

NNECL responds to the Review of Early Deaths of Care Leavers

October 2026

The early death of any care-experienced young person is a loss that should leave us all deeply sad. These were young people with hopes, relationships, ambitions and futures they should have had the opportunity to live. Each death represents a life cut short and a loss felt by those who loved them and those who didn't get a chance to.

We owe every one of these young people more than our sadness. We owe them action. If we already know the inequalities, gaps in support and systemic failures that place care-experienced young people at greater risk, what are we doing as a society if we are not addressing them?

We acknowledge the difficult and emotionally demanding work undertaken by Ashley John-Baptiste and Clare Chamberlain in producing the *Review of Early Deaths of Care Leavers*.

Surely the most meaningful way to honour each of these young people is to act, in their names, on what we already know needs to change.

We have been here before

The premature deaths of care-experienced young people are not a newly identified problem. Successive governments have known for years about inequalities in physical and mental health, increased risk of early death and barriers to support.

Josh MacAlister's 2022 *Independent Review of Children's Social Care* identified increasing life expectancy as a national mission and made recommendations on mental health, housing, relationships and corporate parenting. Four years later, MacAlister, now Minister for Children and Families, commissioned another review identifying many of the same concerns.

Young people have repeatedly shared deeply personal experiences with ministers, parliamentary committees and researchers. NNECL and other organisations have provided extensive evidence. The problem is not that governments have failed to listen. It is that what they have heard has not led to the systemic change needed to protect young people's lives. How many more young people must share their experiences before we move from gathering evidence to delivering change?

We already know what works

Around one in four care leavers has a diagnosable mental health condition. Successive reviews, parliamentary inquiries and charities have identified the need for faster access to mental health services, better transitions into adulthood and stronger coordination between services. Practical recommendations and pathways for change already exist. Too many remain unimplemented.

NNECL is one of many organisations demonstrating what effective support looks like. Our independently evaluated Quality Mark strengthens practice in wellbeing, accommodation, transitions and student success. In December 2025, Minister MacAlister encouraged universities to adopt it. But encouragement is not an enforceable minimum standard. We continue to call for mandatory adoption so that support does not depend on where a young person studies.

Leaving-care services also need proper investment. Personal Advisers need manageable caseloads, specialist expertise and time to build trusted relationships. Young people should not have to navigate disconnected health, housing, education and social care services alone. We do not have a lack of evidence, recommendations or solutions, we lack consistent implementation and accountability.

The responsibility to protect wellbeing

We are concerned about the emotional impact of this review and the repeated expectation that care-experienced people revisit painful experiences. Commissioning a care-experienced person to investigate the deaths of others with similar experiences carries particular responsibilities. We hope appropriate professional supervision and psychological support were available to those undertaking this work. Young people across our network have needed support to process the report. One asked, "I don't know why you're doing all this work when the report says we'll be dead soon." This was surely not the intended message, but it demonstrates why research must be communicated with care.

Care experience must never predetermine someone's future.

Young people deserve to see themselves living long, healthy and fulfilling lives, not futures defined by mortality statistics. NNECL asks when repeatedly inviting people to share their trauma, without delivering meaningful change, becomes tokenistic or harmful? That responsibility belongs to government and every organisation working with care-experienced people, including us at NNECL.

NNECL will continue working with government and partners, while challenging the gap between what is known, what is delivered and who is held accountable. We believe progress must be measured by lives improved, not reviews commissioned or promises made. We call on government to:

1. **Act on the 2025 Education Select Committee's *Children's Social Care* recommendations:** Publish progress on mental health support, trauma-informed services and assessments, with clear funding, timescales and accountability.
2. **Invest in Personal Advisers:** Ensure manageable caseloads, specialist expertise and training to provide consistent, trusted support.
3. **Introduce enforceable post-16 education standards:** Build on the independently evaluated NNECL Quality Mark so care-experienced students receive appropriate support wherever they study.
4. **End gaps in support during transitions to adulthood:** Guarantee continuity of mental health, housing and social care support, with clear responsibilities between services.
5. **Strengthen corporate parenting accountability:** Ensure statutory duties are fulfilled and young people have effective ways to challenge failures.