

Care Leavers & the Criminal Justice System

The Role of Support Systems during Transition



WHY THIS MATTERS

Earlier independence: Care leavers often move to independence earlier, with fewer supports.

Justice overrepresentation: Care-experienced young people are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system.

Support matters: Preparation, aftercare and stable relationships can shape transition outcomes.

Evidence gap: How transition support influences later justice contact remains unclear.

FINDINGS



Transition: Stability, preparation and support are central to successful transitions.



Justice contact: Instability and earlier adversity can increase vulnerability to criminal justice contact.



Relationships: Consistent supportive adults can strengthen security, trust and emotional support.



Pathway planning: Planning works best when it is early, flexible and tailored.



Barriers to access: Housing instability, stigma, mistrust and conditionality can restrict support.



SOCIAL BOND THEORY

Transition from out-of-home care is significantly influenced by the supportive relationships care leavers form.

According to Social Bond Theory, strong social bonds with family, mentors and community members can deter criminal behaviour.

For care leavers, supportive relationships can provide emotional and practical support, helping them navigate the challenges of independence and potentially reducing criminal justice contact.

