

Client: Barnardo's in partnership with IKEA

Agency: Leap

This entry is for publication

# LifeLabs

Delivering change  
through an inspiring  
co-design approach



# Executive summary

**Leaving care without a safety net is hard, and it's what most young care-leavers face. With few friends or family, and little support, they have no safe space to fail - no opportunities to try, discuss and learn how to live independently.**

Barnardo's wanted to address this issue through a pilot project with their Plymouth Care Journeys' service, aimed at over 800 17-21 year-olds in, or leaving, the care system in Plymouth.

This was Barnardo's objective:

**How can we empower care experienced young people to get the right support to develop the skills needed to start living more independently?**

Meeting this objective meant putting these young people at the heart of a co-design approach, ensuring the project would deliver exactly what they needed. We worked with 11 young people from Barnardo's Plymouth Care Journeys service: empowering and giving them a voice was what guided us throughout.

The scope of work spanned three phases:

- First, we co-designed the LifeLabs brand with the young people, and, through primary research and workshops, established the need for an online "video-based toolkit" of independent-living resources in five areas: DIY, managing money, reducing energy consumption, batch cooking, and mental wellbeing.
- Second, we designed this portal with them, and produced 18 videos covering these themes.
- Lastly, we developed a collaborative exhibition in IKEA Exeter: a chance for the young people to be seen and heard, and a celebration of skills learnt and friends made throughout the project.

LifeLabs launched in Plymouth in February 2020. The pandemic reduced its budget and scope, but the co-design approach's early success and increased awareness of the issue saw Barnardo's corporate partner, IKEA, inject £75k into the project. This paid for the portal, its content and the exhibition, which all launched in May 2021.

So, how to gauge the success of such a project?

- Over 1,200 unique users visited the portal within six months of launch.
- Young people gave powerful testimony of confidence gained, skills learned and friendships made.
- And, crucially, LifeLabs has been such a success that Barnardo's are rolling it out nationally, and IKEA have extended their support by another year, with £70k more funding.



## Key results

### Co-creation

The 11 care-experienced young people involved gained valuable life experiences.

### Process impact

The project offered a focus during lockdown and gave them a safe place to fail and to share (as well as to learn new skills and make new friends).

### National expansion

The pilot's success has secured an additional £70k to develop national expansion, with the potential to reach c.150k young people in or leaving care in the UK.

### Partnership

The project impact resulted in a major corporate partnership extension of at least 12 months between Barnardo's and IKEA.

### Engagement

1,200 unique users of the LifeLabs portal within six months of promotion to local Plymouth networks and Barnardo's internal services, suggesting a high level of engagement by the 800 young care leavers in the Plymouth care system.

### Systemic change

The project was aligned with key findings from IKEA and Barnardo's 2021 research report which highlighted the difficulties young people face when they leave care. Recommendations were presented to the Government in response to the England care system review.



## Context and overview of the issue

Every year, around 10,000 children and young people in England, aged 16 to 18, leave local authority care. Many find this difficult and unsettling, as they figure out how to live independently without friends or close family.

In England, the average age for leaving home is 23, yet those in the care system, for whom the state acts as 'corporate parent', are expected to leave at 18 or even younger. This means many vulnerable young people trying to manage alone before they're ready. Sadly, Barnardo's regularly sees young care-leavers struggling to deal with living on a low income, managing their tenancy, or feeling lonely, isolated and scared.

Care-experienced young people aged 19-21 years old are significantly less likely to be in education, employment or training (or other positive destinations) compared to peers who have not been in care. They are also more likely to be homeless and to take their own life.

Care Journeys is a Barnardo's Core Priority Programme: it aims to ensure care-experienced young people will be just as likely as their peers to be in those 'positive destinations,' which, as described by Barnardo's, are more accessible if you live in a place that you like, feel empowered to live independently and, most importantly, are well and happy.

### **Barnardo's and IKEA partnership**

Since 2018, Barnardo's and IKEA's national partnership has been helping improve the lives of some of the UK's most vulnerable children and young people. They both believe that every young person deserves a place to call home and a healthy start in life. The partnership aims to support young care-leavers to learn independent-living skills and improve their lives at home, while also trying to have a long-term impact on the care system.

## Project brief

Barnardo's wanted to address the issues facing young care-leavers through a pilot co-creation project based with the Barnardo's Plymouth Care Journeys' service. In the Plymouth care system there are over 800 17-21 year-olds in or leaving care.

This was their objective:

**How can we empower care experienced young people to get the right support to develop the skills needed to start living more independently?**

## Key facts

# 10,000

the number of 16-18 year olds leaving the care system every year.

# 33%

of care-leavers become homeless within two years after leaving care.

# 35%

of care-leavers live on their own with loneliness and isolation and no support.

# 40%

of care-leavers aged 19-21 are not in positive destinations compared to 10% of their peers.



# Co-creation process and findings

Meeting the project's objective meant putting these young people at the heart of a co-design approach, ensuring the project would deliver exactly what they needed. We worked with 11 young people from Barnardo's Plymouth Care Journeys: empowering and giving them a voice was what guided us throughout.

The work spanned three phases:

1. Primary research, workshops, service design, alpha-testing new technologies, naming and branding of the project (18 months)
2. Online portal design and development, content creation (six months)
3. Collaborative exhibition design and delivery (five months).

## Phase 1: Research, workshops and branding of the project (18 months)

Leaving care is rarely seen or heard, so we wanted to give young people an authentic voice and understand their experiences. This meant developing both an in-depth understanding of what would help their transition to independent living, as well as a visual language which they felt they could own.

Given the vulnerable nature of the group, it was also vital to find the most appropriate way to collaborate with the young people. So we worked closely with a senior Barnardo's project worker, who was the main focus of all our interactions with them.

A behaviourist facilitated a series of "new experiences workshops" which allowed young people to try new experiences, and gauged their responses to various tasks and new technology. We then ran a second series of "Alpha test" workshops in which we co-designed the name and brand of the project with them. These workshops helped us identify the specific skills and advice which the young people most wanted, as well as the best medium for them.

## Phase 2: Portal design and development, content creation (six months)

*Thanks to phase 1's insights and deliverables, we had identified the project's core strands. However, the pandemic reduced budgets, so scoping new technologies such as VR had to be postponed until further funding could be secured.*

Having co-created a project name and brand with the young people, and with an informed understanding of what would be most useful to them, we delved deeper into their preferences as to types of content and preferred platforms.

We first conducted a Typeform survey to find out how the young people liked to engage with media-rich content: phones were used a lot more than desktop PCs, YouTube was their favourite social media platform, multimedia was preferred to text to learn about a subject, and videos decisively beat podcasts. Our follow-up live survey confirmed that four to six hours each day were spent watching videos, with YouTube the stand-out platform, and phones the favoured way to watch. We also established that there was a unanimous interest in learning the stories behind the videos, through a combination of video and supporting text.

Our third survey was to understand the designs which resonated with the care-leavers. The outcomes were a lively/busy design, black and white images with colour overlays, and a vibrant colour palette.

# Phase 1 discovery

- **National workshop held at the annual Barnardo's Care Journeys network day**
- **Service design research and collaboration**
- **New experiences workshops**
- **Alpha testing workshop**

# Phase 1 key findings

- **Young people at the centre of empowerment**
- **Learning at an own or phased but supported pace**
- **Name and brand have to be designed in a way the young people can associate with**
- **The need for an online videos-based toolkit**
- **Five specific skills and themes identified: DIY, managing money, reducing energy consumption, batch cooking, and mental wellbeing**

# Co-creation design solutions

## Phase 2 design solutions

With this clear direction, we designed and developed an online portal which was a mobile and video first design; set up to stream videos that would be housed in YouTube; with a busy, vibrant look and feel which incorporated black and white images; and structured to allow for supporting back stories to be told through video and text.

Running concurrently with the LifeLabs portal was the video content to be housed on the platform. This comprised a series of four experience-led videos of young people sharing their lived experiences and overlaid with animation to highlight the key points, and eight instructional videos. As with the portal, the young people were involved in every key creative decision and helped guide the videos' direction. The videos focussed on the five skills areas identified in phase 1.

## Phase 3: Collaborative exhibition design and delivery (five months)

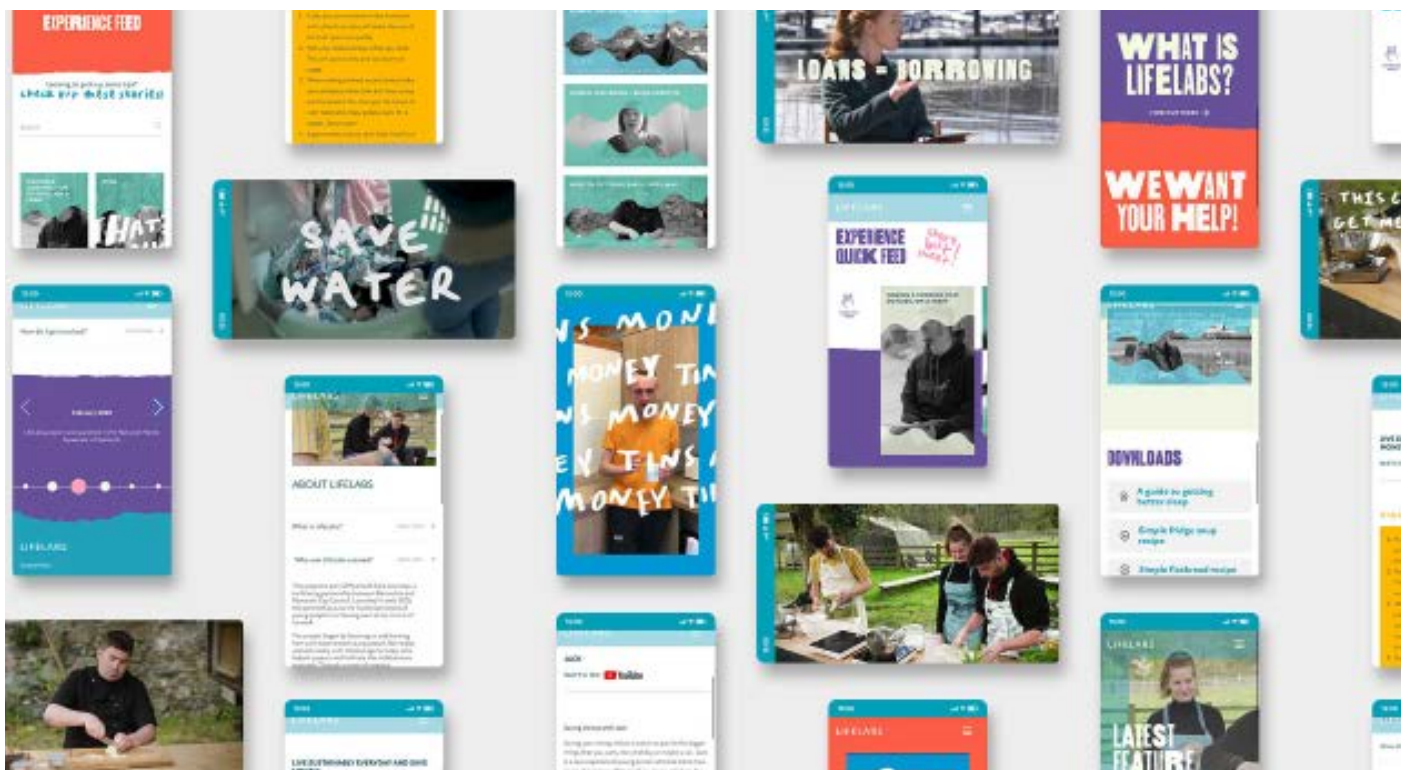
The final phase of the LifeLabs project was the collaborative exhibition in IKEA Exeter: a platform for care-experienced young people to be seen and heard, and to celebrate the skills they'd learnt and the friendships they'd formed during the project.

The exhibition involved planning workshops, DIY workshops led by IKEA co-workers with the care-leavers, creating videos of the DIY workshops, which were streamed as part of the exhibition and also added to the portal along with supporting content about the young people's personal journeys.

## Phase 3 design solutions

The exhibition was centred around the idea of pride, which emerged as the central theme from the planning workshops. It was designed around the personalised pieces of furniture the young people created in the DIY workshops. These items were displayed on plinths with QR codes linking visitors to videos of their personal stories as care-leavers.

At the centre, a large screen streamed a behind-the-scenes video from the DIY workshops. Large-format floor graphics made of quotes from the young people guided visitors through the exhibition. At the end, there was a wall of large-format portraits of the five young people who had taken part - their identities protected by images of their favourite home space.



# Results

## Launch

LifeLabs was launched in Plymouth in February 2020 by the young people involved in the process. The online portal and collaborative exhibition launched in IKEA Exeter in May 2021; the Plymouth care-leavers were invited to the opening and were thrilled to see their work and stories brought to life.

## Design fees

Our design fee was £100,999, which covered two years of work: primary research; design and facilitation of ten workshops with the young people, and Barnardo's and IKEA stakeholders; creative direction, pre-production and project management of 18 videos, with animation for four of them; UX/UI, wireframing, design and development of the online portal; creative direction, design and project management of the collaborative exhibition.

## Results overview

When LifeLabs was launched, it was seen as bold and brave by the Chief Executive of Barnardo's, and ambition was high. However, the pandemic then reduced its budget and scope; focus changed to raising awareness and securing additional funding so the project could deliver on its promise.

Due to the co-design approach's early success, and increased awareness of the issue, Barnardo's corporate partner IKEA decided to support the project with £75,000, which enabled the creation of the online portal, videos and supporting content, and the exhibition.

The programme of work had a huge impact on the care-experienced young people involved in the co-creation. By taking part in the workshops and helping create the videos they formed friendships and grew in confidence as they learnt new independent living skills.

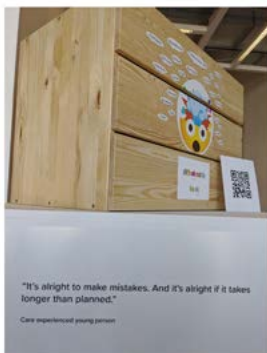
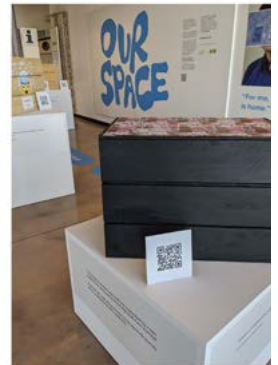
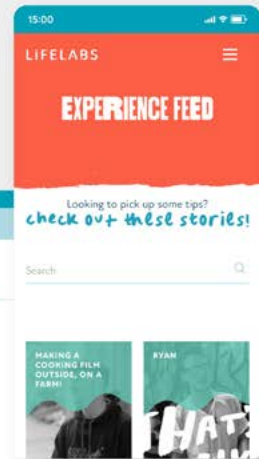
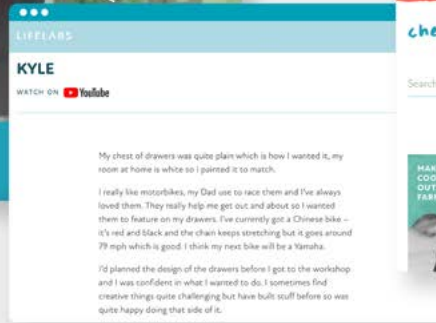
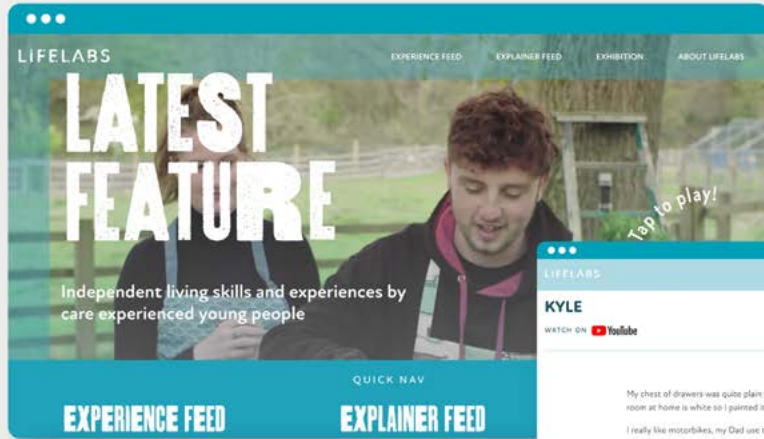
The pilot project's positive outcomes – both for the young people involved in the process and the 1,200+ users of the platform within six months of launch – were so well received by Barnardo's that they are now scaling up LifeLabs nationally, giving it the potential to reach the UK's 150,000 young people in or leaving care. IKEA have also extended their corporate partnership for 12 more months, donating an additional £70,000 to support this expansion. Part of this money is being used to employ a care-experienced young person to join Barnardo's Care Leavers Core Priority Programme, to help lead on the rollout of LifeLabs across the UK.

# Key results

***"This is BRILLIANT. Stop what you are doing and watch this. This is exactly how we should be listening to and learning from young people. This is "story" free; not a chance anyone could watch this and respond with pity. This is voice, power, integrity and true insight. So refreshing."***

Nataliya Deleva  
Head of Voice and  
Influence team  
Barnardo's







## Results

### Co-creation - the impact of the process

Barnardo's objective for this pilot project posed the question: How can we empower care-experienced young people to get support to develop skills to start living more independently?

Empowerment is difficult to measure, but if we use the Cambridge Dictionary definition – gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you – then we believe our co-creation process enabled the young people to have a voice, and that it provided a safe space for them to share their experiences and to say what resources they needed to support the transition to independent living.

*"I wasn't going to come in [to the DIY workshop filming] because I woke up late. And I haven't been in the best frame of mind for the past couple of days. But I'm glad I did, cause it's distracted me and I've had fun and I've got a smile on my face. And I met [name protected] for the first time."*

(Care-experienced young person from Barnardo's Plymouth Care Journeys service, speaking on the DIY workshops film.)

According to IKEA and Barnardo's 2021 "No Place Like Home" research report, many young care-leavers face loneliness and isolation. Although this is difficult to quantify, we have powerful testimonials from the young people involved which tell us that they made new friendships and learnt new life skills by sharing and listening to others' experiences.

*"I've learnt quite a few life skills but the biggest thing is learning other peoples' experiences. Like, knowing that there are people who have been through similar experiences. And then people who have been through completely different experiences and learning from that...the biggest thing is just knowing I'm not alone."*

(Care-experienced young person from Barnardo's Plymouth Care Journeys service, speaking on the DIY workshops film.)

Anecdotally, over the two years of working on the project we watched with pride as the 11 care-experienced young people from Barnardo's Plymouth Care Journeys' service grew and grew in confidence. Choosing to be on camera for the experience and explainer videos reflected an astonishing development in confidence for this group which, at the start of the project, had little self-belief.

The success of the co-creation approach has provided Barnardo's with an opportunity, for the first time, to employ a care-experienced young person as a project worker to help co-ordinate the national expansion of LifeLabs, and to ensure that the experiences of those involved and resources that are created continue to meet real needs.

## Key results

***"After watching this music video I was able to get on the bus and record this song. It was a struggle to even get on the bus as I'm really nervous but this song really helped me so I knew if I could record, it could help other people in the same situation as me."***

Care-experienced young person



## Results

### Engagement with the portal

When the LifeLabs portal launched in May 2021, it was promoted to local Plymouth networks and Barnardo's internal services. Within six months, there were over 1,200 unique users of the portal and over 1,100 views across the videos. With promotion largely focussed on Plymouth's roughly 800 young care-leavers, these results suggest a high level of engagement within the target user group.

### National expansion

All the positive impacts on Barnardo's care-leavers from Plymouth – confidence gained, life skills learnt, new connections made – alongside the portal's high numbers from limited promotion, meant that Barnardo's, supported by IKEA, decided to turn the local pilot into a nationwide programme with the potential to reach roughly 150,000 young people in or leaving care.

IKEA's additional £70,000 will help LifeLabs to:

- **Recruit a young care-leaver to a new role to lead the roll-out**
- **Develop the portal's functionality**
- **Create new content for the portal**
- **Run skills workshops with groups of young care-leavers across the country.**

### Partnership

Barnardo's had a three-year corporate partnership with IKEA, from 2018-2021. The success of LifeLabs' pilot phase led IKEA to extend this by at least a year, with £70,000 extra to be used specifically for the national expansion.

### Systemic change

The project was aligned with key findings from IKEA and Barnardo's 2021 research report which highlighted the difficulties young people face when they leave care. Recommendations were presented to the Government in response to the England care system review.



## Key results

**High level engagement:**

**1,100 digital views from a 800 person target audience**

***“Most young people used to get given the leavers manual and throw it in the bin. This proves that if we provide trusted content designed by the young people who have experienced it we can provide tools that can make independent living a positive destination for care-experienced young people”***

Jason Owens  
Senior Project Worker  
Plymouth Care Journeys  
Barnardo's

## Results

***“The success of LifeLabs is based on the project being created by young people for young people. It’s their voice, it’s so authentic and for any care-experienced young person to have that peer support is absolutely fundamental. It’s crucial that this approach is now taken across the UK to bring the change that is needed and we’re so grateful that IKEA supported this approach”***

Nick Cook, Assistant Director  
Children’s Services  
Barnardo’s Cymru and South West



## Results

***“LifeLabs gave a voice to the young people, which meant the report had more substance. It allowed for the emotional importance of the findings to come to life.”***

Rod Weston-Bartholomew  
Assistant Director Impact  
Care Journeys Barnardo's



### **Influencing factors**

The pandemic was an influencing factor as IKEA was not able to deliver the preferred support workshops and so needed to find an alternative solution to deliver their key partnership perspectives. They invested on the fact it was a co-design project and this was a deciding factor.

Both Barnardo's and IKEA PR teams were supposed to raise awareness of the project but this support never materialised so although their help would have been seen as an influencing factor it could also be argued that without their help the initial launch didn't have the impact we had hoped for.

