MoneyReady

Transforming financial futures for Northern Ireland's care-experienced young people

Roundtable Report

June 2026

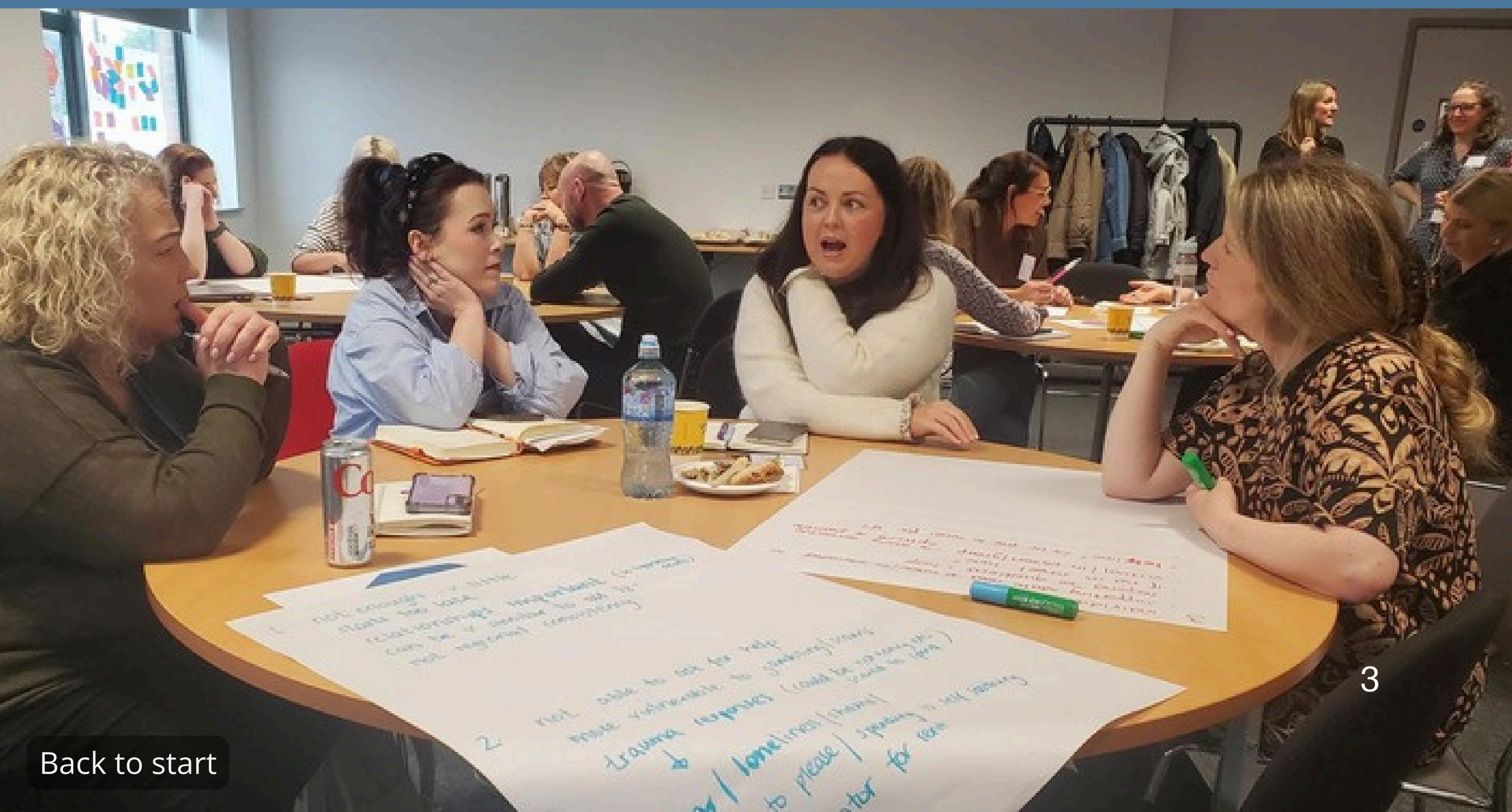
Contents

Event Details

Date: Friday 19th June 2026
Time: 11am - 2pm
Venue: The Innovation Factory, Belfast

Overview

On 19th June 2026, Money Ready convened a stakeholder event in Belfast bringing together practitioners, carers and partners to explore the financial education landscape for care-experienced young people in Northern Ireland. Following a welcome and insights from Angela Hillan, Northern Ireland Manager, guests took part in two rounds of facilitated roundtable discussions. This document summarises the key themes and findings from those discussions.



Hearing from young people

The roundtable discussions were grounded in the real experiences of care-experienced young people in Northern Ireland. These quotes, shared by Angela Hillan during her introduction, reflect what Money Ready has heard directly from young people we've worked with across the region.

On financial education in school...

"I feel like I should have been taught at school."

"We should have more of this in LLW" [Learning for Life and Work]

"It should go hand in hand with writing a CV."

On budgeting and spending...

"Getting your first pay check and blowing it and getting used to a certain income and then if that changes once again..."

"It's a shock to the system."

"You get all this money at 18 but you're not told what to do with it."

On support...

"I had no-one to help me."

"You don't know what you're actually entitled to until it's too late."

"At 18, if you make a mistake you're out on the street."

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Attendees included:

Susanne Brady, Department of Health
Sinead O'Kane, Queen's University Belfast
Rhiannon McStocker, Queen's University Widening Participation Unit
Caitlin Ewing, Include Youth
Gillian Lynas, Foster Care Associates
Aimée Carlisle, Foster Care Associates
Helen Ramsey, The Fostering Network
Nicky Kells, The Fostering Network
Paul Cassidy, University of Ulster
Mairead Cullen, Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Samantha Scullion, MAPS
Helen Clarkson, Barnardo's NI
Bronagh O'Sullivan, SPPG
Mairead Heaver, BHSCT
Pamela Nugent, BHSCT
Shannon Gordon, Northern Ireland Youth Forum
Fiona MacManus, Extern
Geraldine McGuigan, VOYPIC
Jo Irvine, VOYPIC
Gayle Suarez-Mitchell, Consumer Council NI
Mark Clegg, Youth Action
Angela Hillan, Money Ready
Gemma Orr, Money Ready
Sarah Ferries, Money Ready
Michelle Galbraith, Money Ready

Theme 1

Current provision, gaps and the impact of missing financial scaffolding

The cliff edge problem

A consistent theme across tables was the structural gap created by how care operates. In care settings, young people have most practical and financial decisions managed on their behalf, from pocket money to shopping to school trips. When they leave care, often at 18, they face an abrupt transition with little to no preparation for independent financial life. Participants described this as a "cliff edge": young people are expected to manage complex financial decisions overnight, without the gradual exposure to money management that most of their peers accumulate growing up.

One discussion table noted that everything being handled for young people in care is understandable and well-intentioned, but it can have unintended consequences if it removes the learning. Another observed that worrying about what comes after 18 can prevent young people from focusing on the present, including engaging with education and learning.

Entitlements and support: the gap between policy and practice

Young people in care are entitled to a needs assessment covering aspects of financials (including guidance on budgeting, contingency planning and more) and a personalised pathway plan. In practice, participants noted that resource and capacity pressures mean this does not always happen well, or happen at all. Social workers are stretched. Support that should be in place weeks or months before a young person turns 18 sometimes isn’t delivered until just before or after precisely when they need it most.

One attendee also made the point that even where strong plans are in place, external events sometimes throw the timeline out of sync, e.g. a young person has to move out, or a placement breaks down.

There were also concerns about the quality of pathway planning. Plans are sometimes completed without the young person's meaningful involvement. Questions were raised about whether social workers themselves have sufficient financial literacy to oversee them effectively.

Entitlements and support: the gap between policy and practice (continued)

Northern Ireland currently lacks consistent provision across trust areas, with different support provided at different ages and with different needs prioritised. The ambition to start planning for leaving care earlier (at 14 rather than 16 or 18) and extend support to age 25 in line with other countries exists, but participants were clear that the reality does not yet allow for this.

Vulnerability and risk

Several discussion tables highlighted the heightened vulnerability of care-experienced young people to financial harm. A lack of financial knowledge combined with distrust, not knowing who to ask, and fearing scams without fully understanding how to avoid them, leaves young people exposed. Shame and anxiety were also recurring themes. Fear of losing money leading to hoarding, and shame around financial difficulty making it harder to seek help.

The rise of "easy money" opportunities, including adult online platforms, was noted as a concern, as was the contrast between different care settings. Participants described significant differences between residential care and foster care or kinship care. One participant specifically mentioned the transition many young people face when moving from residential care into supported living, where breaking the rules or not upholding tenancy agreements is more likely to result in a placement falling through, thus posing a greater risk of homelessness.

Knowledge sources and fear of missing out (FOMO)

In the absence of formal financial education or family guidance, care-experienced young people often turn to friends and social media for financial information. Participants flagged the particular challenges around digital payments, as cards are easy to use and hard to track, as well as practical gaps around employment, like the wait between starting a job and receiving a first payslip, and how to budget across a full month.

A sense of disconnection and FOMO (fear of missing out) was also raised: care-experienced young people can feel excluded from the social and financial milestones their peers are navigating, such as buying new technology or a car with help from parents.

Theme 2

What should effective financial education look like for this group?

Start earlier and build it in

Across all tables, participants emphasised that financial education needs to start earlier than it currently does. Pathway planning that begins before a young person's 16th birthday, ideally at 14, was cited as better practice, though capacity constraints mean this is often not happening. Waiting until 18, when young people are already moving to living independently, is too late.

There was also strong consensus that financial education should not be an add-on. It needs to be embedded within the structures that already hold responsibility for care-experienced young people, including health, education and the trust, rather than sitting outside them.

Person-centred and trauma-informed

Effective financial education for this group cannot be one-size-fits-all. Participants were clear that it must be person-centred, responsive to individual circumstances, learning styles and life stages. A young person whose "cup is overflowing just trying to survive" is likely not ready to engage with a five-year financial plan.

Trauma-informed approaches were mentioned across multiple tables as essential. Financial education needs to meet young people where they are, not assume linear pathways by age.

Equip the whole support network

Young people cannot be educated in isolation. Participants repeatedly stressed the need to upskill and equip those around them such as foster carers, kinship carers, residential staff and social workers. The phrase "the blind leading the blind" was used to describe situations where staff are expected to support young people's financial learning without having adequate knowledge or resources themselves.

Co-producing content with foster and kinship carers, so they can pass knowledge on, was highlighted as a practical approach. Several tables also noted that financial education needs to be integrated into the careers service and supported by employers who understand the particular circumstances of care-experienced young people.

Practical, relatable and honest

Effective education needs to connect to real life. Participants called for content that is practical, relatable and honest, acknowledging real challenges like gambling, the gap before gaining a job and getting first pay and managing bank cards, rather than abstract or aspirational. Real-life activities, peer stories and lived experience were highlighted as particularly powerful tools.

Incentives were mentioned at more than one table as a useful lever for engagement, both to encourage attendance and to connect theory to practical applications.

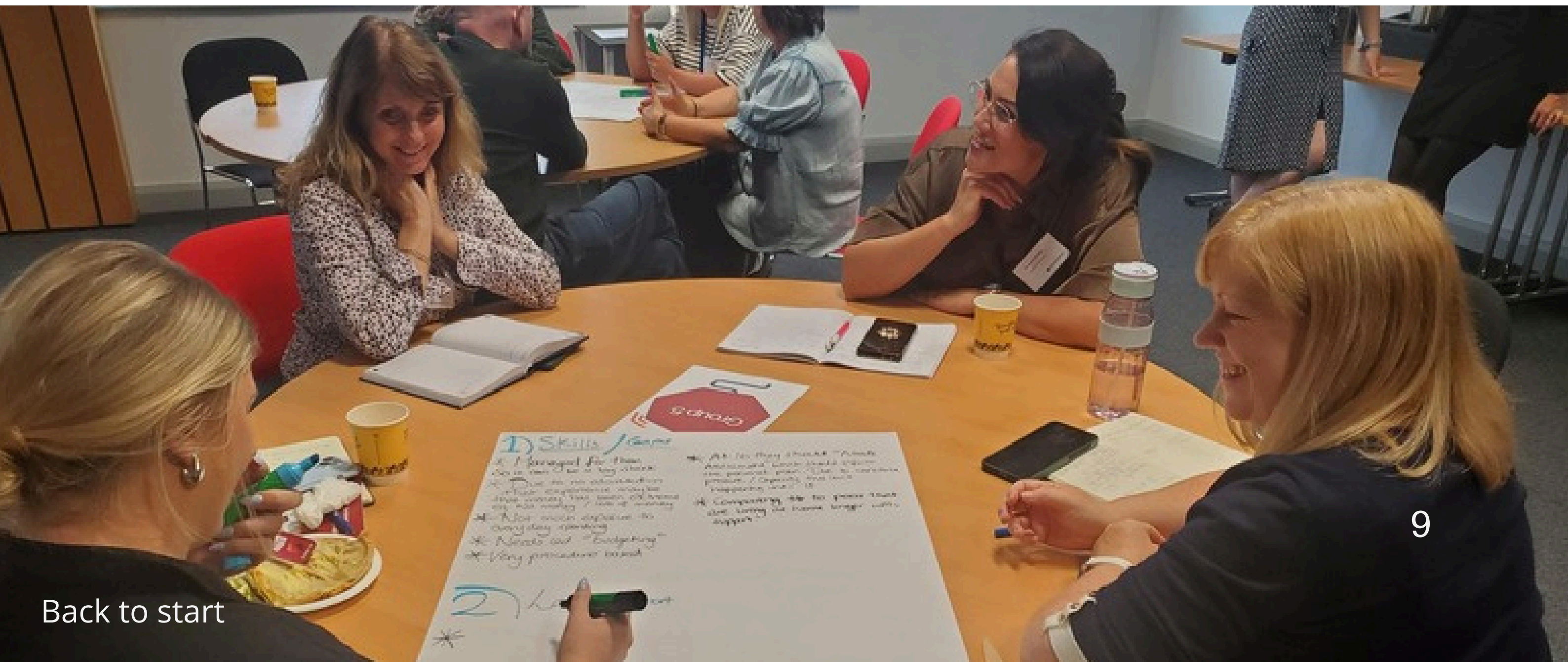
Consistent, connected and accessible

Consistency emerged as a key theme: consistent provision across regions, resources, and a support network that works together rather than in isolation. Participants highlighted the importance of "singing from the same hymn sheet", connecting financial education across the different agencies and people involved in a young person's life.

On format, participants noted that digital options are valuable for flexibility, but that in-person delivery tends to be more effective for in-depth learning. On innovative approaches, a 24-hour money helpline for those over 18 was raised as one practical idea for bridging gaps in ongoing support.

Address stigma and shift perception

Participants noted that money remains a taboo subject generally, and this is compounded for care-experienced young people by shame and stigma around their circumstances. Effective financial education needs to create safe spaces to have these conversations, and the wider system needs to move beyond the stigma of care experience altogether.



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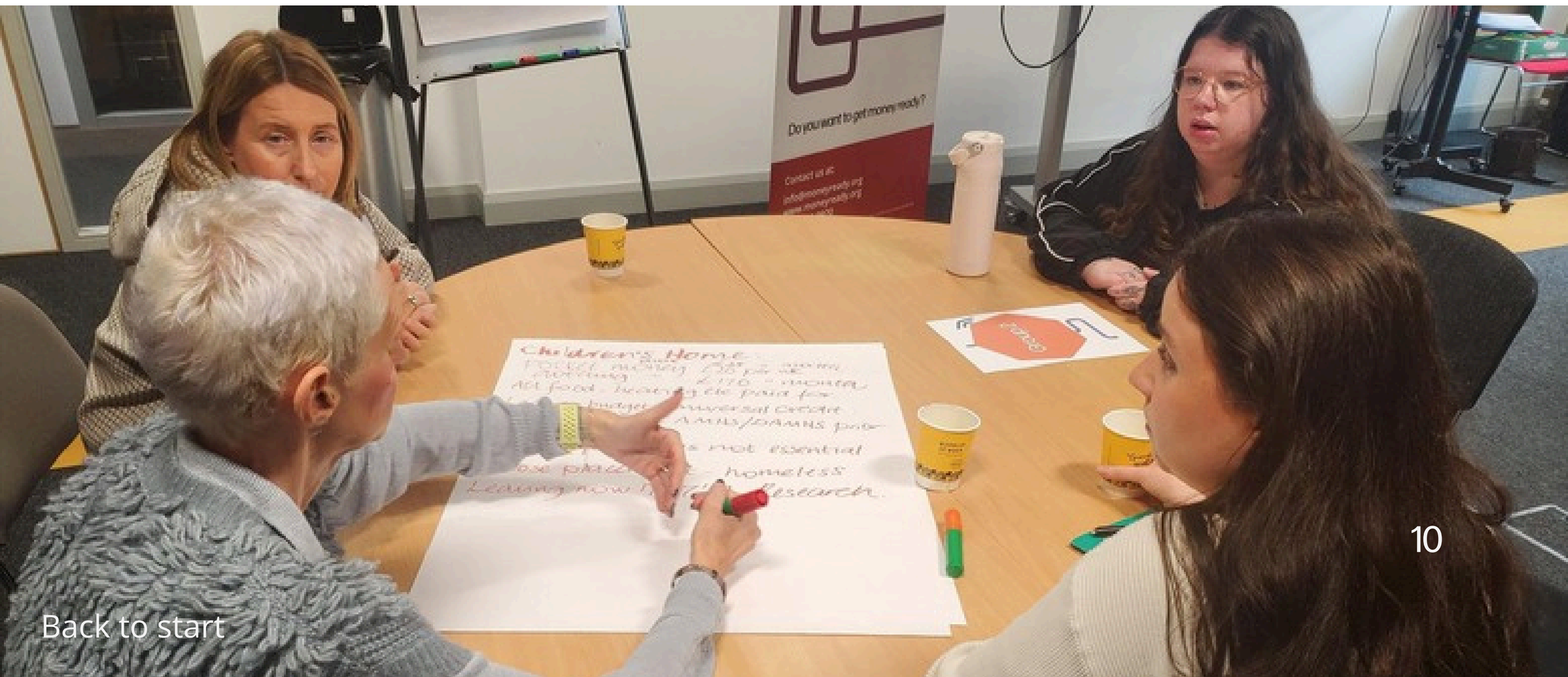
Summary of key recommendations emerging from discussion

- **Embed financial education in existing structures:** Health and Social Care Trusts, the Education Authority and careers services should embed financial education within existing structures and pathway planning, rather than treating it as an add-on or something only taught in schools, recognising that care-experienced young people can struggle with formal education engagement for a variety of reasons including trust, placement moves, trauma and mental health.
- **Start earlier:** Health and Social Care Trusts and Leaving and After Care teams should begin pathway planning and financial education earlier, ideally by age 14, ensuring young people are meaningfully involved in the process.
- **Extend support beyond 18:** The Department of Health and the Executive Office should work towards sustained support for care-experienced young people beyond 18, in line with the ambition to extend this to age 25 as seen in other nations.
- **Upskill the whole support network:** Trusts, fostering and kinship services, voluntary sector organisations and social work teams should invest in upskilling foster carers, kinship carers, residential staff, social workers and voluntary sector practitioners so they can model and reinforce financial learning as part of everyday life.
- **Adopt trauma-informed, person-centred approach within financial education:** Ensure that the sector's trauma informed approach to supporting the development of young people in care extends to financial education. Delivery should respond to individual circumstances and life stages, rather than being offered as a one-size-fits-all programme.



Key recommendations (continued)

- **Ensure consistency across trust areas:** As part of ongoing work to ensure consistency of care across NI, the Department of Health should ensure financial education is an integral part of provision across all Trusts, so that a young person's postcode does not determine the quality of support they receive.
- **Centre lived experience:** Commissioners and programme designers should involve people with lived experience of care in the design and delivery of financial education, to ensure it is relatable, credible and trusted by the young people it is intended to reach.
- **Normalise financial conversations:** All organisations working with care-experienced young people, including Trusts, schools, careers services and third sector partners, should actively work to normalise financial conversations and address the stigma that prevents young people from seeking help.

Please note: This document reflects the views and experiences shared by participants and does not represent the formal position of Money Ready or any participating organisation.

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