

TITLE OF REPORT: Case Study on Support to Care Leavers
REPORT OF: Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning

Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the OSC's views on the provision on the support offered to care leavers and forward these views to the Looked After Children's Team

Background

2. Performance reports have been presented to OSC to demonstrate how we are meeting our performance targets and how we compare both regionally and nationally in relation to Looked After Children. Following the last report presented to OSC they requested further information on the support to Care Leavers, particularly focusing on Education, Employment and Training as there were concerns about the cohort of young people in education, employment and training being lower than the national and regional average.

Care Leavers Offer

3. An increasing focus is being placed on care leavers and every local authority has a statutory duty under the Children Leaving care Act 2000 to offer care leavers support, advice and guidance. Gateshead publishes their current offer on the Council website, which outlines the services and support we offer our care leavers
4. Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Government introduced the requirement for local authorities to publish a 'Local Care Leaver Offer', which outlines the services for care leavers available within the local authority area. This offer is a combination of statutory entitlements as well as how Gateshead and its partners can give over and above their statutory duty. The Local Offer will be published in April 2018 and it will include:
 - Council tax exemption for care leavers up to the age of 25
 - Peer mentoring
 - Housing pathway with a range of options for young people
 - An improved employment, education and training offer from both within the council and from partners
 - Support from our partners and local businesses to support our care leavers both practically, emotionally and culturally

The Role of the Corporate Parent

5. Gateshead have always been very clear about their role as Corporate Parents for Looked After Children and Care Leavers and have always had high aspirations for a child in care or care leaver as any good parent would have for their own child. It means providing them with the stability and support they need to make progress; helping them to access new opportunities and experiences that inspire them to set ambitious goals for themselves. It means celebrating their successes, but also recognising that they will sometimes make mistakes and need help to get back on track. It also means supporting them to gain the skills and confidence to live independent lives, while letting them know that they have someone to call on for help if the going gets tough.
6. The Government has introduced a set of Corporate Parenting principles that require all departments within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, and encourage them to look at the support and services they provide. The principles require corporate parents:
 - To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
 - To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
 - To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
 - To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
 - To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
 - For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
 - To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
7. These principles are being shared with Councilors, directors and managers across services to ensure we can give our Looked After young people and care leavers the best possible opportunities

The Role of the Personal Advisor

8. Prior to the young person's sixteenth birthday a needs assessment will be carried out by the young person's social worker and a Personal Advisor will be allocated. The personal advisor will initially work alongside the young person's social worker attending Looked After Reviews and obtaining the views of the young person about their plan for the future and who will be responsible in supporting the young person. They produce a pathway plan for the young person and are responsible for reviewing and updating this.
9. Independent living skills will be promoted by the personal advisor with the young person making their way through the Independent Living Skills Booklet.

This booklet not only educates and promotes, it allows the professionals working with the young person to assess their skills for adulthood.

10. When the young person turns 18 the personal advisor continues to work with them, ensuring they have the right support in place, coordinating their pathway plan and having contact with them every 8 weeks (as a minimum). This support used to end when a young person reached 21, however this now remains in place until the young person is 25 years old.
11. The personal advisor, alongside the work around accommodation, education, employment and training, will also work closely around the young person's health; both their physical and emotional wellbeing. If the young person has any outstanding needs with respect to their health they will support the young person to visit their GP or support them to attend the monthly health drop-in, which is co facilitated by the LAC Health Team. If the young person wishes to speak to someone around their emotional wellbeing, again the same route can be taken. The personal advisor can also refer the young person (with their permission) to North East Counselling Service for additional support for the young person.

Pathway Plans

12. All Care Leavers have a Pathway plan, which considers the young person's need for support and assistance, based on previous assessments and LAC plans. The pathway plan sets out what they need and who will support them. This plan is reviewed every six months to ensure the care leaver is being supported in their transition from care. The pathway plan outlines
 - Accommodation
 - Practical life skills including money management
 - Education and training
 - Employment
 - Financial support
 - Specific support needs
 - Contingency plans for support if independent living breaks down
13. These elements are intended to provide a full package of support o the young person to enable them to make the transition from care to living independently. The young person's voice is key to the success of the pathway plan and they will be actively encouraged to attend the pathway plan review or have their views represented by a person of their choice or via MOMO.

Education, employment and training

14. We have high aspirations and ambition for our young people therefore it is important that we support all of our young people in Employment, Education and Training. We work closely with REALAC whilst our young people are looked after. The Virtual School team promotes and supports the educational achievement of looked after children across all services and at every level of the authority, particularly with social workers, designated teachers and foster

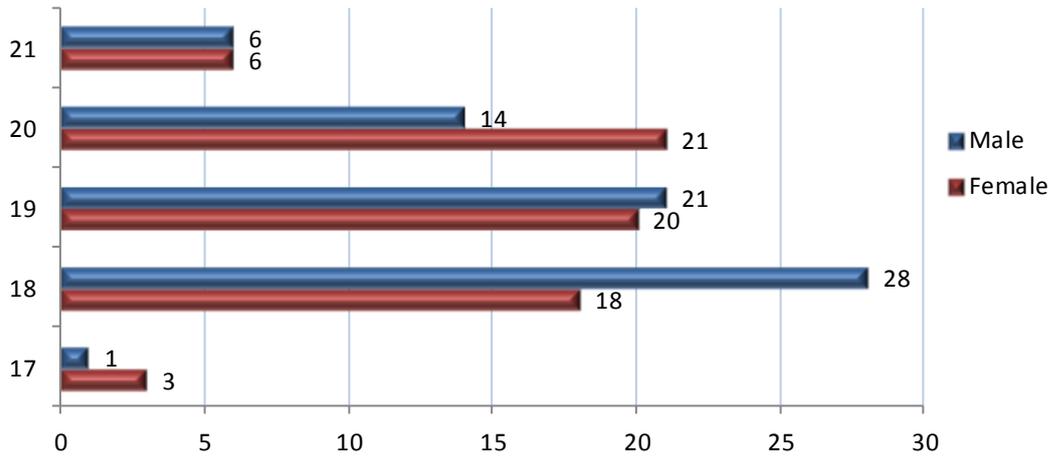
carers, to ensure that it is treated as a high priority. REALAC provides direct support to children, carers, social workers and schools in the following areas:

- Before going into the world of work the young person can access the Pathways to Work programme facilitated by REALAC which offers young people the opportunity to experience work for a couple of weeks before committing to their long term plan.
- Between the age of 16yrs – 18yrs, the young person will be supported into employment, education or training. The personal advisor and social worker assess the needs of the young person in an effort to work towards a clear pathway for them which is documented within the pathway plan.
- Up to and beyond the age of 18yrs the young person can be referred to Learning & Skills who offer career information sessions, CV Design and Mock Interview Skills. The young person will also be assessed and the result of the assessment will determine whether they will be offered a Study Programme, Traineeship or Apprenticeship:
 - Study Programme;
 - A 1 year programme covering English, Maths, ICT Vocational Skills, Employability Skills
 - Traineeship;
 - A 5 month programme for young people who are not apprenticeship ready
 - Apprenticeships;
 - 12-18 month paid employment for 30hrs a week, where the young person receives a qualification as well as experience of working.

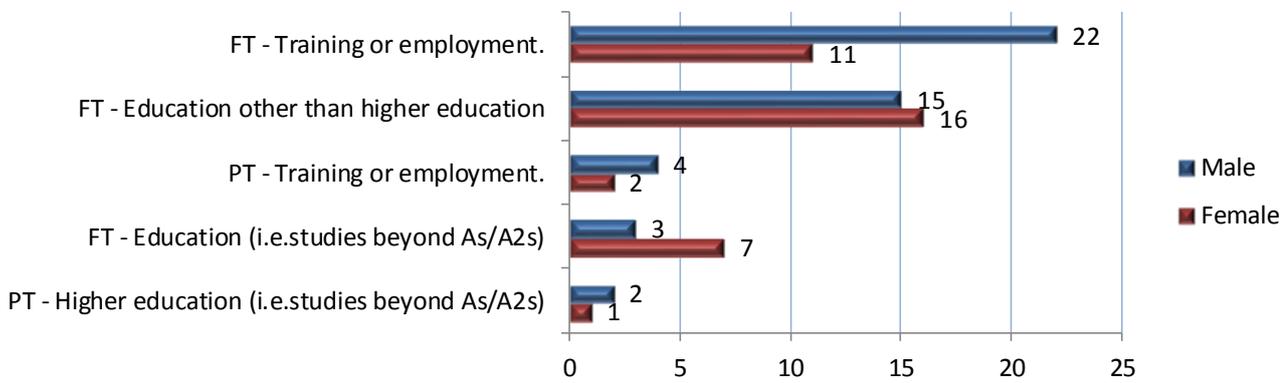
15. We also work in partnership with Gateshead College who deliver a comprehensive range of industry related workshops alongside a Certificate in Occupational Studies for the Workplace. Young people will receive guidance and support which will enhance their opportunity to move into employment.

16. If the young person is not ready for work and needs additional support, the personal advisor can refer to Building Better Opportunities – Wise Steps where young people will receive one to one support from a job coach for up to 18 months. Together the job coach and the young people will focus on removing any barriers to work through social inclusion activities, life skills, confidence building and skills development. Activities will also include ICT training and personal money management. This equips the young person with the skills to move on to employment or training.

EET by age and gender

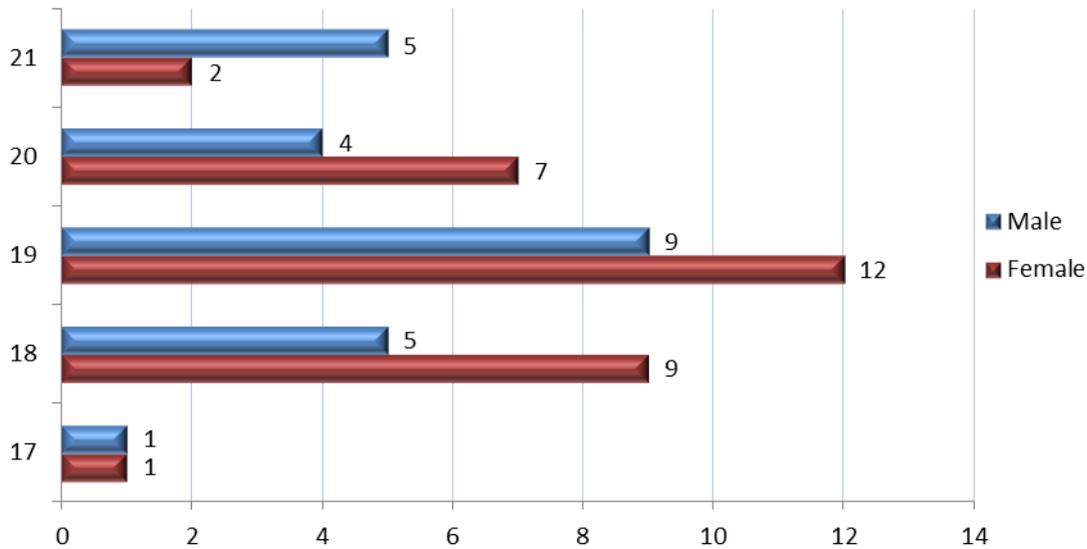


EET by Type and Gender



17. There are 138 young people who are included in the statistics for 2017-18, 68 (49%) are female and 70 (51%) are male. There is a higher number of males (44) in EET compared to females (37)

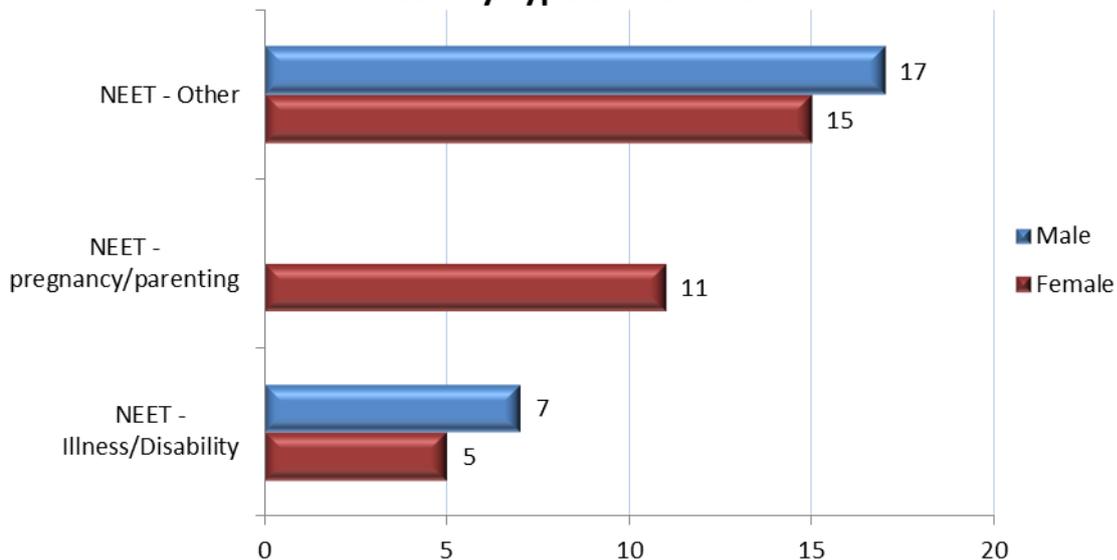
NEET by Age and Gender



18. Of our 138 care leavers not in any form of Employment, Education or Training (NEET), the majority are categorised as NEET – other (32). 14 of these young people refuse to engage with services, despite the best efforts of their personal advisors and the other 18 are actively seeking employment or training.

19. There are 12 NEET due to an illness or disability which is preventing them working, of which 7 have had historical special educational needs (SEN) and there are 11 females who are categorised as NEET due to pregnancy or parenting commitments. In addition to this there is 1 young person who is an asylum seeker and has no leave to remain as yet.

NEET by Type and Gender



20. If we were to exclude this cohort of 24 who aren't available to work, i.e. those whom we have judged are currently unable to be in EET, our EET figure would be 72.8% (83/114).
21. These figures are an improvement on last year and demonstrate the progress the service is making in supporting young people in education, employment and training

Identifying young people needing additional support

22. The service acknowledges that there has been an issue with young people leaving care refusing to engage in employment, education and training and have taken proactive steps to try and improve the statistics and outcomes for care leavers.
23. Delivering courses and training specific to care leavers enabling them to access EET is a challenge that the service is striving to meet. Progress is being made in this area as REALAC have tailored training or offered specific work experience in a supportive environment for young people who have found it challenging to sustain mainstream courses. External training providers such as Talent Match, and Generation North East optimises the support available to our young people and reduces the risk of NEET.
24. Learning and Skills are also working proactively with us to determine the skills and abilities of our young people and are developing appropriate pathways into both council and external apprenticeship providers, with the acceptance and understanding that some of our young people will need additional support to succeed in their chosen apprenticeship
25. There are also regular meetings being held with partners looking at apprenticeships for Looked After children and care leavers, discussing the need for increased apprenticeship provision within the Council and the support these young people will require. This work has enabled 4 LAC and Care Leavers to recently take up apprenticeships within the Council and a further 13 apprenticeships have been pledged across the council for LAC and care leavers.

Accommodation

26. To enable young people to feel safe and acquire the skills needed for independence they need a stable base. Most of looked after young people are placed within our own resources and within a 20 mile radius of Gateshead.
27. In 2016/17, Gateshead was ranked 1st in the country for placement stability. 88% of our looked after children, who had been looked after for at least 2.5 years, had been in the same placement for at least 2 years. Considerably higher than the England average of 70%. Over the same period, Gateshead was ranked 4th in the country for our low percentage of children placed at a

distance. This gives our care leavers a positive start to move into independence.

28. The Children Leaving Care Act 2000 imposes duties on Local Authorities to support care leavers to obtain suitable accommodation which should:

- Avoid moving and disrupting young people who are settled
- Assess young people's needs and prepare them for any move
- Offer a choice of accommodation (where practicable)
- Provide a support package to go with the accommodation
- Have a contingency plan in case accommodation arrangements break down

29. Accommodation choices currently available to the care leavers are:

- Staying Put
- Supported Lodgings
- Supported accommodation
- Semi-supported accommodation
- Taster flats
- Own tenancy

30. To ensure the right type of provision is available to all care leavers a new accommodation strategy has been developed between Children's Services, Commissioning and Housing. This has been out to tender and the new model commences on 1st July 2018 providing;

- Emergency supported accommodation
- A short term assessment unit
- Medium term 24 hour supported accommodation with step down shared living and dispersed houses
- Supported lodgings
- Taster flats

31. There will be a multidisciplinary panel that will monitor all placements and coordinate planned moves. They will also evaluate the progress of this strategy.

32. All young people leaving care receive support from their personal advisor when moving onto their preferred accommodation and they will get a visit 7 days after moving in to ensure things are going to plan.

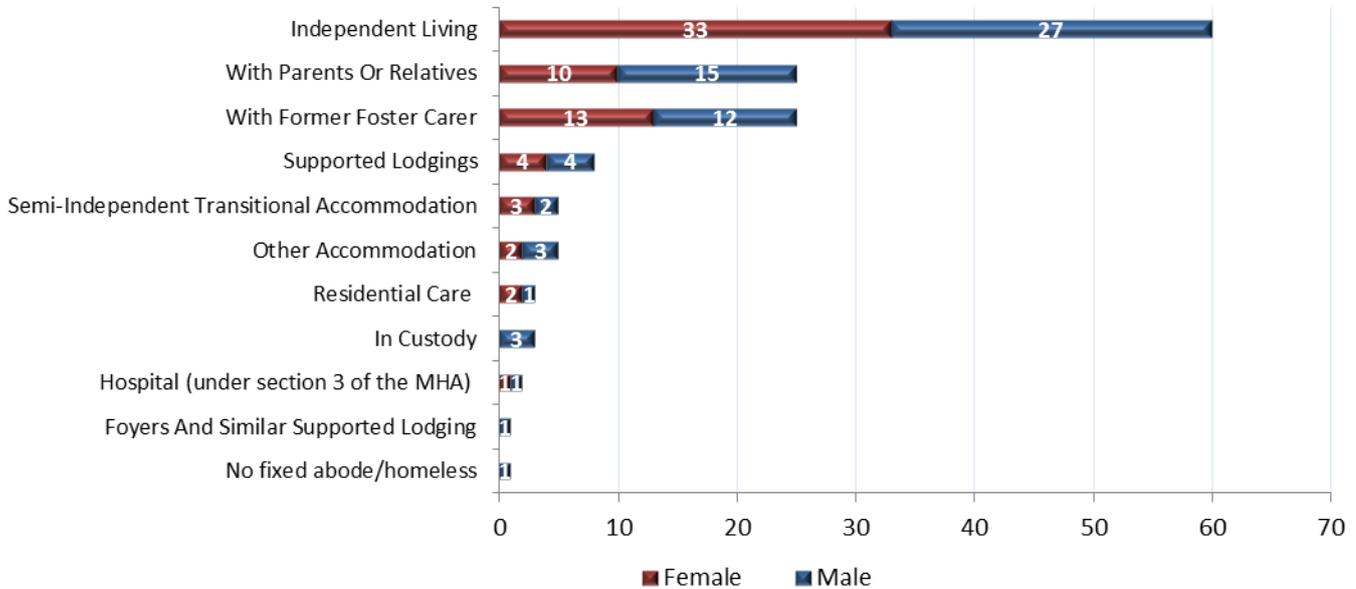
Current Situation

33. 96% of our care leavers are in suitable accommodation, with 60% in independent living and 36% living with parents/relatives or their former foster carers.

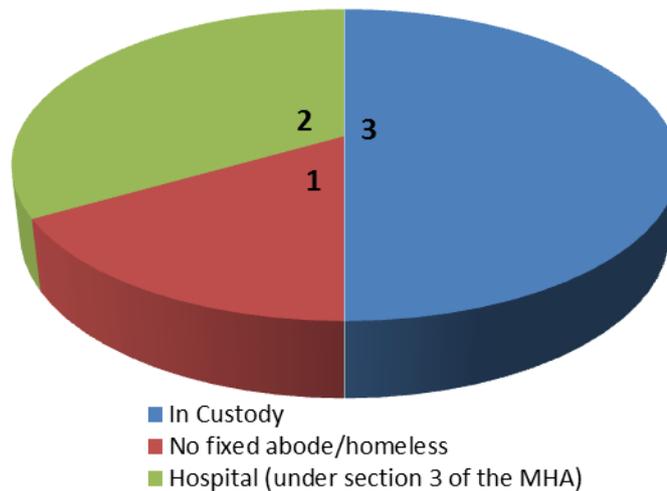
34. 4% of our care leavers are in unsuitable accommodation. There are 3 males who are in custody, 1 male and 1 female who are in hospital, under section 3 of the Mental Health Act and there is 1 male who has no fixed

abode/considered homeless. He is currently out of touch and refuses to leave contact details with the service

Accommodation type



Types of unsuitable accommodation



35. Prior to the young person moving onto their preferred accommodation, they are offered a course facilitated by Learning & Skills; named Financial Education. This course consists of:

- Budgeting
- Managing income and expenditure
- Banking, saving and borrowing
- Financial future employment
- Debt Management

36. If a young person is going into supported accommodation or a taster flat they are referred through to 2 Way Tenancy Solutions who run a training programme which consists of:
- Managing a Tenancy
 - Living on your own
 - Keeping a Tenancy
 - Repairs
 - Budgeting
37. On completion of this course the young people will receive a microwave, toaster and kettle to assist them in setting up home. If the young person takes a taster flat or their own tenancy, they will also receive additional support from Housing, via a tenancy support worker. The young person will also be entitled to financial support up to £2,000 to set up their own home.

Financial support

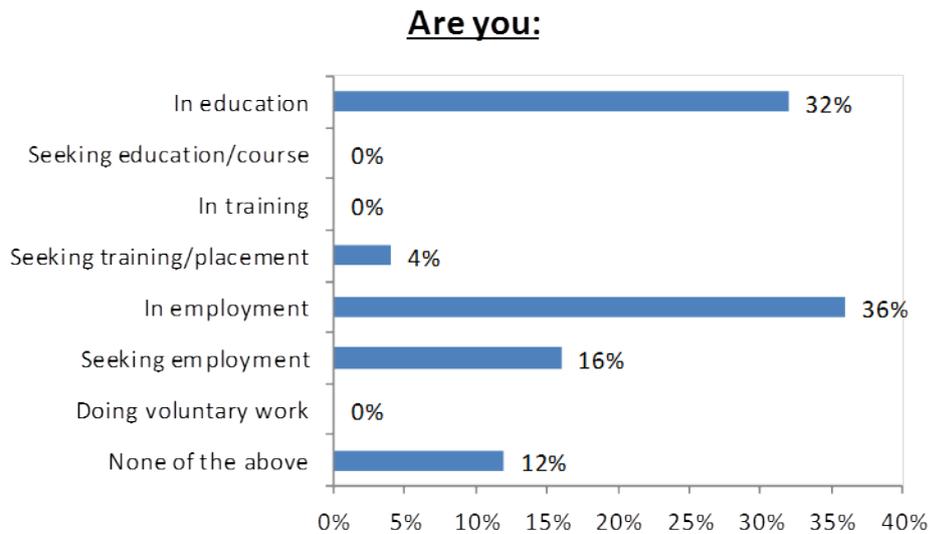
38. Gateshead Leaving Care Service has comprehensive financial procedures in place to support care leavers in EET. The focal point of the financial support is to assist care leavers who are combining having to live independently with either being employed or in training. For example care leavers receive monthly incentives for attending education, employment or training and the services ensures that they are not financially disadvantaged or penalized in relation to housing benefit or other entitlements. Support with utility bills during the winter months is also offered in recognition of the challenges some of our young people face.
39. Young people who are attending Higher Education receive financial assistance and support which is managed and administered appropriately by the Leaving Care Service. Young people in higher education are provided with accommodation during the holiday period whether this is via Staying Put arrangements or additional weeks within their accommodation at University.
40. The Leaving Care Service will support a young person continuing in a pathway of education and training until their 25th birthday, which complies with the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

What our care leavers say

41. The 'Tell Us What You Think' care leavers' survey was conducted in March 2018 with care leavers aged 18 – 22, with a total of 25 questionnaires being completed. The highest numbers of respondents were aged 18 (58%), (8 female and 10 male). Overall, the gender split of the cohort completing the survey was 64% female and 36% male. This is in line with previous surveys, where we have tended to see a higher response from females than males.

Survey Results

- Education, employment and training

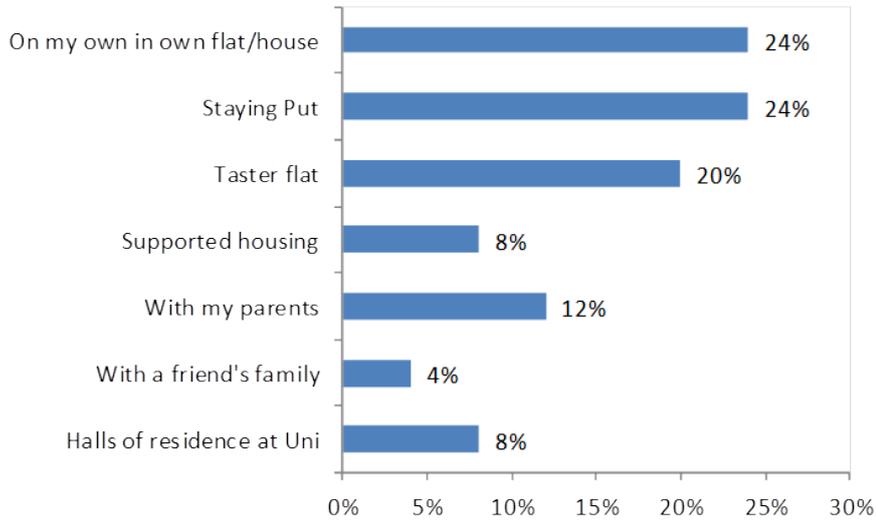


42. Of the young people who completed the survey 68% were in education, employment or training, with 20% seeking employment or training. The 12% who responded as none of the above are the young people identified earlier in the report as either being young parents or unable to work through illness or disability.

- Accommodation

43. 24% of respondents reported that they were living in their own flat/house, 24% were in staying put placements, 20% were in taster flats, 12% living with their parents, 8 were in supported housing, 8% were in university halls of residence and 4% living with a friend's family.

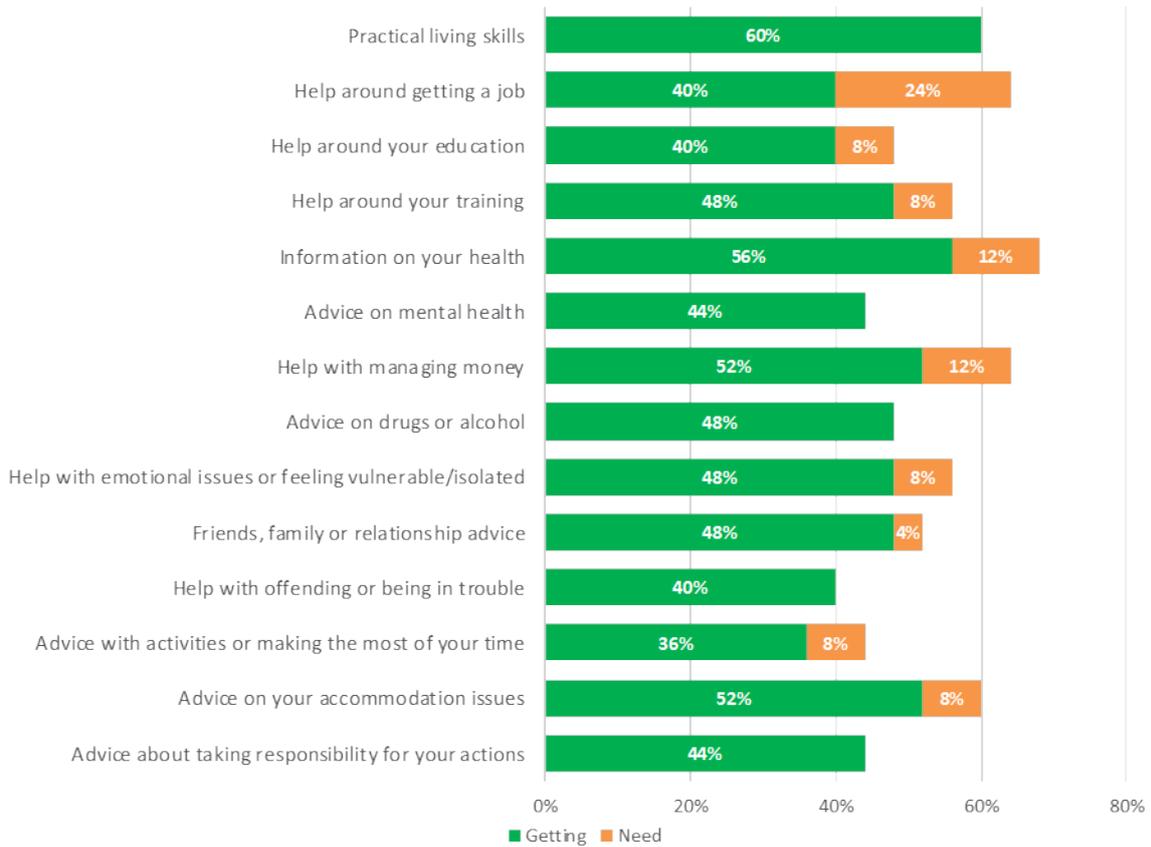
What type of accommodation do you currently live in?



- **Support**

44. 16 (76%) of respondents said they felt the support they were receiving at the moment was either good or very good. The below chart shows the percentage of support received/needed as indicated in the survey.

Support received and support needed



80% (20) of respondents reported that their accommodation was good or very good, with 96% reporting that they felt safe or very safe in the building they lived in.

Issues the OSC might want to consider

45. In light of the information provided the OSC might wish to consider whether it is satisfied with the level of support being offered to Care Leavers. When addressing this question the OSC might wish to take into account the following

- Are we working proactively as corporate parents for Care Leavers?
- Have we got the right involvement from our partners?
- Are we promoting positive outcomes for Care leavers?
- Are we offering the right support to the NEET cohort?

Recommendations

46. The views of the OSC are sought on:-

- Whether it is satisfied with the level of support Care leavers are receiving in Gateshead

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