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# **The Role of Carers in Supporting the Progress of Care Leavers in the World of Work**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this component of a preliminary cross-national study (Ireland and Catalonia) of care leavers' experience in the world of work is to explore how carers may influence the entry of young people in care into the world of work, and how they may also influence the young people's progress in that world. A total of 22 care leavers, aged 23-33 years, were recruited on the basis of their having substantial employment experience since leaving care. Evidence from the interviews reveals the importance of the role of carers in the work-related progression of the young care leavers, especially in relation to gaining work experience while they were still in care. The qualitative analysis shows that carers were influential in promoting (and sometimes hindering) progress in work and education. Carers were often reported to play an important role in opening up opportunities, giving support (modelling skills development, giving practical help, etc.), being role models, and cultivating the young person's agency. On the basis of these findings, we propose an initial conceptualisation of carer roles in positive work support.

**Key words:** carers, care leavers, world of work, agency, mentoring, support

## 1. Introduction

Youth unemployment is increasingly recognised as a major problem globally, in many developed and developing economies (ILO, 2013). According to Eurostat (2014), the average unemployment rate for young people aged between 15 and 24 in the EU-28 was 22.2 %. Youth unemployment is even higher in the two country contexts of this study: it is running at double the EU rate in Catalonia (47.1%), and is slightly above the EU average in Ireland (23.9%).

Long-term unemployment carries a high risk of social exclusion for young people. This is especially so for those already belonging to a group at high risk of marginalisation such as young people from social and ethnic minorities with high exposure to poverty. One such group is care leavers: young people who have grown up in public care, and who must make their own way in the world when they reach the legal age limit for leaving care. In many jurisdictions, including Ireland and Catalonia, this is 18 years of age. There is international evidence that young people who have been in care may face a higher risk of unemployment or low quality employment compared to peers (Courtney et al., 2011, Naccarato et al., 2010 and Pecora et al., 2006). These young people may also face more challenges in accessing employment (Courtney and Dworsky, 2005, Courtney et al., 2007, Dixon, 2007, Dumaret et al., 2011, Mendes, 2009 and Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2006).

For young people exposed to earlier risk in their lives, it has been observed that the period roughly between late teens and mid-twenties seems to be a pivotal 'window of both opportunity and vulnerability' in terms of future prospects (Obradovic et al., 2006). This message from broader research underlines the significance of this time period for care leavers. It further highlights the value of seeking to help young people in care to break through the major barriers – structural and biographical – that they may face in entering the labour market. Positive experience in work is one of the ways 'later bloomers' from care, or with experience of other forms of earlier adversity, may be able to gain a chance to make up lost ground in terms of their overall prospects and development (Obradovic et al., 2006)

The two institutional pillars of social inclusion for young people on the margins may be said to be education and work / employment. The children and young people in care literature has engaged extensively with the issue of education through a range of empirical and conceptual work thanks to the widely recognised inspiration of, among others, the British researcher Sonia Jackson (Jackson et al., 2005; Jackson, 2010; Jackson & Höjer, 2013). A key message emerging is the positive (and often decisive) influence of carers in the progress of the minority of young people in care who do well in education (Tilbury et al., 2014). This latter point found echoes in our earlier paper on progress in work of young people in or leaving care (Arnau & Gilligan, 2015)

The term carer is a widely used 'umbrella' term in the field of out-of-home care. It covers those who provide 24 hour care and support to young people living in a care setting in the care system. Carers may work on shifts (as in residential centres) or may literally be full time carers in their own homes. Different terms apply in different national systems to those playing carer roles including foster (family) carer, relative or kinship carer, residential social worker, social care worker, social educator or social pedagogue. In the Catalan context there is usually one specific professional, the social educator, qualified with a minimum of a degree in Social Education who is involved either within residential centres or transitional housing services.

It is perhaps not surprising that carers are relevant to the work success of care leavers since their recognised role in educational support and progress would seem to imply a similar potential role in relation to work progress. Accepting this point, however, still leaves further questions about how precisely carers help with work progress, about which carer practices seem to make a difference? It should also be acknowledged that not all carers might engage with these helpful practices to the same extent. Indeed there is some evidence that some young people in care may be critical of their carers for what they see as insufficient support (Storer et al., 2014). Such variation in experience of the carer role tends to underline however the value of understanding it better.

Work support by carers might be seen by some as entailing a widening of the role of the carer beyond daily care in the care setting. Increasing discussion of (and action on) extending the care leaving age beyond the typical age of 18 also brings the question of a wider understanding of the carer's role more sharply into focus (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006a; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006b; Courtney et al., 2007). If carers are to be mandated formally to remain involved as carers in the lives of young people in care to age 21 or beyond, then this draws them inevitably into issues of work and unemployment. All of this further underlines the relevance of the issue of carer support for the work progress of care leavers.

In earlier papers, we have theorised about aspects of the role and activities of carers (Gilligan, 2000; Gilligan, 2008; Gilligan, 2012; Arnau & Gilligan 2015) The most recent paper, in particular, has also drawn attention to how carers may share their social capital with the young person in their care and how this is relevant to work support. A recent paper by Berridge (2014) highlights a different aspect of how carers may practise work support. It offers some insight into the ways in which care workers in a residential setting showed interest and gave encouragement in relation to the progress of young people learning to drive.

This paper seeks to highlight the potential role of carers in work-related support of care leavers. It explores the work support practices of carers that the young people in the sample found to be helpful in their positive work progress. Indicators of such positive work progress are understood here as work stability, work satisfaction, or a strong foothold in the world of work. The paper considers examples of *how* carers may support care leavers in their efforts to access and sustain work opportunities. It looks at what carers can do while the young person is in care and after they have left formal care to help the young person's progress along a positive work pathway. It addresses these issues by drawing on further data and analysis which complements work first reported in an earlier paper on our study of care leavers who have succeeded in the world of work (Arnau & Gilligan, 2015) The findings from this study reported here seek to learn from this success by looking at how at least some of the carers played their part in the work success of the care leavers concerned. This question of how to support work progress is critical: it is one thing to know that work progress is important, another to know more about *how* to support that progress. Since carers are likely to be the adults with most intensive contact with young people in care, their potential contribution in work support seems worthy of deeper exploration.

## **2. Methods**

A multiple case study approach was used in two sites: Ireland and Catalonia. This cross-national design, based on maximum-variation sampling (gender, type of placement, countries,

education / work history, etc), strengthened the value of the findings where points of consistency emerged across diverse cases in two quite different contexts.

## Sample

A total of 22 care leavers (10 from Ireland and 12 from Catalonia) were recruited on the basis of three criteria: having extensive care experience; being in their mid to late twenties (in the achieved sample, all participants fell within the age range 23 to 33); and having substantial employment experience since leaving care.

To recruit participants, authors relied on social workers, social educators and foster carers who first approached potential participants on behalf of the researchers with a letter of invitation provided by the researchers. If they were willing to participate, the care leavers then made contact with the researchers. This approach complied with both data protection and ethical approval requirements established by the Research Ethics Approval Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin

In presenting quotes from interviews, the researchers have changed the names of participants in cases and changed the names of cities, shops, places, etc. to avoid the risk of participants' identification by the kind of things they have said.

## Interview

An open-ended interview, based on an agreed topic guide, was conducted in both locations. This sought to explore, among other things, how the care leavers saw the influence of carers on their work trajectories since leaving care. One focus of the interview was the care leavers' view of the factors and influences that had helped their entry into, and progress within, the world of work, and the role that carers and other significant people had played in this process

A variety of topics were covered in order to fully understand care leavers' impressions and experiences in the world of work: current / most recent work setting / experience, overall work experience since their first job (whether while still at school and in care or following leaving care), how they get and keep their jobs, who helped them in this process, good and bad experiences throughout their work life, relationships at work, etc. A flexible approach was used in terms of the order in, or degree to, which topics were covered. This interview approach proved effective in allowing the researchers to get a range and depth of information from across the sample.

## Procedures

All of the interviews were conducted in person and were tape-recorded and transcribed. Informed consent was obtained prior to the start of the interview. The recruitment process and the materials and procedures used were the same in both locations.

In order to analyze data, a conventional content analysis was conducted using coding categories derived directly from the text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A random sample of interviews was selected to generate an agreed set of codes and categories by the two principal investigators. Once the researchers found consistency in the coding, the rest of the interviews were categorized and analyzed.

### 3. Results

The results presented here are based on the young adults' recollections of how their carers supported (or not) their work progress while in and out of care.

Before describing the results, it is important to mention the care placement experience of the 22 participants as that may be relevant to the type of support they received during and after care. Eight young people in the Irish sample had been fostered with non-relatives, and two had experience of both residential care and family placement (one with relatives and the other with non-relatives). In the Catalan sample, all the young people had been living in residential care under the care of social educators: five had lived in the same residential centre throughout their time in care, while two others had lived in more than one centre, and a further five had experience of both residential care and family placement (four with relatives and one with non-relatives).

Across both countries, carers were often reported to play an important role in the care leavers' pathways into work in one or more of four main ways: (i) sharing social capital / opening up new work opportunities, (ii) giving ongoing support (in skills development and practical matters, etc.), (iii) being (or providing access to) role models, and (iv) cultivating the young person's agency. Nevertheless, the intensity and nature of this support varied across cases, according to the participants, depending on the qualities of the environment / placement.

#### ***Social capital of carers - 'bridging' young people into opportunities, through their range of contacts***

Carers from both contexts were reported as being very supportive in sharing their contacts to help the young people find work opportunities

*“Peter [social educator] was able to help me because he knew the person who was working in the human resource department and he gave her my cv.” (Case 14, Catalonia).*

*“(...)I had got [first job] through my foster parents. They knew somebody that was working there and got me into part time work there.” (Case 2, Ireland).*

In the majority of the Irish cases, carers would also help to structure opportunities for the young people's entry into the world of work, not allowing work opportunities to obstruct education:

*"My own foster family, would have been put a huge, a lot bigger emphasis on education...we were only supposed to be working on holidays." (Case 10, Ireland)*

### ***Carers as sources of ongoing support***

Carers were reported to be an important source of support in the young people's work trajectories and in other areas of life. Two of the Irish participants recalled how their carers had been a consistent source of general support.

*"I was lucky I had, em, you know, the sort of the guidance of Rose and John [Foster parents]. And they, they kept up with me and they always helped me along" (Case 3, Ireland)*

*"And if I didn't have the support of my foster family, I wouldn't have got where I am today (...) Em, they did help in the road to success, I suppose (...) I had the stability obviously of, you know, a secure home. I had a bed, I had people that I could ring up if I needed to, you know." (Case 2, Ireland)*

However, some of the Catalan participants had a different experience with such support being more casual and less predictable as the social educators changed or the attention that they were giving was divided amongst other young people:

*"We are their job, that's something you learn over time. No matter how close you get to someone, that person leaves in the end, then you come to a moment when a lot of people leave, you build a wall, you tell yourself you can't get close to anyone because they leave in the end. It's a barrier you set yourself." (Case 18, Catalonia)*

*"Some educators go to work just for money and then go home. However, others dedicate themselves to children (...) In the centre you share the tenderness that they give to you, you share it with eight or ten more children (Case 15, Catalonia)*

But there were other instances, where the carers also offered more specific work- related support. In many cases foster carers from Ireland were reported as assisting with the logistics of travel to work

*"Yes, myself or my foster sister had to be collected [from the workplace] like so if they [foster parents] got a phone call and there was no talking they knew it was myself or my foster sister and they used to come in and pick us up." (Case 10, Ireland)*

In most cases carers had mentored young people in their role as new employees / job applicants, and had passed on relevant know - how / basic skills. In one example, the young person had opportunities to gain experience in the carer's own workplace, and to actually learn certain key skills from her carer

*“Em, well, say my foster mum Sinead, she would, she worked, she was a, a secretary, so she worked in an office. So, like, I used to go in and do work experience say for, with school and stuff, em, to her office. So, like that, it would be, computers like she showed me kind of everything to do with computers. Em, all like basic office stuff, like binding, eh, filing and it did, it all stood to me, (Case 6, Ireland)*

The same young person also reflected on how her carer had imbued her with a whole mentality or discipline about being organised in her approach to life, a quality very relevant to progress in any workplace.

*“She’d be really particular. Em, and I would be and we were only actually talking about it the other day. Em, like she would have a place for everything and I would be very like that. Like, you know, something belongs here and that’s it, you know. Where she, we, we were only, it’s mad we were only laughing about it the other day, ‘cos she was giving out about something. And I was like, now I know where I got it, I got it from you.” (Case 6, Ireland)*

In another example, a young person recalled how her foster father had actively sought to 'coach' her in certain key work skills and also help her keep skills fresh that she had learned on courses

*“I wanted to learn how to use the computer, I wanted to continue doing those things. So David [foster dad] would let me dictate things [do dictation] for him so that I wouldn’t lose that skill, he let me use things on computers, still does things for me, like showed me how to use Excel, things that helped me when I started to temp, like I wasn’t great at them, but we, and they only had the one computer, but like, would come home in the evening and would spend time with me, force me to study for certain things. “ (Case 1, Ireland)*

In Catalonia, one young person reported how social educators helped her in developing some basic skills necessary for work and life and to increase her contacts with other significant adults:

*“They [the social educators] are very good because they organize your time table (...) they taught us how to be self-sufficient and made us aware of the importance of having a job, but above all, to have a good attitude in our relationships with other people (...) In the residential center they are not demanding a lot, they work*



*mainly on emotional themes (...) to help you to look at things in a different way, to have more contact with adults. (Case 15, Catalonia)*

### **Carers as role models**

In some instances, the young people acknowledged how living with their carers had exposed them to relevant role models. Other young people in the foster care households sometimes had served as role models for the participants. One participant mentioned the biological children of the foster carer as role models in the world of work:

*“I suppose my foster sister, like being in work and stuff like that, it kind of was a bit of a role model (...)and then the fact that all my older [foster] siblings had work, like that was all kind of, it was all very positive” (Case 10, Ireland)*

One Catalan young person who had been placed with relatives, reported that he had learned from them many daily skills, useful for life and for the ‘soft skills’ sought by employers.

*“Between 16 and 17, I stayed with them [relatives] and they taught me good manners, to get up at a good time, to behave properly at work, to value work...(Case 12, Catalonia)*

### **Cultivating the young person's agency**

Carers offered direct support to help the young person gain skills relevant to work. In addition, they also seemed to contribute significantly in less direct but also powerful ways through the climate of the emotional and social environment they enacted for participants. The qualities of this environment could have considerable influence on the young person's motivation and sense of security.

This young person reflected back on how placement stability had been important. But he also recalled the climate of trust the carers created. This encouraged him to make his own plans and choices, while the carers were still setting the overall parameters.

*“I was in an extremely stable foster environment. Like, I was fostered, em, by the same family for essentially my whole entire life... I kind of think it's, my [foster] parents were supporting me throughout all my choices... And I suppose, if I, if I had decided to choose a path that was going to be essentially negative for me, they would have kind of, intervened a lot more strongly. But I suppose, they always kind of trusted my judgement.” (Case 5, Ireland)*

In Catalonia, different young people had been allowed to exercise choice. One participant reflected how, looking back, he would now have preferred some more limit setting by his / her carers regarding work and more priority for studies:

*“Maybe I wished I had been given some rules, in the sense that, they [social educators] permitted me not to work, and made me study” (Case 20, Catalonia).*

In another case, the participant recalled the focus on work by his / her carer:

*“They said you must work because in two years time you will know what will happen...” (Case 18, Catalonia)*

These comments reflect a reported tendency for social educators in Catalonia and Spain to be only moderately involved in the issue of supporting education (Del Valle et al., 2013). Some of the study participants from Catalonia spoke of the difficulties they had had in continuing in education. Social educators were reported to encourage young people to work, but also not to give education sufficient priority. There may be different reasons for this. One possibility may have been a concern that without acquiring work experience while in care, the young people on leaving care would face bleak prospects for securing employment in an economy where one in two young people face unemployment.

#### **4. Conceptualising the Carer role in work support**

##### ***Mentoring***

Mentoring has become recognised as a potentially valuable way that interested adults can contribute to the well-being of vulnerable young people. Such mentoring is increasingly a feature of specifically designed programmes which match young people and volunteer mentors who meet regularly to share activities as part of the programme. It is also recognised in the literature that mentoring relationships and activity may emerge more organically or spontaneously from within the young person's social network (Greeson, & Bowen, 2008; Greeson et al., 2015). Gilligan (1999) drew attention to the potential value of 'organic' (or more informal) types of mentoring in the lives of young people in care.

In this study, the participants recalled examples which seem to represent intuitive or spontaneous mentoring activity on the part of the carers. In many instances, the carers could be said to have been mentoring the young people in the acquisition and performance of key skills and roles in the world of work. A very clear cut example is the female carer who brought the young person into her office and quite explicitly sought to use the direct opportunity this experience offered as a way for her to transmit skills and reinforce values. It seems that she saw herself as mentoring the young person in absorbing the skills and qualities necessary to prosper in the world of work. Arguably, carers were mentoring the young people in the 'soft skills' so beloved of employers in two ways. Firstly, there were the explicit examples that reflected mentoring efforts in relation to, acquiring in effect, soft skills. But there was also the part played by the overall 'culture' of the foster home in terms of imbuing

the qualities underpinning soft skills: punctuality, etc. The carer could help the young person to arrive on time for work, by a lift, but the carer could also have helped cultivate a home climate where the young person had begun the subtle process of internalising key qualities such as the habit of punctuality and the personal planning behind it. In the care setting, the young person might also learn (or not) how to engage in simple conversation with others, colleagues or customers.

### ***Gender and relevant carer practices***

While many of the young people in family placement may refer to both carers, it is clear also that the female carer was often very active in supporting work progress. Nevertheless, the influence of male carers is also discernible, a clear example being case 1 where the foster father was active in coaching the young person in acquiring and reinforcing key board skills. This example resonates with the points made in Gilligan (2000) and (2012) about how male foster carers may play a particular role in supporting the engagement of the young person in care in the wider world beyond the foster home.

### ***Levels of engagement with work support***

In this study, where carers were reported to be engaged in relation to work for the young person, this seemed more often to involve a foster carer rather than a social educator. While this is an interesting difference and worth investigating further, a larger sample would be required to assess whether such a difference continues to hold up. It is certainly not inevitable that carers in residential settings are more detached in this regard. The work of Berridge (2014), for example, suggests, (again based on a small sample), that residential workers may also be quite engaged in supporting young people in the acquisition of work related skills such as driving. Taken with the evidence of the current study, a tentative conclusion could be that the specific context plays an important part in how carers conceive or play their role. This suggests a need for further focus on this point to understand better which aspects of context may influence the levels of carer engagement (and how). Where such engagement by carers exists, it is also important to seek more understanding of how it interacts with the young people's progression in work / work preparation and entry.

### ***Supporting the 'enactment' of agency by the young person***

From the wider study (as reported in Arnau & Gilligan, 2015) on which this paper is based, it seems that in many cases, young people themselves made the initial decision to seek work. Once that decision was made, they seemed to enlist the support of carers and others, as necessary, in pursuit of work opportunities. From the accounts of the study participants, carers were mostly pleased to play this support role. A number of researchers (Dewhurst et al., (2015), Munford & Sanders (2015), Sanders & Munford (2014), draw attention to how social workers and other concerned adults can play a key role in helping vulnerable young people in enacting their agency, in following through on their plans, on helping make their plans happen. There is certainly some evidence from this study in the very specific area of

work support that seems to endorse this point. The study also underlines how important carers may be more generally in supporting young people in their care to 'enact' their agency

### ***Wider implications for how to support work entry and progress among young people in care***

This is a critical issue, how to help young people in care make progress in the world of work. Young people may encounter formidable challenges, both in facing the realities of a demanding and often unforgiving labour market, and in adjusting to those realities because of the issues from their own personal life journey. In the US in particular, there has been a strong trend towards developing specific work support programmes which aim to equip young people with certain work-related skills (Barnow et al., 2015). Zinn and Courtney (2015) highlight the challenges for such programmes in developing 'soft' rather than 'hard' employability skills. What is interesting about the findings from this specific (European) study sample (of work 'achievers') is that they reveal more spontaneous support efforts by carers, rather than programmatic approaches to work support.

The findings from this study may help to inform more programmatic efforts in training young people, but they should also promote recognition of how carers can contribute more independently or 'organically', through for example, their acting as role models. It seems important to support carers, with more training and resources so as to reinforce their role in helping young people to cope with the demands of the labour market. It may be helpful to think of the value of informal as well as formal approaches to enhancing young people's employability skills in terms of finding and holding down a job. These skills are extremely valuable and necessary to help young people such as care leavers to be self sufficient in the labour market and in life (Arnau-Sabatés et al., 2014). The findings presented here are a reminder of how full-time carers may play a key role in the transmission or cultivation of such skills (and especially the more elusive 'soft' skills) among young people in care. This is not a call to displace employment training programmes, but a reminder that carers may also have an important role in promoting and resourcing key skills for success in the world of work.

In considering how to support the work progress of young people in care, the evidence from this exploratory study suggest that such support may need to be considered at two levels: firstly, climate of care and secondly, practical guidance or support. Climate covers issues such as carers' expectations, values and support in relation to education; stability of care placements; carers' own work ethic, etc. Practical guidance and support relates to issues such as helping young people prepare themselves for work tasks and skills, as well as more practical points such as lifts to or from work when no public transport is available. The findings here suggest the relevance of both levels. It may be more difficult to deliver successful practical support without an accompanying supportive climate in the care setting, a point with relevance for programmatic approaches to work preparation. 'Climate' as suggested here embraces deeper issues that are less amenable to short training interventions (for example values about education, placement stability, etc.).

## 5. Implications for policy and practice

The results of this preliminary study draw attention to *how* carers can be influential in supporting the early work progress of young people in care. In many of the examples recounted by the participants, the actions of the carers seemed to occur spontaneously or 'organically'. Perhaps carers were drawing on traces of their own personal memories from that stage of life and how they had been supported, or they were drawing on previous experience with their own teenage children or younger siblings. Whatever the source of inspiration for them, the carers in question often seemed, instinctively, to have a sense of the 'right' thing to do, the right response in terms of opening up opportunities for the young person, and a response that 'worked' in the recollection of the young adult. The right response might range across one or more of encouragement, 'coaching' and mentoring, using social capital in the form of contacts to open up possible job interviews, offering lifts to or from the workplace especially at very early or late hours.

Implicit in many of the stories was a message that the carers seemed to be giving the young people. This message was experienced as: 'we believe you can do this'. This may seem a simple message, but it is very powerful for young people who may not have that confidence in themselves or may not have had that sense of confidence invested in them many times before. The carers seemed to play a helpful role rather like that of the parent or relative who supports the participation of a young person in sports or comparable activity. While they might not have been able to sit in the supermarket aisle observing or cheering on the work performance of the young person, as carers might sometimes do on the sidelines of a sporting event, the carers could still show equivalent signs of genuine interest and belief in the young person in a range of other ways. Such interest and belief could be very precious for any young person, but especially for a young person in care whose earlier life experiences may have eroded a sense of being worthy, or capable, of gaining such adult interest. Perhaps this subtle value of work experience for the young person in care needs constant emphasis. Achievement in the workplace opens up moments of (even tacit) adult interest and affirmation from carers, and indeed from other interested adults such as employers or work colleagues. The participant accounts serve to reveal two important related insights. They show that work was often an arena which opened up new opportunities for experiencing precious carer (and wider adult) interest and affirmation. They also give some sense of *how* such interest and affirmation may be manifested.

Since these varied carer responses (where evident) seemed to have considerable influence in the overall progress of the young person, an implication of these findings would seem to be the value of raising awareness among carers and social workers about the significance of these seemingly modest or simple actions related to work support in terms of longer term prospects. The stories from many of the participants show how important their accessing such work opportunities and experience had been, and how important the contribution of carers had been in their finding those opportunities and gaining that experience. The carers had often 'got', instinctively, the symbolic and practical value and meaning work experience had for the young people in their care. Perhaps the single most powerful message – or reminder – to come from the findings in this study is the importance of positive expectations on the part of carers. A much appreciated part of caring – as seen by the young people – is carers having positive expectations of them, and carers living out those positive expectations in a myriad of simple enabling actions.

The potential length of time spent by young people with given carers is growing in certain jurisdictions, where the care leaving age limit is being raised beyond 18. Courtney et al., (2012) and Napolitano and Courtney (2014), reported that 15 jurisdictions in the US (most recently California) have introduced such reforms and there have been similar changes implemented or announced for Scotland and England [see Children and Families (England) Act, 2014 and Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, 2015]. This emerging trend towards later care leaving age means that carers in such systems are increasingly likely to become even more relevant in terms of the preparatory processes for the young person entering – and remaining in - the world of work.

This study shows that carers can help young people gain precious part time work experience while still in care, and can also, in other ways help them become established in the world of full time work. These insights strengthen the case for re-conceptualising the role of carers, an issue that has implications across recruitment, training and support strategies for carers. It also suggests related changes in the expectations social workers and others have of carers and the support carers can offer in this arena of cultivating and supporting work opportunities and work skills for young people in care.

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