

Book Review

Book Title

Beyond 18 - Leaving child care institutions: a study of aftercare practices in five states of India. UNICEF: India Country Office. Available at:

https://www.udayancare.org/upload/Reports/2019-20/Full%20report_%20Beyond%2018.pdf

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This is a review of an overview report of a study conducted by Udayan Care in India with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Tata Trusts and the five State Governments of Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

The study is based on a sample of 435 care leavers and over 100 key informants, including professionals working on the ground on child protection in the five states. The data for the five states highlights consistently poor outcomes in education, housing, life skills and other domains of the lives of the care leavers within the study, as well as highlighting state level variances in care leavers' experiences and outcomes. Across the states, the study shows that the quality of support received by care leavers is not comprehensive and that their journey to adulthood is often disrupted, unstable and full of challenges.

There are many similarities across national contexts, in terms of issues highlighted in the report as well as proposed solutions that resonate with those involved in research, policy and practice with care leavers. For example, despite clear laws and policies, and research evidence into 'what works', there is the challenge of consistent implementation with variations within and across each of the five states, resulting in what may be described as a 'post-code lottery' of supports and services. This is a picture that will be familiar to many in Scotland.

The study proposes a 'Sphere of Aftercare' concept, or model, which offers a framework for support across eight interdependent domains (such as housing, health and wellbeing, education and so on) much like the [Pathways Planning](#) headings or pillars of the [Scottish Care Leavers Covenant](#). This acknowledges the interconnected holistic needs of young people transitioning from care to adulthood as well as making the case for improved inter-agency planning and collaboration.

The study calls for a renewed political commitment and leadership at both local and national levels to remove the practical barriers faced by care leavers as they transition to adulthood and increasing independence.

The study also makes a number of key recommendations including: the need to recognise care leavers as a distinct vulnerable group (a protected characteristic); strengthening the voices of care leavers; greater collaboration amongst agencies; an improved focus on the implementation of existing legislation and policies; as well as proposing changes to specific aspects of legislation and policy to improve planning and strengthening entitlements.

Overall this is a fairly comprehensive study, both accessible and clear in its findings and recommendations. Whilst targeted primarily at a domestic audience, the common themes, issues, challenges and potential solutions will be familiar and resonate strongly across different national contexts. Despite the political, cultural and social differences in India – and the scale of the issues they face in comparison to many western countries – there is a positive core to this report. It is well balanced in identifying challenges and issues, alongside offering clear, tangible evidence-based recommendations for change and improvement. Running through the study is a clear values-based and rights-informed message which acknowledges the hopes and dreams of care leavers and calls for a renewed commitment to ensure them 'a life of dignity as well as protection from moral and material abandonment' (p.19). This is a message that transcends national contexts and one that needs repeating regularly in Scotland and across the UK.

Reference

Azam, A., Ganotra, K., Madhavan, L. Prasad, L., Bhargava, R., Kasana, S. & Roy, S. (2019). Beyond 18 - leaving child care institutions: Supporting youth leaving care; A study of aftercare practices. Delhi: Udayan Care. Retrieved from <https://www.udayancare.org/research-and-publication/research-studies-and-papers>

About the author

Kenny McGhee is the Throughcare and Aftercare Lead with CELCIS, based at the University of Strathclyde. Kenny has been actively involved in the development and implementation of policy, practice and research into issues to improve services and outcomes for young people transitioning from care to adulthood and interdependence. He works with corporate parents and other key stakeholders at both national and local level to close the implementation gap between policy and practice.