



# TwinNet & Care Leavers Network

*Transnational guidelines and  
best practice*

## Introduction

This guide is part of the TwinNet project: Creating a bridge between French and Italian Care Leavers, a transnational initiative jointly developed by the Agevolando Association and CREA Bretagne. Both organisations, with equal and complementary roles, work together to create a network of care leavers in the French region of Brittany, inspired by the already consolidated model of the Care Leavers Network Italy. The main objective is to promote the active participation of young people outside the family, providing them with concrete tools to influence the policies of care and accompaniment to autonomy.

The project is based on a principle of mutual exchange and co-construction: Agevolando, drawing on its decades of experience in the creation of care leaver networks in Italy, brings expertise, good practices and methods of youth empowerment. In parallel, CREA Bretagne, with

its strategic role in French regional social policies, guarantees the integration of the Italian model in the French context, adapting it to local institutional and cultural specificities. This equal partnership does not envisage a simple transfer of knowledge from one country to another, but a real process of co-design and adaptation, in which both organisations bring their own added value.

Through mobility, exchanges and moments of confrontation between Italian and French care leavers, the project aims at building a sustainable and participative network, capable of amplifying the voice of young people and influencing the political and social decisions that affect them. The following guide collects the good practices that emerged from this experience, offering a replicable model for the creation of care leaver networks in other European contexts, with a focus on active participation, youth empowerment and co-responsibility between institutions and beneficiaries.



## Modelling Objectives:

1. **Dissemination of best practices:** Sharing successes and lessons learnt from previous experiences to inspire similar initiatives.
2. **Facilitating implementation:** Providing a clear, accessible and replicable methodological framework, even for organisations with limited experience in the field.
3. **Adaptability:** Offer a model that is flexible enough to adapt to local, cultural or institutional specificities.

## Good Practices for Care Leaver Networking through Transnational Partnerships

Creating networks for Care Leavers is an ambitious and fundamental initiative. The aim is to offer young people a platform to express themselves, support each other and develop personally, while fostering collaboration between local and international actors.

### Macro Level Approaches

To start a network, it is essential to structure the initiative around clear and inclusive methodological principles:

#### 1. Preliminary analysis of the territory

- Carry out a territorial diagnosis by identifying:
  - **Available resources:** support tools, funding, local infrastructure.
  - **Obstacles:** social stigmatisation, geographical dispersion of young people, lack of awareness among professionals.
  - **Levers:** potential collaborations, favourable policies, existing initiatives.
- Draw up a **mapping of key stakeholders**, including institutions, third sector bodies involved in the protection system, youth associations, social services and local businesses.
- Involve local experts and young people to validate and enrich this analysis.

In our experience, the crucial first step is to convince professionals and key actors. The organisation of public child protection policy, through the coordination of the different actors in the system at local level, plays a decisive role in mobilising the key stakeholders who can contribute to the creation and smooth functioning of such a network.

The **CREAI** (Centre Régional d'Etudes d'Actions et d'informations en faveur des personnes en situation de vulnérabilité) played a significant role in this work in some French regions between 2022 and 2024. Operating at regional level, CREAI Bretagne performs an essential public service mission: to integrate professional practices in the territories that embody and translate the fundamental principles of public policies. Thanks to its membership of the national network coordinated by ANCREAI, CREAI Bretagne can count on a consolidated network of regional centres, which puts it in direct contact with almost all organisations, institutions and social actors active in the field of child and support for people in vulnerable situations. This strategic position not only facilitates the flow of knowledge and good practices, but also gives CREAI Bretagne a special responsibility in linking and coordinating efforts to promote a systemic and inclusive approach at national level.

However, it is essential to emphasise that the active participation of young people in this process is based on several fundamental conditions. On the one hand, it requires the conviction and mobilisation of professionals, who must be sensitised, trained and involved in the co-construction of solutions with young people - solutions that respond to the specific problems of the sector, guaranteeing the full involvement of young people



in the exercise of public policy for child protection. On the other hand, this participation cannot materialise without adequate financial support to ensure the implementation of instruments that facilitate and encourage their involvement. Financial resources must not only enable participation, but also enhance it, making it visible and recognising its crucial role in improving public policy.

Therefore, **convincing** is not only about gaining intellectual agreement, but also eliciting a collective and lasting commitment to create a community supported by adequate resources and a shared vision.

## 2. Involving all stakeholders

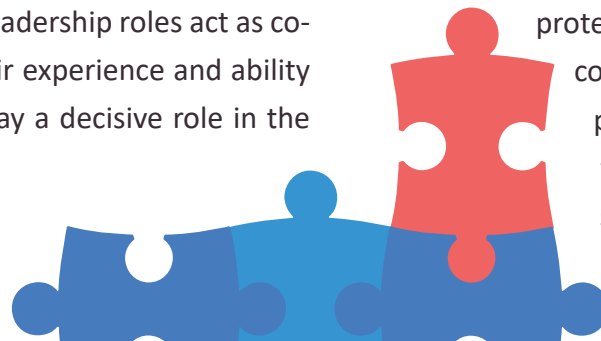
- Ensure the **active participation of young people**, taking into account their specific needs and including them from the planning stage.
- Work with **professionals in the field**, such as specialised educators, social workers and public administrators.
- **Adapt approaches** according to the age and status of young people:
  - For minors: work with foster parents or educators, integrating protective mechanisms to create safe collaborative spaces.
  - For adults: consider their degree of autonomy and their experiences with communities for minors and foster families, past or present.

At this stage, it is crucial that **young seniors** in leadership roles act as co-animators to mobilise other young people. Their experience and ability to represent models of participative success play a decisive role in the collective dynamic.

It is equally essential to preserve the individual freedom of young people, allowing them to participate without pressure, to abstain from commitment if they wish and to leave the project at any time. This flexibility guarantees a respectful, volunteer-based framework in which everyone can invest at their own pace and according to their own aspirations.



The experiences observed by Agevolando, a TwinNet project, also made it possible to highlight the possibility of setting up a parallel group of professionals, so that the participative approach promoted for young people can be flanked by joint reflective work on the part of practitioners who work daily with adolescents and young people from protection pathways. It can be thought of as a level of confrontation between professionals on the same issues proposed to the young people with a view to building spaces for confrontation and/or joint advocacy opportunities, or as a small support group for the activities of the young people



involved to reinforce, support, accompany the processes of construction and development of the youth group. Initially, the progression towards active participation of both young people and professionals has to be conceived and implemented in parallel.

To this end, it is necessary to create specific spaces dedicated to each group, initially separate: a "**youth group**" and a "**professional group**", in which each can explore their social concerns and representations. These spaces provide an environment conducive to the expression of each group's specific needs, expectations and problems. They also make it possible to prepare the ground for a confrontational meeting between the two parties.

If one opts for a group of professionals to be involved in parallel, the initial phase is of strategic importance: it must not only highlight the respective needs of young people and professionals, but also lay the foundations for a common language. This shared language is indispensable to converge visions and build a collective framework for action.

The objective is not to conduct an investigation into system malfunctions nor to highlight organisational or institutional weaknesses. Rather, it is to establish an authentic and constructive dialogue focused on creating bonds that transcend the limits of the system. These ties must be oriented towards a central objective: the future and well-being of young people, enabling them to play an active and valued role in this process of transformation.

In summary, this phase represents a **key moment of convergence**, where young people and professionals can evolve together towards a common vision, guided by a shared commitment and mutual understanding.

In this sense, the "**Lundy model**" envisages measures that enable young people to be part of a participative dynamic:

- **Space:** a safe, suitable and favourable place for exchanges, with the possibility of entering and leaving freely.
- **Voice:** facilitated through different means of expression (writing, speaking, drawing, etc.) and clear and accessible information to develop communication skills.
- **Listening:** involving helpful and attentive professionals.
- **Influence:** participating in decisions on the evolution of the project, impacting on their commitment and the continuation of the process.

### 3. Promoting and strengthening peer support

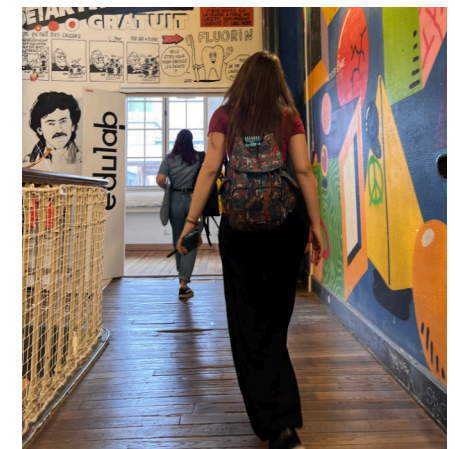
- **Objective:** To strengthen credibility and involvement through mentoring.
- **Actions:**
  - Involve young people with previous experience in similar networks to act as mentors and role models.
  - Organise experience-sharing sessions to inspire participants and actively involve them in network building.

Peer support is a fundamental pillar to foster individual and collective growth, creating a network of experiential exchange that enhances personal experiences as a resource for the group and institutions.

Right from the start-up phase of the project it is important to involve young people from other territories or other countries who have already had experience of active participation in a care leaver network. Therefore, the involvement in the partnership of an organisation experienced in the setting up and management of care leaver networks, with many years of experience at national level in its own country, is essential. It will be the task of this organisation to identify among its members a group prepared and willing to bring its experience to the young people who will be involved in the project. This group, possibly heterogeneous in terms of gender and experience (family foster care vs. care in communities for minors), will have the task of structuring, together with the professional staff of its own organisation, training modules capable of stimulating the participation and involvement of the beneficiaries through mirroring and mutual recognition resulting from the sharing of similar stories and experiences, capable of breaking the stigma and opening up the relationship. In this process young people can thus feel free to give voice to their thoughts, emotions and experiences, rereading their story in a proactive key and supporting a transformative pathway that helps to consolidate certainties and awareness of their own resilience and possibilities. Care leavers, guided also by the experience of more experienced "colleagues", will have the opportunity to talk about their own "wounds" and this favours the construction of a collective conscience, allowing them to recognise themselves as active citizens who are builders of their own rights.

*Peer mentoring* makes it possible to activate the group in a safe and 'peer' dimension, also thanks to the fundamental presence of professional facilitators, capable of grasping any drifts of the group on vindictive dimensions or any emotional over-stimulation of individual participants, with a constructive, protective and reassuring approach given by the emerging sense of belonging to a "community" of resilient young people.

After an initial meeting session dedicated to group creation, it is necessary to define common objectives on which to build subsequent actions. It is important for all participants to share a common and co-constructed vision as it allows participants to act cooperatively and strengthen the group spirit. Everyone must feel that they have an active role and are involved according to their expectations and possibilities. Doing together and co-constructing the collective process as equals has in itself a restorative value and a synthesis of their own experience in the child protection system: from a disadvantaged position (of children



victims of a traumatic history, of betrayed, neglected, abused children) care leavers move on to an active role as builders of collective knowledge, as experts in social discourse, as bearers not only of suffering but also of transformation and improvement within an adult community that listens, welcomes and values.

In addition to the sense of belonging with the other group members, facilitators, i.e. professionals whose task is to set the boundaries and, knowing the individual care leavers, help them to participate by supporting them where they experience fatigue.

It is important to identify among the members of the nascent group those who, because they are older and more knowledgeable and trained, can act as guides, progressively acquiring positive and constructive leadership, and who can subsequently assist the facilitator in involving new adolescents and young people in the group.

### **Possible activities:**

#### **1. Facilitating intercultural dialogue**

- Organisation of meetings between Italian and French care leavers, promoting the sharing of experiences and good practices, both online and in presence.
- Supporting the preparation of hosting activities in the partner country, fostering mutual understanding and the creation of an international working group.

#### **2. Promoting autonomy**

- Creation of thematic workshops such as the "**Pathway to Autonomy**", involving interactive activities such as the use of LEGOs and puzzles to stimulate personal and collective reflection on what it means to be autonomous.
- Guided discussions to discover the resources that supported the young people in their growth and identify useful strategies for building a personal and professional support network.

#### **3. Advocacy and participation**

- Organisation of focus groups and plenaries to define advocacy strategies that put the voice of care leavers at the centre.
- Use of tools such as word clouds and visual discussions to bring out key ideas on how to build territorial networks and amplify the demands of young people.

#### **4. Recreational, cultural and social activities**

- Planning of participatory activities such as city tours, thematic treasure hunts, and convivial moments to foster socialisation and a sense of belonging.
- Promotion of cultural events that allow participants to explore local contexts and strengthen ties with the territory.

Peer support follows a methodology that combines experiential and scientific aspects. Through a **mixed control room**, the team plans every detail of the activities, from reception to training, and evaluates the

results to continuously improve the project.

Mobility in the countries involved is a crucial moment to develop participatory content and create shared recommendations to be taken to policy makers and practitioners in the socio-educational system.

Following each mobility, an after-activity **debriefing** is necessary to ensure continuous learning from the successes and critical issues encountered.

#### 4. Ensuring Sustainable Financing

- **Objective:** To ensure the longevity of the initiative.
- **Actions:**
  - Seek public subsidies, private partnerships or European funding.
  - Establishing mechanisms to support:
    - a. **Mobility of participants**, especially for international exchanges.
    - b. **Access to technological resources** to facilitate communication and coordination.

When deciding to set up a network of care leavers, it is essential to make it clear from the outset to the partners that this challenge - as conceived and realised by the organisations of the countries that are experts in this field - cannot end on the date of the conclusion of the start-up project, but must consider from the outset the search for contributions and funding capable of guaranteeing the continuity of the pathway in the medium-long term. It is therefore necessary to establish connections and alliances with the public and private system, in particular with the stakeholders in the area, so that listening spaces



capable of influencing public opinion, the operators and the institutions reached by the "voice" of the care leavers can open up. The exchange and relationship with the actors of care and leaving care - at all levels - must be able to promote stimuli capable of finalising concrete changes at the level of practices, representations and policies. The effectiveness of the work being progressively carried out must be demonstrated by highlighting the impact and potential of a bottom-up participatory action that needs to progressively find the resources to be able to function autonomously and with full sustainability. It is therefore necessary to set up a working group of design, networking and administrative management professionals capable of supporting the network in the search for strategic solutions to provide continuity and sustainability over time.

There is then a need to systematise a work programme involving periodic meetings between participants, dissemination of results and emerging proposals, exchanges at local, regional, national and

international level with other care leaver networks. These are all legitimate activities to give strength and meaning to the network, but they require careful, constant and targeted fund-raising and planning work.

Within this framework, it is essential to equip oneself with appropriate tools and technologies, adapted and dedicated to the various operational needs such as the exchange of information between network members, the exchange with the possible group of professionals, the collection of data and information on the outcomes of the work being carried out, and public and institutional communication.

### *Impact of achievements on availability of funding*

The activities carried out in France as part of the TwinNet project demonstrated the value of the initiative and its potential in securing sustainable funding. Visits to Lille, Lyon and Dijon actively involved care leavers and professionals, creating a productive dialogue that allowed young people to share ideas and experiences directly with practitioners. This exchange strengthened the self-confidence of the participants and promoted the creation of a broader and more supportive network.

The focus of the meetings was on preparing young people to engage with professionals, demonstrating how their voices can influence social practices and policies. Despite some difficulties related to limited time and language barriers, significant recommendations emerged, highlighting the care leavers' commitment and ability to share.

Particularly in Dijon, although the number of participants was small, there was a strong openness and willingness to collaborate.

These results confirm the tangible impact of TwinNet, making it particularly attractive to potential funders. The experiences of the different cities can be presented as examples of success in applying for public and European grants, highlighting the project's ability to:

- Strengthening personal and social skills of care leavers;
- Facilitating dialogue between young people and professionals to promote concrete changes;
- Creating connections and replicable models at regional level.

In addition, the data collected during the activities, such as feedback from participants and recommendations that have emerged, can document the effectiveness of the project and justify further investment.

### *Future perspectives:*

To ensure economic sustainability, the project will continue to build on its achievements by promoting strategic partnerships with public and private entities. It will also be crucial to develop digital tools and multimedia materials to increase TwinNet's visibility and attract new funding, demonstrating how activities can generate lasting and replicable change in other realities.

## 5. Modelling the experience

- **Objective:** To create a replicable framework for broadening impact.
- **Actions:**
  - Develop a methodological guide that formalises the steps and tools needed to create and manage the network.
  - Include concrete examples, good practices and case studies to facilitate adoption in different contexts.

In order for a care leaver network to have a relevant impact at supra-regional or national level, it is essential that the model adopted is easily replicable and adaptable to different contexts.

The geographical dimension of a care leaver network works if there is a certain proximity between the participants. The Italian example, active since 2014, currently has a presence in 9 regions of the country where activity is concentrated in a single city. The most stable and active operational core is made up of young people living in the same city or its immediate surroundings. The consolidation of the activity and the creation of a meaningful sense of belonging are possible, or more easily achieved, if participants can meet more easily and also share informal spaces of aggregation and free time.

The replicability of the network in another region or department of the same country must take these premises into account. Furthermore, it is necessary to document the process of implementing the network in such a way as to have all the information and suggestions needed to

produce a "guide", tailored to the social and institutional characteristics of one's own country, useful for replicating the intervention in other territories and/or regions. The guide must represent a compass capable of orienting those who take on this challenge in taking their first steps, but it is necessary to consider that each territory has specific characteristics linked to its own institutional, child protection and safeguard system, with different traditions, roles, representatives. It is therefore necessary to understand the local context and embroider the intervention around its specificities and prerogatives.



## ***Examples of actions and achievements:***

One of the main results of the TwinNet project was the development of adaptable training modules designed to meet the specific needs of the care leavers and professionals involved (available at: EU results platform URL). Each module was designed taking into account the number of participants and the peculiarities of the groups, overcoming language and cultural barriers through inclusive methodologies.

During the meetings in Bologna, Rennes, Lille, Lyon and Dijon, Italian care leavers played a central role, conducting activities dedicated only to French youth. This approach favoured the creation of safe spaces where young people could share experiences and ideas in an authentic way. In parallel, French professionals worked separately on the same issues, supported by their Italian colleagues. The second day of the visits saw direct confrontation between care leavers and professionals, promoting constructive and mutual dialogue.

A key element was the constant presence of Italian professionals, representing not only Agevolando, but also associations and key stakeholders in Italy. This facilitated an exchange of perspectives between Italy and France, highlighting differences and similarities in care leaver support systems and fostering mutual enrichment.

## ***Content of the training modules***

- **Adaptation to groups:** Flexible tools that take into account the specific characteristics of each group, such as size, composition and level of active participation.

- **Activities for care leavers:** Dynamics aimed at strengthening self-esteem, encouraging active participation and preparing young people for confrontation with professionals.
- **Interprofessional meetings:** Methodologies that foster dialogue between professionals from different fields, based on common themes and the direct experience of care leavers.
- **Intercultural confrontation:** Strategies for dealing with cultural, linguistic and methodological differences that emerged during visits to France.

## ***Building a constructive dialogue:***

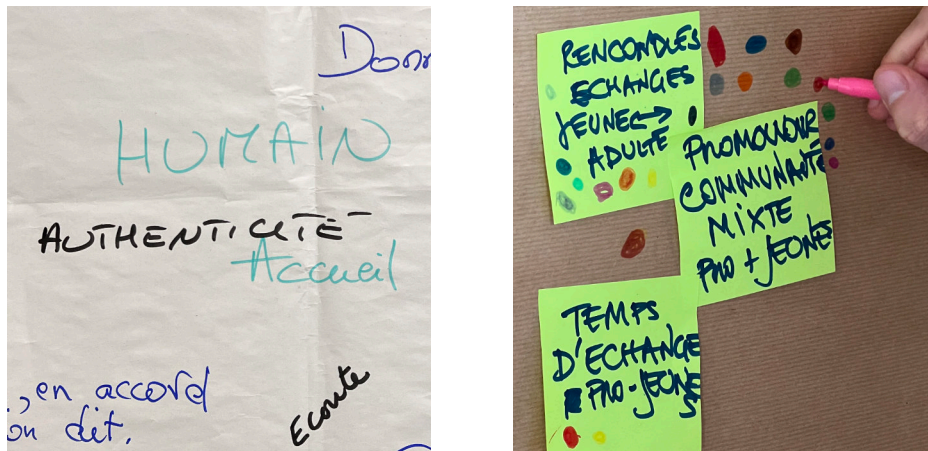
The activities highlighted the importance of dialogue not only between young people and professionals, but also within the groups themselves: care leaver with care leaver and professionals with professionals. This made it possible to compare experiences, visions and operational practices, promoting greater mutual understanding. It was particularly interesting to observe how, in the cities visited, French professionals adopted different approaches than their Italian colleagues, stimulating reflections on how to improve their respective support systems.

## ***Future perspectives:***

Through this work, the project aims to build an international community of care leavers and professionals, capable of facing common challenges together and developing innovative solutions for supporting young people coming out of guardianship.

## Towards a sustainable and participatory network: conclusions and perspectives

Building a network of care leavers represents a unique opportunity to create a support ecosystem that puts young people at the centre, valuing their experiences, needs and aspirations. Through a structured and inclusive methodological approach, it is possible to turn challenges into opportunities, promoting meaningful change at both the individual and collective level.



### Summary of steps for building a care leaver network

**1. Territory analysis:** Identify existing resources, obstacles and potential collaborations with institutions, Third Sector organisations and professionals. This initial step helps to understand the context and define a solid base for the network.

- 2. Active involvement of young people:** Ensuring the participation of care leavers from the early stages of the project, listening to their voices and integrating their perspectives to design effective and targeted interventions.
- 3. Peer support:** Promoting mentoring dynamics led by young people with previous experience, creating a virtuous circle of mutual support that strengthens the sense of belonging and empowerment.
- 4. Training and empowerment:** Organise sharing sessions and thematic workshops on autonomy, advocacy and participation to develop personal and social skills.
- 5. Economic sustainability:** Seek public and private funding to ensure the continuity of the project. The creation of strategic partnerships with local stakeholders is crucial to secure stable resources.
- 6. Dialogue with institutions:** Establish alliances with institutions and professionals to influence public policy and promote systemic change.
- 7. Replicability of the model:** formalise the experience in a methodological guide describing key steps and good practices, adaptable to different territorial and cultural contexts.
- 8. Continuous evaluation:** Regularly monitor and evaluate activities and achievements, using feedback from participants to continuously improve and adapt the network.

By following these steps and practices, networking for care leavers becomes a structured, inclusive and sustainable process. These

networks play a crucial role in the empowerment of young people, while promoting rich exchanges and collaborations at local, national and transnational levels.

The constitutive identity of the network is in the transformative action of advocacy with a strong link of audience and influence, with a public

projects and paths between those who provide services and those who use them, generates virtuous processes of co-responsibility, enabling care leavers to give back the help received.

At the national level, a care leaver network has a more direct impact on the macrosystemic dimension as it affects the institutional system by facilitating possible regulatory changes and public information and awareness effects.

By enhancing the protagonism of care leavers, a network allows them to be recognised as "experts by experience", and therefore capable of offering an original and irreplaceable contribution. The involvement of the care leavers of the network in research and training paths (as co-researchers and co-teachers) becomes an important step of legitimisation of high value experiential competences, which open communication channels based on reciprocity and on the development of equal relationships. This enhances people's knowledge and makes the social discourse concerning children and adolescents in guardianship and young people in leaving care more comprehensible.



that listens and actively responds to requests for change and improvement of the system of protection, protection, reception and accompaniment to autonomy of a territory or country. The network makes it possible to sensitise the world of professionals and institutions to the proposed indications, finalising concrete changes in representations, practices and policies.

The collective dimension is generative because the collaboration between professionals and beneficiaries, i.e. the co-construction of

Overall, the activation of a network of care leavers represents a high-impact innovation, capable of producing systemic changes where it can concretely affect the policies and social representations of a country, its practitioners and citizens.



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