkeeping app. *Archival Science*, *24*(1), 41-60.
- Willig, C. (2013). *EBOOK: introducing qualitative research in psychology*. McGraw-hill education (UK).
- Wood, H., O'Farrell, K., Bjerk-Andersen, C., Mullen, C., & Kovshoff, H. (2019). The impact of Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) for children and young people. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 35(3), 326-338.
- Woodall, T., Browne, K. D., Green, K., & Majumder, P. (2023). An exploration of young people's experiences relating to stability and permanence throughout their care journey. *Qualitative Social Work*, 22(4), 771-794.
- Wright, A. C., & Collings, S. (2025). Conceptual meanings of permanency: Photovoice with care-experienced youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 28(1), 236-253.
- Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology and health*, *15*(2), 215-228.
- Youdell, D. (2006). *Impossible bodies, impossible selves: Exclusions and student subjectivities* (Vol. 3). Springer Science & Business Media.

Yousuf, R. (2024). The voices of Looked After Children: Care leavers reflect on their experiences of placement transitions Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust/University of Essex].

Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of Eligible Texts for Title and Abstract Screening

Table A1

Article title (54 results)	Author	Abstract screen	Reason for exclusion at this stage
Emerging Adulthood: Exploring the implications for care experienced young people and those who care for them. 2022	McGhee et al., 2022	No	Context specific, not a study
Theorising the potential of physical education and school sport to support the educational engagement, transitions and outcomes of care-experienced young people. 2024	Sanford, Quarmby & Hooper, April 2024	No	The main aim of the project was to examine the strategies in place to support care-experienced young people's engagements with sport/PA and to explore their lived experiences of these.
Participatory Research with Care Leavers to Explore their Support Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic.	Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022	Yes	
Exploring history in the social ecology of care leaving: Northern Ireland as illustration. The effect of provisions on the mental health of young adult care leavers. A systematic	Pinkerton, 2021	No	
review.	Rice & O'Connor, 2023	No	Systematic review

Rethinking pedagogical practices with care- experienced young people: lessons from a sport-based programme analysed through a Freirean lens.	Quarmby & Luguetti, 2021	No	
Care Leavers' Priorities and the Corporate Parent Role: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective	Atkinson & Hyde, 2019	Y	
UI and into a years doubt along the addressing the			
"I got into a very dark place": addressing the needs of young people leaving care during the Covid-19 pandemic. 2021	Kelly et al., 2021	Yes	
Care leavers: A British affair.	Power & Raphael, 2017	No	A model to inform policies, not based on lived experiences
"Could an Increased Focus on Identity Development in the Provision of Children's Services Help Shape Positive Outcomes			
for Care Leavers?" A Literature Review.	Ferguson, 2018	No	Literature review

An inter-disciplinary perspective on evaluation of innovation to support care leavers' transition. 2021	Lynch et al., 2021	No	Not about experiences
A small-scale qualitative scoping study into			
the experiences			
of looked after children and care leavers who			
are parents in Wales. 2017	Roberts, 2017		Not relevant to transition
Care leavers' views about transition: a			
literature review.	Atkinson & Hyde, 2019	No	Systematic review
	<u>, </u>		<u>, </u>

Participation in social, leisure and informal learning activities among care leavers in England: positive outcomes for educational participation.	Hollingworth, 2012	No	Not relevant to experiences of leaving care
The rights movement of young people living in and leaving care in England between 1973 and 2011: A history from below.	Stein, 2021		Not relevant - good for context
Child Social-Care Recording and the Information Rights of Care-Experienced People: A Recordkeeping Perspective. 2019	Hoyle et al., 2019		Record-keeping and the information rights of care leavers
Work and resilience: Care leavers' experiences of navigating towards employment and independence.	Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021		
It's Been a Massive Struggle': Exploring the Experiences of Young People Leaving Care During COVID-19.	Roberts et al., 2021	Yes	
Exploring health priorities for young people leaving care.	Matthews & Sykes, 2012	Yes	
Guidance, policy and practice and the health needs of young people leaving care.	Goddard & Barrett, 2008		Healthcare specific, healthcare services
From dependence to interdependence: towards better outcomes for young people leaving state care.	Mendes, 2006		A review - across USA, UK and Australia
Dealing With It': Experiences of Young Fathers in and Leaving Care.	Tyrer et al., 2005	No	Specific to experiences of parenting

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing, and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care.	Rogers, 2015	No	Not care leavers experiences - social workers and college professionals within further education
Graduating from the child welfare system: a comparison of the UK and Australian leaving care debates.	Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2004	No	Not relevant directly
Investing in the relationship: Practitioners' relationships with looked-after children and care leavers in Social Work Practices.	Ridley et al., 2016	No	Examining the relationship between care leavers/LAC and social workers vs transition processes
Care leavers in early adulthood: How do they fare in Britain, Finland and Germany?	Cameron et al., 2018	No	Cross-cultural comparison
To plan or not to plan: The internal conversations of young people leaving care.	Hung & Appleton, 2016		
Care leavers and social capital: understanding and negotiating racial and ethnic identity. 2010	Barn et al., 2010	No	Identity development and formulation
Raising the profile of care leavers with mental health and/or intellectual disabilities: A contribution from Northern Ireland.	Kelly et al., 2022	No	Quant
The experiences of unaccompanied asylum- seeking children in and leaving the out-of- home care system in the UK and Australia: A critical review of the literature.	Barrie & Mendes, 2011		Critical review of literature - good for context and analysis
Transitioning care-leavers with mental health needs: 'They set you up to fail!'.	Butterworth et al., 2017	Yes	
Leaving Care: The Need to Make Connections	Coyle & Pinkerton, 2012	No	Scoping review

Corporate parenting in a pandemic:			
Considering the delivery and receipt of			
support to care leavers in Wales during			Not experiences - corporate
Covid-19.	Roberts et al., 2021		parenting based
Leaving care: Looking ahead and aiming			
higher.	Jackson & Cameron, 2012		European comparison
Young Disabled People and the 'New			
Arrangements'			
for Leaving Care in England and Wales.	Priestley, Rabiee & Harris, 2003	Yes	
Opportunities and shallon assurance in a			
Opportunities and challenges: supporting journeys into education and employment			
for young people leaving care in England.	Dixon, 2016	Yes	
for young people leaving care in England.	Dixon, 2010	1 CS	
Young people's experience of social support			
during the process of leaving care: A review			
of the literature.	Hiles et al., 2013	No	
	,		
"So what am I?" — Multiple perspectives			
on young people's experience of leaving care.			
2014	Hiles et al., 2014	Yes	

Pregnancy and parenthood among young people in and leaving care: what are the influencing factors, and what makes a difference in providing support?	Chase et al., 2006		Not directly relevant
'The bridge between school and uni, that's the bit that's missing': improving access to higher education for care-experienced students.	Bayfield et al., 2024		Impact project - relates to website development and not scrutinised properly
Resilience, higher education and widening participation: generating change for care experienced students Linking parental wellbeing with the wellbeing of care-experienced university	Ellis & Johnston 2024		Experiences of university transition exclusively
students: analysing relevance and interconnections through the lens of 'lived lives'	Green & Moran, 2022		University students explicitly - parental wellbeing vs experience of transitioning to independence
Childhood adversity and affective touch perception: A Comparison of care leavers and non-care leavers	Shaunna et al., 2020		Context - not experiences of leaving care
Risk, resilience and identity construction in the life narratives of young people leaving residential care	Schofield, Larsson & Ward, 2022	Yes	Yes - resiliency factor in promoting successful transitions
Review of young people leaving care: supporting pathways to adulthood	Brydon 2014		Australian, context specific
Review of youth leaving foster care: a developmental, relationship-based approach to practice	Lewis, 2012		Book
Mentoring for young people leaving care	Joseph Rowntree Foundation	Yes	

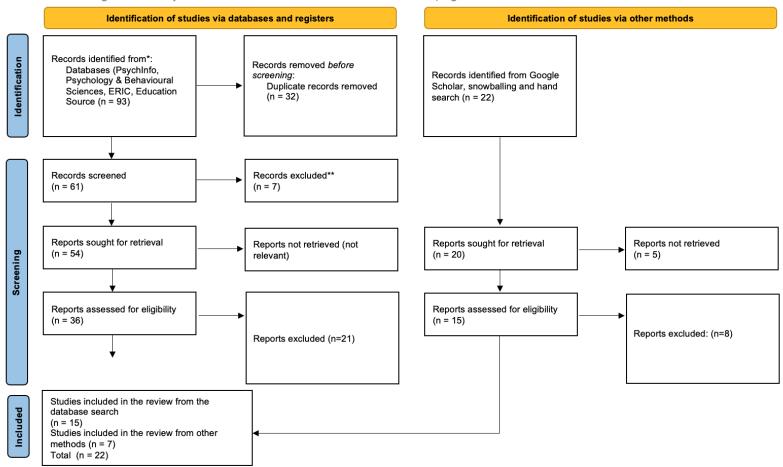
'So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past': legacy, care leavers and university study.	Simpson & Murphy, 2022	Yes	
Care-experienced children and the criminal justice system.	McGrath, Gerard & Colvin, 2020		Australian and criminal justice system
Record keeping and the life-long memory and identity needs of care-experienced children and young people. Children's participation in LAC reviews: a study in one English local authority.	Hoyle et al., 2020 Pert, Diaz & Thomas, 2017	No Yes	Not explicitly relevant to leaving care/entering adulthood
The Experiences of Care Leavers (Postcare Adults) in Social Work Education.	Mayall et al., 2015		specific to social work adults vs the experience of transition
The Experience of Care leavers in UK Highe r Education.	Cotton et al., 2014		Not experiences of leaving care

- 1. Adley, N., & Jupp Kina, V. (2017). Getting behind the closed door of CEYP: understanding the role of emotional support for young people leaving care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(1), 97-105.
- 2. Barratt, C., Appleton, P., & Pearson, M. (2020). Exploring internal conversations to understand the experience of young adults transitioning out of care. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(7), 869-885.
- 3. Butterworth, S., Singh, S. P., Birchwood, M., Islam, Z., Munro, E. R., Vostanis, P., Paul, M., Khan, A., & Simkiss, D. (2017). Transitioning care-leavers with mental health needs: 'they set you up to fail!'. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 22(3), 138-147.
- 4. Clayden, J., & Stein, M. (2005). Mentoring young people leaving care. *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*. *York*.
- 5. Dadswell, A., & O'Brien, N. (2022). Participatory research with CEYP to explore their support experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 52(6), 3639-3657.
- 6. Devenney, K. (2017). Pathway planning with unaccompanied young people leaving care: Biographical narratives of past, present, and future. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(3), 1313-1321.
- 7. Dixon, J. (2008a). Young people leaving care: Health, wellbeing and outcomes. *Child & Family Social Work*, 13, 207-217. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2007.00538.x
- 8. Driscoll, J. (2013). Supporting CEYP to fulfil their educational aspirations: Resilience, relationships and resistance to help. *Children & Society*, *27*(2), 139-149.
- 9. Goddard, J. A., & Barrett, S. (2008). Guidance, policy and practice and the health needs of young people leaving care. *Adoption & Fostering*, 32(1), 50-59. https://doi.org/10.1177/030857590803200107
- 10. Hiles, D., Moss, D., Thorne, L., Wright, J., & Dallos, R. (2014). "So what am I?"—Multiple perspectives on young people's experience of leaving care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 41, 1-15.
- 11. Hyde, R., & Atkinson, C. (2019). CEYP' priorities and the corporate parent role: A self-determination theory perspective. *Educational & Child Psychology*, *36*(1), 40-57.
- 12. Hung, I., & Appleton, P. (2015). To plan or not to plan: The internal conversations of young people leaving care. *Qualitative Social Work*, 15(1), 35-54. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325015577408
- 13. Kelly, B., Walsh, C., Pinkerton, J., & Toal, A. (2021). "I got into a very dark place": addressing the needs of young people leaving care during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Children's Services*, *16*(4), 332-345.
- 14. Liabo, K., McKenna, C., Ingold, A., & Roberts, H. (2016). Leaving foster or residential care: a participatory study of CEYP' experiences of health and social care transitions: Experiences of health

- and social care transitions. *Child: Care, Health and Development, 43*. https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12426
- 15. Matthews, S., & Sykes, S. (2012). Exploring Health Priorities for Young People Leaving Care. *Child care in practice*, 18(4), 393-407. https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2012.717913
- 16. Furey, R., & Harris-Evans, J. (2021). Work and resilience: CEYP' experiences of navigating towards employment and independence. *Child & Family Social Work*, 26(3), 404-414.
- 17. Pinkerton, J., & Rooney, C. (2014). CEYP' experiences of transition and turning points: Findings from a biographical narrative study. *Social Work & Society*, *12*(1).
- 18. Priestley, M., Rabiee, P., & Harris, J. (2003). Young disabled people and the 'new arrangements' for leaving care in England and Wales. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 25(11), 863-890.
- 19. Roberts, L., Mannay, D., Rees, A., Bayfield, H., Corliss, C., Diaz, C., & Vaughan, R. (2021). 'It's been a massive struggle': Exploring the experiences of young people leaving care during COVID-19. *Young*, 29(4 suppl), S81-S99.
- 20. Schofield, G., Larsson, B., & Ward, E. (2017). Risk, resilience and identity construction in the life narratives of young people leaving residential care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(2), 782-791.
- 21. Simpson, D., & Murphy, S. F. (2022). 'So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past': legacy, CEYP and university study. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *25*(2), 259-274. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1865527
- 22. Sims-Schouten, W., & Hayden, C. (2017). Mental health and wellbeing of care leavers: Making sense of their perspectives. *Child & Family Social Work, 22*(4), 1480-1487. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12370

Appendix C: The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 Flow Chart

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases, registers and other sources



^{*}Consider, if feasible to do so, reporting the number of records identified from each database or register searched (rather than the total number across all databases/registers).
**If automation tools were used, indicate how many records were excluded by a human and how many were excluded by automation tools.

Source: Page MJ, et al. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71.

Appendix D: Data Extraction Table for Identified Studies

Table A3

Selected Papers	Source	Population (age, migration status)	Method (design, data collection, data analysis)	Focus	Findings	Critique
1.CEYP' Priorities and the Corporate Parent Role: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective	Atkinson & Hyde, 2019	Ten young people aged 16-19, interviewed from two LA	An exploratory in- depth survey approach, employing a qualitative research design; interviews audio-recorded, transcribed and anonymised; thematic analysis	Focus on CEYP'	Small-scale study: age range and demographics may not be representative	Limitations: Small-scale, unrepresentative demographics
2.To plan or not to plan: The internal conversations of young people leaving care	Hung & Appleton, 2016	Nine participants aged 19-24 from a specialist CEYP service in London, UK	Qualitative design, open-ended interviews; IPA and Miles and Huberman's Interactive Model	the impact on	Participants identified with three identity categories: active, survival-oriented, or passive agency	Limitations: Sample missed hard-to-reach youth; data from only participants' accounts
3.Transitioning care-leavers with mental health needs: 'They set you up to fail!'	Butterworth et al., 2017	Sample of 103 CEYP, stratified into two groups: mental health support (51) and no support (39); further opportunistic sampling	Semi-structured interviews with thematic analysis using Krueger and Casey's framework	Study on mental health support and transitions at age 18	Findings suggest services fail to meet needs; improvements needed in support structures	Limitations: Small sample from one LA, high proportion of women, sample size may not reflect saturation
4.Work and resilience: CEYP' experiences of navigating towards	Furey & Harris- Evans, 2021	Interviews with CEYP and work	Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis focusing on resilience	Identified emotional support as a key factor for resilience	Highlights the importance of emotional support networks in facilitating successful transitions.	One LA, lack of data on non- participating youth and other concerns like housing,

Selected Papers	Source	Population (age, migration status)	Method (design, data collection, data analysis)	Focus	Findings	Critique
employment and independence		supervisors from one LA	and supportive working environments	in work environments	The application of resilience theory helps to frame the experiences of CEYP within a	financial assistance, housing, and educational opportunities.
					broader context.	The study provides a snapshot of CEYP' experiences but does not track their progress over time.
5.Supporting CEYP to Fulfil their Educational Aspirations		Seven young people aged 16-20, invited via LA CICC	Semi-structured interviews with grounded theory analysis	Examines the role of relationships in supporting educational aspirations of CEYP	High motivation for education; the importance of trust-based relationships	Limitations: Small sample size, no theoretical sampling
6.Getting behind the closed door of CEYP: emotional support	Adley & Jupp-Kina, 2017	Six CEYP aged 18- 21	Semi-structured interviews with thematic analysis	Explores the lack of emotional support and its impact during transitions	Emotional support and individual tailoring were key recommendations.	Small scale: influence of social workers recognised
7.Leaving foster or residential care: A participatory study of CEYP' experiences	Liabo et al., 2016	Young people in health and social care transitions	Participatory research with interviews and meetings	Examines positive and negative experiences in transitions from care	Health often not prioritized; need for more holistic support	Focuses on CEYP' narrative but lacks data on some important services
8. Young people leaving care: Health, well-being and outcomes	Dixon, 2008	106 CEYP aged 16- 18	Mixed methods, including standardized health and wellbeing measures	Explores the health and well-being during the first 12-15 months of independence	Mental health and general health outcomes show need for ongoing support	Limitations: Data from 7 LAs, not representative of all regions
9.CEYP' experiences of transition and turning points: Biographical narrative study	Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014	Eight young people in Northern Ireland	Biographical narrative interviews using BNIM	Focus on key turning points in CEYP' lives	Identified a pattern of loss, stability, and self-actualisation	Emphasises individual experience but lacks broader sample

Selected Papers	Source	Population (age, migration status)	Method (design, data collection, data analysis)	Focus	Findings	Critique
11.So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past: legacy, CEYP and university study	Simpson & Murphy, 2022	14 CEYP and one CEI	Data not provided	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
12.Mentoring for young people leaving care	Clayden & Stein, 2005	17 CEYP, 12 mentors, 10 project coordinators	Mixed methods, interviews and file analysis	Explores mentoring's impact on the transition from care	Reveals mentoring's positive effects but doesn't explore other important support areas	Focused on mentoring alone; limited exploration of broader needs
13."I got into a very dark place": Needs of young people leaving care during the Covid-19 pandemic	Kelly et al., 2021	24 CEYP aged 18- 25 in Northern Ireland	Semi-structured interviews conducted via WhatsApp or phone	Examines the exacerbation of adversities during the pandemic	Findings highlight inadequate state response and need for better communication and support	Limitations: Focus on one region
14.Participatory Research with CEYP to Explore their Support Experiences During COVID-19	Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022	CEYP from six LAs	Participatory approach, with questionnaires and focus groups	Insights into support experiences during the pandemic	Promotes CEYP' voices but had predetermined data collection methods	Limitation: Broad focus with some predetermined methods
15.It's Been a Massive Struggle': Exploring the Experiences of Young People Leaving Care During COVID-19	Roberts et al., 2021	21 young people, mostly from Wales	Semi-structured interviews, poems, and artwork	Examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CEYP	Highlights social isolation and resilience but limited depth	Limitation: Small sample and lack of longitudinal data
16. Young Disabled People and the 'New Arrangements' for Leaving Care	Priestley et al., 2003	28 young disabled people	Semi-structured interviews	Focus on young disabled people's experiences transitioning out of care	Identifies unique challenges such as housing, education, and independence	Limited by small sample size and specific focus
17."So what am I?" — Multiple perspectives on young people's experience of leaving care	Hiles et al., 2014	Six CEYP aged 16- 22 and four professionals	Two focus groups	Examines experiences of leaving care from multiple perspectives	Identifies need to review support structures	Limitations: Small sample, participants may have stronger support networks

Selected Papers	Source	Population (age, migration status)	Method (design, data collection, data analysis)	Focus	Findings	Critique
18.Risk, resilience, and identity construction in the life narratives of young people leaving residential care	Schofield et al., 2022	20 young people aged 17-26	Qualitative interviews and narrative approach	Explores risk, resilience, and identity construction	Five pathways identified: connection, agency, constructive activity, and coherence	Sample size and representativeness as limitations
19.Exploring health priorities for young people leaving care	Matthews & Sykes, 2012	Nine CEYP	Semi-structured interviews	Focus on health priorities during transition	Findings not specified	Small sample size, limited regional representation
20.Exploring internal conversations to understand the experience of young adults transitioning out of care	Barratt et al., 2019	Six CEYP	Semi-structured interviews with IPA	Focus on internal conversations and planning for the future	Explores reflexivity, future orientation, and family relationships	Small sample size but appropriate for method testing
21. Guidance, policy and practice and the health needs of young people leaving care.		30 individual interviews with CEYP and 70 questionnaire responses	Mixed – interviews and questionnaires	Exams the perspectives of CEYP in relation to health and social care	Demand for increased support, more information, more joint up support, general leaving care as the main identified issue.	One region
22.Mental health and wellbeing of care leavers: making sense of their perspectives	Sims- Schouten & Hayden	Twenty-two CEYP (11 males, 11 females); six of the participants were from a black and minority ethnic background. Average age of participants was 18.5	Semi-structured indepth interviewing alongside some documentary analysis of organisational data used to contextualise what young people said. Positioning Theory and multilevel synthesised discourse analysis	The personal narratives of CEYP in relation to mental health and wellbeing and the role of a lifeskills programme in supporting them. The study is underpinned by positioning theory	Leaving care projects tend to focus on employment and housing than issues related to mental health and wellbeing. Complexity of transitioning from care with mental health and wellbeing needs not understood by CEYP themselves. Leaving care projects need targeted approach to mental health and wellbeing taking an intrapersonal approach and building resilience	The need for more in-depth and longitudinal research

Appendix E: The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Research Checklist (CASP, 2018)

A4

Critical Appraisal Question Studies	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Has the relationship between the researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear stateme nt of the finding s?
CEYP' Priorities and the Corporate Parent Role: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective (Atkinson & Hyde, 2019)	Yes - to explore CEYP needs and priorities in preparing for adulthood from the perspective of self- determination theory	Yes - to explore CEYP experiences and preferences for graduated transition to adulthood	Yes - exploratory in-depth survey employing qual design. Enabled in-depth exploration	Yes - CEYP were recruited through purposive sampling - two LAs in England. Pas and social workers identified ppts. Inclusion criteria established (care before 16, communicatio n skills to clearly express views)	Yes - semi- structured interviews to explore perspectives (aged 16-19) - turning point and engagement with pathway planning	No	Yes - informed all stages of the project (informed consent, withdrawal, ethical approval host university, BPS guidelines	Yes - analysed using B&C model of thematic analysis. Responses also mapped onto SDT framework - second, deductive round of analysis	Yes, summary o

To plan or not to plan: The internal conversations of young people leaving care. (Hung & Appleton, 2016)	Yes - to characterise the internal conversations of individual young people in transition from state care, with a goal of supporting practitioners' approaches to 'pathway planning' and contributing to theories of agency in emerging adulthood under conditions of long-term adversity.	Yes - using open-ended interviews to explore participants experiences of agency. Exploring internal conversations, rich insight	Yes - qualitative enquiry, emphasising 'first person perspective'	Yes - Purposive sampling - recruited at a specialist service for CEYP in London UK	Yes - openended interviews corresponding to the Archer 2003 qualitative interview framework. Participants completed two interviews - focused on helping young person communicate their reflexive thoughts about internal conversations and real-life situations	No	Yes - approved by University and UK Social Research Committee. Participants asked for detailed feedback about interview process - minor amendments made. Safety net of support put in place in the event of young people reporting distress	Yes - analysed using IPA and Miles and Huberman's Interactive Model - met critical realist epistemology and allowed for detailed analysis of individual data. Combination of data analysis approaches is carefully described in the context of young adults	Yes - summary practice relevan
Transitioning care-leavers with mental health needs: 'They set you up to fail!'. (Butterworth et al., 2017)	Explored CEYP' experiences of mental illness and transition in social care and mental health services	Yes - qualitative data collected by semi- structured interviews with CEYP and health and social care staff (also quant - analysis of case notes but not	Yes - qual inquiry - interested in understanding experiences of current mental health and social care pathways to inform service development for transitions support services, effectiveness of current services, how experienced,	Participants sampled from one LA in the West Midlands. Stratified sampling used to identify two groups of young people those receiving mental health support and those without.	Yes - qual study used semi-structured interviews based on a topic guide - developed by study team and reviewed and enhanced through consultation with four young people	No	Yes - ethics approval granted by Social Care Research Ethics, informed consent granted by ppts and inclusion of CL in topic guide development.	Analysis through a thematic approach, systematically recorded, coded, classified. Krueger and Casey's Analysis framework (Krueger & Casey, 2009) was drawn on	Yes - summaris perspectives and relation to recor implications for and policy

		included in this paper)	areas for improvement	Opportunistic sampling then used to recruit CEYP with suspected mental health needs with service contact and without	from LA CICC			to identify concepts	
Work and resilience: CEYP' experiences of navigating towards employment and independence.(Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021)	Yes - to gain perspectives from CEYP and employers. Exploring perspectives of young people involved in internship programme and work-based supervisors	Yes - case study design. Exploring perspectives and experiences.	Yes - qual methodology	Participants engaged in a UK local authority initiative to support CEYP into employment. Purposeful sample	Interviews and focus groups to generate rich and indepth data	No	Yes - approved by University Ethics and LA Ethics Committees, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity assured.	Thematic analysis as it allowed for an exploration of perspectives of different participants, identified common themes across data sets and supported parallel process of evaluating programme.	Yes - broken do sections ('emoti supportive work environments' a external suppor
6. Supporting CEYP to Fulfil their Educational Aspirations: Resilience, Relationships and Resistance to Help (Driscoll, 2013)	Yes - employs the concept of resilience to explore the significance of supportive relationships in enabling this group of YP to make decisions about their future	Yes - to enable a detailed exploration of young people's perspectives in the context of intricate lives in which personal-	Qual methodology - sought the views of young people themselves only	Yes - invited to participate through LA CiCC		No	Yes - conducted in accordance with National Children's Bureau (2009). Ethical approval gained from King's College and LA. Informed consent, right to withdrawal etc.	Yes - grounded theory to promote conceptualisati on from participants experiences	Yes - broken do sections

		educational strands were interdepende nt							
Getting behind the closed door of CEYP: understanding the role of emotional support for young people leaving care (Adley & Jupp-Kina, 2017)	Yes - to explore the experiences of CEYP transitioning to independence	Yes - exploring CEYP views about their emotional support networks through understandin g the world as it is experienced by them. Phenomenolo gical approach - to understand meaning of everyday lives	Qualitative. Phenomenologica l inquiry.	Conducted in partnership with care leaver team in LA	A visual tool created by the researcher to structure indepth interviews and focus discussions on participants support networks. Reveals indepth data.	No		Yes - analysed and transcribed using thematic analysis as described by Attride Sterling (2001), to organise themes uncovered in a visual form to highlight the connection between original data and final interpretation	Yes - overview
CEYP' experiences of transition and turning points: Findings from a biographical narrative study (Pinkerton & Rooney, 2014)	Yes - explore CEYP accounts of transitioning from care and key turning points. To identify how they articulate their experiences of transitioning to	Yes - exploring perspective	Yes - biographical approach to interviewing using BNIM procedures for the first account to invite ppts to look back at life course, how they understand and define the world.	Snowball sampling through contact with the researcher's trust	Biographical interviewing - viewed as a naturalist method to generate data, exploring lived lives and experiences. Pinkerton's leaving care wheel used in second	No	Yes - ethical approval from university ethics and regional research ethics committee	Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) is a qualitative research approach used primarily in the social sciences to explore and understand	Yes - clearly se to recommendar

	independence and adulthood				interview, to aid discussions		people's life stories and experiences. It is particularly valuable for studying how individuals make sense of their lives, how their identities are formed, and how they navigate significant life events.	
Participatory Research with CEYP to Explore their Support Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic. (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022)	Yes - exploring CEYP support experiences during Covid- 19	Yes- insight into the support experienced from the perspective of CEYP during Covid19	Participatory approach to develop qualitative survey for CEYP, alongside focus group with CEYP	Yes - volunteer sample in six LAs. Opportunity sample - recruited through support worker network, information shared with those interested in signing up	Qualitative survey responses and focus group	Ethical approval granted by ARU Education and Social Care School Research Ethics Panel. Information sheet and consent gained	Conducted initial thematic analysis (iterative process). Qualitative findings from questionnaire and focus group	Yes - presented headings
"I got into a very dark place": addressing the needs of young people leaving care during the Covid-19 pandemic. (Kelly et al., 2021)	Explored the views and experiences of young people leaving care	Yes - exploring lived experiences	Yes - exploratory study, to identify the lived perspectives of CEYP during the	Participants were recruited via the Voice of Young People in Care		Ethical approval from research team's University, all data strictly and	Thematic analysis using NVivo. Initial findings shared with	Yes - detailed d findings and sur

	during the first phase of Covid-19 lockdown		pandemic including their views on the formal support services	(VOYPIC), the non- government organisation supporting children and young people living in and leaving care that commissioned the research.			securely held. Informed consent	round table meeting of 25 social work practitioners and commissioners from statutory leaving care services	
It's Been a Massive Struggle': Exploring the Experiences of Young People Leaving Care During COVID-19. (Roberts et al., 2021)	Yes - experiences of young people leaving state care during Covid-19	Yes - data generated to offer insights in young people's lives and support responses during Covid-19	Yes - exploratory, interviews and focus group data	Participants were purposively recruited via local authority and third sector organizations to ensure continued access to support.	Yes - semi- structured interviews and/or artwork conveying experiences through pandemic. Insight into daily lives, routines, access to services, resources, relationships during transition to adulthood. Focus group data	No	Yes - ethical approval for the study was provided by Cardiff University's Research Ethics Committee and the study design considered the precarity and vulnerability of CEI. Young people's voices included in the research design and findings	Data analysed using a deductive and inductive approach - themes generated from patterns emergent within and across the data. The visual materials and poetry submissions were also considered in the analysis to clarify and extend the associated themes generated in the interviews.	Yes - summaris

Young Disabled People and the 'New Arrangements' for Leaving Care in England and Wales. ()	Yes - exploring the experiences of young disabled CEYP in the transition to adulthood	Exploring experiences using semi-structured interviews. Seven of the ppts also joined a project steering group and met with the team to develop the research agenda and contribute to the analysis of emergent themes		In a single LA. Purposive sample. Initial mapping exercise to determine CYP who might be eligible	Yes - using semi- structured interviews	No		Tapes transcribed and analysed by two members of the team using a grounded theory approach	Yes - clear sum into eight theme
"So what am I?" — Multiple perspectives on young people's experience of leaving care. (Hiles et al., 2014)	Yes - to explore young people's experience of leaving care in the United Kingdom	Yes - young people's experiences of leaving care in UK	Qual methodology with CEYP and professionals, alongside ethnographical and auto ethnographical data from researcher	Participants selected opportunistical ly based on attendance at a CEYP group	Yes - Focus groups	Yes - research positioning and reflexivity explicitly referred to and explored	Acted as a pilot study for broader study proposal which received ethical approval from the NHS Research Ethics Committee	Thematic analysis	Yes - summary
Exploring health priorities for young people leaving care. (Matthews & Sykes, 2012)	Experiences and health priorities of young people leaving care	Yes - qual meets interpretative phenomenolo gical approach	Yes - qual meets interpretative phenomenological approach, explores in detail how people make	Purposeful sampling - researcher selecting those that have been through the	Yes - semi- structured interviews	No		Yes - naïve reading, structural thematic analysis and	Yes - planning a the transition fro limited focus or psychological p discussed.

			1					:44-4:	
			sense of personal and social worlds.	experience under study to provide valuable data				interpretation of the whole	
Risk, resilience and identity construction in the life narratives of young people leaving residential care (Schofield et al., 2022)	Yes - to explore the narratives of CEYP from birth to residential care to early adulthood	Yes - interviews, exploratory - transition to adulthood from residential care	Narrative approach to explore complex patterns of movement in care experiences	Yes - opportunistic, through the voluntary sector organisation	Interviews	No	Yes approved by university ethics committee and informed consent	Yes - narrative analysis	Yes - findings c summarised - fi identified from
Leaving foster or residential care: a participatory study of CEYP' experiences of health and social care (Liabo et., al 2016)	Exploring CEYP transitions across health and social care, providing young people's narrative	Yes - Participatory meetings and individual interviews with young people and practitioners	Mixed methods qualitative - integrating different qualitative methods. Discussion and interview techniques used, alongside pictorial and other participatory methods	yes - themes clearly outlined	Participatory meetings and interviews		Study approved by UK Social Care Research Ethics Committee	Thematic and framework approaches	Clear findings p CEYP priorities
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past': legacy, CEYP and university (Simpson & Murphy 2022)	Small scale qualitative study	Yes - the aim of our study was to capture information about CEYP' perceptions and experiences		Yes purposeful	Interviews		Ethical approval was gained from the authors' University and all names below are pseudonyms.	Yes - thematic	Yes, clear finding

Exploring internal conversations to	Yes - clearly	of HE to add to understandin g and insight in these areas Yes - clearly	Semi-structured	Purposeful	Interviews			Primary	Yes - eight then
understand the experience of young adults transitioning out of care. (Barratt et al., 2020)	outlined, to explore the experience of CEYP transitioning out of care using the concept of internal conversations	outlined, to explore the experience of CEYP transitioning out of care using the concept of internal conversations. In-depth understanding collected	interview guide informed by Archer and completing a social networking map using participatory mapping technology. IPA - gives focus to meaning making and experiences. Second interviews, completion of adult self-report mental health measure (not included in analysis) with qual exploration	sampling	Interviews			qualitative method of analysis was Interpretative Phenomenolog ical Analysis. Clear review of themes and codes, informed by Archer's Theory of internal conversation	discussed
Pathway planning with unaccompanied young people leaving care: Biographical narratives of past, present, and future (Devenney, 2017)	The primary aim is to gain a deep understanding of the personal experiences of unaccompanied young people, focusing on	Yes - in line with Biographical narrative analysis	Yes		in depth interviews at two time points. Interviews designed using visual methods, participants created a 'time	No	Ethical considerations that took account of the experiences of the participants were built into the research design. Institutional	Biographical Narrative Analysis	Yes

	biographical narratives				tree'. The views of UYP in leaving care.		ethical approval was received from the University of York.	
Mental health and wellbeing of care leavers: making sense of their perspectives	Sims- Schouten & Hayden	Yes - Discourse analysis	Yes – focusing on CEYP' narratives	Yes -	Yes	?	Yes – approved by a University Ethic Committee	Yes – transparent account of the semi- structured interview approach. Discourse analysis process clearly described.

Appendix F: The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Version 2018 applied to Mentoring for Young People Leaving Care (Clayden & Stein, 2005)

A5

Category of study designs	Methodological quality criteria	Responses	Comments
Screening questions			
	Are there clear research questions?	Yes	
	Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	Yes	Qual information gathered from interviews to explore the experiences of CEYP, mentors and project coordinators
Qualitative	Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	Yes	Yes, allows for in-depth, multi-perspective exploration of young people's EET experiences, professional support and mentor experience for their future plans. 17 YP interviews, 12 mentors and 10 project coordinators
	Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	Yes	Yes - interviews. Achievement of goals - qual measure during file search
	Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	Yes	
	Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	Yes	

	Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	Yes	
Quantitative descriptive	Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	Yes	To some extent, purposive sampling used to do a file search in 14 mentoring projects, date 1 March 2000-28 Feb 2001, to maximise sampling.
	Is the sample representative of the target population?	Yes	Database of 181 mentoring relationships
Mixed methods	Are the measurements appropriate? Is the risk of	Yes	Database analysis of referral forms, session logs, recording sheets etc.
	nonresponse bias low?		
	Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	Yes	
	Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	Yes	
	Are the different components of the study effectively	Yes	

integrated to answer the research question?		
Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately	Yes	
interpreted? Are divergencies and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?		Comparison of quant vs qual
Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	Yes	Quant provided data on 181 mentoring relationships over 13 projects. Complemented by interviews with 17 young people
		Offers insight into the value of mentoring relationships for young people leaving care coping with the challenges of the transition

Appendix G: The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Version 2018 Applied to Young People Leaving Care: Health, Wellbeing, and Outcomes (Dixon, 2008)

A6

Category of Study	Methodological	Responses	Comments
Designs	Quality Criteria		
Screening Questions	Are there clear research questions?	Yes	
	Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	Yes	Yes - face-to-face interviews with young people (YP) and their leaving care workers.
Qualitative	Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	Yes	Yes, allows for in-depth exploration.
	Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	Yes	
	Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	Yes	
	Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	Yes	Thematic Analysis.
	Is there coherence between qualitative	Yes	

Quantitative Descriptive

data sources,
collection, analysis,
and interpretation?
Is the sampling Yes
strategy relevant to
address the research
question?
Is the sample
representative of
the target
population?
Are the Yes
measurements

appropriate?

Mixed Methods

Is the risk of Yes nonresponse bias low? Is the statistical Yes analysis appropriate to answer the research question? Is there an adequate Yes rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question? Are the different Yes components of the study effectively integrated to

Two standardised measures - baseline information to assess change in mental and general health and wellbeing was measured using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), Lancashire Quality of Life Profile, and Cantril's ladder for subjective general wellbeing.

To further examine the interaction between health and wellbeing and wider areas of young people's lives, multivariate analysis was used.

The paper emphasises that both quantitative and qualitative data are necessary to capture the full scope of these experiences. The study aims to offer a holistic view of the health, wellbeing, and outcomes of young people leaving care, ultimately contributing to better support and services for this vulnerable group.

answer the research question? Are the outputs of Yes the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted? Are divergencies Yes The study uses triangulation to compare the quantitative and qualitative and inconsistencies data. The researchers include reflective discussions in the analysis, between acknowledging and exploring any inconsistencies. quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed? Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?

Appendix H: Table A5 The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Version 2018 Applied to Goddard and Barrett, 2008

A7

Category of Study Designs	Methodological Quality Criteria	Responses	Comments
Screening Questions	Are there clear research questions?	Yes	Yes – to examine the healthcare needs of care leavers in the transition to adulthood, and experiences of healthcare services
	Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	Yes	
Qualitative	Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	Yes	Qualitative data taken from 30 individual interviews
	Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	Yes	
	Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	Yes	
	Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	Yes	
	Is there coherence between qualitative data sources,	Yes	

Quantitative Descriptive	collection, analysis, and interpretation? Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	Yes	70 questionnaire responses – these informed the interviews
	Is the sample representative of the target population?	V	Yes – care leavers within one region in the UK
	Are the measurements appropriate?	Yes	
Mixed Methods	Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	Yes	
	Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	Yes	Using SPSS
	Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	Yes	
	Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?	Yes	

Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	Yes	
Are divergencies and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed? Do the different components of the study adhere to the	Yes	The study uses triangulation to compare the quantitative and qualitative data.
quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?		

Appendix I: Amended TREC Ethical Approval Form (including Appendices), including London Children in Care Council Risk Assessment Process (Corporate and Strategic Implications) (October 2022) and Fieldwork Risk Assessment Audit

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

This application should be submitted alongside copies of any supporting documentation which will be handed to participants, including a participant information sheet, consent form, self-completion survey or questionnaire.

Where a form is submitted and sections are incomplete, the form will not be considered by TREC and will be returned to the applicant for completion.

For further guidance please contact Paru Jeram (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

FOR ALL APPLICANTS

If you already have ethical approval from another body (including HRA/IRAS) please submit the application form and outcome letters. You need only complete sections of the TREC form which are NOT covered in your existing approval

Is your project considered as 'research' according to the HRA tool? (http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/index.html)	Yes
Will your project involve participants who are under 18 or who are classed as vulnerable? (see section 7)	Yes
Will your project include data collection outside of the UK?	No

SECTION A: PROJECT DETAILS

Project title	Preparing for Adulthood: Participatory Research Exploring the Experiences of Care				
	leavers with Pathway Plans				
Proposed project start	March 2024	Anticipated project	August 2025		
date		end date			
Principal Investigator (no	ormally your Research Supe	ervisor): Ben Craik			
	Please note: TREC approval will only be given for the length of the project as stated above up to a maximum of 6 years. Projects exceeding these timeframes will need additional ethical approval				
<u> </u>	-				
Has NHS or other	YES (NRES approval)	_			
approval been sought		_			
for this research	YES (HRA approval)	J			
including through submission via	Other	٦			
Research Application	Citiei				
System (IRAS) or to	NO				
the Health Research		_			
Authority (HRA)?					
If you already have ethical approval from another body (including HRA/IRAS) please submit the application					
form and outcome letters.					

SECTION B: APPLICANT DETAILS

Name of Researcher	Anna Tench

Programme of Study and Target Award	Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology (M4)
Email address	atench@tavi-port.nhs.uk
Contact telephone number	07715275881

SECTION C: CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Will any of the researchers or their institutions receive any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research over and above their normal salary package or the costs of undertaking the research?				
YES ☐ NO ☑ If YES, please detail below:				
Is there any further possibility for conflict of interest? YES \square NO \boxtimes				
Are you proposing to conduct this work in a location where you work	or have a p	lacement?		
YES □ NO ⊠				
If YES , please detail below outline how you will avoid issues arising around project:		_		
There are no conflicts of interest to declare. This project is being undertaken	•	·		
one the researcher is on placement in. The research will recruit participants	through the	pan-London Children in		
Care Council (CICC) members and Participation Officers under the pan-London Offer				
(<u>https://www.partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk/CiCC</u>), as commissioned by the City of London Corporation.				
However, it is recognised that care leavers who are residents/known to professionals in the researcher's local				
authority may be represented through connection to a London CICC member	authority may be represented through connection to a London CICC member or Participation Officer. These			
individuals will not receive preferential treatment during the research process. They will also not be excluded from				
working together. The researcher will manage this through keeping a reflect	tive diary, su	pervision, and reflective		
groups with Trainee Educational Psychologists on their course. This will ensure	sure spaces	for reflexive and reflective		
practice for the researcher, whilst providing different forums for the researcher to digest and feedback feelings,				
examine personal assumptions, support critical thinking, and hold a curious	position in a	all stages of the project.		
		N		
Is your project being commissioned by and/or carried out on behalf of a body external to the Trust? (for example; commissioned by a local authority, school, care home, other NHS Trust or other organisation).	YES	NO ⊠		
*Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation which is external to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (Trust)				
If YES , please add details here:				
Will you be required to get further ethical approval after receiving TREC approval? YES □ NO ☑				
If YES , please supply details of the ethical approval bodies below AND include any letters of approval from the ethical approval bodies (letters				

	260		
received after receiving TREC approval should be submitted to complete your record):			
Ethical processes have been followed and approval has been obtained from the London Children in Care Council			
(CICC). The CICC do not have an additional ethical approval process that the researcher needs to go through.			
Access for the research has therefore been granted by the Director of the Partnership for Young London and			
CICC, who holds requisite authority to make this decision as a senior leader within the organisation. The CICC			
are also developing their own risk assessment for the research project in line	e with their in-house procedure, to		
mitigate risk implications (see Appendix E).			
If your project is being undertaken with one or more clinical services or orga	nisations external to the Trust, please		
provide details of these:			
N/A			
If you still need to agree these arrangements or if you can only approach orgapproval, please identify the types of organisations (e.g. schools or clinical s			
N/A			
Do you have approval from the organisations detailed above? (this includes R&D approval where relevant)	YES NO NA 🗵		
Please attach approval letters to this application. Any approval letters	As above - Access for the research		
received after TREC approval has been granted MUST be submitted to be appended to your record	has been granted by the Director of		
appended to your record	the Partnership for Young London		
	and CICC, who holds requisite		
	authority to make this decision as a		
	senior leader within the		
	organisation.		
SECTION D. SIGNATURES AND DEGLARATIONS			
SECTION D: SIGNATURES AND DECLARATIONS			
APPLICANT DECLARATION			
I confirm that:			
The information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowle	dge, correct and up to date.		
I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research. Lacknowledge my obligations and commitment to unhelding othical prince.	oinles and to keep my supervisor		

- I acknowledge my obligations and commitment to upholding ethical principles and to keep my supervisor updated with the progress of my research
- I am aware that for cases of proven misconduct, it may result in formal disciplinary proceedings and/or the cancellation of the proposed research.
- I understand that if my project design, methodology or method of data collection changes I must seek an amendment to my ethical approvals as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

Tench							
Tenc	;h	;h 	;h 	;h 	:h 	;h 	;h

		201
Signed	AR	
Date	26.04.24 (amended version following initial review) 21.06.24 (updated)	

FOR RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENT APPLICANTS ONLY

					
Name of	Ben Craik				
Supervisor/Principal					
Investigator					
Supervisor –					
 Does the student have YES ⊠ NO □ 	e the necessary skills to carry out the research?				
■ Is the participant inform YES NO □	mation sheet, consent form and any other documentation appropriate?				
■ Are the procedures for YES ⋈ NO □	r recruitment of participants and obtaining informed consent suitable and sufficient?				
	• Where required, does the researcher have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance?				
Signed	Be Gr				
Date	26.04.2024				
COURSE LEAD/RESEAR Does the proposed resear	RCH LEAD rch as detailed herein have your support to proceed? YES ⊠ NO □				
Signed	Mishell				
Date	25.4.24 (amended version following initial review)				

SECTION E: DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

1. Provide a brief description of the proposed research, including the requirements of participants. This must be in lay terms and free from technical or discipline specific terminology or jargon. If such terms are required, please ensure they are adequately explained (Do not exceed 500 words)

This is a small-scale qualitative participatory research project. The study aims to carry out an in-depth qualitative exploration of care leaver's experience of having Pathway Plans in the transition to adulthood. The Pathway Plan is a statutory document that follows 'eligible' looked after children and young people (CYP) transitioning to independence, covering their needs, areas for development, resources, and actions. Participation in the process is emphasised; Pathway Plans should be accurate and reflect the needs, wishes and feelings of a young person (Ofsted, 2022). However, Plans are often described as inadequate and agerelated rather than needs driven (Munro et al., 2011).

Pathway Plans are legal documents that guide care experienced individuals (CEI) in the transition from care, detailing their current and predicted needs, views, and future goals in relation to *accommodation*, *finance*, *health and wellbeing*, *emotional support*, *education*, *and employment* (Butterworth et al., 2017). It is the

collective responsibility of the local authority (LA) to support young people in the development, on-going assessment, and review of their Pathway Plan as they transition to independent living (Hyde & Atkinson, 2019). Research examining how young people experience the planning-to-leave care process remains limited (Glynn & Mayock, 2019). To address this gap and enrich literature into the views of young people out of care, this study will explore care leavers' experiences of being involved in the Pathway Plan process, with a view to emancipation and empowerment.

The proposed research will engage care leavers in semi-structured interviews and creative techniques, to explore their views around Pathway Plans. The research will harness a participatory approach, in which participants (aged 18-25) will be 'co-researchers'. Community based participatory research involves working in collaboration with individuals in a community impacted by a specific phenomenon (Holkup et al., 2004). A group of 4-6 care leavers (co-researchers) from across London will thus be actively involved in supporting the research' design, analysis, and dissemination. This includes making decisions about the preferred data collection method, from semi—structured interviews to creative storytelling methods including creating collages or using photovoice activities (employing photographs to deepen understanding about an issue); these visual approaches are known to be effective in communicating the perspectives of CEI (Kelly et al., 2018). The study should enable care leavers to discuss areas of interest, identify common themes and consider possible changes to the Pathway Plan process.

Research question: "What are Care leavers' Experiences of Pathway Plans in the Transition to Adulthood?" Due to the study's participatory nature, this question may be refined. The data will be analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis, as outlined below.

This ethics form will address support available for the participants. As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (EP), the researcher has the necessary skills to support CEI. In this role, the researcher has received training on relational ways of working with CYP, consultation and social emotional mental health approaches. They have further completed training on participatory research methods as an Assistant EP, alongside conducting a participatory research project with a team of EPs.

2. Provide a statement on the aims and significance of the proposed research, including potential impact to knowledge and understanding in the field (where appropriate, indicate the associated hypothesis which will be tested). This should be a clear justification of the proposed research, why it should proceed and a statement on any anticipated benefits to the community. (Do not exceed 700 words)

The proposed research emerged from a growing awareness nationally about the vulnerability of young people leaving care in the transition to adulthood. A 'care leaver' is defined as a person who has been in LA care for a period of at least 13 weeks since they were 14, until the age of 16 (The Children Act, 1989). It is estimated that over 10,000 young people transition from being in care to become a care leaver each year in the United Kingdom (UK) (Department for Education [DfE], 2022). This transition has been likened to falling off a 'cliff edge' (DfE, 2016), with educational, physical, mental health and employment outcomes for care leavers consistently poorer than their non-looked after peers (Teyhan et al., 2018). Ensuring care leavers are given

meaningful support for the transition to post-care is thus vital for adulthood preparedness and successful life outcomes.

Preparing CEI for adulthood begins before the age of 16 through the development of a statutory Pathway Plan. Research examining how young people experience the pathway-planning process remains in its infancy. The current research aims to address a knowledge gap and enrich the literature by exploring the meaning care leavers make of their experience with Pathway Plans. This is a small-scale qualitative participatory research project, in which the participants (care leavers aged 18-25) will be co-researchers. The research will carry out an in-depth exploration of care leaver's experience of having Pathway Plans, with a view to emancipation and empowerment. The broad research question is: 'What are Care leavers' Experiences of Pathway Plans in the Transition to Adulthood?'

The project will be seen through the lens of a transformative paradigm, in line with the project's participatory and inclusive approach in which the results of the inquiry are linked to action which furthers a social justice agenda (Merton, 2017). The research will be exploratory, as it aims to expand on limited information available about care leavers' lived experiences.

Research aims:

- To develop a better understanding of the experiences of care leavers with Pathway Plans when
 preparing to leave care and transition through independence.
- To amplify the voices of care leavers, with a view to empowering those involved in the research as well as the care leaver community more broadly.
- To learn from the co-researchers' lived experiences whilst also developing their skills and voices within the research process (Gal, 2017).
- To contribute to a body of educational and psychological research around CEI. There is a paucity of
 research considering the specific role of Pathway Plans in supporting care leavers, thus the study has
 the power to further knowledge about care leavers' views towards LA support in preparing for
 adulthood.
- The findings could hold practical implications for guidance and policy around support for care leavers.
 The research could further offer recommendations for professionals working with care leavers in the
 Pathway Plan process, as well as present training and development opportunities for stakeholders
 such as Virtual Schools, Social Workers, and Children's Services responsible for supporting and
 safeguarding care experienced CYP.

Rationale: The study will provide in-depth inquiry into the experiences of care-leavers with a Pathway Plan. This presents a unique contribution to a knowledge gap in the literature. The research aims to be empowering for the co-researchers in that they will be involved in making decisions throughout the research process, with opportunities to create positive change around the development, implementation, and review of the pathway planning process. The researcher further aims to challenge dominant discourses around care leavers, as often constructed by those in positions of power (Lensvelt et al., 2021), to promote inclusion for this vulnerable group. Importantly, this research will be one of few to explore this phenomenon using a participatory agenda.

As crucial stakeholders in using Pathway Plans, the study therefore presents an opportunity for care leavers to be centrally involved in decision making processes for leaving care (Wallace & Giles, 2019).

There is a clear need for EPs and other professionals to enact change to promote positive outcomes for CEI It is hoped that this study will contribute towards the literature which enables EPs to understand care leavers perspectives and offer support in the transition out of care, spanning accommodation, finance, wellbeing, emotional, education, and employment outcomes.

 Provide an outline of the methodology for the proposed research, including proposed method of data collection, tasks assigned to participants of the research and the proposed method and duration of data analysis. If the proposed research makes use of pre-established and generally accepted techniques, please make this clear. (Do not exceed 500 words)

The research will use a participatory qualitative research method. Participatory approaches offer an orientation focusing on participation with a community affected by a phenomenon, to make decisions about the research and create change (Aldridge, 2016). An overall plan for the study has been devised, based on Kornbluh et al., (2015)'s Youth Participatory Action Research stages. Co-researchers will be invited to attend up to six workshops outlining the research process (including ethical issues), teaching on research methods, material planning and analysis (see Appendix C). The level of co-researcher involvement has been considered extensively, informed by Bigg's (1989) *collaborative* mode of participation and Shier's Pathways to Participation (2001). Thus, the study will be managed by the researcher, but they will work in partnership with co-researchers in some capacity across the research stages.

Any potential changes to the research question (based on co-researcher input) will be discussed by researcher and their research supervisor. The need for the submission of an amendment to TREC will be considered and followed up as appropriate.

Data Collection:

Co-researchers will choose their preferred method of data collection. The following approaches have been chosen following an extensive literature search:

- Semi-structured interviews allow care leavers to share their stories, provide reflection and an indepth understanding of their perspectives on preparing for adulthood (Schofield et al., 2017).
- Creative storytelling methods creating collages or photovoice activities (employing photographs to deepen understanding about an issue). Visual approaches are known to be effective in communicating the experiences of CEI (Kelly et al., 2018).

Any interviews will be conducted by the researcher, who will have also facilitated the co-researcher workshops. The interviewer will therefore be familiar to interviewees enabling them to feel at ease, with the semi-structured approach allowing it to feel like a 'conversation with a purpose' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Co-researchers will have the opportunity to speak to their creative storytelling method if chosen. It is anticipated that interviews would be up to one hour. Audio from interviews would be recorded, with consent from co-researchers gained beforehand.

Data Analysis:

Information gathered will be transcribed and analysed using Reflective Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2016, 2019). RTA requires analytical and interpretative work from the researcher; themes are generated by the researcher through data engagement, their values, experience, and training. The coding process is considered organic, and data is captured inductively to ensure themes are created from the data, instead of via pre-existing themes or codes. This allows for codes to evolve and pattern recognition, capturing the researcher's deepening understanding of care leavers' experiences. Emerging themes will become the categories for analysis and co-researchers would then be involved in the following stages: 'reviewing and developing', 'refining, defining, and naming' themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

It is anticipated that data analysis will be conducted over a 3-month period, after data collection is complete. The researcher will keep a reflexive journal to log evolving feelings and decisions made in relation to the research process, data collection and analysis.

SECTION F: PARTICIPANT DETAILS

4. Provide an explanation detailing how you will identify, approach and recruit the participants for the proposed research, including clarification on sample size and location. Please provide justification for the exclusion/inclusion criteria for this study (i.e. who will be allowed to / not allowed to participate) and explain briefly, in lay terms, why these criteria are in place. (Do not exceed 500 words)

The researcher hopes to recruit 4-6 participants as co-researchers, meeting Braun and Clarke's (2013) guidelines for a small-medium project. In keeping with the participatory approach, the participants will be co-researchers and vice versa. The researcher intends to use an opportunity sample, meaning co-researchers will be selected based on a naturally occurring group. Co-researchers will be invited to participate as members of the Pan London Children in Care Council (CICC). Recruitment snowballing (chain-referral sampling) will also be used as a method for recruiting care leavers. Participation Officers and care leavers that are part of a London CICC will use their network, to recruit members from their respective care councils and/or reach out to care leavers that they know who might be interested in participating.

For further information on the Pan-London CICC offer see <u>London Children In Care Council | PYL (partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk)</u>. Young people will be approached to join the research project through email, attendance at existing pan-London CICC meetings and through Participation Officers at Participation Network meetings under the pan-London Care Offer https://www.partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk/CiCC).

CICC meetings:

- As care leavers, young people attending the CICC will all be over the age of 18.
- The researcher will offer to attend a CICC meeting to meet with the young people and potential coresearchers.
- Information sheets (Appendix A) and consent forms (Appendix B) will be forwarded via email to interested young people prior to the initial co-researcher meetings. Participation will be on a voluntary basis and individuals who express an interest will be given information sheets, consent forms and the opportunity to ask questions.
- Assuming all participants to be co-researchers, there will be collaboration between researcher and coresearchers in all stages of the research process.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants in the study is as follows:

- Adults will be aged 18-25. This falls under the definition of 'care leaver' contained in section 2(7) of the
 Children and Social Work Act 2017 (The Children and Social Work Act, 2017). As care leavers, young
 people attending the CICC, known by CICC members or supported by Participation Officers will all be over
 the age of 18.
- Adults will be care leavers (those who have been in care for at least 14 weeks since their 14th Birthday) with
 a Pathway Plan. This will be confirmed by the London Children in Care Council (CICC).
- Adults will be part of the London CICC, known to a member of the CICC or known to a Participation Officer.
- Adults will be able to communicate verbally in English.
- Adults will be able to participate in all co-researcher sessions. If they cannot attend, co-researchers should
 inform the researcher in advance where possible.
- 5. Please state the location(s) of the proposed research including the location of any interviews. Please provide a Risk Assessment if required. Consideration should be given to lone working, visiting private residences, conducting research outside working hours or any other non-standard arrangements.

If any data collection is to be done online, please identify the platforms to be used.

The research project is intended to take place in person, in a location familiar and convenient to the co-researchers. It will be made clear that this is a confidential space, and the co-researcher group will develop a group agreement together in the first session. During any in-person or online group sessions a minimum of 1 members of staff from the CICC will also be present; the CICC Development Officers have built positive, trusting relationships with the care leavers, and this will mitigate any risk in terms of how co-researchers' relate to each other, whilst offering a secure base for participants. During interviews the researcher will be alone with the young person. Please see risk assessment (Appendix F) for more information.

Interviews in the data collection phase will all be face-to-face. However, the researcher recognises the time commitment of this research for co-researchers and the research therefore may follow a hybrid model, whereby some of the co-researcher sessions are online and others face-to-face. This would be agreed on through discussions with the London CICC Development and the co-researchers. Online sessions would be via a secure platform such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. In this instance, organisational or confidential spaces would be used to access the online sessions. Any online data would be stored in secure digital files on a password protected laptop and/or University OneDrive. If an online platform is used, the researcher would follow ethics guidelines for internet mediated research as published by the British Psychological Society (2021) https://www.bps.org.uk/guideline/ethics-quidelines-internet-mediated-research

6.	Will the participants be from any of the following groups?(Tick as appropriate)
	Students or Staff of the Trust or Partner delivering your programme.
\boxtimes	Adults (over the age of 18 years with mental capacity to give consent to participate in the research).
	Children or legal minors (anyone under the age of 16 years) ¹
	Adults who are unconscious, severely ill or have a terminal illness.
	Adults who may lose mental capacity to consent during the course of the research.
	Adults in emergency situations.
	Adults ² with mental illness - particularly those detained under the Mental Health Act (1983 & 2007).
	Participants who may lack capacity to consent to participate in the research under the research requirements of
	the Mental Capacity Act (2005).

207
 □ Prisoners, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). □ Young Offenders, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). □ Healthy valuations (in high risk intervention studies)
 Healthy volunteers (in high risk intervention studies). Participants who may be considered to have a pre-existing and potentially dependent³ relationship with the investigator (e.g. those in care homes, students, colleagues, service-users, patients). Other vulnerable groups (see Question 6).
Adults who are in custody, custodial care, or for whom a court has assumed responsibility. Participants who are members of the Armed Forces.
¹ If the proposed research involves children or adults who meet the Police Act (1997) definition of vulnerability ³ , any researchers who will have contact with participants must have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance. ² 'Adults with a learning or physical disability, a physical or mental illness, or a reduction in physical or mental capacity, and living in a care home or home for people with learning difficulties or receiving care in their own home, or receiving hospital or social care services.' (Police Act. 1997)
³ Proposed research involving participants with whom the investigator or researcher(s) shares a dependent or unequal relationships (e.g. teacher/student, clinical therapist/service-user) may compromise the ability to give informed consent which is free from any form of pressure (real or implied) arising from this relationship. TREC recommends that, wherever practicable, investigators choose participants with whom they have no dependent relationship. Following due scrutiny, if the investigator is confident that the research involving participants in dependent relationships is vital and defensible, TREC will require additional information setting out the case and detailing how risks inherent in the dependent relationship will be managed. TREC will also
need to be reassured that refusal to participate will not result in any discrimination or penalty.

7. Will the study involve participants who are vulnerable? YES oxtimes NO oxtimes

For the purposes of research, 'vulnerable' participants may be adults whose ability to protect their own interests are impaired or reduced in comparison to that of the broader population. Vulnerability may arise from:

- the participant's personal characteristics (e.g. mental or physical impairment)
- their social environment, context and/or disadvantage (e.g. socio-economic mobility, educational attainment, resources, substance dependence, displacement or homelessness).
- where prospective participants are at high risk of consenting under duress, or as a result of manipulation or coercion, they must also be considered as vulnerable
- children are automatically presumed to be vulnerable.

7.1. If YES, what special arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable participants' interests?

The ethical challenges associated with researching vulnerable people such as care experienced young people are considerable (Barnard, 2003). This is particularly pertinent to care leavers as it is likely that they have experienced adverse life events such as abuse or neglect or placement changes (DfE, 2019). Power-related criticisms and ethical procedures of participatory research are also known (Spencer et al., 2020). The researcher has considered these challenges in depth and recognises that care will need to be taken to minimise psychological distress. The outlined ethical procedures go some way to addressing this, however there is possibility that co-researchers may be emotionally impacted during the process. As a Trainee EP it is felt the researcher has skills to identify and support with signs of distress. Furthermore, the researcher recognises the importance of building rapport with co-researchers to ensure they feel safe and to minimise any potential power imbalances (BPS, 2021). The researcher will be meeting the young people from the Pan-London CICC and Participation Officers from the pan-London Network prior to the study's recruitment.

An information sheet for the co-researchers has been created. It explains the purpose of the research, what will happen if participants take part and procedures for gaining informed consent. The information sheets make it clear to participants that they do not have to take part in the research and if they do choose to participate, they can withdraw at any time should they wish to. This includes withdrawing during any stage of data collection, and their

right to withdraw would be supported. Participants will be informed that they are able to withdraw after their involvement up to the point of anonymising contributions (up to four weeks after each interview).

Prior to the interviews the researcher will meet with all co-researchers to read through the information sheet and the consent form and will answer any questions they may have. Following receipt of informed consent, the initial workshop will offer further information about the project and research process (Appendix D), presenting another opportunity for participants to ask clarifying questions or withdraw. After the first session, care leavers will be given a debrief letter with further details of support.

The researcher will use research supervision to ensure data collection is conducted sensitively and rigorously e.g., using open questions). Co-researchers will also be given clear information about how their data will be collected and analysed, and they will be involved in designing data collection methods (e.g., qualitative questions). Developing the co-researchers' capacities in basic research methods and analysis through training would offer process validity (Aldridge, 2016) and transparency throughout the project.

The CICC Development Officers have built positive, trusting relationships with the care leavers. They will be present during the co-researcher sessions, to mitigate any risk in terms of how co-researchers' relate to each other, and to offer a secure base for participants.

If YES, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check **within the last three years** is required. Please provide details of the "clear disclosure":

Date of disclosure: 18th September 2023

Type of disclosure: Enhanced Certificate, CHILD AND ADULT WORKFORCE STUDENT (NHS)

Organisation that requested disclosure: TAVISTOCK AND PORTMAN NHS FOUNDATION

TRUST

DBS certificate number: 001847801472

(NOTE: information concerning activities which require DBS checks can be found via https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-check-eligible-positions-guidance). Please **do not** include a copy of your DBS certificate with your application

8. Do you propose to make any form of payment or incentive available to participants of the research? YES ⊠ NO □

If **YES**, please provide details taking into account that any payment or incentive should be representative of reasonable remuneration for participation and may not be of a value that could be coercive or exerting undue influence on potential participants' decision to take part in the research. Wherever possible, remuneration in a monetary form should be avoided and substituted with vouchers, coupons or equivalent. Any payment made to research participants may have benefit or HMRC implications and participants should be alerted to this in the participant information sheet as they may wish to choose to decline payment.

Depending on the availability of resources, all co-researchers may be provided a high street voucher, not exceeding £20. This will be funded by the London CICC or the researcher.

9. What special arrangements are in place for eliciting informed consent from participants who may not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information provided in English; where

participants have special communication needs; where participants have limited literacy; or where children are involved in the research? (Do not exceed 200 words)	
N/A	
N/A	

SECTION F: RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

SECTION 1. RION AGGESSIMENT AND RION MANAGEMENT
10. Does the proposed research involve any of the following? (Tick as appropriate)
□ use of a questionnaire, self-completion survey or data-collection instrument (attach copy) □ use of emails or the internet as a means of data collection □ use of written or computerised tests □ interviews (attach interview questions) □ diaries (attach diary record form)
 □ participant observation □ participant observation (in a non-public place) without their knowledge / covert research □ audio-recording interviewees or events □ video-recording interviewees or events □ access to personal and/or sensitive data (i.e. student, patient, client or service-user data) without the
participant's informed consent for use of these data for research purposes administration of any questions, tasks, investigations, procedures or stimuli which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally painful, stressful or unpleasant during or after the research process performance of any acts which might diminish the self-esteem of participants or cause them to experience discomfiture, regret or any other adverse emotional or psychological reaction Themes around extremism or radicalisation
investigation of participants involved in illegal or illicit activities (e.g. use of illegal drugs) procedures that involve the deception of participants administration of any substance or agent
use of non-treatment of placebo control conditions participation in a clinical trial
research undertaken at an off-campus location (<u>risk assessment attached</u>) research overseas (<u>please ensure Section G is complete</u>)
11. Does the proposed research involve any specific or anticipated risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life?
social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures.
social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES ⊠ NO □
social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures.
social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures. The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. Care therefore needs to be taken throughout to minimise
social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures. The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. Care therefore needs to be taken throughout to minimise risk of psychological distress. The informed consent and right to withdraw highlighted goes some way to
social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures. The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. Care therefore needs to be taken throughout to minimise risk of psychological distress. The informed consent and right to withdraw highlighted goes some way to addressing this, however there is a possibility that participants may become distressed during interviews, and
social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures. The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. Care therefore needs to be taken throughout to minimise risk of psychological distress. The informed consent and right to withdraw highlighted goes some way to addressing this, however there is a possibility that participants may become distressed during interviews, and it will not be possible to predict how participants will react to topics that arise.
social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures. The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. Care therefore needs to be taken throughout to minimise risk of psychological distress. The informed consent and right to withdraw highlighted goes some way to addressing this, however there is a possibility that participants may become distressed during interviews, and it will not be possible to predict how participants will react to topics that arise. Participants might have the opportunity to talk about personal experiences and this may cause distress to
Social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures. The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. Care therefore needs to be taken throughout to minimise risk of psychological distress. The informed consent and right to withdraw highlighted goes some way to addressing this, however there is a possibility that participants may become distressed during interviews, and it will not be possible to predict how participants will react to topics that arise. Participants might have the opportunity to talk about personal experiences and this may cause distress to participants or remind them of a difficult period of their lives. This is particularly pertinent to care leavers as it
Social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures. The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. Care therefore needs to be taken throughout to minimise risk of psychological distress. The informed consent and right to withdraw highlighted goes some way to addressing this, however there is a possibility that participants may become distressed during interviews, and it will not be possible to predict how participants will react to topics that arise. Participants might have the opportunity to talk about personal experiences and this may cause distress to participants or remind them of a difficult period of their lives. This is particularly pertinent to care leavers as it is likely that they have experienced adverse life events such as abuse or neglect or placement breakdowns
Social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures. The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. Care therefore needs to be taken throughout to minimise risk of psychological distress. The informed consent and right to withdraw highlighted goes some way to addressing this, however there is a possibility that participants may become distressed during interviews, and it will not be possible to predict how participants will react to topics that arise. Participants might have the opportunity to talk about personal experiences and this may cause distress to participants or remind them of a difficult period of their lives. This is particularly pertinent to care leavers as it is likely that they have experienced adverse life events such as abuse or neglect or placement breakdowns (Department for Education, 2019). Interview questions will thus remain open to allow participants to be in
Social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES NO If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures. The research involves a potentially sensitive topic. Care therefore needs to be taken throughout to minimise risk of psychological distress. The informed consent and right to withdraw highlighted goes some way to addressing this, however there is a possibility that participants may become distressed during interviews, and it will not be possible to predict how participants will react to topics that arise. Participants might have the opportunity to talk about personal experiences and this may cause distress to participants or remind them of a difficult period of their lives. This is particularly pertinent to care leavers as it is likely that they have experienced adverse life events such as abuse or neglect or placement breakdowns (Department for Education, 2019). Interview questions will thus remain open to allow participants to be in control of how much information they share. As co-researchers, participants will also have agency in the

further exploration. Co-researchers will be made fully aware of the aims and process of the research to ensure informed consent is gained. The co-researchers will be invited to contribute as much or as little as they wish and will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the research at any time.

Throughout the process the researcher will seek to be attuned to signs of distress and participants will be reminded of their agency in the research process, as above. Further steps that may be taken are highlighted in question 15.

12. Where the procedures involve potential hazards and/or discomfort or distress for participants, please state what previous experience the investigator or researcher(s) have had in conducting this type of research.

The researcher had experience of conducting interviews for research purposes in their undergraduate degree in Psychology (University of Sheffield, BSc Psychology, 2012-2015). As a Trainee Child and Educational Psychologist, the researcher has the skills to be able to identify and support with any signs of distress including verbal and body language. The researcher completed a research qualification whilst working as a Research Assistant; emphasis was placed on ethical practice when conducting research with vulnerable groups. The researcher has also had specific experience working with care experienced young people and those who may have experienced trauma, both prior to training as a psychologist and in the Trainee role.

The researcher will receive regular supervision through their EP placement and University. They will also access regular research supervision from a supervisor with experience of overseeing TEP research projects. The research supervisor also has professional EP experience supporting care experienced CYP, alongside working with young people in CICCs across London.

13. Provide an explanation of any potential benefits to participants. Please ensure this is framed within the overall contribution of the proposed research to knowledge or practice. (Do not exceed 400 words)

NOTE: Where the proposed research involves students, they should be assured that accepting the offer to participate or choosing to decline will have no impact on their assessments or learning experience. Similarly, it should be made clear to participants who are patients, service-users and/or receiving any form of treatment or medication that they are not invited to participate in the belief that participation in the research will result in some relief or improvement in their condition.

As highlighted, there is an urgent need for more interventions to support care experienced young people and improve outcomes for this group (NICE, 2017). Educational Psychologists have a key role in advising on and delivering interventions to support the social, emotional, and mental health of children and young people 0-25 in a range of settings.

Further, the researcher values research methods that use young people's voices to empower, self-advocate and create change, after working in Education Research and Policy where adult-centric research agendas were dominant. The researcher acknowledges the potential value a participatory approach could bring to coresearchers and care leavers more broadly, who as a vulnerable group, experience poor outcomes following the transition to adulthood and remain largely unrepresented within research. Given the value-based and inclusive participatory approach, the researcher hopes the research will raise awareness about issues of injustice for young people who are leaving or have been in care, whilst providing a platform for care leavers to use their voice and offer insight to the Pathway Plan process. The researcher would aim to develop an action

plan in collaboration with the co-researchers and grounded in the knowledge created through the study's findings. It is hoped that the findings are shared so that Pathway Plans reflect the true experiences of care leavers, to maximise impact in this process and potentially inform future policy and practice for care experienced individuals during the complex transition to adulthood, locally and nationally.

Furthermore, it is hoped that participating in the research will give participants the chance to reflect upon and share their experiences, build connections with others, have their voice heard and review the experience of partaking in the research process.

14. Provide an outline of any measures you have in place in the event of adverse or unexpected outcomes and the potential impact this may have on participants involved in the proposed research. (Do not exceed 300 words)

Due to the participatory nature of the research, the co-researchers will have the opportunity to design the interview questions. They will also have control over how much information they choose to share. Participants will be made fully aware of the aims and process of the research, in addition to potential topic areas that may come up, through the information sheet. This will ensure full informed consent is gained. The participants will be invited to contribute as much or as little as they wish and will be reminded of their right to withdraw from any aspect of the research. Further steps that may be taken are highlighted in question 15.

15. Provide an outline of your debriefing, support and feedback protocol for participants involved in the proposed research. This should include, for example, where participants may feel the need to discuss thoughts or feelings brought about following their participation in the research. This may involve referral to an external support or counseling service, where participation in the research has caused specific issues for participants.

The researcher will seek to be attuned to signs of psychological distress whilst facilitating interviews and throughout the co-researcher sessions. Interviews will be terminated if necessary. The researcher will check in with participants after co-researcher sessions and interviews, to monitor their emotional wellbeing. This will include using the online feedback tool mentimeter (https://www.mentimeter.com), to enable participants to offer feedback anonymously and in their own time, should they prefer.

If participants would like to speak further about any thoughts or feelings brought about following their participation in the research, the researcher will offer a further space for reflection, separate from the study. There will also be a more formal feedback session once a decision has been made with the co-researchers about how to disseminate the research. This will be an opportunity for participants to express any views or emotions about the research process and their involvement. It will be a space to debrief the participants.

The researcher will support participants to identify trusted people whom they can contact for additional support, such as the London CICC Development Officer, their Personal Advisor or Participatory Officer. Participants can also be signposted to their local authority's care leavers' service page which outlines specific support for young people leaving care both within and external to their local authority. As the study involves young people actively participating throughout the research process, the researcher will ensure that consent is an ongoing process rather than an initial, one-off action. Consent will thus be constantly reviewed, with

until the point of	to withdraw at any time. It will be made clear that right to withdraw will be made available
	data analysis, as the data will be collated at this point.
	ride the names and nature of any external support or counselling organisations that gested to participants if participation in the research has potential to raise specific participants.
If required, partic	cipants will be signposted to a range of services supporting care leavers, including:
GP Serv	rices
• <u>Bernardo</u>	os Support for Care leavers
Home Pa	age - Become (becomecharity.org.uk)
• The Car	e leavers Association
• <u>Centre F</u>	Point Support for Care leavers
research, th words) N/A	ne participant's performance and/or the results of the research. (Do not exceed 500
	TOPOSED THE UK TOPOSED RESEARCH INVOIVE TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE UK? □ YES ☑ NO
io. Does the pr	·
If VES, place	aa aanfirm
If YES, pleas	se confirm:
☐ I have	se confirm: e consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? vw.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/
☐ I have	e consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice?
☐ I have http://www.	e consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? ww.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/ e completed ta RISK Assessment covering all aspects of the project including consideration
☐ I have http://www. ☐ I have of the loce. All overseas project their nominee. Note that the through the TRE.	e consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? ww.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/ e completed ta RISK Assessment covering all aspects of the project including consideration cation of the data collection and risks to participants. ject data collection will need approval from the Deputy Director of Education and Training or lormally this will be done based on the information provided in this form. All projects approved
☐ I have http://www. ☐ I have of the loce. All overseas project their nominee. Note through the TRE. If you have any construction.	e consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? ww.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/ e completed ta RISK Assessment covering all aspects of the project including consideration cation of the data collection and risks to participants. ject data collection will need approval from the Deputy Director of Education and Training or lormally this will be done based on the information provided in this form. All projects approved to process will be indemnified by the Trust against claims made by third parties.

	21	3
N/A		

SECTION G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND WITHDRAWAL

ECTION 6. FARTICIPANT CONSENT AND WITHDRAWAL
20. Have you attached a copy of your participant information sheet (this should be in <i>plain English</i>)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.
YES ⊠ NO □
If NO , please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:
21. Have you attached a copy of your participant consent form (this should be in plain English)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.
YES NO
If NO , please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:
22. The following is a <u>participant information sheet</u> checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.
 ☑ Clear identification of the Trust as the sponsor for the research, the project title, the Researcher and Principal Investigator (your Research Supervisor) and other researchers along with relevant contact details. ☑ Details of what involvement in the proposed research will require (e.g., participation in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-recording of events), estimated time commitment and any risks involved.
 \int A statement confirming that the research has received formal approval from TREC or other ethics body. \int I the sample size is small, advice to participants that this may have implications for confidentiality / anonymity.
 ☑ A clear statement that where participants are in a dependent relationship with any of the researchers that participation in the research will have no impact on assessment / treatment / service-use or support. ☑ Assurance that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied. ☑ Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of
information provided is subject to legal limitations. A statement that the data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the <u>Trusts 's Data Protection and handling Policies.</u> : https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/
Advice that if participants have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Head of Academic Registry (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)
Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

	wing is a <u>consent form</u> checklist covering the various points that should be included in
this docu	ment.
	project (with research degree projects this need not necessarily be the title of the thesis) and
names of inve	stigators. on that the research project is part of a degree
	on that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw at any
	ndraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
audio-/video-r	on of particular requirements of participants, including for example whether interviews are to be ecorded, whether anonymised quotes will be used in publications advice of legal limitations to
data confident If the samp information.	iality. ble size is small, confirmation that this may have implications for anonymity any other relevant
l <u>—</u>	sed method of publication or dissemination of the research findings.
	any external contractors or partner institutions involved in the research.
	any funding bodies or research councils supporting the research.
may occur.	on on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others
may occur.	
SECTION H: CO	ONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY
24. Below is a	checklist covering key points relating to the confidentiality and anonymity of
	ts. Please indicate where relevant to the proposed research.
☐ Participants	will be completely anonymised and their identity will not be known by the investigator or
	e. the participants are part of an anonymous randomised sample and return responses with
	onal identification)?
	ses are anonymised or are an anonymised sample (i.e. a permanent process of coding has it whereby direct and indirect identifiers have been removed from data and replaced by a code,
	retained of how the code relates to the identifiers).
	s and data are de-identified (i.e. direct and indirect identifiers have been removed and replaced
	investigator or researchers <u>are</u> able to link the code to the original identifiers and isolate the
	hom the sample or data relates). have the option of being identified in a publication that will arise from the research.
	will be pseudo-anonymised in a publication that will arise from the research. (i.e. the
researcher will	endeavour to remove or alter details that would identify the participant.)
	ed research will make use of personal sensitive data.
publication.	consent to be identified in the study and subsequent dissemination of research findings and/or
равносиот.	
to legal lim informatio de-identific	ts must be made aware that the confidentiality of the information they provide is subject nitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data may be subject to a subpoena, a freedom of n request or mandated reporting by some professions). This only applies to named or ed data. If your participants are named or de-identified, please confirm that you will y state these limitations.
YES 🖂	NO 🗆
If NO , pleas	se indicate why this is the case below:

NOTE: WHERE THE PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVES A SMALL SAMPLE OR FOCUS GROUP, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE ADVISED THAT THERE WILL BE DISTINCT LIMITATIONS IN THE LEVEL OF ANONYMITY THEY CAN BE AFFORDED.

SECTION I: DATA ACCESS, SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT

26. Will the Researcher/Principal Investigator be responsible for the security of all data collected in connection with the proposed research? YES ⊠ NO □
If NO , please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:
27. In line with the 5 th principle of the Data Protection Act (1998), which states that personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes for which it was collected; please state how long data will be retained for.
☐ 1-2 years ☐ 3-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 10> years
NOTE: In line with Research Councils UK (RCUK) guidance, doctoral project data should normally be stored for 10 years and Masters level data for up to 2 years
28. Below is a checklist which relates to the management, storage and secure destruction of data for the purposes of the proposed research. Please indicate where relevant to your proposed arrangements.
Research data, codes and all identifying information to be kept in separate locked filing cabinets. Research data will only be stored in the University of Essex OneDrive system and no other cloud storage location.
 □ Access to computer files to be available to research team by password only. □ Access to computer files to be available to individuals outside the research team by password only (See 23.1).
Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically within the UK. Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically outside of the UK.
<u>NOTE:</u> Transfer of research data via third party commercial file sharing services, such as Google Docs and YouSendIt are not necessarily secure or permanent. These systems may also be located overseas and not covered by UK law. If the system is located outside the European Economic Area (EEA) or territories deemed to have sufficient standards of data protection, transfer may also breach the Data Protection Act (1998).
Essex students also have access the 'Box' service for file transfer: https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/it-services/box
 ☑ Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers. ☐ Collection and storage of personal sensitive data (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political or religious beliefs or physical or mental health or condition). ☑ Use of personal data in the form of audio or video recordings. ☐ Primary data gathered on encrypted mobile devices (i.e. laptops).
NOTE: This should be transferred to secure University of Essex OneDrive at the first opportunity.
<u>NOTE:</u> For hard drives and magnetic storage devices (HDD or SSD), deleting files does not permanently erase the data on most systems, but only deletes the reference to the file. Files can be restored when deleted in this way. Research files must be <u>overwritten</u> to ensure they are completely irretrievable. Software is available for the secure erasing of files from hard drives which meet recognised standards to securely scramble sensitive data. Examples of this software are BC Wipe, Wipe File, DeleteOnClick and Eraser for Windows platforms. Mac users can use the standard 'secure empty trash' option; an alternative is Permanent eraser software.

<u>NOTE:</u> For shredding research data stored in hardcopy (i.e. paper), adopting DIN 3 ensures files are cut into 2mm strips or confetti like cross-cut particles of 4x40mm. The UK government requires a minimum standard DIN 4 for its material, which ensures cross cut particles of at least 2x15mm.	
29. Please provide details of individuals outside the research team who will be given password protected access to encrypted data for the proposed research.	
N/A	
30. Please provide details on the regions and territories where research data will be electronically transferred that are external to the UK:	
N/A	
SECTION J: PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS	
30. How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated? (Select all that apply)	
□ Peer reviewed journal	
Non-peer reviewed journal Non-peer reviewed journal	
Peer reviewed books	
☐ Peer reviewed books☐ Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos)	
 ☐ Peer reviewed books ☐ Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos) ☐ Conference presentation 	
 □ Peer reviewed books □ Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos) □ Conference presentation □ Internal report □ Promotional report and materials 	
 □ Peer reviewed books □ Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos) □ Conference presentation □ Internal report □ Promotional report and materials □ Reports compiled for or on behalf of external organisations 	
 □ Peer reviewed books □ Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos) □ Conference presentation □ Internal report □ Promotional report and materials □ Reports compiled for or on behalf of external organisations □ Dissertation/Thesis 	
 □ Peer reviewed books □ Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos) □ Conference presentation □ Internal report □ Promotional report and materials □ Reports compiled for or on behalf of external organisations 	

31. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC)? At all times the researcher will strictly adhere to ethical guidelines published by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2016). The researcher will seek guidance and support from the research supervisor, to manage any potential risk to the researcher. The researcher also recognises the limits to their own expertise, and will signpost participants to seek advice or support from the CICC Development Officers or professional services, if required (discussed in question 16). BECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS 32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application. Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant) Recruitment advertisement Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant) Assent form for children (where relevant)
31. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC)? At all times the researcher will strictly adhere to ethical guidelines published by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2016). The researcher will seek guidance and support from the research supervisor, to manage any potential risk to the researcher. The researcher also recognises the limits to their own expertise, and will signpost participants to seek advice or support from the CICC Development Officers or professional services, if required (discussed in question 16). BECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS 32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application. Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant) Recruitment advertisement Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
31. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC)? At all times the researcher will strictly adhere to ethical guidelines published by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2016). The researcher will seek guidance and support from the research supervisor, to manage any potential risk to the researcher. The researcher also recognises the limits to their own expertise, and will signpost participants to seek advice or support from the CICC Development Officers or professional services, if required (discussed in question 16). BECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS 32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application. Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant) Recruitment advertisement Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
At all times the researcher will strictly adhere to ethical guidelines published by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2016). The researcher will seek guidance and support from the research supervisor, to manage any potential risk to the researcher. The researcher also recognises the limits to their own expertise, and will signpost participants to seek advice or support from the CICC Development Officers or professional services, if required (discussed in question 16). SECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS 32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application. Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant) Recruitment advertisement Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
Society (BPS, 2021) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2016). The researcher will seek guidance and support from the research supervisor, to manage any potential risk to the researcher. The researcher also recognises the limits to their own expertise, and will signpost participants to seek advice or support from the CICC Development Officers or professional services, if required (discussed in question 16). SECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS 32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application. Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant) Recruitment advertisement Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
the researcher. The researcher also recognises the limits to their own expertise, and will signpost participants to seek advice or support from the CICC Development Officers or professional services, if required (discussed in question 16). SECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS 32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application. Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant) Recruitment advertisement Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application. Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant) Recruitment advertisement Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
 Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant) Recruitment advertisement Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
 ☐ Recruitment advertisement ☐ Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) ☐ Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
L L ASSENTITION OF CHILDREN (MINORE FOLOVENT)
Letters of approval from locations for data collection
☐ Questionnaire ☐ Interview Schedule or topic guide
Risk Assessment (where applicable)
Overseas travel approval (where applicable) 34. Where it is not possible to attach the above materials, please provide an explanation below.

References

- Aldridge, J. (2016). Participatory research: Working with vulnerable groups in research and practice. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2016). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. Qual. Res. Sport Exerc Health 11(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806
- Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2019). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? Qual. Res. Psychol. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238
- Butterworth, S., Singh, S. P., Birchwood, M., Islam, Z., Munro, E. R., Vostanis, P., Paul, M., Khan, A., & Simkiss, D. (2016). Transitioning care-leavers with mental health needs: 'they set you up to fail!' *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 22(3), 138–147. https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12171
- Children and Social Work Act (2017). London: HMSO. Retrieved from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents/enacted

- Cargo, M., & Mercer, S.L. (2008). The value and challenges of participatory research: Strengthening its practice. Annual Review of Public Health, 29(1), 325–350.
 https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.29.091307.083824
- Children Act, (1989). London: HMSO Retrieved from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents
- Department for Education. (2015b). Care leavers' transition to adulthood. London, United Kingdom: The National Audit Office.
- Hyde, R., & Atkinson, C. (2019). Care leavers' priorities and the corporate parent role: A selfdetermination theory perspective. Educational & Child Psychology, 36(1), 40-57.
- Department for Education. (2018c). National implementation adviser for care leavers' first year report:
 October 2017 to October 2018. (Report No. Ref: DFE-00356-2018). Retrieved from
 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/916016/National_Implementation_Adviser_for_Care_Leavers_Annual_Report.pdf
- Holkup, P. A., Tripp-Reimer, T., Salois, E. M., & Weinert, C. (2004). Community-based participatory research: an approach to intervention research with a Native American community. ANS. Advances in nursing science, 27(3), 162–175. https://doi.org/10.1097/00012272-200407000-0000
- Lensvelt, I., Hassett, A., & Colbridge, A. (2021). More than meets the eye: how black and minority ethnic care-leavers construct and make sense of their identity. *Adolescents*, 1(1), 36-53.
- Mertens, D. M. (2017). Transformative research: personal and societal. *International Journal for Transformative Research*, 4(1), 18–24. https://doi.org/10.1515/IJTR-2017-0001
- Oakley, M. Miscampbell, G. and Gregorian, R. (2018). Looked-after Children The Silent Crisis. Social Market Foundation. Ofsted. (2022). "Ready or not": Care leavers' views of preparing to leave care. <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ready-or-not-care-leavers-views-of-preparing-to-leave-care/ready-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or-not-care-leavers-views-or
- Teyhan, A., Wijedasa, D., & Macleod, J. (2018). Adult psychosocial outcomes of men and women who
 were looked-after or adopted as children: Prospective observational study. *BMJ Open*, 8(2).
 https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2017-019095
- Wallace, F. and Giles, P. 2019. Participatory Research Approaches in Educational Psychology Training and Practice. Educational Psychology Research and Practice. (1), pp. 1-9. https://doi.org/10.15123/uel.8831x

Note. Amendments highlighted in red.

TREC Appendices

Introduction Session for Co-researchers - Microsoft PowerPoint Slides





- Training to be an Educational Psychologist
- Support children and young people aged 0-25
- Support young people in the preparation for adulthood and transitioning to independence
- Support adults that work with young people



My Job

Research

- Find out what is important to young people
- Explore what young people need and how best to support them
- Publication share findings with professionals and services supporting care leavers



Skills and lived experience with pathway plans in the transition to adulthood

Voice and a platform to advocate for other young people in preparing to leave care



Semi-structured interviews

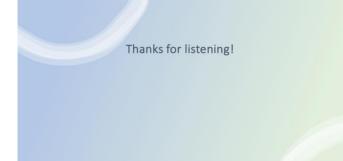
Creative methods (collages and photovoice activity)



Ideas – areas of focus



Questions?



https://democracy.cityoflondon.gov.uk/documents/s175613/Item%202.%20Safeguarding-Sub-Committee-Pan-London-Children-in-Care-Council-October%2022-final.pdf

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- 7. Strategic implications None.
- 8. Financial implications This project has restricted funding for two years.
- 9. Resource implications This project is funded for two years.
- 10. Legal implications None.
- 11. Risk implications All programmes are supported by risk assessments across the organisation, and this is presented to trustees on a bi-monthly basis.
- 12. Equalities implications –This work aligns with the Public Sector Equality Duty, and we are clear that the work will be focused on supporting those who are protected by existing equality legislation age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.
- 13. Climate implications All this work is aligned with the organisational environmental policies, and we work to ensure that we assess the climate impact across all of our respective work streams. Staff and young people use public transport to get to work, and we facilitate a range of our programmes online to reduce environmental impact.
- 14. Security implications None.

Conclusion

15. This report contains an update on the work of the Pan London Children in Care Council and our proposals for the future. The work is closely aligned with

the City of London Children in Care Council, and we continue to work together to improve outcomes for young people.

Appendices

None.

Sharon Long

Director, Partnership for Young London

T: 077 8067 4311

E: sharon.long@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Name: Anna Tench	School: Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust
Student number: 22002860	Supervisor / Director of Studies: Ben Craik
Thesis Title: Preparing for Adulthood: Participatory Research Exploring the Experiences of Care leavers with Pathway Plans	
Fieldwork location: The CICC City of London Building/online	Type of Fieldwork: Face-to-face Interviews. The research incorporates a participatory approach whereby the researcher will meet with coresearchers to design the research questions, analysis and dissemination. These sessions will be either face-to-face or online.
Proposed dates or periods of Fieldwork: March 2024- June 2025	
Potential hazards or risks: (rate high medium or low)	
Young person might become aggressive towards researcher (Low)	2.
3.	4.
5.	6.
7.	8.
9.	10.
Potential Consequences for each hazard: (please continue on a separate sheet if necessary) The young person might become aggressive towards researcher during the interview: The interviewer might be hurt during the interview if the interviewee gets aggressive and/or violent within the interview.	

Controls in place for each hazard in order of likely risk: (please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

going through legal implications.

This would mean the interviewer is at risk of minor or serious harm and could result in the interviewee

Interviewee might become aggressive towards researcher. The researcher would be alert to early warning signs that the interviewee is becoming agitated and respond in a way to de-escalate the situation, serving to safeguard the researcher and co-researcher's welfare:

- Consider the questions/prompts being asked/used with supervisor to ensure they are not overly provocative.
- Discuss with a member of CICC staff where I will be and how long (approximately) the interview will be. Check in and out with this individual before and after interview/s.
- Inform an individual outside of the building where I will be and approximately how long for. Check in and out with this individual before and after interview/s.
- Check the interviewee is the person they say they are at beginning of the interview.
- Let the interviewee know they can leave when they want, if they get upset or frustrated.
- Let the interviewee know they do not have to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable with
- Interviewer to be aware how issues such as values and culture can affect interviewee's emotional state. In addition, how the use of recording equipment and body language might impact on individual's emotions.

By signing this document you are indicating that you have consulted the policy and have fully considered the risks.

I agree to the assessment of risk in relation to this project.

Signature of Student:

Signature of Supervisor of Studies:

Date: 25.04.24

Date: 26.04.24



This research project will explore the lived experiences of care leavers, to give professionals and services supporting care leavers insight into your perspectives of the transition to adulthood.

The project will involve a group of care leavers being trained in research techniques, to design and participate in the project. This is a fantastic opportunity to have your voice heard, and be involved in an exciting doctorate research project!

You will be given a £20 high street voucher as a thank you for participating, alongside gaining valuable experience as a co-researcher - this can be put on your CV!

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED PLEASE CONTACT
MYSELF, ANNA TENCH
(ATENCH@TAVI.PORT.NHS.UK) OR LOUISA
(LOUISA.FOYLE@CITYOFLONDON.GOV.UK) FOR
MORE INFORMATION!

Appendix K: Information Sheet for the Research



Information Sheet

Research investigating your experiences of Pathway Plans

The following information is provided to ensure that you have a clear understanding of the current research and what would happen if you want to be involved. The information is shared with you so that you can let us know if you want to take part.

Research Title: "Preparing for Adulthood: Participatory Research Exploring the Experiences of Care leavers with Pathway Plans"

Who am I?

My name is Anna Tench, and I am currently studying a course in Child, Community and Educational Psychology at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. I am carrying out this research as part of my training, to better understand the experiences of young people leaving care. The project will be written up to form my doctoral thesis.

What is the research?

The aim of this research is to explore the lived experiences of care leavers with Pathway Plans in the transition to adulthood. This research aims to gain the perspectives of care leavers to develop knowledge about the pathway planning process in preparing for independence. The aim is to give professionals and services supporting care leavers an insight and knowledge into your experiences of having a Pathway Plan, to help them better understand processes for care leavers in preparing to leave care. Should you choose to take part, I will be asking you to help me design parts of the research and decide how we will share the findings.

The research aims to be published so it can be read by professionals working with care leavers to support them with a better understanding of what you went/are going through.

Why have you been asked to take part?

Some research has been undertaken looking at the experiences of care leavers in the process of leaving care, but to date this has not focused on Pathway Plans. You are being invited to participate in this research on the basis that you have the skills and lived experience of being involved in the process of pathway planning. This could develop knowledge about Pathway Plans in the process of leaving care, and inform policy and practice around supporting care experienced young people in the transition to adulthood. It is important that you have your voice heard!

What happens if you take part?

If you agree to take part, you will be working alongside a small group of other care leavers from the CICC, and myself as a 'co-researcher'. You will be invited to:

- Join up to six workshops with myself, the researcher, and the other 'co-researchers'. The sessions will last 30-45 minutes. The sessions will follow a hybrid model and take place at the Guildhall building or online (via Microsoft Teams) at an agreed time.
- You will learn about some different research methods and ways of doing research
 and support choices in the research design of the project. You will have a choice in
 how you would like to take part. You may choose to talk about your experiences
 and share your ideas on your own in an interview-format or through creative
 methods that we decide on together.
- You can stop taking part in sessions at any time if you want to. The sessions will be recorded (sound only) and transcribed (written up) by the researcher.
- You will benefit by having the opportunity to learn about research methods and develop presentation, communication, and evaluation skills. You may also evaluate your experience of the project and share your views on the findings, prior to the research being written up. Have your voice heard!
- Co-researchers will be offered a £20 high street voucher as a thank you for taking part in the research.

It is important to note that involvement or information given in this research will have no impact on your engagement with the London Children in Care Council (CICC).

What will happen to the information collected?

The findings from the research will be presented to a group of Trainee Educational Psychologists and Tutors. It will be up to you as a co-researcher to decide how the findings might be shared more widely. The research may also be published in a journal (anyone can read this). No information that identifies you specifically will be shared, and I will change any names and remove any identifying information you mention.

The information you give will be analysed alongside data given from other participants. From this point it will not be possible for the information you gave to be deleted from the analysis. However, the raw data given can be deleted on request. Anonymised notes and recordings will be destroyed on completion of the research.

Will everything be kept confidential? (Will my name or other identifiable information be used?)

All the information collected from you will be kept safe and confidential. This includes any records or notes made from the meetings or interviews; these will be kept in a safe, secure location with you name being changed to a code to prevent you being identified. This will be done in line with the University's Data Protection Policy.

It is important for you to know; data cannot be kept confidential if you mention something that makes me concerned about either your safety of that of someone else. In this case, I would have to share this information with others to maintain safety. Wherever possible, this would be discussed with you first.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide if you wish to take part or not. This information sheet has been provided to help you decide if this is something you want to do or not. Even if you do decide to take part but change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time, including during interview, up to the point where I have started to analyse your data. You will not be expected to give a reason for your withdrawal and all information gathered about you up to that point will be destroyed.

You are free to **stop taking part** at any time. Should you wish to withdraw from the research study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason. You might choose to come to some sessions but not take part in all the sessions. That's fine, just let me (the researcher) or Louisa Foyle know.

Who has given permission to do this research?

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Ethics Committee has given ethical approval for this piece of research to be carried out. In addition, the London CICC have agreed for me to come in and work with you with your permission.

What if I complain?

If you have any concerns about the research or how you have been treated you can speak about these with myself or contact Paru Jeram, Senior Academic Governance and Quality Officer academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Further Information

If you have any further questions about the research or if you would like to know more about it, you can contact me at atench@tavi-port.nhs.uk. If you do not want to email me, you can also email my supervisor Ben Craik (bcraik@tavi-port.nhs.uk).

If you would like to speak to anyone in the CICC team about the project, you can contact Louisa Foyle, CICC Development Officer (louisa.foyle@cityoflondon.gov.uk)
Thank you for taking the time to read this information.
Anna Tench (Trainee Educational Psychologist)



Consent form for taking part in research

Research Title: Preparing for Adulthood: Participatory Research Exploring the Experiences of Care leavers with Pathway Plans

I have the read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the experimental programme has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the programme at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

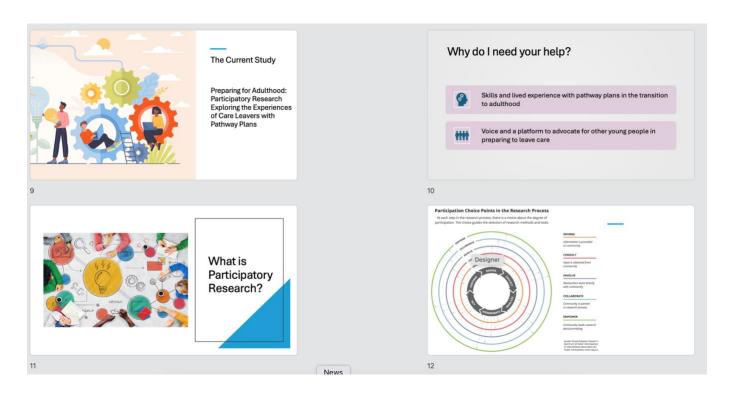
Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)
Participant's Signature
Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)
Investigator's Signature
Date:

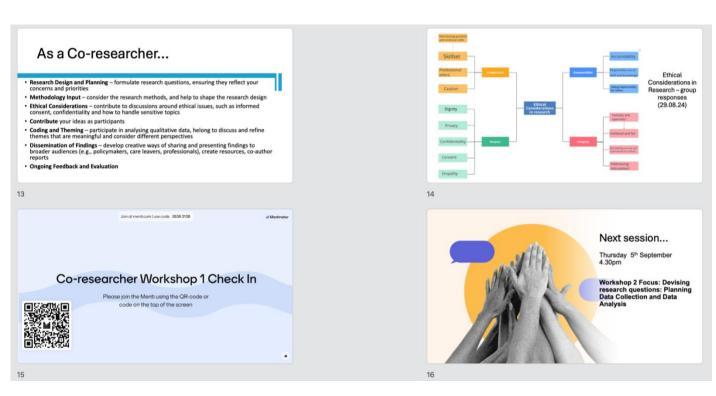
Appendix M: Co-researcher Workshops

Workshop 1: What is Research?

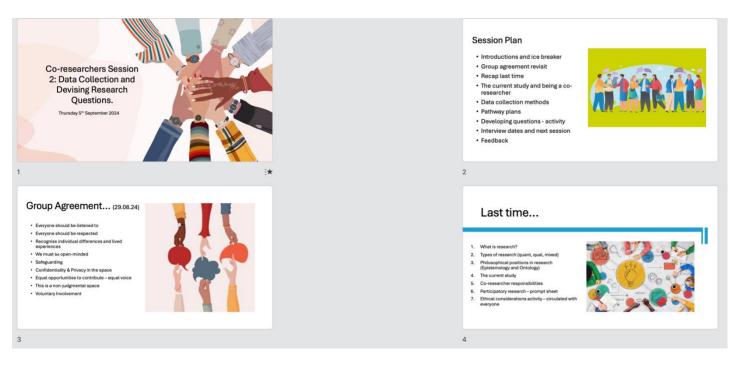


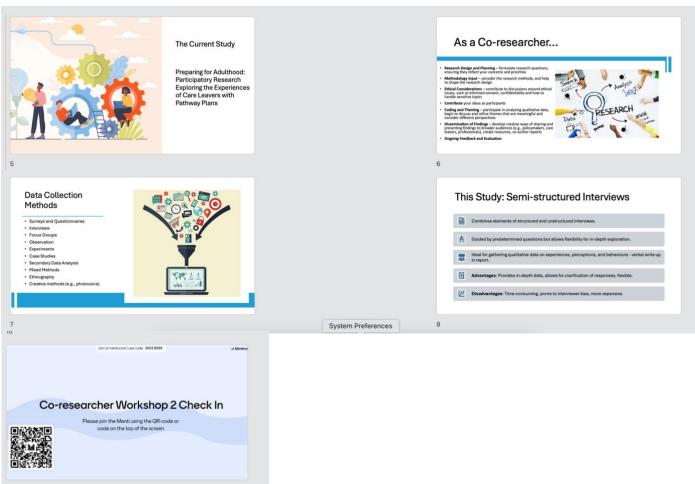






Co-researcher Workshop 2: Data Collection and Devising Research Questions



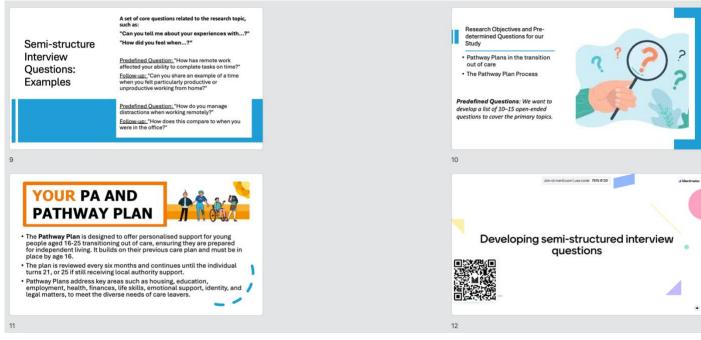


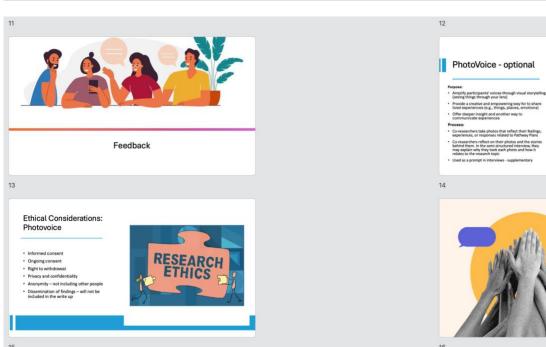
Potential interviews

Tuesday 17th September
 Thursday 27th September

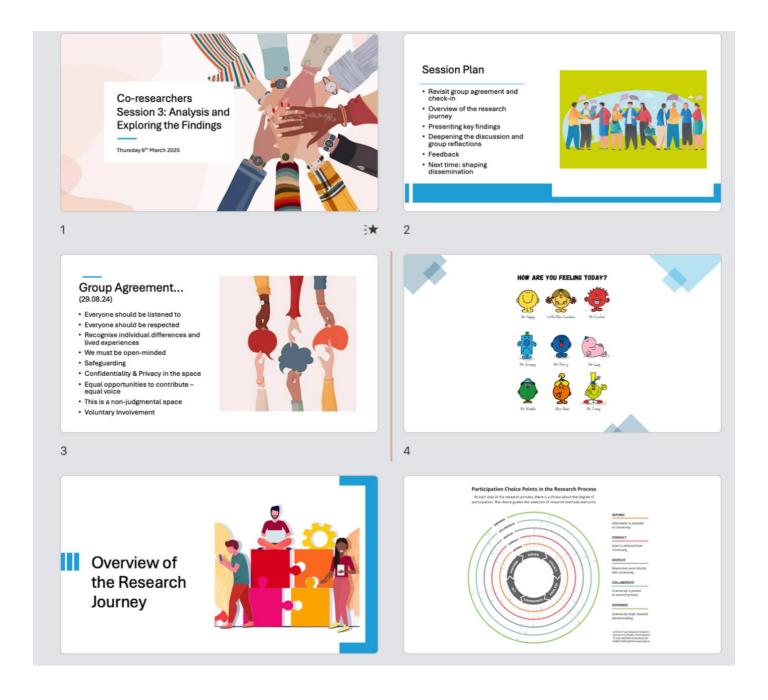
Workshop 3 Focus: Thematic Analysis and Findings Feedback

dates...





Co-researcher Workshop 3: Data Analysis



Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2009, 2016)

RTA is a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns (themes) in qualitative data.

The researcher's perspective, experiences, positionality and interpretations shape the themes.

- Familiarisation Reading and engaging with the data
 Coding Identifying key points in the data
 Theme Development Grouping codes into meaningful themes.

- meaningful themes.

 4. Reviewing & Retining Checking and adjusting themes.

 5. Defining & Manning Themes Making sure they clearly capture key insights.

 6. Writing Up Presenting the analysis in a meaningful way.



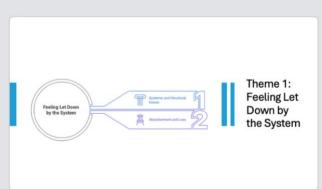
Presenting Key Findings

7

Research Question reminder

What are Care leavers' Experiences of Pathway Plans in the Transition to Adulthood?

9





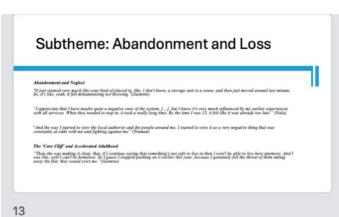
10

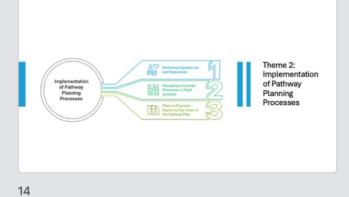
Subtheme: Systemic and Structural Issues

Instability and Competing Priorities in an Overburdened System

"It makes you feel so small when people get the basic details about you wrong, details you've shared with them in confidence because they asked you to. It feels like a betrayal." (Nala)

"Don't just do it [the pathway plan] to tick a box. We often realise when we're being treated like service users or just numbers, and we're very sensitive to that" (Matilda).





Subtheme: Emotional Responses and Experiences

The Impact of Pathway Planning in Facilitating Challenging Conversations
"I bink like talking about like certain experiences that I didn't want to face wave!. There was some things that I wasn't mentally ready to face. [...] Jet quite overwhelmed at the time. And like, they don't give you time to think about this stuff, they just dive savight into it. (Lucy)

Pathway Planning for Surveillance vs Reassurance

"I mean, it feels like monitoring, that I know that's probably not, it's not their intention. Maybe partly because it does feel like an
outcome neature, that you would have no like a service evaluation, mastricely" (Valla)

The Need for Personalisation in Pathway Plans
"I feel like it felt challenging for me because when you rate something from one to ten I need an explanation as to why you've done that II just levere it upon to interpretation, and it shears' give you like a conclusive answer as to why I've put that number down or why I also give to x, y and z "Irmana).

Subtheme: Navigating Uncertain Processes in Rigid Systems

"Because it's just like, the person, or whatever, the PA has decided to write, can be really dehuma form and you're thinking I feel like an object" (Lucy)

"It's written as though they have the lowest especiations of you, and shat's how I feel in general. You get treated as somebody with care experience, you just get treated as though you don't know anything, and you're just less than." (Nala)

Reviewing Plans

"Like not the content of it or the results of it, but just by knowing that, you know, in a few months' time fit will be reviewed]." (Matilda)

15

Subtheme: Plans to Practice: Exploring Key Areas of the Pathway Plan

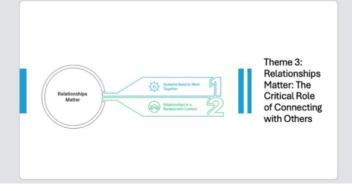
"I think it helped me become independent. In like, learning how to do like the basic stuff, like set up bank accounts, organising finances. I think that's why I felt more comfortable around the care cliff thing." (Lucy)

"One of those areas was my mental health, and we isolated and acknowledged that in the Pathway Plan. And through that I ended up having reoccurring counselling sessions. I still do now, with a clinical practitioner not too far away from here." (Tuman)

"It's to inform not just me but also whoever's concerned with the pathway plan, like my PA, about the risks to—I don't know—my safety. There was a section on, like, if you've had problems with addiction? What support is in place if you should noted it? (Matilda)

"There is a disconnect in terms of what's happening on your pathway plan and in reality." (Lucy)

16



Subtheme: Systems Need to Work Together

Joint Working Matters

"They [uni] organised for me to have a care leaver special internship programme, which they set up for a group of us. But they sort of didn't realise [they] never sorted accommodation for over the summer, until, like, the reat academic year when everyone else was moving in in August. So, then that's how I ended up with, like, chasing them..." (Lucy).

Community Support Beyond Pathway Plans

"In my opinion, it's really the organisations, not the local authorities, that are better at providing support. But I didn't know that at the time." (Jasmine).

Subtheme: Relationships in a Bureaucratic Context

Relationships with PAs

"Just having a PA that's—she was also very, very vibrant, very, like, colourful. Her clothes were quite loud and proud. I think having someone like that take you through this process did make it easier because, I don't know, she's a very, very positive person. (Matlew)

"I'm unassigned, because a PA left. So I'm still waiting to get a new PA. [...] My first PA I didn't see for three years. They had never seen me. So, I guess in that sense, they wouldn't be doing the pathway plan." (Jaamine)

"I didn't want to talk to her and because I didn't want to tell her about everything, because I don't trust that they're actually going to do anything with that information. I'm like what is the point of this?" (Nala)

19



20

Subtheme: Community and Peer Connections

"Like the identity of being care experienced. I didn't really have the chance to support that or understand it fully until I got that job with the United Foundation supporting care experienced people. [...]. That was quite liberating because I was able to support care experienced people while also exploring my own care experienced thentity. It was really helpful because I could think there are other people who are going through these judgments too." (Lucy)

"If I had found the right resources or organisations earlier, it could have made a big difference. There are other advocates out there, but it feels like I missed the chance to connect with them sooner." (Jasmine)

"Because it's like I have friends, but they're treating me as though I don't have any other support or expecting me to not." (Nala)

21

Subthemes: Language and Moving Beyond the 'Care Leaver' Label

"And like some of the judgements, the stereotypes it's just mental like what informs people. Do I look like a criminal to you?" (Vala)

"I think it's like it's great when you want to get you know get your point across that you don't have to say I've been through this business you can just say I'm a care leaver and so labels can be helpful with that side of things." (Live

"And it's just really annoying—the irony of it, you know? You've been affected the same by the system, but one single definition of a word means you don't get the same support as everyone else. I think that's just really frustrating". (Jasmine) 22

Subthemes: Understanding and Recognising Intersecting Identities

"Religion is very important to me, but if they don't even know me as a person, why would they care about what my religion is? I think not knowing like the things I'm interested or passionate about or like aspirations or goals". (Jasmine)

It felt as though it didn't capture the full essence of who I was as a person at the time, and I couldn't really relate to it. So there was always this juxtaposition in terms of like actually sticking towards it" (Truman)

The Power of Lived Experience In Creating Change The Power of Lived Experience In Creating Change The Power of Lived Experience In Creating Change The Power of Lived Experience In Creating Change

Subtheme: Navigating Self-Advocacy and Feeling Heard

"You can ask to see it or make amendments to it [PP reviews], because sometimes there are amendments that I do want to make to it. But because I wasn't vocal enough, I didn't say anything and then I was just like 'I should have said that!" (Truman)

"It was only until, I think, I raised the alarm bells and got in contact with a few advocacy groups that I had that P4 moved on I think it was outside, but you could call them up or ask them to advocate for you. Just to help you out if you felt like misrepresented or unheard" (Jasmine)

"I feel like that experience has very much taught me that if I don't tell people how I feel, then nothing will get going or nothing will move forward." (Lucy)

25



26

Subthemes: Embracing Co-Production in Facilitating Change

"In terms of advice, I would definitely say include young people. But I would say include young people from as broad a background as you can". (Nala)

"Um, consult care experienced people more. When designing these things {PP}, I felt like they were being created by a group of older people who believed they had enough empathy to design them [...] I think it's not enough to just do your job." (Matilda)

"I believe that there's a lot of revisions that need to be made with the pathway plan. Those revisions should be made with the young person involved, so like a group of young people. Like what we've been doing here, it would very much enlightening to them and would be helpful to exchange ideas and discuss what should be involved and what shouldn't" (Truman)

27





28

Mentimeter Join at Menti.com (Code 3596 8667) Do these findings feel useful or important?

What stands out to you?

What does it make you think about?

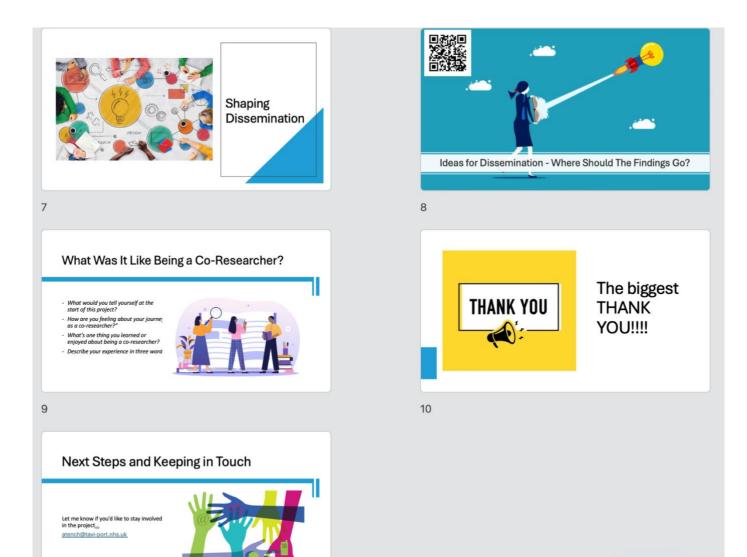
What is it like to hear some of these things?



31

Co-researcher Workshop 4: Shaping Dissemination





Appendix N: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Experiences of the Pathway Plan

- 1. Please could you tell me about your experiences having a pathway plan?
 - a) How did you feel about the support and guidance provided through the plan?

Understanding the Purpose of the Pathway Plan:

- 2. In your view, what do you think is the intended purpose of pathway plans in leaving care?
 - a) Can you tell me how the pathway plan has achieved this purpose in your case?

Impact of the Pathway Plan Post-18:

- 3. How has the pathway plan contributed to your experiences after turning 18?
 - a) Were there any specific areas where the plan was particularly helpful or perhaps less helpful?

Frequency and Adequacy of Reviews

- 4. What is your experience of reviewing your pathway plan?
 - a) Were there times when you felt more frequent reviews would have been helpful?

Relationship with Personal Advisor

- 5. Can you tell me about how your relationship with your PA has influenced your experience of the pathway plan process?
 - a) Can you tell me about your experiences of PA support?
 - b) Were there any areas where you felt more support was needed?

Experience of the Pathway Plan Form Process:

- 6. What is your experience of the process of filling out the pathway plan form?
 - a) Were there any parts of the form that were particularly challenging?
 - b) What would you change about the process of filling out the form, or the form itself?

Individual Experiences

7. Are there any aspects of your identity that you feel may have influenced your experience leaving care and/or having a pathway plan?

You may consider factors such as race, religion, culture, gender, sexual orientation, or class.

Overall Reflections:

- a) Looking back, what if anything would you change about pathway plans or the support you received?
- b) What advice would you give to those responsible for creating and reviewing pathway plans for people with care experience?
- 7. Thank you for sharing your experiences, we have come to the end of my questions. Is there anything else you would like me to know?

Researcher Interview Schedule

START ZOOM, HIDE CAPTIONS

Warm-up: (5 min)

Introductions, check in, rapport (how has your day been so far/what have you been up to/where are you based what's the weather like)

Let them know that I'm so interested in their experiences and could spend all day asking about it but for the purpose of the research I'll have to follow a bit of a structure so I might prompt you with some questions or might move on from some others.

Check somewhere quiet and private?

Are they using their photograph to supplement their experiences and/or to be included as data?

START RECORDING

Introduction:

Welcome and thank you

Purpose of the research: Research exploring the experiences of people who are care experienced with a pathway plan. Participatory approach, participants have also been invited to be co-researchers and develop the research questions/research design.

What led to it: Lack of research, important it is on the agenda for change. Value and importance of incorporating CEYPs in processes around decision making/affecting their transition to independence.

Confirm participants meet criteria for inclusion: Aged 18-25, people with care experience (CEYP) (as outlined by the LA), have experience with a pathway plan

Reasonable adjustments: let me know if at any point you want to pause for a break or stop the interview. Also, if you need me to repeat questions or type them into the chat.

Are you ready to begin?

CHECK-IN, OPTIONAL BREAK

Conclusion:

Ending: Thank you for sharing your experiences. Is there anything else you would like me to know?

STOP RECORDING

Debrief: How did you find sharing your experiences with me? Is there any further support that you feel you require following this conversation? Signpost to support listed on the debrief form.

Do you have any questions about the research?

Reminder regarding confidentiality and anonymity in reporting, and option to withdraw until 3 weeks from now.

Check how participants would like to be identified within the research (gender, age, preferred pseudonym, borough, care status?)

Follow-up prompts and probes:

- Can you tell me a bit more about that?
- How did that make you feel?
- What was that like for you?
- Why do you think that happened?
- Can you give me an example?
- What do you mean by ...?
- What were you thinking at that moment?
- What stood out to you the most?
- Can you describe that experience in more detail?
- How did others react?
- What was the outcome?
- Was there anything that surprised you?
- How did you handle that situation?
- What did you learn from that experience?

Social constructionist lens:

- What influences do you think shaped your view on this?
- What do you think people assume about this?
- Can you describe how others around you saw this?
- How do you think your experiences compare with those of others?
- How do you think your understanding of this has developed over time?
- In what ways do you think your background affects your perspective on this?
- How do you think social expectations play a role here?
- How do you see the role of culture in shaping this?
- What stories or narratives do you think are common around this topic?

Appendix O: Example Co-research Transcript Excerpt

Truman

But yeah, in terms of like the pathway plan, I don't think when I first got it, it really helped or supported me that much.

But it was like later down the line when I had like a PA and she sat me down and really got me to think about it, what I wanted out of it. That's when there was some substance to it. I think the intended purpose is to essentially help the young person to isolate specific goals or timeline their own achievements, and what they want to accomplish... and try and support them on that path. It's quite - it's a very weird thing because sometimes you actually do get the help or sometimes it's just missing, but yeah.

Um, I find it strange for the sole reason is that sometimes I'd say in my case ...

I'm just thinking in my head how to adjust... [long pause]

Truman

Just give me one moment [long pause].

Interviewer

Take your time

[long pause]

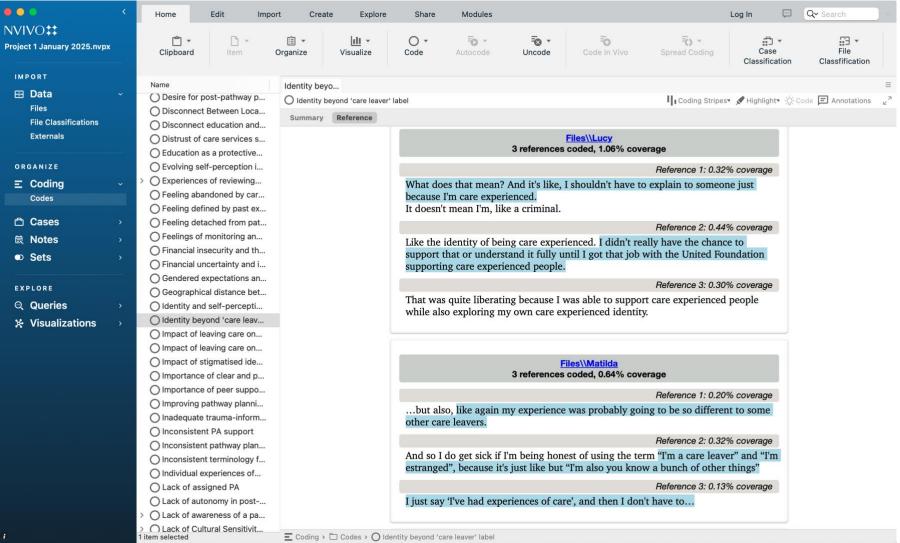
Truman

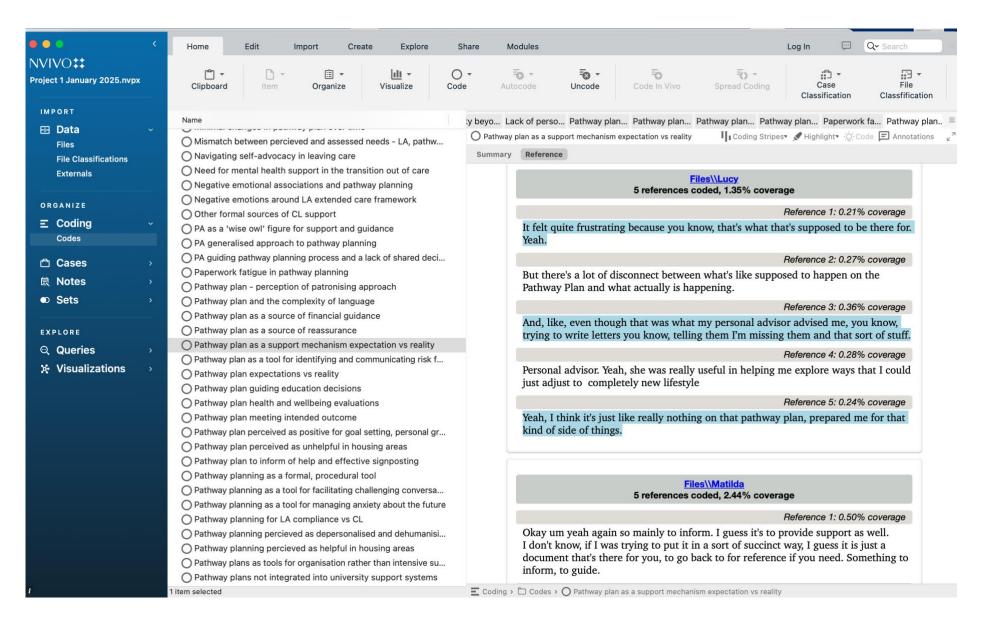
Okay I'll say this right...the first reason why I thought the pathway plan was so weird is because when I look back at my different social workers and my two different PAs, um it was very strange how some social workers or some PAs would look look at it and be like "Oh, it's of very high importance that you have to do it, and it has to be completed"......then others would be like very much laid back on it. And we wouldn't stress too much about it. Yeah, so um It's understandable to for me to be like yeah, it's it's a whole strange ordeal. And even now I still feel a bit indifferent about it. If it was much more a consistent thing, I think It would be much more helpful.

Interviewer

I can see that it's an interesting point..

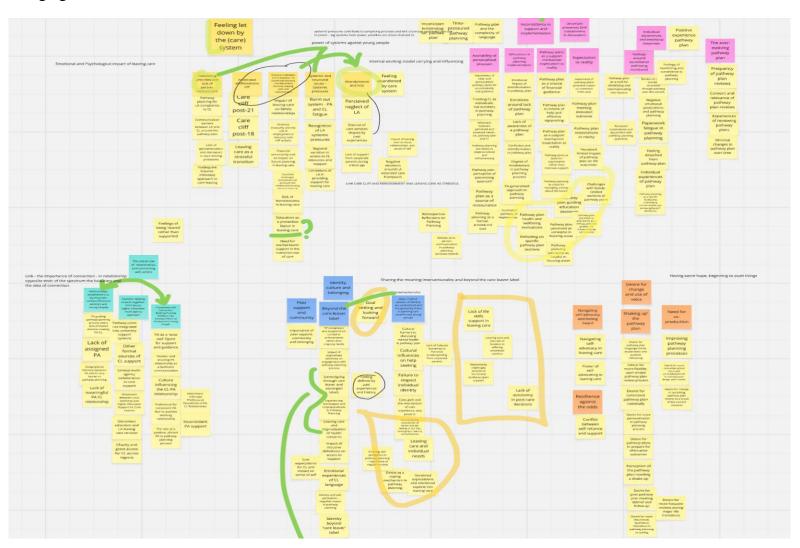
Appendix P: Screenshots of Nvivo Showing Example Thematic Coding for CEYP Narratives





Appendix Q: Screenshot of Miro Mind Maps

Illustrating Emerging Themes from Codes



Illustrating Emerging Themes and Subthemes

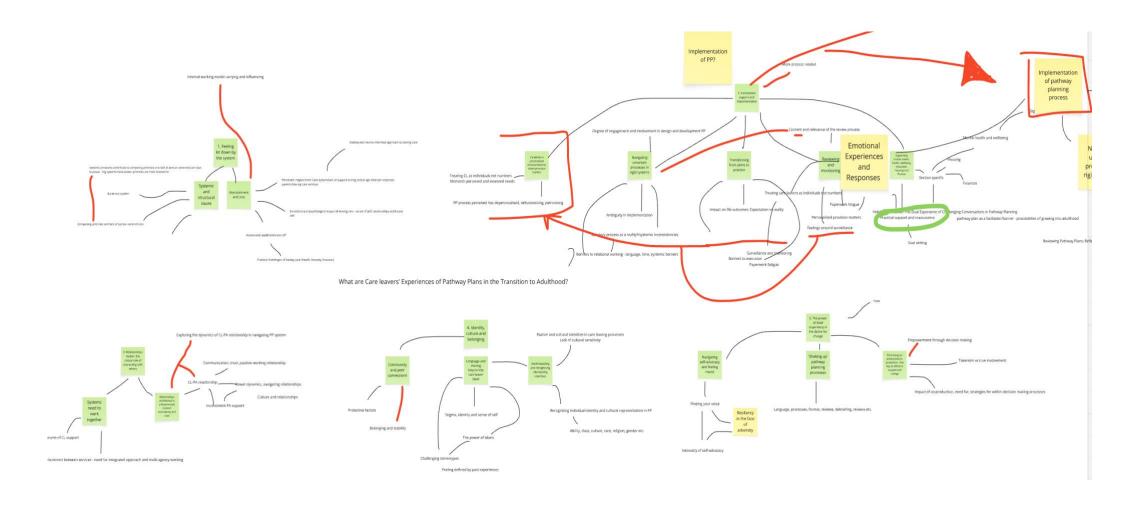


Table A8

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	IPA is a qualitative approach that explores the lived experiences of individuals, offering rich insight into their personal and social realities (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Like RTA, IPA acknowledges the researcher's active role in interpreting data. To deepen analysis, researchers aim to understand participants' emotional and cognitive states (Smith & Osborn, 2003), encouraging them to articulate and explore their feelings rather than simply recount their experiences. However, since IPA emphasises deeply interpreting participants' subjective experiences, I was concerned that it might not fully align with PR, which values the co-construction of knowledge. Participatory approaches focus more on collaborative engagement, where participants actively shape the research process, contrasting to IPA's emphasis on the researchers' interpretation.
Grounded Theory	Grounded Theory is primarily used when the aim is to develop a theory based on data analysis (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019). It assumes that underlying patterns within the data can explain a particular phenomenon or problem, making it more suited to explanatory research rather than descriptive or exploratory inquiries. Given the exploratory nature of this study, I determined that Grounded Theory was not the best fit. I did not see a need to generate a new theoretical model to explain CEYP' experiences given the depth of research already in this field. Instead, I believed that identifying effective practices in this area would be more beneficial for corporate parents and wider leaving care systems. Moreover, as PR often aims to generate shared understandings and practical solutions, the development of a new overarching theory was not a priority.
Content Analysis	Although content analysis and thematic analysis are often conflated, they are distinct analytical methods (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2014). Content analysis is typically more descriptive and often incorporates elements of quantification (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Unlike RTA, content analysis does not explicitly address the researcher's role, personal identity, or worldview. Given my position as the LR, recognising and articulating my assumptions and subjectivity were crucial to the study. Content analysis did not provide the depth required to capture my relationship with participants or the impact of this dynamic on data interpretation. Additionally, content analysis is sometimes criticised for detaching data from its contextual background (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Given the increasing number of CEYP and the evolving landscape of local authority work, maintaining contextual integrity in applying findings was essential. As a result, content analysis was not chosen for this study. Content analysis also runs the risk of detaching data from its context, which is critical in

	participatory research where the contextual integrity of findings must be preserved. Given the complexity of CEYP's experiences and the evolving landscape of LA work, content analysis was not chosen.
Codebook Thematic Analysis	Positioned between coding reliability and RTA, Codebook Thematic Analysis employs a structured framework for coding through a predefined codebook. This approach often prioritises consensus among researchers or frequency of occurrences to determine the significance of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). While efficient, its rigid structure could have excluded potentially valuable themes, particularly in a participatory setting where themes emerge dynamically through collective exploration. In contrast, the flexible nature of RTA better suited the needs of this study, allowing themes to evolve organically and ensuring that reflexivity and researcher influence were fully incorporated.

Appendix S: Amendment to Trust Research Ethics Application (received 22.04.24) and Ethical Approval

The following comment was raised:

Condition	Comments	How was the condition met?
1.	Provide a risk assessment commenting on risks to the researcher and any mitigations.	 Discussion with Research Supervisor and Course Research Lead Inclusion of Fieldwork Risk Assessment Audit (Appendix F) Amendments made to section 5, discussing researcher risk assessment and further considerations to lone working and location of interviews.
2.	Do you have any advisory comments relating to the proposed project or methodology? (this section is optional): A minor point, but the application says the participants will be given a gift voucher of the value of £20, whereas the information sheet just says they will be paid £20 – this should be clarified one way or the other.	This has been addressed and the information sheet has been updated, to say that coresearchers will be given a £20 high street voucher.

Appendix F: Amendment to Trust Research Ethics Application (21.06.24)

The following comment was raised:

Amendment	Comments	How was the condition met?
Amendment to recruitment method.	- Changes to recruitment approach. Coresearchers will be invited to participate as members of the Pan London Children in Care Council (CICC). Recruitment snowballing (chain-referral sampling) will also be used as a method for recruiting care leavers. Participation Officers and care leavers that are part of a London CICC will use their network, to recruit members from their respective care	 Discussion with Research Supervisor. In addition to employing an opportunity sample, snowball sampling through Participation Officers and current members of CICCs will effectively facilitate recruitment for studies within the pan-London network, enabling access to a broad and diverse participant pool. Amendments made to section F and 7 of TREC, discussing the value of also including snowball sampling.

- councils and/or reach out to care leavers that they know who might be interested in participating.
- Snowball sampling can be particularly useful in care leaver research due to the unique characteristics and challenges associated with recruiting this vulnerable and hard-to-reach group. Using networks through snowball sampling can lead to higher participation rates and more comprehensive data.
- This method of sampling can build trust and leveraging existing trust networks.
 This might make potential participants more likely to get involved and trust recommendations from peers.
- Some care leavers may be hesitant to identify themselves due to stigma or privacy concerns. Snowball sampling can also help in identifying care leavers who might otherwise remain hidden.
- Ethical considerations including confidentiality, ensuring voluntary participation and informed consent will be followed, clearly outlining the process and use of snowball sampling.



Quality Assurance & Enhancement Directorate of Education & Training Tavistock Centre 120 Belsize Lane London NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/

Anna Tench

By Email

10 May 2024

Dear Anna,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: 'Preparing for Adulthood: Participatory Research Exploring the Experiences of Care leavers with Pathway Plans.'

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Franklyn

Academic Governance and Quality Officer

T: 020 938 2699

E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

RE: Anna Tench Ethics re-submission 02.07.24 Paru Jeram <PJeram@tavi-Port.nhs.uk> Thursday 18 July 2024 at 13:24 To: Anna Tench; Cc: Philip Archard; Ben Craik; Michael Franklyn; Academic Quality; +1 more TREC Application Fo... A MB Download • Preview

Dear Anna,

Please accept my apologies for the delays in responding to your request for a change in your research protocol.

I can confirm that I have received your updated TREC documentation in light of the changes to the recruitment approach and I can confirm that the changes have been approved. You may proceed with your research.

Your updated TREC form is attached.

<u>Please note that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc.</u>, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

Kind regards,

Paru

Mrs Paru Jeram

Senior Academic Governance and Quality Officer Academic Registry <u>Doctoral Student Research and Research Ethics</u> Spelling mistakes are possible – apologies in advance

Appendix T: Application of Yardley's (2000) Principles

Table A9

Yardley (2000)	Established by:
Criteria	
Sensitivity to Context	 The LR maintained a heightened awareness of the relevant literature and theory throughout the entire research process, from planning to writing up, ensuring sensitivity to the experiences of CEYPs. In addition, the researcher attended a conference by the Public Policy Exchange ('Improving Outcomes for CEYPs: Can a New Government Break the Care Ceiling?') in on the 23^{rd of} July 2024 to further develop their understanding and immerse themselves in the political landscape and current issues facing CEYPs in the UK. The participatory approach enabled the co-researchers' to interpret and provide fresh perspectives on the findings, free from biases influenced by prior literature. The relationship between the LR and co-researchers has been carefully examined, with attention to power dynamics and the use of a reflective diary to uncover potential biases. This ensured the research remained sensitive to both its theoretical foundations and the socio-cultural context in which the data was collected. The study was critically evaluated the participatory research methods considering the theoretical context underlying its methodological approach. Additionally, the findings are connected to the theoretical context in the discussion through the process of vertical generalisation (Johnson, 1997) ensuring a robust integration of theory and practice.
Commitment and	- Rigour in participatory research depends on quality participation and fair distribution of power. The LR aimed to promote
Rigour	 co-researchers' voices giving them ownership and opportunities for decision making throughout the study. For Process Validity (Aldridge, 2016, 2017), the LR supported the research capacities of co-researchers with basic research ethics and method training. The LR developed expertise and skill in the RTA process. LR followed updated guidance from Braun and Clarke (2022) to ensure a robust RTA process. Testimonial Validity: co-researchers supported the design of the data collection method and interview questions. They also provided their interpretations of the researcher' analysis and provided input on dissemination options. The LR used research supervision to ensure data collection was conducted sensitively and rigourously e.g., using open questions/ avoiding value laden questions.

Transparency and	- The LR ensured alignment between the epistemological and ontological perspectives, the methodological approach, and the
Coherence	research aims.
	- Transparency was maintained with co-researchers regarding their participation and autonomy, using tools like Google
	Forms to schedule workshops and accommodate time constraints.
	- The research process, including data collection, storage, analysis, and use, was clearly communicated to co-researchers throughout their involvement.
	- Co-researchers received detailed information on how their contributions shaped the study.
	- The LR fostered trust by sharing their background, beliefs, and experiences when appropriate.
	- Research supervision was used to validate patterns and themes during RTA, ensuring rigour and alignment with participatory principles.
Impact and Importance	- This research provides insights into CEYPs' experiences with PPs during the transition out of care. By adopting a
	participatory approach, it offers novel perspectives on the priorities of CEYPs, shaped through their involvement in
	designing data collection tools.
	- It empowered a small group of CEYP to actively participate in a doctoral-level research project, centering their voices in the
	research process and acknowledging them as experts in their own experiences.
	- The findings have potential applications for policy, practice, and guidance related to leaving care in the UK.

Appendix U: Additional Supporting Quotes from Co-researcher Transcripts

Table A10

Supporting Quotes	
Theme 1: Feeling Let Down by the System	
"It's always been, there's always been a caveat when I've asked for help or advice withlike" but you have	
your Pathway Plan?" by the way. I think once, even, I got a link to a copy from my PA of the Pathway Plan,	
[] which makes me think - is it, as much as it serves a purpose for me, is it not, is it less helpful in that it can be	
used as a sort of "we've done what we need to" by local councils and PAs? Because it felt like that sometimes" (Matilda, A1)	
(Mathua, A1)	
"I think to sum it up, in the letter that they had as a response to the complaint my name was spelled wrong. My	
first name and my second name" (Nala A1)	
"I still struggle with things that have happened to me, but I don't identify with the system—as cringe as that	
sounds. [] (Nala A2)	
"Okay, with the form itself So, it felt like a checklist, really. Yeah, I think each and every single one [pathway	
plan] felt very much like a checklist" (Nala A3)	
"In one old report I found, there was just no sense of humanness in it. It was like they were just doing it because	
they had to, to tick a box, not because they cared" (Nala A4)	
"And there is like the core sliff becoming an adult" (I very A1)	
"And there is like the care cliff, becoming an adult" (Lucy A1)	
"By like 20, they want you out and gone." (Jasmine A1)	
25 me 20, and man you out and gone. (vasinine 111)	

"To me it's weird that they never ask me what I even want to do in life. It's weird, as a CPs, most parents I think would want to ask or have a general idea of like what their kids or young people wanted or even desired or were passionate about." (Jasmine A2)

"I'm like still under them. I hate how that sounds I hate that language. And I'm just, it really confuses me because I absolutely still struggle. Like I really still struggle. Some things that have happened to me, but then I still don't identify with the system, as cringe as that sounds" (Nala A5)

"And I think my distrust stems from the fact that, from a young age, I couldn't trust services because they failed to intervene when they should have". (Nala A6)

"Like not to be rude, but I just feel like the whole way that services are set up are just not trauma-informed at all". (Nala A7)

"There's nothing clear or constructive they're offering to get involved with. But at the same time, it feels contradictory because they're constantly prodding and wanting to know all this personal information. But they're not trained for it, so they can't actually do anything with the information they're asking for. It makes the whole conversation feel pointless. In that sense, it's not a helpful relationship because I'm not gaining anything from it because it just feels like I'm informing them". (Nala A8)

"Yet I was still in that position [living] with those people. And when I turned 17, none of those people that were, like, sitting around the table writing questionnaires, ticking questionnaires and asking me questions, were anywhere to be seen". (Nala A8)

"They just felt like I survived the first year, and then, you know, you're like basically 20 now, you should be fine" (Lucy A2)

"It felt quite stressful in that sense. It's like the case they tried to close the cases at 21. Some people would just get a text message from their PA and that was it of their case was being closed". (Jasmine A3)

	"It was really messy. I had to go to the civic centre to tell them I was homeless. Like, it was really undignifying."(Nala A9)
Theme 2: Implementation	of Pathway Planning Processes
Subtheme: Emotional Experiences and Responses	"I think I talked about this section on like sort of family contact levels. I can't remember how it was raised. That was a shock" (Matilda A2) "Parts of the form that were particularly challenging were again, like the family stuff, it was destabilising a little bit, because you know family's always difficult and writing stuff down on paper about them, you know finding ways to put it into words, is weird as well" (Lucy A3) "It felt like we were making decisions about you know family contact levels, but I thought that would be purely up to me. Well it is, but the fact that it was included [in the PP] was a bit puzzling". (Matilda A3)
	"Yeah, she [PA] left it to last actually - that [family] section she said, "I'll leave the worst till last"" (Matilda A4). "I remember being given this questionnaire a few times when I was around 17. I made my feelings clear - I felt it wasn't appropriate, and I refused to do it. I wouldn't have anything to do with it, because I just saw it as a thing that they're making me do rather than something that I would find any value in. And it kind of makes me feel sick actually, like how much of other people's narratives are in this file that has my name on it. Because it's just not me. It's not a representation of me." (Nala A10) "I just saw it [PP] as a thing that they're making me do rather than something that I would find any value in" (Nala A11) "I find the whole thing really challenging. It just doesn't feel appropriate. I can't think of a good analogy for it, but it's like, you know, it's so intrusive. There's nothing that's being done about any of that. For example, if I put on there [PP] drugs and alcohol, if I put 10, like, I'm really, really struggling with this, what are they going to do about it? Just like, write a referral? Something I could have done myself. Like, it just feels so patronising". (Nala A12)

	"Okay, with the form itself So, it felt like a checklist, really. Yeah, I think each and every single pathway plan felt very much like a checklist" (Truman A1). "I just like to see it for what it is, which is, yeah, it gives me some form of comfort. It feels good" (Matilda A5). "I think it was just knowing that they were there helped me through a stressful period of changelike not the content of it or the results of it, but just by knowing that, you know, in a few months' time [the PP will be reviewed]." (Matilda A5) "Because I think one of the things for me was I really struggled to like understand and formulate ideas of my own of what could have gone into the form." (Lucy A4)
Subtheme: Navigating Uncertain Processes in Rigid Systems	"I was just like ah here we go again like more wrong information, after all these things I say I'm frustrated they say about me" (Jasmine A4) "And it still had information about like I was living at my family, which I was like how does that make any sense? Like I think I was laughing because it was so ridiculous" (Jasmine A5) "I don't know when that was from because I was just confused, I was like why would I be in college and why would I be at this GP I've never heard of?" (Jasmine A6) "This was earlier this year they checked, so to me it concerns me that that information was still there from 2018, and the fact that it was wrong anyway" (Jasmine A7) "There's some sort of information like this on the pathway plan, so I know it's not completely forgotten, but I don't know which is worse. If they didn't do it or if they have one that's got wrong information" (Jasmine A8) "Then when they said, okay, no, it does exist, but it's just got this information, it's like, I guess for me, I think it would have been better for me if they said it didn't exist, because to me it didn't". (Jasmine A9)

Practice: Exploring Key	
Subtheme: Plans to	"But I think a lot of the sections, I don't really think have directly helped me" (Truman A2)
	maybe every six months as It's as in a lot of other councils is more helpful" (Matilda A9)
	"I don't know if the frequency would have helped me particularly, but I do think more than once a year like
	"The overarching word that comes to me is 'patronising.' That's how it feels if I were to describe it in one word (Nala A15).
	"It's something that's predictable. A blanket, a comforter." (Matilda A8)
	"It does just feel like I'm part of the service evaluation, of like how well they're doing. It feels like I'm in prison. just makes you feel like an inmate" (Nala A14)
	"I think it's just a way of getting lots of thoughts about lots of like horrible situations onto paper" (Matilda A7)
	"Like I'm not going to put my deepest darkest fears on this form that's going to be sent around" (Nala A13).
	"Then especially when delivering the training on pathway plans, and the whole point was to get PAs to try to include young people in them. So, it felt so like foreign to me that I'm delivering training on something I've never experienced" (Jasmine A11)
	"It is really quite infrequent now, it's like every six months." (Lucy A6)
	"On the odd occasion, if you use a really technical language, I don't understand, then rewording something could just help it all click in place." (Lucy A5)
	"It's like a scheduled opportunity. It's not something I've heavily relied on, but I just think, it just provides structure." (Matilda A6)
	"It's like I've lived it, so believe me if I said I didn't go to that college!" (Jasmine A10)

Areas of the Pathway Plan

"It was mostly because I wanted to return back into education and that's because I was like okay I didn't get the grades that I wanted initially. So I went back did it again and I'm still in education now. But yeah I think it did have a big impact." (Truman A3)

"We talked about finding out support, setting up the counselling, making sure that I felt supported with my mental health. And then she really encouraged me to sign up for the gym, so I signed up to do swimming" (Lucy A7).

"Even the questions they ask, like one about identity - how much I struggle with it on a scale of one to ten - or about drugs and alcohol. These are things they wouldn't be able to help with anyway" (Nala A16).

"At the time, it was putting in my pathway plan to be active and be much healthier because I was very much of a recluse, just at home, doing nothing. So, we got that into place." (Truman A4)

"I don't know if that's too strong a word, but a bit like, you know, well, that's useless, thanks a lot. Thanks for nothing" (Matilda A10).

"Not having a guarantor, not any support around that, like that kind of stuff could have been helpful at the beginning" (Nala A17)

"I think whilst I didn't want to like bring it into that sort of area, it didn't feel like there was a prompt to. Because I was very much answering the pathway plan how it how it asked to be answered. I didn't feel like there was a...that they wanted me to" (Matilda A11)

"To my understanding, it's meant to support, I guess it's meant to give like a framework for some of the needs or support you might need, especially transitioning in leaving care". (Truman A5)

"I felt like I put all of that effort out there, only to be met with, "Actually, we don't want to know you anymore." It was really distressing" (Lucy A8)

Yeah, that was one of the things that was included [in the PP] because I absolutely despised going to the dentists. I was just gonna abandon it." (Lucy A9)

Theme 3: Relationships Matter: The Critical Role of Connecting with Others	
Subtheme: Systems Need to Work Together	"Like, there are so many people with care experience that are in higher education. But it just didn't feel like anyone kind of had that, anything. So, it kind of felt like they just didn't know what to do with me" (Nala A18).
	"16. And I was like, what do you mean I have 16 SWs? I don't remember meeting 16 SWs" (Nala A19).
	"And then there's similar things here, like the, um, the Mayor of London runs, or, you know, like just similar grants or charities or events, but she doesn't, like, know or agree." (Matilda A12)
	"I think I was really fortunate in that last year when XX gave me that job at the United Foundation. I really needed that to pay for groceries. And I got a lot of support in writing that first cover letter because I really didn't have a clue what to do" (Lucy 10)
	"Even when I was applying, they didn't know anything about the process or what I needed. Whenever I asked a question, they'd respond with, "Oh, we don't know. We need to check." It felt like they [LA] didn't know anyone else who had gone to university or had experience with it." (Nala 20)
	"It was this mentoring organisation called 'Say Yes' Mentoring. They gave me one of their volunteer mentors, and it's like a mentoring program, meeting weekly like over WhatsApp video. They were the first person who I had met like earlier this year, so around April, and they'd actually come to the sessions, and I could tell they wanted to be there. I enjoyed it and I was shocked by it because it's like, this is dodgy, why do you want to be here? Like you don't need to be here, you're volunteering!!" (Jasmine A12)
Subtheme: Relationships in a Bureaucratic Context: Consistency and Trust	"There's nothing clear or constructive they're offering to get involved with. But at the same time, it feels contradictory because they're constantly prodding and wanting to know all this personal information. But they're not trained for it, so they can't actually do anything with the information they're asking for. It makes the whole conversation feel pointless. In that sense, it's not a helpful relationship because I'm not gaining anything from it because it just feels like I'm informing them." (Nala A21)

	"I'm capable. I'm doing a doctorate, like what? And in those spaces, people trust me as a human and I'm seen as somebody who's capable. Yet in these other spaces, it's like, "oh my God, you must be so damaged". I must have to explain every single thing to you. Like you must be taking drugs. You must be taking alcohol, like all these things." (Nala A24)
Care Leaver Label	shouldn't have to explain to someone just because I'm care experienced" (Nala 23)
and Moving Beyond the	like, you have to go through the whole thing of actually explaining. What does that mean? And it's like, I
Subtheme: Language	"I think that really, like, especially even now when you come to uni and you say, yes, I'm care experienced, it's
and Peer Connections	
Subtheme: Community	
Theme 4: Identity, Cultur	e and Belonging
	"I don't need them. It's weird. It's like an artificial relationship. And then suddenly they want to know everything about my life." (Nala A22)
	"I've had three PAs now, the first one was non-existent." (Jasmine A14)
	"I think it's good because it keeps it professional because you shouldn't be too attached to someone who is a service provider and is looking after you. Yeah, I think professionalism is there for a reason, right?" (Matilda A14)
	"I don't have any PA. Since then I'm unassigned, but my case is still open" (Jasmine A13)
	"She didn't want me to prioritise education, and she wanted me to move into semi-independent accommodation." (Truman A6)
	"Just having a PA that's - she was also very, very vibrant, very, like, colourful. Her clothes were quite loud and proud. I think having someone like that take you through this process did make it easier because, I don't know, she's a very, very positive person." (Matilda 13)

For example, with LSE, when I joined, I noticed their definition was different from other universities." (Matilda A14)

"You are almost like a lower social class to everyone else because you are in care. Almost like everyone sees you as, like, you used to be a really bad child." (Lucy A11)

"Yeah, I think the language used can be really dehumanising. I know like language training is such a thing" (Lucy A12)

"There's a resistance to help from institutions, and I feel like it comes from village culture back home in Lebanon. If help is offered, you should take it. But in the back of my head, there's still this feeling. Like, even now, when I want to go back to Manchester City to visit my mates, I'll stay with a mate and their mum - I've stayed with them so many times. But it still feels like, why am I staying in someone else's home? I don't know. It has definitely influenced me. It's always there in the back of your mind because I don't think you can ever fully separate from parts of your culture, right? You are always influenced by your biases and thoughts." (Matilda A15)

Subtheme: Understanding and Recognising Intersecting Identities

Because in my first initial pathway plan, I was just recently coming to care. I didn't even know that I was autistic. So, with my first social worker, we were trying to get me to, you know, get the diagnosis for it." (Truman A7)

"A social worker came to see me and said, "Oh, you're mixed-race?" I didn't know that.' That was... great. It wasn't great - just for the record. That moment really summed up my entire experience, because anyone who actually knows me would know that's something really important to me. [...]. I feel like, you know, being in care is difficult for numerous reasons, but when you have mixed heritage, I feel like it's even more confusing" (Nala A25)

"I feel like also my identity as a mixed-race person, um, that's been really like tricky for me to navigate. They haven't been helpful with that. Um, I guess XX [PA] more so, but like this is a wider systemic issue". (Nala A26)

"This whole identity was something that I really wanted to push away for a really long time. So actually, having anyone come into my space and give me a questionnaire [Pathway Plan] about my life, I really struggled with. It's like, you don't even know my identity" (Nala A27)

"I remember being given a social worker who was Zimbabwean, and it was written in my notes that it might help me to connect or like understand my heritage. And I'm Jamaican and English. She was really like unhelpful in every sense of the word. But that like feeling of, oh, we've got two black people. Let's just like put them together because surely they'll just understand each other. When actually you know, there's two different cultures". (Nala A28)

"My ASD, my autism has had a significant impact on how I viewed my pathway plan and how I experienced it as well. [...]. When I moved on to my first PA, she would go out of her way to just deny that I actually had a diagnosis - when I had an actual written diagnosis of autism. And it made me feel like this world couldn't really be real, like nothing made sense". (Truman A8)

Theme 5: The Power of Lived Experience in Creating Change

Subtheme: Navigating Self-Advocacy and Feeling Heard

"I would also make sure I take my time and explore the different options rather than just agreeing to the first thing that was offered to me, because that's what I often did. I just say often one thing and I'm like 'that's fine' even though it wasn't really useful" (Lucy A13)

"In the areas where I do struggle, I'm able to identify those myself. I have the capacity to recognise them, and I'm already being supported by a specialist team" (Nala A29)

"I'm involved in quite a bit of their [CiCC] work. But no, I wouldn't say it's supportive for me. Like I feel involved and passionate, and glad like to have quite a good relationship with them. And I'm glad we can like influence policy." (Jasmine A14)

Subtheme: 'Shaking Up' the Pathway Planning Process

"I think no one has mentioned that the explanation of what it was for wasn't clearly communicated in a way that's easy for younger people to understand". (Lucy A14)

"And even now I still feel a bit indifferent about it. If it was much more a consistent thing, I think it would be much more helpful" (Truman A9)

"It's just wondering if the pathway plan itself needs a bit of a ... shakeup"

"I think like when I was going from second into third year, that would have been helpful, like to follow up, like maybe a couple of months later." (Lucy A15)

"And definitely make sure they're properly briefed on the purpose it serves." (Matilda A16)

"Then like my advice would be make sure you understand why the pathway plan steps and actions in place can help you later on. Have an idea of any support you'd like in case things go wrong." (Lucy A16)

"I think creating a way that like they're held accountable for not including people who are like verifying it with the young person." (Jasmine A15)

I'm sure they did consult care-experienced kids to some extent - when designing pathway plans, but I think it's not enough to just do your job." (Matilda A17)

"I think having some sort of like way so that things like my case don't happen in the future. (Jasmine A16)

"Yeah, you could actually sit down with your PA, and they tell you what the pathway plan is. And what is expected from the young person and the outcomes of that" (Truman A10).

And then each day they tackle different things whether it's their mental wellbeing, whether it's their education, their short -term goals, long -term goals. And it is a whole person thing rather than just a few pages and it's very much detailed to that person." (Truman A11)

"I don't know who gets a copy of the pathway plan. I still don't know" (Matilda A18).

"In doing the pathway plan, I feel like the young person should be given much more insight into what the system as a whole can do to help them, if that makes sense" (Truman A12).

"Obviously finances and housing in particular. I think those would have set me up for planning much earlier on because I didn't really understand that I probably would have needed a backup plan and what to do if there is an issue". (Lucy A17)

	"Like a dictionary or something of just like basic terms [] saying this is what you can be entitled to based on your abilities, or who you can go to if you need any help with applying to housing benefits or universal credit". (Lucy 18) "It's just wondering if the pathway plan itself needs a bit of a shakeup" (Matilda, A19)
Subtheme: Embracing	
Co-Production to Drive	
Meaningful Change	

Appendix V: Practical Steps for Supporting Young People's Self-Determination. Adapted from Hyde and Atkinson (2019)

Autonomy

- Young parents provided with clear guidance around ways of returning to training or education with accompanying childcare options.
- Young people have opportunities to experiment with independence skills in 'real-life' contexts as part of a graduated approach (e.g. making appointments).
- To maximise young people's engagement with career, further education or employment planning, consideration given to involving young person's key adult in school or college settings in this process. This key adult might facilitate opportunities to attend open days, college/training site visits.
- Access to high-quality work experience linked to their training or education, training or career goal.
- Young people are supported to gain ownership over their Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and Pathway Plans.
- Young people understand the benefits and purposes of the general act of planning ahead, given how PEPs and Pathway Plans figure in their lives.
- Flexible systems that accommodate previous interruptions to young people's education or training pathways if applicable.
- Given the role that emotional wellbeing and mental health can play in facilitating or undermining young people's autonomous motivation in relation to post-16 goals, early access to support services must be prioritised.
- EPs could provide therapeutic support to facilitate care leavers' engagement with post-16 priorities.

Figure 4: (Continued) Practicable steps for supporting young people's self-determination.

Autonomy

- Young parents provided with clear guidance around ways of returning to training or education with accompanying childcare options.
- Young people have opportunities to experiment with independence skills in 'real-life' contexts as part of a graduated approach (e.g. making appointments).
- To maximise young people's engagement with career, further education or employment planning, consideration given to involving young person's key adult in school or college settings in this process. This key adult might facilitate opportunities to attend open days, college/training site visits.
- Access to high-quality work experience linked to their training or education, training or career goal.
- Young people are supported to gain ownership over their Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and Pathway Plans.
- Young people understand the benefits and purposes of the general act of planning ahead, given how PEPs and Pathway Plans figure in their lives.
- Flexible systems that accommodate previous interruptions to young people's education or training pathways if applicable.
- Given the role that emotional wellbeing and mental health can play in facilitating or undermining young people's autonomous motivation in relation to post-16 goals, early access to support services must be prioritised.
- EPs could provide therapeutic support to facilitate care leavers' engagement with post-16 priorities.

Figure 4: (Continued) Practicable steps for supporting young people's self-determination.