

# People at the Centre Update 14



## **COVID-19 has exacerbated and amplified the precariousness of many care leavers' situations**

The new October 2020 [briefing from Scottish Care Leavers Covenant Alliance 'Collaborative Voice', "The challenge of 2020: Supporting care leavers in Scotland during the pandemic and beyond"](#) draws together learning from their networks and partners to share how care leavers have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and offers a number of associated recommendations.

The briefing reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has "exposed the structural disadvantage and discrimination that many care leavers face". It also highlighted a number of key priority areas including:

- Digital Inclusion
- Continuing Care, Housing and Accommodation
- Mental Health
- Relationship Based Practice

### **Digital Inclusion**

The briefing concludes that as more services have moved online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital inclusion has become a crucial factor in care leavers ability to access health services, maintain social contact, support their mental health and wider wellbeing.

Recommendation summary: Digital connection must be regarded as a right

Further information on the challenges that face care leavers who have been digitally excluded during COVID-19 and the recommended actions to address these can be found in the [report "Bridging the digital divide for care experiences young people in Scotland: If not now, when?"](#)

## Mental Health

“Social isolation and loneliness are significant factors in relation to mental health and emotional wellbeing for care leavers”

Scottish Care Leavers Covenant shared that physical and social distancing measures, coupled with anxieties surrounding the impact of the virus on family, friends and lack of control, has had a significant negative effect on the mental health and wellbeing of care leavers.

Recognising that mental health services were already stretched prior to COVID-19, the briefing reports that appropriate mental health services are now increasingly difficult to access as the criteria for support has been reduced, resulting in long waiting lists for those who do not meet them. Regional and geographic variation in mental health provision further complicate the picture.

“Social isolation, combined with precarious finances, uncertainties about work or college, challenges of parenting and at times little or no ability to connect via digital media, make for a ‘perfect storm’ for an already disadvantaged, vulnerable group, many of whom may still be struggling with unresolved childhood trauma”

### Recommendation summaries:

- Access to mental health services for care leavers, whose vulnerabilities and disadvantage are already established as a national concern, must be prioritised.
- Corporate parents must recognise the vital role and agility of partners in the voluntary and community sector to promote mental wellbeing amongst care leavers and ensure appropriate sustained funding.

The Scottish Care Leavers Covenant is coproduced by a cross-sector alliance of organisations: Barnardo's Scotland, Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS), Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice (CYCJ), Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS), Life Changes Trust, Quarriers, Staf and Who Cares? Scotland