Pathways Beyond Care:

Lessons from the UK and Ireland

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare



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14 May 2025

Key messages

- Improving outcomes for care leavers is a project **across the life course** – not just something to be a priority at age 18
- **Network for Life**
- Supporting progress in **education** and **work** – across the life course
- Right support at the right time vital – but ***relational* support** important all the time – importance of *long-timers* in social network
- Preserving and building strong connections over time is vital (through family, shared interests, education, workplace, community)

Key messages

- Improving outcomes for care leavers is a project **across the life course** – not just something to be a priority at age 18. early help can be decisive (quality of care before 18)
- Young person is an active agent in finding their own way – our task is to assist them and lift the load a little
- Social connections are the game changer (especially over long term)
- The enemies are isolation, instability, uncertainty
- → The right support, at the right time, in the right way
- Example: Funding driving course and licence for young person while in care (support combines with the effort of the young person). A winning combo over the life course!

Supporting Care Leavers
Three key phases for influence **across the life course**



Network for Life

- preserving and building connections that endure – from where?

Family

Shared Interests

Education

Workplace

Community

Sinead O’Connor



Sinead O’Connor.
From troubled teenager in care to international rock star. ***How?***

- In her book, Sinead acknowledged the role of a young Catholic nun who was a carer in one of her residential placements
- Nun saw her talent and potential and in an effort to ‘engage’ her, she bought her her first guitar
- She also arranged one to one lessons for her with a young music teacher.
- Sinead’s first public performance was at the music teacher’s wedding

- Her life after leaving care was greatly shaped by what happened while in care.
- Quality of care practices an important element. **Outward-facing care practices** (Gilligan, 2025)
- Intertwining of care (encouraging) / education (learning music) / ‘work’ (performing – and connecting to world of music) over time.
- (Music did not resolve all Sinead’s issues in her troubled life, but did greatly enrich and transform the life she had.)

Support

- System level
- Inter-personal
- Mental health

Connections

- To people (family etc)
- To social groups (sport, community, hobbies, faith, ethnicity

Education and work

- (Early) Work experience
- Second chances
- Multiple pathways

Selected Publications (relevant to Presentation)

- **Gilligan, R.** (2025) 'Transformative Change for Children in Residential Care: Exploring the Potential of Support for Work, Recreation and Educational Opportunities from a Life Course Perspective' Chapter 2, pp. 34-51 IN eds. Shalhevet Attar-Schwartz and Eunice Magalhães *"The Social Support of Young People in and after Residential Care: Is Someone There for You?"* Routledge
- **Gilligan, R**. and Brady, E. (2022) 'What helps adult care leavers return to education? Exploring the relevance of learner identity and the life course perspective' *Journal of Youth Studies,* https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2098706
- **Gilligan, R.,** Brady, E. and Arnau-Sabatés, L., (2025). 'The educational and work progress of care experienced adults: the potential contribution of birth family adults over time' *Children and Youth Service Review*
- McPherson, L., Canosa, A., **Gilligan, R.,** Moore, T., Gatwiri, K., Day, K., Mitchell, J., Graham, A., Anderson, D.**,** 'Young People's Lived Experience of Relational Practices in Therapeutic Residential Care in Australia' *Children and Youth Service Review* Young people's lived experience of relational practices in therapeutic residential care in Australia - ScienceDirect
- Sting, S. Stohler, R., Brady, E., **Gilligan, R**., Werner, K. (2025). Barriers to the educational progress of care leavers: the neglected role of stigma? *Children's and Youth Services Review*,
- Soyez, V., **Gilligan, R.,** Arnau-Sabatés, L., Johansson, H., Höjer, I., Pazlorova, H., Sjöblom, Y., & Stoddart, J. (2024). Early work experiences, social inclusion and transition to adulthood: the voice of care-experienced young adults. *Journal of Social Work*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14680173231225423