

Long description/transcript - Degrees of Support comic

Cover page

Three people are illustrated in shades of blue and orange. Behind them are signposts labelled “Postgrad”, “Home”, and “Work”. One person with short hair stands against a background of houses. Another, with long straight hair in a ponytail, appears before shelves of books. A third, with a curly ponytail, stands in a kitchen.

The title reads “Degrees of Support: How Care-Experienced Graduates Navigate the Transition Beyond University.”

This comic explores how graduates who have experienced the care system navigate life after university — in work, housing, and postgraduate study — and how support, or the lack of it, shapes those transitions.

Page 1 – Definitions and About the Research

At the top, text explains the difference between care leavers and care-experienced people. Care leavers are those who have been in local authority care for at least thirteen weeks, including their sixteenth birthday.

They are entitled to a personal advisor until age twenty-five.

Care-experienced includes anyone who has spent time in care, even if they do not meet the legal definition, and many of them receive no statutory support.

At the bottom, a person labelled Zoe gestures toward a city skyline under a cloudy sky.

The accompanying text introduces the Care-Experienced Graduates Project (2021–2024) — a qualitative, longitudinal study using interviews and diaries to explore how care-experienced graduates navigate life after higher education.

It notes that while access to university has improved, support after graduation has been neglected, despite graduates facing barriers linked to trauma, disrupted schooling, stigma, and financial precarity.

Page 2 – Hopes and Plans

The page is titled “Hopes and Plans.”

Speech bubbles express the graduates’ ambitions and excitement about their futures.

One says, “I would love to be an academic. I’ve really loved researching.”

Another says, “The plan is to go into research. I bloody love it. I’m like, ‘What are we changing today then?’”

Others express goals like having independence, meaningful work, stability, and better prospects.

One says, “I’m excited to step beyond the ‘student’ label and make a difference where it

matters.”

Another adds, “I want stability. I want something that’s going to financially support me.”

Narration explains that after graduation, care-experienced people often worry about housing, employment, and postgraduate study, and they face barriers linked to their care backgrounds.

This section introduces the comic’s purpose: to show how support — or its absence — shapes these transitions, and to amplify care-experienced graduates’ voices using their own words.

Pages 3 and 4 – Housing (Barriers)

An eight-panel sequence titled “Housing” shows a graduate’s struggle to find stable housing.

Panel 1: A person stands near houses and a car under a cloudy sky. Text reads, “I’ve never really felt at home anywhere.”

Panel 2: The person looks worried. Text says, “I moved more than usual between different homes when I was younger.” They sigh, “Again?”

Panel 3: They look pensive. Text reads, “It’s really important for me now to have my own home.”

Panel 4: Across a desk, an official rejects their housing application. “Sorry, you’re not registered here.”

Panel 5: They think, “I’m not sure I want to move back there,” after being told to apply to a different council.

Panel 6: They stare at a calendar marked “March.” Text: “They said it’ll probably take two years.”

Panel 7: Someone says off-screen, “You’ll have to ask your family or friends for a guarantor.” The graduate replies quietly, “I don’t have anyone to ask.”

Panel 8: They hold their head in frustration. Text reads, “We had to pay four months of rent up front with one week’s notice.” A thought bubble says, “Where am I going to get £3,000 by next week?”

Together, these panels show how housing instability and bureaucratic barriers compound the challenges for care-experienced graduates without family networks.

Page 5 – Housing (Support and Stability)

A nine-panel page in shades of orange contrasts positive housing experiences.

Panel 1–3: A person with orange hair describes using a graduation bursary to pay a rental deposit and rent, later gazing contentedly at a sunset through a window.

Panel 4–6: Another graduate explains that their university allowed them to stay in student accommodation after graduation — even covering the cost. They say, “I’m so grateful for how they helped me.”

Panel 7–9: A third person with curly hair enjoys their new social housing, drinks tea, and smiles while petting a cat. They say, “I wasn’t expecting it to happen so quickly.”

The final frame shows an apartment building under a yellow sky with the caption, “I feel a lot more stable now.”

This page highlights how consistent institutional and local-authority support can make the transition to independent housing safe and sustainable.

Page 6 – Housing Recommendations (Infographic)

A white background infographic lists three recommendations, surrounded by small illustrations of home comforts like mugs, slippers, and cats.

1. Universities should provide graduation bursaries for care-experienced students.
2. They should offer extended accommodation contracts after graduation to reduce homelessness risk.
3. Local authorities should offer guarantor schemes for care leavers entering private rentals.

A footnote mentions Kent County Council and Teignbridge District Council as examples of good practice.

Page 7 – Employment (Barriers)

A nine-panel page in blue shows a graduate juggling multiple jobs.

Panel 1: A person sits tired at a desk, saying, “I have to work four part-time casual jobs just to make ends meet.”

Panel 2: A hand tamping coffee accompanies narration: “Other graduates can try something new and, if it fails, go home to their parents.”

Panel 3: The graduate drinks coffee, thinking, “If I fail, that’s my home at risk.”

Panel 4–6: They explain that others can quit or change jobs because they have family backup, while they cannot.

Panel 7: Someone gestures toward them, saying, “Look at the opportunity we’ve given this care-experienced person.”

Panel 8: The graduate looks serious, replying, “I’m here because I’m qualified.”

Panel 9: They look down, thinking, “It’s nothing to do with being care-experienced.”

The panels expose how precarious work and bias shape care-experienced graduates’ employment.

Page 8 – Employment (Supportive Workplace)

Nine panels in warm tones show a supportive, inclusive workplace.

Panels 1–3: A group of colleagues chat. The graduate explains that their employer provided an occupational health advisor and speech-to-text technology.

Panel 4: They wear headphones, focusing on work. Text: “It’s helped me do my job well.”

Panels 5–7: Lunch outdoors with colleagues who know and respect their care background. A manager asks, “Is there anything else we can do to help?” The graduate notices how colleagues ask thoughtful questions but aren’t intrusive.

This section illustrates how trust, awareness, and practical support make a workplace empowering rather than patronising.

Page 9 – Employment Recommendations (Infographic)

Another infographic page outlines four recommendations.

Illustrations include a calendar, laptop, wallet, and speech bubbles.

1. Employers should offer a living wage to sustain independent living.
2. They should address bias through training on care experience.
3. Organisations should assess trauma training needs for managers and bring in skilled trainers.
4. Workplaces should normalise accommodations by including them in onboarding.

Footnotes cite Rees Foundation and NHS Education for Scotland guidance.

Page 10 – Postgraduate Study (Barriers and Partial Help)

Eight panels transition from blue to orange.

Panels 1–3: A student recalls being told, “You should go and do your master’s,” but worries, “Would I be able to afford to live if I did?”.

Panel 4–6: They struggle financially. Another says, “There’s no support for postgraduates,” while a third adds, “You can’t access hardship funds if you have savings.”. One explains, “I need savings because I can’t just go back to mum and dad.”.

Panels 7–8: A short-haired student asks, “Can you help me?”. The response is, “This is the best we can do for you.”. They smile faintly, “Thanks, this is actually really helpful.”.

These panels show how limited postgraduate funding forces care-experienced students to depend on piecemeal help.

Page 11 – Postgraduate Study Recommendations (Infographic)

Three recommendations appear, surrounded by drawings of books, stationery, and a graduation cap.

1. Universities should adapt hardship funds to reflect care-experienced students’ realities.
2. They should create postgraduate scholarships to assist with living costs.
3. Local authorities should clarify whether any postgraduate support exists, and how to access it.

Page 12 – Back Page

The back cover features a summary of the comic’s purpose, credits, and logos.

The blurb asks,

“What happens when your childhood circumstances constrain your opportunities as a graduate?”

It explains that the comic contrasts the realities of supported and unsupported transitions, and offers clear recommendations for fairer opportunities.

Credits list researcher Dr Zoe Baker, producer and editor Gabi Putnoki, and illustrator Rosie Murrell.

It acknowledges funding from the British Academy, the University of Sheffield, and CIRCLE.

Dr Baker’s research focuses on inequality and social justice in higher education, and she also volunteers as an Independent Visitor for children in care.

Logos of the British Academy, the University of Sheffield, and CIRCLE appear at the bottom.