

# SUPPORTING PEOPLE THROUGH TRANSITIONS

LESSONS FOR LATER LIFE FROM OTHER MODELS



CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN  
FOUNDATION

UK BRANCH



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Above: Ex-service personnel often find it difficult to ask for help.

Front cover: Certain groups are more vulnerable to poor transitions.

This paper is an edited version of a research report, *A Comparison of Support Models for Transitions* by Bridget Pettitt and Liz Kwast. The full report is available from the CGF website and gives an overview of theoretical models and includes more examples of different services. This edited paper has been prepared by freelance writer, Sharon Telfer.

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# SUPPORTING PEOPLE THROUGH TRANSITIONS

## LESSONS FOR LATER LIFE FROM OTHER MODELS

**We go through many changes in the course of our lives – from child to adult, working to not working, cared for to carer, relationship to bereavement.**

**The Transitions in Later Life programme, run by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch), explores what support might help people in mid- to later life feel more able to manage changes as they age.**

**This research, by Bridget Pettitt and Liz Kwast of BPRC, draws on experiences of transitions in other parts of the life course to identify lessons for later life. The study finds broadly similar patterns in providers, the services offered and how these are delivered. A number of themes emerge.**



**When people are made redundant, they can also lose important social relationships that they had with co-workers.**



Mentoring tackles behaviour and attitude, and can have a significant impact on the aspirations of disadvantaged young people.

## KEY LESSONS

**A coordinated approach is essential.** The need for joint working is slowly being recognised, but many programmes still work in isolation. Few offer a 360° approach: those seeking support must engage with several agencies to get all the support they require.

**Long-term initiatives are needed to build resilience.** Poor resilience is a key risk factor for poor outcomes so several organisations run resilience-building initiatives. However, short-term programmes have limited effect.

**Mentoring/coaching is effective but under-used for later life.** Most mentoring roles for retirees focus on supporting younger people through volunteering. Those recently retired could offer local support for those approaching retirement.

**Ignoring emotional needs increases the risk of a poor outcome,** but transitions are often defined in practical terms, such as their financial implications. Such practical support can, however, be a hook into offering subtler – and potentially harder to accept – support with emotional and behavioural issues

**Support should help people engage with and plan for transitions.** ‘Letting go’ of the past can be a significant loss. Most support models allow users to acknowledge this loss as well as looking forward to the future.

**‘Menus of services’ allow users to select what best suits their personal needs.** Organisations providing such menus often work in partnership to pool resources and jointly train and equip staff and volunteers.

**Services should remain available through a period of adjustment,** not just up to the point of transition. They should also be flexible enough to respond to emerging needs.

**There is a real need for clearer entry points** to help individuals identify where to go for the support, advice and information that would best suit them. While services use many different channels, these often offer only partial advice and information.

## INTRODUCTION

This study looks at existing support for four groups undergoing major transitions: personnel leaving the armed forces, workers facing redundancy, young people leaving care and young people trying to get their first job. The aim is to identify common lessons that might be taken forward for those facing transitions in mid- to later life.

The researchers assess what works in terms of building resilience and wellbeing, and highlight opportunities and barriers to successful models.

Entering the job market can be difficult if you haven't had an opportunity to gain work experience. Photo: Samuel Mann.



# WHAT MAKES PEOPLE MORE VULNERABLE TO POOR TRANSITIONS?

The effect of poor transitions can be serious. Different groups have specific support needs, but research has identified a number of common risks. For the groups considered in this report, this included: unemployment, social exclusion, alcohol/drug dependency, contact with the criminal justice system, homelessness, debt and mental health issues.

## The impact of external factors

For all the sample groups, **low levels of education and/or skills** adversely affect transitions. Ex-service personnel with low levels of transferable skills, for example, are less likely to make a successful transition into civilian life.

When you join up, you don't think about what you're going to do after. You think you'll be there for life. Then, when you do get out, you think you'll just leave and get a job, but it's not that easy. You end up sitting around, twiddling your thumbs. What are you going to put on your CV? "Two tours of Afghanistan" That doesn't mean anything to civvies.

*Ex-service member, quoted in Doing Our Duty, Centre for Social Justice, 2014*

People's **socio-economic circumstances** affect their options. Someone made redundant in an area of high unemployment will have more difficulties finding a new job. **Geography** can also be limiting. For example, young people in rural areas may have little opportunity to gain work experience before applying for a job.

**Timing** also has an impact. Early leavers from the armed forces and young people who leave care before 18 are less likely to fare well.

I didn't feel safe and would have liked to stay with my carer. I was not ready!

*Care leaver*

Some, like those forced to leave the armed forces through illness, simply do not foresee a transition. For others, the current situation becomes unsustainable, such as when relations break down between care leavers and foster family. Sometimes people do not recognise the warning signs:

The announcement, I was told, was going to be about the restructuring of my department. Thinking back, this should not have come as a surprise ... But, I told myself I had nothing to worry about – I was at the top of my game, I had earned a name for myself ... There was no way they would be getting rid of me ...

*Manager, made redundant from a financial organisation, quoted in 'Life after redundancy', The Guardian, 5 January 2010*

## The impact of personal attitudes

But individual attitudes are also as influential. Many people go into denial when first confronted with the prospect of a transition. This **lack of engagement** can make them slow to take up offers of support. For ex-service personnel, for example, experience of a successful transition was directly linked to both their attitudes and expectations, and their level of engagement with and awareness of the process (*The Transition Mapping Study*, Forces in Mind Trust, 2013). People may also be **reluctant to ask for support**. The culture in the armed forces, for example, may make it difficult to ask for help.

It's a pride thing. I don't ask anybody for anything. It took me a long time to ask for help.

*Ex-service member, quoted in Doing Our Duty, Centre for Social Justice, 2014*

For some, **lack of planning** may be an issue. School leavers, for example, often fail to realise what entering the job market will entail.

The only thing I knew I wanted when I was 16 was that I wanted to leave school.

*School leaver, quoted in Understanding Age and the Labour Market, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2015*



Preparing for transitions is central to adjustment.

Others may be **too occupied with the present** and may not grasp how changes could affect them.

I was given a choice. Go off and do my resettlement training, and let these guys go off to Afghanistan without the proper preparation or stay and spend my last days in the Army training them up. I wasn't going to leave my mates unprepared. So I stayed, and then left the Army with nothing.'

*Ex-soldier*

After the transition has taken place, people may be **unable to adjust to the new situation**. Transitions can also bring with them both a **loss of identity and of social relationships**. Ex-service personnel leave behind a very strong group identity and often feel cast adrift in 'civil society'. Redundancy often means people lose contact with work colleagues who have been a big part of their social lives.

## What improves the experience of a transition?

- **Acceptance** – the ability to accept a transition is going to take place and to predict the implications
- **Financial security** – no adverse effect on finances or alternative financial plans can be set in place
- **Emotional security** – a willingness to accept and take into account the emotional impact of a transition
- **Social security** – the support of a social network, be it friends or family, is crucial in the ability to cope with transitions
- **Experience** – in all cases, prior experiences of a transition can aid an individual's ability to deal with another transition
- **Skills** – having or being able to develop skills that offer new opportunities
- **Resilience** – either innate or learned

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

The tendency is to offer practical support, but a failure to address what an individual is thinking brings a real risk of poor transitions. A key adjustment for ex-service personnel, for example, is the ‘culture shock’ of adapting to civilian life.

People’s emotional reaction is also significant, both for their support needs and chances of making a successful transition.

... [redundancy] turned into a total lack of confidence and lack of self-esteem, the whole thing about “Why me? Why not somebody else?” “What did I do wrong?” sort of self-blame. And then, for me, that rapidly turned into almost agoraphobia. I actually found that within about four weeks I was struggling to talk to people on the phone or even leave the house.

*C, quoted in ‘Coping With Redundancy’ video, NHS Choices*

An occupational psychologist has identified emotional factors likely to occur during career change. Most apply in other transitions:

- Individuals differ in vulnerability to transitions.
- Transitions often reach a crisis about six months after change, +/- 1 month.
- They can have several outcomes, depending on circumstances.
- Effects transcend the individual’s life-work boundary into other roles.
- They can cause transitions for others: family, friends, colleagues, and helpers.
- Change involves situational and intrapersonal learning and un-learning.

- Transitions involve at least two levels of adaptation - behavioural and cognitive restructuring. These occur at different phases of the cycle.

*Source: D. Williams, Life Events and Career Change: Transition Psychology in Practice. Eos Life-Work Resource Centre, 1999*

### Resilience is crucial

The role of resilience in ensuring a successful transition is widely recognised. Lack of resilience is associated with poor outcomes. ‘Resilience’ can consist of inherent character traits (someone’s ability to ‘bounce back’) or skills that can be learned.

There are many different strategies to improve individual resilience. However, programmes during or after the transition only have a limited effect. Research suggests that long-term changes require a whole systems approach:

Improved resilience will not result from any one particular action or decision; it arises from a ‘critical mass’ of different efforts to improve young people’s outcomes.

*Source: A Public Health Approach to Promoting Young People’s Resilience, Association for Young People’s Health, 2016*

### Learning resilience

**The Who Cares? Trust is working in partnership with award-winning social business, Kaizen, to deliver workshops for care leavers that will help them:**

- Learn what resilience is and why it matters

- Discuss the ‘inner critic’ and its impact on their personal stress
- Identify their own triggers and strategies for managing themselves
- Explore how they want their future to be and what it would take to lead themselves

- Learn how to have their actions determined by their goals, rather than how they feel in the moment



## WHO PROVIDES SUPPORT?

The framework for support is complex. Different sectors – mainly the statutory, private and not-for-profit sectors – offer support in all the transitions studied in the sample.

Statutory organisations, be they central or local government, play a role in most support schemes. For the sample groups, specific departments take the lead where there are central government obligations:

- Ministry of Defence (MoD) for those leaving the armed forces
- Department for Education (DfE) for care leavers
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for those facing redundancy and for young people entering the labour market

These departments are responsible for developing strategies and guidelines, and for monitoring and evaluation. Local authorities and statutory organisations, such as Jobcentres, provide the actual services. There are different interpretations of this model across the UK: for example, redundancy support forms a specific part of the Skills for Scotland strategy, but this is not the case for the equivalent in England.

The practical interpretation of strategy and guidelines can be problematic. The National Audit Office, for example, found support for care leavers ineffective because each local authority had a different interpretation of their responsibilities under the Care Leavers' Strategy (*Care Leavers' Transition to Adulthood*, National Audit Office, 2015).

Private and charitable organisations also offer support. These initiatives are mostly developed and run separate from statutory programmes, but there are some notable exceptions. The Career Transition Partnership offers armed forces leavers a range of resettlement packages, from simple briefings to a two-year support package. This is provided by Right Management, a private company commissioned by the MoD.

The type of provider can influence the success of the transition. Care leavers, for example, often regard social workers with ambivalence:

I didn't used to talk to my social workers. I can't trust my social worker.

*Care leaver, quoted in Achieving Emotional Well-Being for Looked After Children, NSPCC, 2015*

In all these models, local knowledge is crucial in order to signpost someone to services required for a successful transition. Care leavers, for example, are best supported by someone who can tell them about local shops and amenities.

In all transitions, there is a role for individuals. **Expectations from family and close relations** can have a significant impact (*The Influence of Parents, Places and Poverty on Educational Attitudes and Aspirations*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2011). Friends who have experienced a similar transition can also offer support. However, this support is more difficult to categorise; it depends on individual networks, rather than the type of transition.

### Agency monitoring can improve quality

For each of the transitions studied, there is a further layer of agencies and organisations that monitor service levels and implementation. These agencies can improve the quality of support on offer. The National Audit Office has made recommendations for improving the Care Leavers' Strategy and the services provided (*Care Leavers' Transition to Adulthood*, 2015). The Big Lottery Fund has incorporated monitoring and evaluation from the start of one recent initiative in Scotland.

One way of unifying strategies and guidelines is the appointment of a champion or ombudsman. Such a system already exists for the Care Leavers' Strategy: OFSTED monitors and evaluates its implementation by local authorities. This provides a good overview of the situation in different areas, but its impact is still limited: more than half of local authorities were deemed to require improvements in 2016.

## WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORT ARE AVAILABLE?

Support for transitions can include:

- **Information** on financial implications or services
- **Advice** on practical options
- **Skills development** to support the transition
- **Mentoring** to improve skill sets
- **Emotional/psychological support** to cope with thought processes
- **Social occasions and leisure activities** to build new or adjust existing social networks
- **Resilience building** to help people better deal with a transition and its long-term impact.

More than one provider may offer each type of support. This can result in duplication and inequity of access. For example, a union member faced with redundancy from a large company can access both in-house and union schemes. Someone made redundant from a small non-unionised company may have to seek out their own support. The complexity of the support system also jeopardises a fully integrated service. For example, the National Career Service website does not refer to a helpful video produced by NHS England about support for the emotional impact of redundancy.

Such duplication appears widespread. But there are instances of support providers dividing roles. For those leaving the armed forces, the Career Transition Partnership (run by MoD/Right Management) offers a range of career-focused support. SSAFA (the armed forces charity), on the other hand, provides mentoring to motivate, support and empower service leavers to fulfil their potential outside the military. But other national and local organisations also support to ex-service personnel. This makes it more difficult for individuals to know where to seek support and what services are available from which organisation.

Few organisations offer a 360° approach to support services, presumably because of resource constraints. A more centralised approach – where organisations work in partnership and have clearly defined roles – would make it easier for people to access services. One example of this is the PACE approach to redundancy support in Scotland (see box). There are similar partnerships for supporting young people into education, such as the Edinburgh Guarantee, and a particularly interesting model for pre-retirement support in Ireland, the Retirement Planning Council.

### PACE: The partnership approach

People being made redundant in Scotland can access all their support through PACE, the Partnership for Continuing Employment. Set up by the Scottish Government, PACE also includes DWP (through Jobcentre Plus), local authorities, Citizens' Advice, colleges and training providers. Local PACE teams deliver the service across Scotland.

For employers this means free support for businesses of any size, taking away some of the strain of dealing with redundancy.

For employees it means free, impartial advice on the practical and emotional sides of redundancy. PACE advisers help people recognise their skills, explore their options and prepare for their next move.

Because PACE supports companies across Scotland, the partnership can often connect businesses looking to hire new people with those making redundancies.

Mentoring is recognised as a useful tool for building resilience, but remains under-used for later life. Mentors provide a combination of knowledge, skills, personal experience and sympathy.



## How is support delivered?

A consistent picture across the sample groups is that, while there are many different channels, these often offer only partial advice and information. There is no clear route to identifying what sources would best suit the individual's needs.

Ways of offering support include:

- **One-to-one sessions** at a drop-in centre or with support workers, mentors and coaches. SSAFA runs drop-in centres nationally, but also allocates mentors to help individuals.
- **Group meetings.** These address specific issues but also help to establish new social networks. The Who Cares? Trust runs workshops where young people can develop their skills in a relaxed environment while making friends.
- **Telephone or email helplines.** The National Careers Service runs a helpline for young people seeking advice or information about jobs, careers or training: <https://www.gov.uk/careers-helpline-for-teenagers>
- **Written information.** Advice brochures or leaflets are available at centres, through mailings or online. The TUC has produced a leaflet that explains the rights of people being made redundant.
- **Online and digital.** Much information is now generated and accessed online, including websites and social media platforms. It is worth remembering, however, that easy online access is still not available to everyone. Channels include:
  - dedicated websites, such as: <https://www.forcesreunited.co.uk/>
  - subsections of organisational sites; the central UK government site offers information about redundancy: <https://www.gov.uk/redundant-your-rights/overview>
  - web forums: the Care Leavers Association website has a dedicated area where care leavers can chat: <http://www.careleavers.com/clreunited>
  - Facebook: a Facebook support page was set up for people made redundant when Comet was declared bankrupt: <https://www.facebook.com/Comet-Redundancy-Support-Page-394299797313795/>
  - Instagram: MyBnk works with young people on managing their money: <https://www.instagram.com/mybnk/>
  - LinkedIn: an organisation for blind ex-service personnel has set up a LinkedIn page: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/blind-veterans-uk>

## PROMISING APPROACHES TO SUPPORT

Although most support models are broadly similar, a few examples stand out.

### Mentoring, coaching and peer-to-peer support

**Mentoring or coaching** has proven effective across most support work for transitions. A report on equipping care leavers to reach their potential concluded:

Our work has previously shown that early intervention in the form of intensive mentoring from early adolescence can significantly improve the employment prospects of disadvantaged young people. We recommend that the Government roll out a national programme of high-quality coaching to young people most at risk of being unemployed, including all children in care.

*Source: Finding Their Feet – Equipping Care Leavers to Reach their Potential, Centre for Social Justice, 2015*

Mentoring can also have a positive impact on aspirations. The Spear project run by Resurgo is a pre-employment programme that offers young people training in skills they need to get a job, such as CV writing and interview techniques. It also tackles attitudes and behaviours that many employers cite as major barriers to long-term success for young recruits. Spear offers coaching for young people, but also runs training programmes for those managing the young people, to equip them with the coaching skills needed to tackle performance issues, enhance motivation and improve staff retention.

“The way that the coaches believe in you is something that you don’t really get at college.”

*19-year-old, former care leaver*

Civvy Street, a Royal British Legion project, is piloting an online approach to mentoring service leavers. They describe their approach on their website:

Online mentoring is a planned relationship process that uses a technology platform to match mentors and mentees. As a mentee, you select your mentor from those best matched to your profile and requirements. You are then encouraged to plan the information you want to gather and make regular contact with your mentor over an agreed period using email, phone, Skype, social media or face-to-face communications to ask and answer questions and share career advice.

SSAFA is piloting mentoring for service leavers *and* family members. This will provide one-to-one support during the transition and afterwards for up to one year.

The SSAFA model could be used to offer similar support to those in the process of retiring. Mentors could help:

- Shape a picture of what life after retirement could look like
- Improve self-confidence and the ability to make decisions
- Identify ways of building new social networks
- Promote resilience
- Provide a listening ear
- Signpost services

### The benefits of using a mentor

The SSAFA spells out the benefits of mentoring for service leavers:

- Someone to listen, reassure you and to share your feelings
- Insight into civilian life
- Increase in your self confidence
- Help to build better relationships
- Improved ability to make decisions
- Increase in motivation
- Help for your family
- Support includes: accessible one to one support throughout a transition
- Dedicated trusted mentor
- Unconditional and consistent
- collaboration from another person to help you reflect on your strengths
- Support to draw on your own strengths, develop own strategies and work out your own values

The **peer-to-peer model** is also being widely used. The Rees Foundation is working to build a network of people with care experience who can support each other, creating a sense of belonging and a positive sense of identity. Its themed Revolution Networking events offer care leavers opportunities to meet and share their experiences and advice.

Talent Match London has been designed to provide not only the skills, but the confidence, resilience, networks, and the sustained backing that young people might need to successfully enter the labour market. It uses a 'Talent Plan' for the young person to record aspirations and goals, and a peer-to-peer based approach throughout its activities.

Ideally such support should be available not just before but also after the transition has taken place. One way of achieving this could be to have a process that offers both mentors and peer-to-peer support. Organisations like Age UK already offer a mentoring service in some local areas but not on a UK-wide basis.

## Designing services from real experience

Another option is for people with experience of particular transitions to act as experts in consultations about services. Such co-creation can mean that services really meet the needs of those facing these transitions. Young people themselves develop the programmes for Talent Match London, identify those who would benefit most, offer support, and deliver courses and workshops.

The Rees Foundation is recruiting care leavers aged 18 and above to train as fostering/adoption panel members. These 'care-experienced' people will work with local authorities and agencies to help make recommendations about potential foster carers and adopters.

## Financial support

Some initiatives offer financial support. The ReAct scheme in Wales offers training grants to individuals who have been made redundant. An evaluation of the scheme found that those receiving grants were much more likely to access training and therefore improve their skills. However, there was little difference in employment prospects between those who had received this support and those who had not.

The Life Change Trust in Scotland offered small grants to care leavers 'for things that mattered to them'. Grants were used for driving lessons, laptops, training courses and workshops. But care leavers could also apply for funding for aspirational objectives, such as competing in sport at a national level, accessing a specialist sound engineering workshop, and travelling to an international youth conference. Although it looked at a very small sample, an evaluation found that the funding had a positive impact on the emotional and practical sides of the care leavers' lives. It concluded that 'the positive impact goes beyond the immediate benefit that comes from accessing a small amount of funding'.

## Involving family members

Most support models do not include family members, though they will be affected by the transition. SSAFA has set up support groups for families of injured service personnel, for bereaved families, and for families where a member (not necessarily ex-service personnel) has additional needs or disabilities.

## Working in partnership

While many support models operate within one sector there are examples of successful cross-sector partnerships. The coordination of redundancy support in Scotland through PACE is one (see box on page 8). Catch22 aims to provide work placements, apprenticeships and job opportunities for care leavers. It has worked with Jobcentre Plus and Marriott Hotels on the From Care2Work scheme.

Steps Ahead Mentoring offers young jobseekers (aged 18-24) six one-to-one mentoring sessions to help them improve their employability skills, boost their confidence and find work. Referrals come from Jobcentre Plus advisers and other selected partners. The programme is run by the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) at no cost to the young people or Jobcentre Plus, with support from Nesta and the Cabinet Office via the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund.

## WHERE SUPPORT FALLS DOWN

Existing models also provide warnings of how services can fall short.

- **Lack of clear signposting.** The National Careers Service in England, for example, offers advice and information on practical aspects of redundancy but for emotional support simply signposts people to the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists. In contrast, the Scottish website has a specific section on coping with redundancy which signposts to a range of different services.
- **Late support.** Support may not be available over a timescale that enables someone to plan or prepare for a transition adequately. For example, twenty days is not enough time for service leavers to become entirely proficient in new skills or fields, especially if they are then to compete with more experienced civilians for jobs (*Doing Our Duty*, Centre for Social Justice, 2014).
- **Lack of ongoing support.** Care leavers, for example, often experience a high turnover of support staff, and can also be expected to move to 'instant adulthood' without the support of a family network.

... after I was given my flat I didn't hear from my social worker for six months and that was very, very distressing for me.

*Care leaver, quoted in Survival of the Fittest, Centre for Social Justice, 2014*
- **Low trust in services.** Care leavers, for example, often have a difficult relationship with social workers.

I didn't used to talk to my social workers. I can't trust my social worker.

*Care leaver quoted in Achieving Emotional Well-Being for Looked After Children, NSPCC, 2015*

Resilience is key to successful transitions; sometimes it is inherent, but it can be taught. Photo: Marc Cornelis.



## WHAT NEXT?

As part of its programme, the UK Branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has set up a learning community of organisations working on various ways to improve transitions in later life. This could be extended to develop a similar support model to the ones outlined above for people in later life.

In particular, the importance of resilience building to improve transitions has been a recurring theme. The organisations in the learning community are particularly well suited to look at this issue in more detail, and possibly to extend the work to encompass a wider range of transitions

## FIND OUT MORE

For more on the Transitions in Later Life programme, visit: [www.gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch](http://www.gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch) or contact Programme Manager, Esther Goowin Brown, at [egoodwin-brown@gulbenkian.org.uk](mailto:egoodwin-brown@gulbenkian.org.uk).

## **ABOUT THE CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION**

**The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests. Based in Lisbon with branches in London and Paris, the Foundation is in a privileged position to support national and transnational work tackling contemporary issues. The purpose of the UK Branch, based in London, is to bring about long-term improvements in wellbeing particularly for the most vulnerable, by creating connections across boundaries (national borders, communities, disciplines and sectors) which deliver social, cultural and environmental value.**