

From Us to Us:

**A collection of advice
from care-experienced graduates to
care-experienced graduates**

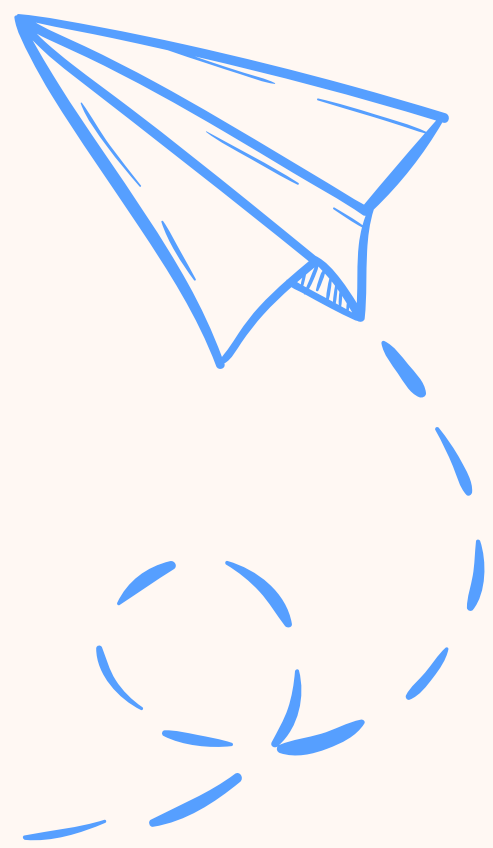
Authored by care-experienced graduates

Edited by Dr Zoe Baker

Illustrated and designed by Abi Morris



What is the purpose of this booklet?



This booklet contains a collection of advice from care-experienced university graduates to care-experienced people who are approaching graduation, or have recently graduated themselves. It has been collectively produced by care-experienced people: the advice on the following pages are direct quotes from care-experienced graduates; the booklet's illustration and design work has been completed by Abi Morris (a care-experienced artist); and the content has been compiled and edited by Zoe Baker (a care-experienced academic).

The advice included throughout has been collected as part of the *Care-Experienced Graduates Project* (2021-2024). The project explored care-experienced graduates' transitions out of university and into graduate life. As part of the project, care-experienced graduates were asked: 'If you could give a piece of advice to another care-experienced person who is about to graduate, what would you say?'. The content of this booklet includes their responses to this question.

Although there are official sources of advice targeted at university graduates, the advice provided by those with shared or similar lived experiences – from people who 'get it' – is especially valuable. Upon sharing the idea for this booklet, one participant in the *Care-Experienced Graduates Project* put this perfectly: 'That would be really nice, because then it's personal; it's from us to us' (Hannah, 32, MA Education graduate).

If you would like to learn more about the *Care-Experienced Graduates Project*, please visit my website: drzoebaker.co.uk.

Contents

Celebrate yourself

Take a step

Ask for support

Connect with others

Define your future

Useful resources

Your notes

2

3

4


5

6


8

9





If you could give a piece of advice to another care-experienced person who is about to graduate, what would you say?





Celebrate Yourself

It is a phenomenal achievement to graduate from university in any context, you know, irrespective of your background. Nobody does the work for you. Nobody passes those exams; nobody sits them. So, for any student to graduate from university, it is a great privilege and a great opportunity... Your life's sort of what you make of it... You know, there might be times where you're not sure and that's okay. Challenges ahead might exist, but we can get through it together as a network. We're part of a formidable network if we all got together, I'm sure.

Carl, 24, MSc Pharmacy graduate

Take a break. If you can, just take a break to appreciate how much you've achieved and to just relax and congratulate yourself, and be kinder to yourself as well... Take a break and appreciate what you've achieved.

Geraldine, 23, Social Sciences graduate

What you've done is amazing, you know, that you've graduated. You've gone through all of that, considering all the challenges that you've probably gone through even before and during it all... you're great, and just keep going.

Dera, 23, Sports Sciences graduate

You've graduated and that is an achievement. That is amazing. Like, appreciate that that's really amazing that your life experiences have happened and you've still managed to get a degree at the end of it.

Austin, 22, Social Work graduate

Take A Step



.....>

No matter what you decide to do, or even to do nothing, or if you want to take step towards something and you're really scared about it, it's just because it's unknown. Just do it, as long it doesn't harm you or harm other people... Do it. Even if it's like something that you fail on terribly, and even if it's a bad decision, do it because at least you've done it. You have to try something to see whether it's either good or bad, or to fail or to pass because you have to experience it.

Otherwise, it will eat you like for a long time. What's the worst scenario that will happen?... Just go for it whatever you do and sometimes you just learn how to breathe. Like everything is overwhelming and there's some stuff you need to sort out immediately. You have to pause and breathe. Take a step back, and just breathe and do something completely different to deal with it - even if that is sleeping - and then come back to it. If you're still feeling the same way, go back, and take a break until you're ready to deal with it.

Nadia, 24, Healthcare graduate

Be prepared. I mean, obviously for graduation it's like different. But what I noticed - and I've heard a couple of people talk about this - is like the sudden thing from going from doing work to not doing any work at all and not having anything, unless obviously you do have a job. But maybe people who haven't got a job or any kind of consistent thing in that respect, that change was so drastic for me...

Be prepared for that change. Be prepared for the change of not having anything to do, at least in my experience, because I didn't have a job... I did volunteering in the end at Shelter and that was the best thing I could have done for myself... Seriously though, be prepared for the change and have your support system in place, whatever that looks like, however that's made up. That would be my biggest advice.

Lou, 21, Politics graduate

Ask For Support

I feel like I'd just want to inform them of as much as I could... like about council tax and how Universal Credit payments work or whatever... just like what kind of support is available to them.

Dera, 23, Sports Sciences graduate

Ask your local authority if there is anything they can help you with regarding housing... Try and get onto the social housing register as soon as you can, if you're not already. Try and save your money for white goods to get your own fridge, or to get curtains, and curtain poles... I would definitely recommend people to save money aside for curtains and curtain poles, because there's nothing more humiliating than knowing that someone could just watch your house... If you want to go on and do more education, you should try your best to fight for it. I think that's sort of all you do is just try your hardest to fight against the tide.

Jade, 23, Politics graduate

Annoy your local authority as much as humanly possible because you might just get something. Try and ask for more than you need just in case, because if you don't get as much as that then chances are you at least get what you need. Try and get as much support from as many different routes as possible, even just like GPs, mental health services, the university... A lot of it is trying to get as much support for as long as possible and that is the difficult bit just because the local authority do kind of give you like an expiry date. But trying to make sure of that as much as possible, seeing what the local authority has offered you that you may not have accessed yet but potentially could be useful for you in the future even if it's stuff like: 'Let's sort out your CV early on' or 'let's try and help you figure out a suitable place to live next year'... Just trying to make use of that support network and expand it... I think a lot of it is just like the chaos of graduating uni... trust in the process and that it all goes well, but yeah, I'm also a staunch believer in my plan B, C, D. But yeah, a good support network, maintaining that, utilising that and expanding that and trying to get as much out of both the university and the local authority as you can before graduation. So, even at my university, they give careers advice for a couple of years after you graduate and everything.

Waide, 23, Healthcare graduate

Connect With Others

I guess really like in a general kind of way, really like focusing on those support networks and those communities and friendships and chosen families. Really focusing on developing them and deepening them because they're really invaluable and mutually beneficial and often like a key source of survival, like in difficult situations that can arise. So, I'd say that's arguably more important than financial stability in a lot of ways, because that kind of thing can kind of come with time, whereas you kind of need those support networks to ground you in the first place to gain financial stability.

Martha, 23, Sociology graduate

If you can, connect in with other people who are going through similar experiences, whether that be in your field of work, whether that be in your local area or whether that be on the national sort of platforms on like Twitter, Facebook, or like the sort of groups that go on. It is hard because I don't want to say 'be open about your experiences' because I think that's more of a 'me' thing than it is an advice thing, but your experiences have happened and now is the time to grow.

Austin, 22, Social Work graduate



Define Your Future

Do what makes you happy. It sounds really cheesy, but even if it's a really low paid job, if it makes you happy, just do it and things will be rewarded as and when. Don't do something for the money, do something because you're happy with it, and leave when and if you feel you're not valued, because you are valued.

Hannah, 32, MA Education graduate

Don't be afraid of being who you are, all of who you are, you know and don't allow any of your story to be your defining. Don't let it define you at all. Don't allow people to use your story for anything other than what you feel is the right thing for you. Don't show them the privilege of hearing your story, so don't share it unless you really want to, unless you're in that space. People don't have a right to your story, they don't. People should feel privileged about the fact that you're sharing stories with them, because that is a privilege.

Lilly, 38, Healthcare graduate

Here's to the next chapter!

This next chapter of your life is not going to make up for the first chapter of your life, but you're going to be in a position where anything you've gone through in the past, you're never going to have to go back to that. What's ahead is better than what was behind you.

I mean, the thing is you can't shake some of the negative experiences. You can't shake the feelings of being abandoned or stuff taken out of your control, but you have achieved something...

You have beaten the odds. You're in that category. So, there's something that you have whether it's a character trait or you've had somebody in your life that's a key supporting element, or you've had something within university that's helped you, that's helped you get past that. But you've overcome those odds and you have the rest of your life to look forward to. You've achieved a position where you're not going to have to go through some of these things that you've experienced in the past... The first chapter of your life is not going to be repeated.

If you've struggled to make ground in your life - and I did for a while - I did all the way through my 20s. You know I had false starts, I spent some time ill, I spent some time in that position where I was claiming benefits and things like that. You do get to a point where you start to worry. I found productivity through the gym and I met people who I had a rapport with, and that opened up opportunities for me to make something, make some money, and do things and go beyond all that... At a level of ability and potential, there's no difference between you and somebody else... You're not going back into the care system. You're going into the world of work or the world of academia or whatever you choose to do with your life... The next chapter of your life is going to be very, very different and you're not going back to where you were. You're not moving backwards.

Michael, 34, IT graduate

Useful Resources

Support and advice

Become

<https://becomecharity.org.uk/>

Rees Foundation

<https://www.reesfoundation.org/>

Finding information

Care Leaver Local Offer

<https://www.careleaveroffer.co.uk/>

Finding opportunities and services

Care Leaver Covenant

<https://mycovenant.org.uk/>

Catch22

<https://www.catch-22.org.uk/find-services/>

Connecting with others

Care Leavers Rock - Facebook Group

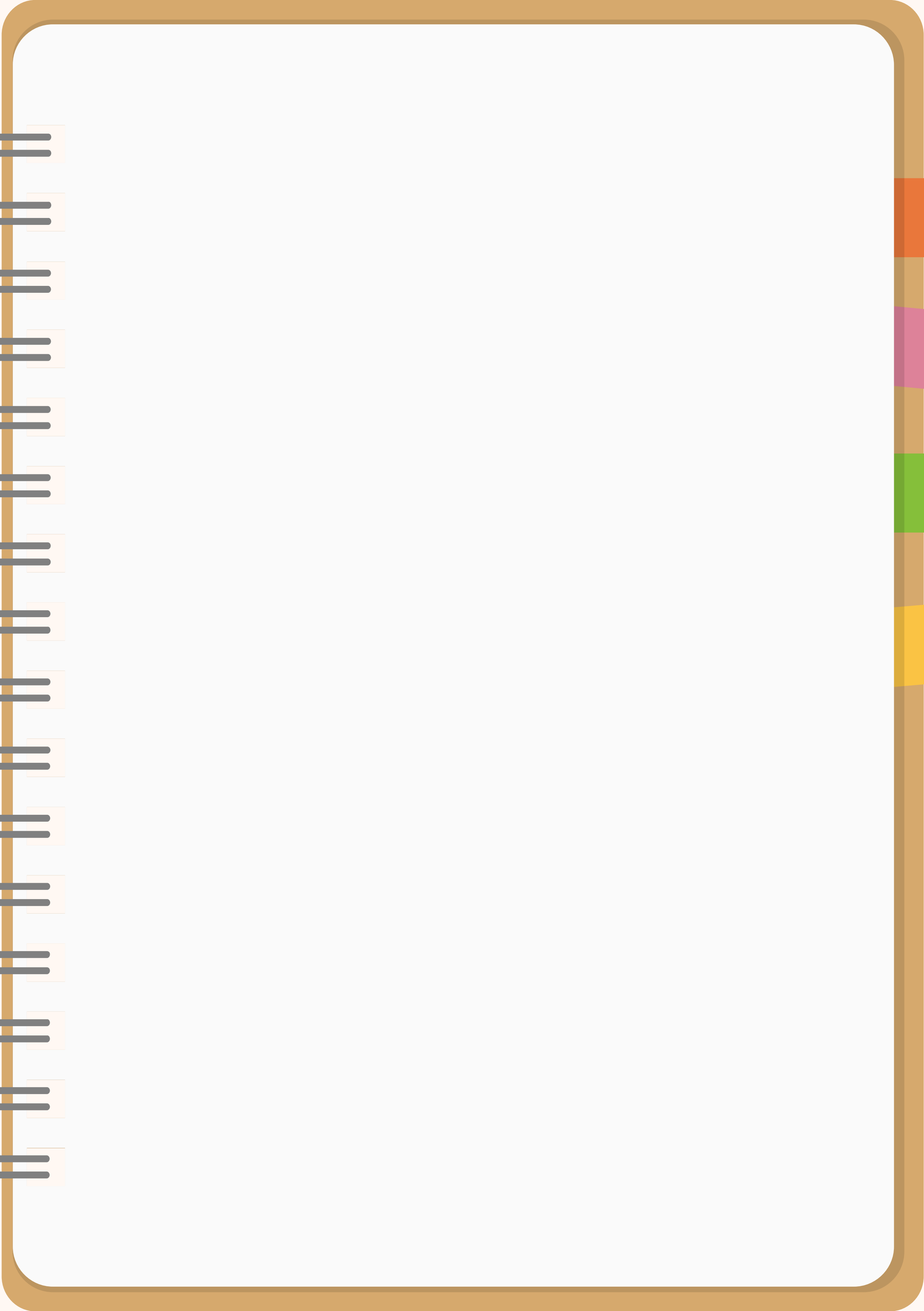
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/CareLeaversRock/>

Rees Foundation - 'Let's Connect' Groups

<https://www.reesfoundation.org/lets-connect.html>



Your Notes



Dr Zoe Baker



Dr Zoe Baker has been researching issues of inequality and social justice in higher education for over ten years and has previously received funding from the British Academy, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and the Unite Foundation. Her work seeks to redress inequalities for care-experienced peoples' access to, progression through, and transitions out of higher education. Outside of her research activities, Zoe volunteers as an Independent Visitor for children and young people in care.



zoe.baker@york.ac.uk



[zs_baker](#)

About the artist



Abi Morris is a care-experienced digital artist who works closely with the charity Article 39 in fighting for the rights of children and young people in mental health inpatient units. Abi has designed multiple pieces of digital art for Article 39 as well as other children and young people's charities and services. She has also designed logos, courses, book covers, and information packs for young people.



abimorris@hotmail.co.uk



[AbiMorris](#)

We would love to hear your thoughts on this booklet! Please [click here](#) or scan the QR code to complete a short feedback form.



SCAN
ME



With thanks to The British Academy for funding the Care-Experienced Graduates Project, and to each and every care-experienced graduate who participated in this much-needed research. This booklet would not exist without your enthusiasm and dedication to the project.

Published July 2024