

Care Leaver Pre Apprenticeship Programme

Review – February 2021

Background

In May 2017 Walsall Council launched its new corporate Apprenticeship Programme – *Endless Possibilities*. The decision to invest in Apprenticeships was largely based on the changes introduced under the Apprenticeship Levy and the Enterprise Act 2016, however, rather than seeing the Levy 'pot' as something to be spent it was felt that use of the Levy funding should be aligned to the Organisation's corporate workforce strategy and other key drivers such as the PROUD Transformation Programme and the Organisation's important role as Corporate Parent. With the latter in mind the Learning and Development Team took a decision to introduce a Positive Action scheme – a Pre Apprenticeship Programme for our Care Leavers to bring care leaver pledges to life.

This targeted scheme for Care Leavers was established to provide those individuals who are interested in pursuing a career with the local authority with the experience and qualifications needed to secure permanent employment and so achieve adult independence and economic wellbeing. The positive action scheme provides Care Leavers with the opportunity to access paid work through an Apprenticeship for a fixed-term period (normally 13 – 24 months) during which time they can gain confidence, learn new skills and gain qualifications enabling them to have an equal chance of obtaining/sustaining further employment once the Apprenticeship ends.

The key aim is to help Apprentices gain access to ongoing employment and create the conditions for sustainable employment. Care Leavers also receive impartial careers advice and guidance from the Learning and Development Team to ensure they can progress onto the next level Apprenticeship or into permanent employment.

The original commitment was to ring-fence 17 Apprenticeships vacancies for Care Leavers – Walsall has actually created 20 opportunities year to date - and on a case by case basis service areas may apply to be considered for a wage subsidy through Walsall Works to offset a proportion of the salary costs for the young person. The care leaver is paid the national minimum rates of pay in order to support the young person's costs of living independently. The young person receives all the usual terms and conditions of employment with Walsall Council including paid holidays and access to the Council's wider learning and development offer.

A Care Leaver bursary is available through the Training Provider so the young person receives £1,000 after completing 90 days on programme.

The Data

Number of Care Leavers Recruited	Number of Care Leavers Who have left programme early without completing	Number of Care leavers leaving and gaining employment elsewhere	Number of Care Leavers progressing into more permanent posts
20	10	3	2

Evaluation

Referencing the data above, it would appear that the pre-apprenticeship programme has not achieved its potential, however, it is well known that the cohort, for a variety of reasons, is difficult to engage. Many lessons learned along the way. It was felt important to hear the voice of all those involved in supporting the programme, including the young people themselves.

Positives:

- ✓ Raised awareness around Care Leavers/LAC across Directorates
- ✓ Pledges completed by Directorates showing commitment to the programme
- ✓ 20 opportunities created
- ✓ 2 Care Leavers came runners up in the Staff Recognition Awards
- ✓ Numbers of referrals were positive to start with
- ✓ In some cases – the distance travelled by the young people has exceeded all expectations
- ✓ Our first Higher Apprenticeship Care Leaver was recruited in December 2019
- ✓ We have worked with Starting Point (Recruitment Specialists) to launch support with Interview Skills
- ✓ Positive Case Studies – 2 Apprentices are seen as Ambassadors, 1 has progressed to the next level apprenticeship and 1 has recently received a Distinction for her studies.

Comments from Care Leavers:

L says : 'Sometimes I was lazy but I could see this was a fantastic opportunity and I needed to work hard to get the results'

T says: 'The Endless Possibilities programme has opened so many doors for me; it has been a great kick-start to my career in Customer Service. The programme accommodated all my needs from support with travel to lack of confidence and experience. The help I have received has been overwhelming; I have been able to achieve many life goals since starting my Apprenticeship. With a lot of hard work and help from the programme, I can positively say I am more confident in the way I present myself and have the ability to offer excellent Customer Service. I am positive it will only get better from here and I look forward to what the future holds for the rest of my career.'

'I am a Care Leaver you should treat me differently'

February 2021

Report created by Helena Baxter

'I would rather work in a factory'

'This is a great opportunity I wish I knew about this before'

As part of the review our Apprentice lead and host managers have raised the following areas for concern:

- Young People are not prepared and were not aware of the requirements of the World of Work before applying to the programme
- Poor Attendance within the workplace - impacting on the team and the business
- Lack of referrals since Summer 2018 - original referrals came via a Black Country Impact Adviser when this adviser left the organisation the referrals reduced
- Input from partner teams within Children's Services has been variable
- Lack of understanding by teams that are referring and Care Leavers that Apprenticeships are real jobs and of the need to comply with the general Terms and Conditions of Employment
- Disciplinary issues
- Concern around Care Leaver as Council Employee building up rent arrears even though pay has been increased
- Managers are 'put off' due to the bad experiences – comments such as 'it's like babysitting'.
- In some instances the well-being of the line manager has been affected and there has been a negative impact upon a team
- Young people going AWOL and concerned managers spending numerous hours on pastoral issues so very labour intensive. Managers are aware of what is involved but it has gone over and above in certain cases
- Personal Advisers requesting Disciplinary Procedure to be stopped as individual is a Care Leaver
- A Manager commented - 'Care Leavers want to be treated equally and given the same opportunities, however, they then expect us as employers to let them not turn up for work and perform badly'

Where are we now?

We will continue to work with our partners in Children's services to develop this programme. We need to ensure that all teams that are referring are aware of the rigour of the Apprenticeship Programme and how the 'right' young person in the right placement can succeed.

Moving Forward

We have a corporate parenting responsibility for our young Care Leavers and a desire to help prepare them for the World of Work. Our Positive Action scheme needs to be robust and our terms and conditions of employment must be adhered to otherwise we are setting up our young people to fail. Private sector employers may not be as understanding therefore we need to ensure our young people are prepared to work hard to learn and earn a wage.

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Recommendations to help move the programme forward

- To work with HR colleagues to develop a briefing for Teams involved with LAC/Care Leavers and anyone who refers into the programme to ensure they are aware of current terms and conditions of employment, expectations and to establish ground rules especially around attendance.
- Young People need access to impartial careers advice and guidance at a younger age so they are better prepared and understand what career paths are available to them.
- Care Leavers/LAC - application process needs to be more robust and more support made available through Walsall Works and the Black Country Impact Team.
- We require data around Care Leavers/LAC so we can understand how many young people are ready for Apprenticeships and what their areas of interest are.
- We will extend work experience if necessary and ensure the programme is person centred.
- Part time hours are now available so young people can build up to 37 hours per week if necessary.
- We need Care Leavers/LAC to have a realistic understanding of the requirements of the world of work.
- Employability Skills training – prior to application, linked to work experience – this can be developed through other partners such as DWP.
- Mentoring will be in place once the Care Leaver is regularly attending. The virtual school will also provide mentoring for the Care Leaver Apprentice to ensure they have ‘wrap around’ support.
- It is suggested that each Care Leaver Apprentice is provided with a Job Coach – on a day to day basis getting them up and into work – is this the role of the Personal Adviser or do we need to engage with someone external to provide this support? This would avoid the line manager’s time being taken up with pastoral care.
- CPD Training for Personal Advisers so they are aware of the opportunities available, the Apprenticeship Programme has changed and the requirements for the various qualifications have increased.
- Investigate links to external Training Providers who deliver Traineeships – we have already made relevant contacts to be able to pursue this in Spring/Summer 2021.
- Personal Advisers to develop profiles on individuals as part of the referral process for transparency – line managers need to be clear about what issues may be linked to the young person in order to better support them and identify the right placement.

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