

Increasing Employment Opportunities for Young People with Care Experience

SUMMARY

Report of a Peer Learning Programme February – December 2021

Facilitated by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, Catch22

Funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation



Background, Objective & Approach

- The background to the Peer Learning Programme was joint work between the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation's Leaving Care Learning Programme to raise the profile of care leavers' employability following the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The programme's objective was to support leaving care teams in Local Authorities (LAs) to learn from other local areas and apply that learning to developing their own practice in working with local employers to provide employment opportunities for young people with care experience. Each Local Authority outlined an issue they wanted to work on during the programme.
- Each session involved: reflections on progress since the previous session; input from a case study from a specialist VCS organisation, another LA, or young people; opportunities to ask questions of the case study presenter; and action planning for the period between the sessions.
- The programme was delivered through a time of fluctuating Covid restrictions. All sessions were delivered online. Participants experienced a number of challenges in progressing their issues because of the impact of Covid, most significantly restrictions in visiting young people, accompanying them to interviews etc, and in engaging with employers face-to-face.

Programme Participants

- Local Authorities who were members of the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, hosted by Catch 22, were invited to apply to join the programme. They were selected to represent a range of geographies and Local Authority types.
- 10 Local Authorities took part in the programme, joining six half-day online facilitated sessions. Each LA brought two or three staff from different departments, including Virtual School Heads, Enterprise & Regeneration Teams, Children's Services, Youth Work.
- Participating Local Authorities were:

County Councils	Unitary Authorities
Cambridgeshire County Council	Hull City Council
Devon County Council	London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Durham County Council	Walsall Council
Kent County Council	Warrington Borough Council
	Wirral Council
	Sefton Borough Council

Local Authority Participants' Goals

- Each LA team was asked to identify an area of work that they wanted to focus on during the programme, and to articulate a goal for their work. The goals identified fell broadly into three categories:
 - External employer facing – engaging with businesses and others outside the council
 - Internal facing – looking to raise the profile of care leaver employability, or increase the number of employability opportunities, within the Local Authority
 - Young people facing – focused on reaching or supporting specific groups of young people (for example those in most need, or in particular school year groups).
- External employer facing:
 - Increasing Care Leaver employment in the local construction industry – a field with a skills shortage. Will cover a wide range of roles (including admin, HR etc) as well as on-site work.
 - Partnering with the DWP to promote Kickstart placements and developing a tailored and supported “Pre-Apprenticeship” programme.
 - Partnering with the construction company contracted to redevelop the civic centre to create employability/ work experience/ apprenticeship opportunities
 - Improving engagement with local businesses, including training and support for them on the issues faced by young people leaving care.

Local Authority Participants' Goals

- Internal facing (LA as employer or corporate parent)
 - Reinvigorate a cross-Council Education/Training/Employment Care Leaver working group, and adopt the “Whole Council” approach promoted by the Care Leaver Covenant.
 - Develop a formalised apprenticeship offer and other work experience opportunities within the Council, and support those care leavers without Level 2 functional skills in Maths & English to fill this gap.
 - Develop a programme of paid sessional opportunities within the Council, to complement existing apprenticeship offers. Includes progression pathways for young people taking sessional opportunities.
- Young People facing
 - Increasing employability-related engagement in Years 10 & 11 through the Virtual School and existing careers support work in schools
 - Increase reach to Care Leavers by piloting different forms of communication (eg workbooks, drop-ins, social media). There is a specific focus on reaching UASC who may need ESOL support.
 - Intensive work with those who have been NEET for more than 12 months, including developing a “case conferencing model”. This is a partnership between the Leaving Care Team, the Community Learning Team and the Employment & Learning Team in the council.

The programme: case studies (1)

- The programme was designed to follow the arc of a young person's journey into employability, using five case studies:
 - “Understanding the local economy” with Alex Latham, Care Leaver Covenant. Alex drew on their work with Manchester City Council. They had used the Covenant's Social Value Toolkit to build support for care leavers into procurement processes.
 - “Understanding the world of work” with Charlotte Robey-Turner & Jacob Brown from Leicestershire Cares, a charity spun out from Business in the Community. They worked with 80+ employers who offered short tours, interview practice, CV clinics and mentored work placements.
 - “Supporting young people towards employability” with Nicholl Hardwick from Drive Forward Foundation, a London-based charity. They offered 1-1 support to identify young people's strengths & aspirations, and worked with Corporate Partners to offer mentoring, internships, apprenticeships and employment. A case study from Camden Council described the creation of a year-long internship offer.

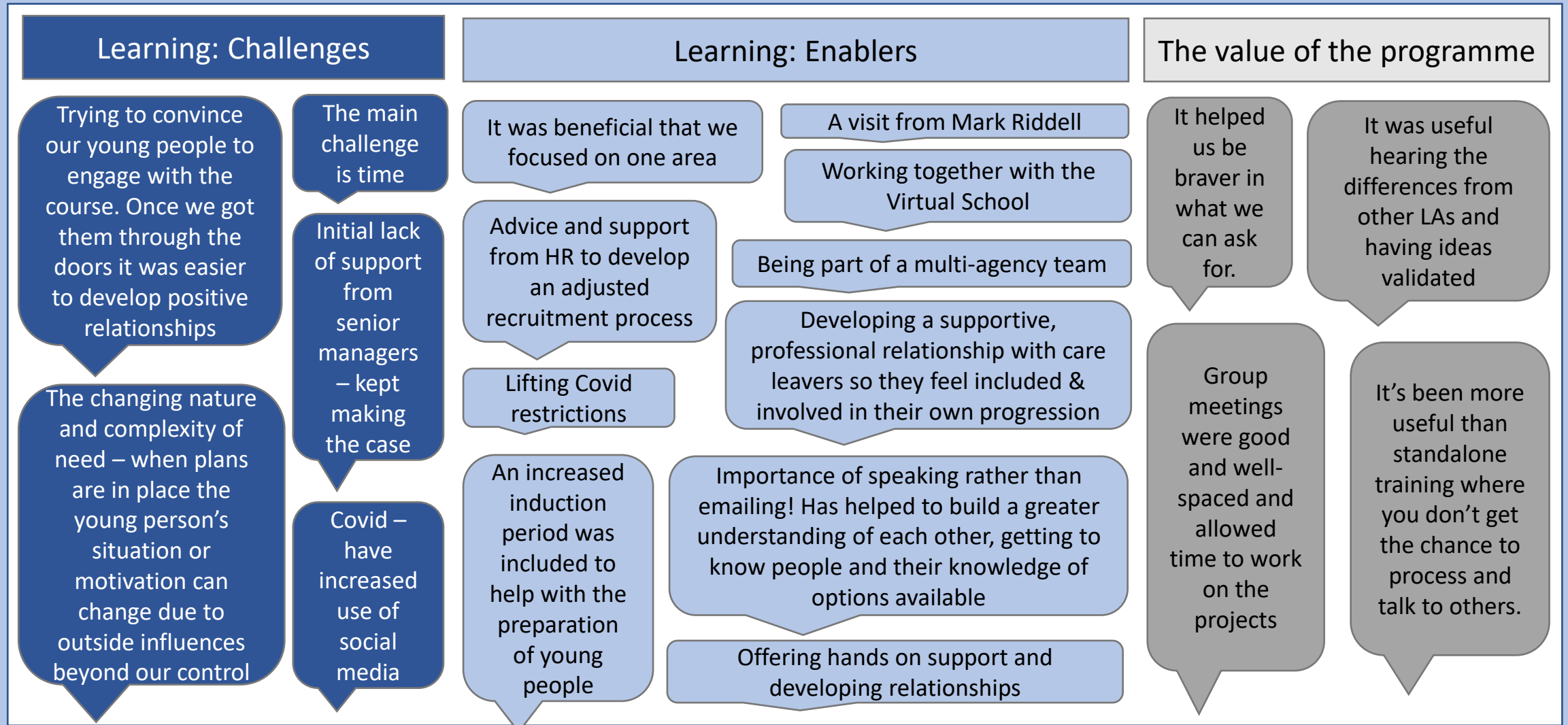
The programme: case studies (2)

- Case studies (continued):
 - “Supporting young people with specific needs”. Nicholl Hardwick gave information on the mental health support that Drive Forward offered to the young people they worked with. Alex Capitani, from Coventry Children’s Services, described how they worked creatively to offer those with insecure immigration status work-related experience.
 - “Learning from young people’s experiences”. Two young people with care experience who had taken part in the civil service internship programme, and gone on to get permanent roles, shared their experience of what had worked in getting them into the roles, and helping them succeed. They stressed the importance of communication at all times of the recruitment processes, and regular feedback.
- The sixth day of the programme reviewed the programme as a whole, reviewed progress against the original goals, and discussed what had most enabled progress to be made.

Programme Impact: Progress made by participants towards their goals

- Built relationships with new external employers, colleges and training & mentoring providers (LAs 1, 6, 10)
- Raised awareness with social workers & PAs about how to assess individuals' readiness for employability opportunities and support young people's development (LAs 2, 9)
- Secured funding for staff, wages and costs such as travel expenses, licences or PPE (LA 1)
- Delivered information sessions to employers, internal Council colleagues and groups of young people (LA 3)
- Set up new structures within the Council to raise the profile, identify new opportunities and chase progress (LAs 4, 5, 7)
- Developed training offers to fill key employability gaps such as lack of Maths & English (LA 6)
- Identified creative ways to offer young people with insecure immigration status opportunities to develop their skills and experience (LAs 6, 9)
- Engaged schools & Virtual Schools in identifying young people's career interests early (LAs 7, 8)
- Set up new ways of communicating with young people through Facebook & Instagram, as well as new drop-ins, hubs and sessions. (LAs 8, 9, 10)

Learning – what challenges were faced & what enabled progress to be made?



Programme Key Learning: Enablers

- Partnership work within the Council – bringing together a range of people from HR, Economic Development, Children’s Services, Virtual School to focus on care leavers
- A clear focus e.g. on an employment sector, or a group of young people – don’t try to do everything at once!
- Recognition of the need for time and support for young people – constant communication while waiting for an opportunity to come through, and ongoing support if a young person’s circumstances change
- Listening to young people’s views, for example on where to deliver courses or sign-ups for programmes
- Senior Manager Support – to resolve issues quickly and make links across council departments
- A variety of entry points and employability offers to meet the needs of a range of young people, including those with insecure immigration status who were not able to undertake work
- Dedicated time or funding, including to pay young people the Living Wage during work experience, internships or apprenticeships
- Good use of data, for example to identify employability barriers such as not having English & Maths
- Taking part in a national peer learning programme brought extra profile to the issue and gave participants information on what was happening elsewhere that they could take to their own LA
- External stimulus – a visit from Mark Riddell prompted senior manager focus on the issue.

Programme Key Learning: Challenges & Responses

- **Challenges faced by young people:**

- **Changing Circumstances:** Young people were not always able to attend planned meetings (for example at school), so teachers/carers communicated information. Lives were often volatile – they could sign up to an opportunity one week and be uncontactable the next. This was overcome by consistent communication.
- **Understanding employability offers and the world of work:** Young people did not always see the benefits of the courses or opportunities that were being offered. This was overcome by linking the training offer to young people's aspirations & interests. A longer induction time period was helpful in enabling young people to settle into a role.

- **Challenges posed by the system:**

- **Senior Manager Focus:** Turnover of senior management, or managers with limited knowledge of care leavers. Projects needed to keep making the case for young people's futures to stay at the top of the agenda, along with a focus on safeguarding children.
- **Time & funding:** Undertaking focused work on care leavers' employability on top of their day job, and recruitment of additional staff took time.
- **Funding:** Funding for young people to go to University was not available from the Council – extra applications for scholarships had to be made.
- **Making Social Value work:** It was harder to get benefits for Care Leavers through social value processes if these hadn't been specified at the start.
- **System Timeframes:** The Civil Service Internship, for example, could take 9 months between job offer and start. It was hard to maintain a young person's motivation.

- **Challenges posed by Covid:**

- **In reaching young people:** Not being able to visit young people directly, meant relying on online communication or key workers. They were supported to undertake interviews online where possible.
- **In reaching employers:** There were limited opportunities to hold employer-facing live events.

Reflection: the role of the peer learning programme

- In reflecting on the learning programme participants highlighted the value of:
 - **Sharing experiences and ideas with other LAs in a safe & honest space.**
 - **Contributions from specialist VCS organisations** – with time to unpick and process the information.
 - **Creating a one-page plan** at the start was felt to help with focus, and **regular meetings of the group** provided time to work on the projects, encouragement to keep on track and a prompt to action.
 - **The contribution from the two young people on the civil service internship** -it reminded participants about the basics – communication, induction and regular feedback, and the challenges young people were facing.
- Suggestions for “even better if” included:
 - **Continuing the offer of 1-1 conversations between the group sessions** – these gave people confidence and ideas to take issues forward, and could have helped LAs were there was staff turnover.
 - **More opportunity to hear young people’s voices** – to understand what had worked for them.
 - **Ensuring the breakout groups were of an even size** – adjusting plans on the day.
 - **Mixing up the breakout groups in different ways** – eg to bring together LAs with large UASC populations.

Key Learning Points – six suggestions for success

1. Tailor opportunities and support to the young person's interests, motivations and work aspirations. Identify any individual barriers, such as lack of English & Maths qualifications or the need for ESOL. Listen to what works for them eg Colleges that are easier to travel to.
2. Use lots of different ways to engage young people – social media, face-to-face, workbooks. Keep in touch – especially if nothing's happening on a job or course application – to offer reassurance.
3. Build a partnership across the Council and its partners – HR, Virtual School, Employment & Enterprise teams, key contractors and statutory partners. Get senior buy-in where you can and lever senior managers' contacts.
4. Be prepared to adjust the normal council procedures – longer recruitment timetables, extended inductions, shorter days – to go at the young person's speed.
5. Build ongoing relationships with employers, enabling them to engage in a variety of ways – from light touch offers such as CV clinics and interview practice, to taster sessions, workplace tours and work experience offers. Consider how to help them meet their CSR objectives or develop their staff.
6. Don't try to do everything at once! Pick one area where you want to make progress and focus on that.

Useful Links & Resources

- **Care Leaver Covenant:** Strategic Resources for Local Authorities, including the Whole Council Approach and the Social Value Toolkit (a guide to supporting Care Leavers through procurement). <https://mycovenant.org.uk/support-the-covenant/local-authorities-engagement/>
- **Leicestershire Cares :** Practical Resources on engaging and working with businesses, including connecting to their Corporate Social Responsibility agendas, and the “Promise to Care” pledge. <https://www.leicestershirecares.co.uk/get-help/get-businesses/>
- Resources for **care leavers with uncertain immigration status:**
- Support in Greater Manchester (Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit): <https://gmiau.org/help-and-advice/services/#children-and-young-people>. Young people they worked with have also produced a widely applicable flyer comprising six things about supporting young people in care affected by immigration control. <https://gmiau.org/six-things-guide-for-local-authority-staff/>
- Support in South London: (South London Refugee Association). A Youth Club and other activities for those aged 14-18, as well as casework advice. More information <https://www.slr-a.org.uk/our-services/youth-work/telephone-advice/>
- General guidance about trafficking and modern slavery, including the National Referral Mechanism is <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms/guidance-on-the-national-referral-mechanism-for-potential-adult-victims-of-modern-slavery-england-and-wales#independent-child-trafficking-guardians-ictg>
- Barnardo’s child trafficking services <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/protecting-children/trafficked-children>.

Employment Education & Training Network

For Employability leads for Care Leavers, within Local Authorities.

Contact nlcbf@catch-22.org.uk to sign up

NATIONAL LEAVING CARE
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