

**Title of the Report:** Increasing Employability for care experienced young people and those **N**ot in **E**ducation, **E**mployment and **T**raining (NEET).

### **Executive Summary**

We have a duty to ensure our young people are engaged in education, employment or training. This report provides an update to the report presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in July 2021 in regards to care experience young people not in Education, Employment or Training.

It aims to give an update of the current data along with an overview of the current initiatives aimed to improve opportunities for care experienced young people.

### **Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board**

1. To provide comparative data for young people not in employment, education, or training.
2. To provide an overview of the initiatives aimed to improve opportunities for care experienced young people.

### **Recommendations**

- The Board is asked to note the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of the Council with regard to ensuring Children in Care and care experienced young people have access to education and training opportunities that will assist them in their future.

### **Background papers:**

Report to the Board in July 2021

### **Resource and legal considerations**

Local authority duties to young people and care leavers are set out in legislation:

Children Act 1989

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

Children and Social Work Act 2017

Education and Skills Act 2008 (sections 10, 12 and 68)

### **Performance Management**

Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen.

- it acts as the visible organisational champion for looked after children and young people and care leavers, promoting their rights, entitlements and aspirations;
- the mobilisation and optimum use of resources available to get the best chance of success for children in care and to support care leavers to positively move on to live independently.

### **Council Corporate Plan Priorities:**

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.

### **Reducing inequalities**

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and families. By being effective Corporate Parents for Children in Care and Care Leavers, we collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face.

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## **Improving Employability and Training for care experienced young people**

### **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 It is recognised that many care leavers do not achieve the same outcomes as their peers highlighting the need to ensure that opportunities created are responsive to challenges faced and increase the chances for achieving sustainable positive outcomes into employment and training. Many of our care leavers have not been afforded the stability that allows them to gain the skills that would make them more employable within the job market. Care leavers are underrepresented in higher education.

1.2 We remain committed to raise aspirations, increase skills and improve opportunities into employment with a focus on mentoring, work experience/ shadowing and apprenticeships with the priority to focus on providing support:

- Those at key point of transition to successfully access their next steps into positive post 16 destinations
- Identify those at risk of dropping out and supporting the retention of those in Education, Employment and Training in their current destination.
- Exploring options and pathways for those not in education, employment and training.

### **1.3 So what are we doing to support young people to maintain work or learning?**

- Social workers, the Virtual School and Personal Advisors actively engage, encourage and support young people in their chosen field of education, employment and training.
- Pathway Plans are more specific about work and learning and what we will do to address if there are challenges
- Personal Education Plans identifying possibility of not being in learning or work.
- Our Impact Advisors work with the young people who have been referred to support them in to the training or employment.
- The IMPACT advisors have established weekly a face to face drop-in service since January 2022 and this is already beginning to make a difference as our young people and personal advisors are utilising the service.
- Monthly Neet Action Group meetings which include Lorraine Thompson, Virtual School Head, Managers from the Transitions and Leaving Care Service and our named IMPACT worker from Black Country Impact as well as representation from Walsall Works.

#### 1.4 Not in education, Employment and Training

The most recent (2021/21) national and regional data for care leavers aged **19 to 21** years in Employment, Education or Training

2020/21	England	52%
2020/21	West Midlands	50%
2020/21	Stat Neighbours	46.4%
2021/22 Quarter 3	Walsall	57.7%

The percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training at quarter three of 2020-21 was 57.7%. This has increased from 52.1% at the end of quarter 2.

At 25 March 2022 we currently have 260 care experienced young people between the ages of **17 and 21 years**.

66% (172 of 260) are in Employment, Education or Training.

35% (88 of 260) are Not in Employment, Education or Training.

- 9 are not available for work or learning because of illness or disability
- 11 are not available for work or learning due to pregnancy or parenting
- 68 are not available for work or learning due to other circumstances.

#### 1.5 Breakdown for young people aged 17 to 21 years

Age	17	18	19	20	21	Total
Employment, Education or Training	70%	82%	57%	55%	55%	<b>66%</b>
Number of young people	34	63	28	30	17	<b>172</b>
Not Employment, Education or Training	30%	18%	43%	45%	45%	<b>34%</b>
No of young people	13	14	22	25	14	<b>88</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>260</b>

1.6 As you can see from the data above, the largest proportion of not in Employment, Education or Training are aged between 19 – 21 years. The focus is therefore on targeted support to focus on work readiness.

Our focus is on the 88 young people that should be actively receiving support to secure employment or training. However, other factors will impact on their readiness for work or able to receive the right level of support owing to a number of factors.

**10 are in custody:** as the restrictions have now eased most young people are able to access learning or work within custody settings.

**11 are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking** and whilst they are able to access educational support through ESOL, some are not able to gain employment owing to their immigration status.

**7 have significant offending history** which limits their options for work and training opportunities.

A number of young people are struggling with independence and are receiving significant support in order to ensure some stability. This sometimes means that their ability to enter the job market or focus on education and training is severely compromised. Other support such as stabilising their mental health or resolving accommodation issues is a priority and once resolved, a greater focus on education and training can begin.

#### 1.7 A more detailed breakdown of all our 17-21 year olds:

Age	17	18	19	20	21	Total	%
Full Time Education (not higher education )	24	33	9	10	1	77	
Full Time Higher Education		4	2	3	4	13	
Full Time in Training or Employment	3	15	8	8	10	44	
Part Time in Education (not higher education)	7	8	1	3	1	20	
Part Time in Higher Education			1	1		2	
Part Time in Training or Employment		3	7	5	1	16	
						172	66%
Not in Education Employment or Training – Illness or Disability		2		5	2	9	
Not in Education Employment or Training – Other Circumstances	12	12	17	17	10	68	
Not in Education Employment or Training – Pregnancy/Parenting	1		5	3	2	11	
						88	34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>260</b>	

#### 2.0 Virtual School – their role in supporting 16/18 year olds into Education, Employment & Training (EET)

2.1 Lorraine Thompson is the Virtual school Lead and leads on strategic planning and developments, policy, new initiatives and service delivery. The role of the Virtual school in supporting 16/18 year olds into Education, Employment & Training (EET). The Virtual School provide support to young people up to the age of 18

#### 2.2 Post 16 key worker role

Our post 16 key worker tracks and monitors 16-18 year olds to ensure they are in appropriate post 16 provision and are given the right support advice and guidance to make informed career choices. Our post 16 key worker:

- Attends Personal Education Plan meetings for young people aged 16 & 17
- Provides career advice to 16+ young people
- Works with our NEET young people to engage them in back into EET
- Attends SEN annual reviews for young people with an EHCP
- Works closely with schools, colleges and training providers to ensure our young people are receiving the right support
- Attends the monthly NAG meeting
- Provides resources/equipment to help young people moving into EET

### 2.3 **Post 16 Mentor**

Our post 16 Mentor works with young people who are at risk of under achievement to

- Remove barriers to participation
- Advocate on behalf of the young person with schools and college
- Attend interviews/meetings with young people

Our post 16 mentor is relaunching our Corporate Mentoring Scheme now that face to face meetings are taking place.

### 2.4 **Careers Advisor Role**

Our careers advisor left the service in February 2022 to take up a post as senior careers advisor at a local college. We are currently looking at how we can provide timely careers advice in the future but in the meantime our secondary key workers are liaising with careers advisers in schools and colleges to ensure our young people are accessing appropriate careers advice.

### 2.5 **Apprenticeships**

We continue to support care leavers onto our council apprenticeship scheme. We offer a pre-apprenticeship scheme jointly developed with Endless Possibilities which includes:

- A 12 week paid work experience to help the young person 'try before they buy' making sure it is the right scheme for them and to gain valuable employability skills.
- A mentor throughout the whole apprenticeship to support the young person and provide advice and guidance to the employer
- Funding for equipment, resources and transport to enable them to be fully equipped for the apprentice
- The virtual school have offered 3 young people an apprenticeship to date.

#### **Endless Possibilities**

We have access to Walsall's 'Endless Possibilities' Apprenticeship Programme. This targeted Programme for Care Leavers was specifically established to provide those Care Leavers who are interested in pursuing a career within the local authority, the experience and qualifications needed to secure permanent employment in order to achieve adult independence and economic wellbeing. The programme offers ring fenced apprenticeships.

There are currently **9** young people in apprenticeships across the Council and in external sectors. Each of the young people in an apprenticeship has a named mentor from the Virtual School.

Our apprentices are paid the national minimum rates of pay for age and not the apprentice rate per hour in order to support the young person's costs of living independently. The young person receives all the usual Walsall Council terms and conditions of employment including paid holidays, staff benefits including access to the Council's wider learning and development offer.

## **2.6 Aspire to University**

We have over 40 young people signed up to our 'Aspire to University' (A2U) Project which is run by Wolverhampton University, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Staffordshire Virtual Schools to encourage more young people to move onto further and higher education.

The project includes providing Mentoring support for young people.

All universities and colleges must now consider care leavers in their access and participation plans in order to encourage and support them into higher education but we are far from getting this right. We have **18** young people attending University.

The Virtual School and the Transition and Leaving Care service work jointly to identify places, secure university accommodation, apply for funding and link in with the student leads. Many universities across the country have a dedicated support for care leavers and so we have now developed a good portfolio of those that are particularly supportive and can advise our young people accordingly.

The Corporate Mentoring Scheme is being relaunched which provides further capacity to support young people at University.

## **2.7 Pupil Premium Funding**

The Pupil Premium funding we receive from the Department of Education to help support children in care between the ages of 5 and 16 years is extended to help support care leavers up to the age of 19. The funding has been used to provide equipment and resources to enable young people to move into Employment, Education or Training. For example, uniform and equipment, travel expenses, driving lessons, extra tuition and online training courses.

A recent pilot run by the Department of Education around pupil premium for post 16 has highlighted the need for additional funding for this group of young people. At the Virtual School Conference held on 16th March 2022 the Department of Education announced that funding for post 16 young people would be available and we would know more in the next few months

## **2.8** Alongside the work of the virtual school staff we also have other mechanisms in place to enable us to identify young people who may be at risk of not being Employment, Education and Training and need additional support at an early age. We have incorporated the Risk of Not in employment, education and training Indicator (RONI) into our personal education plans. This is a scoring system that enables us to identify young people who may be at risk of not being in Employment, Education and Training become so support and resources can be put in place before the young person leaves school in year 11.

We continue to provide support and guidance to our young people who are currently not in Employment, Education and Training by identifying appropriate provision and/or referring them onto other services such as Back Country IMPACT and Walsall Works.

## **2.9 Black Country Impact**

In Walsall, we currently have two Impact workers that work in partnership with the Personal Advisers based in our Transitions and Leaving Care Service. All of our eligible young people are referred to this service and are routinely discussed as part of the monthly NAG meetings. Updates are provided as to the work that has been undertaken and whether the young people are engaging with the support on offer.

As a way of tracking the success, a log of contacts is kept by the Impact workers and shared with TLC Managers in order to ensure that all opportunities are explored and actions followed.

## **2.10 Care Leavers Covenant**

The Care Leavers Covenant provides care leavers with opportunities to enter the world of work, such as offering work experience placements, work shadowing placements, internships, traineeships and apprenticeships.

## **2.11 Transitions and Leaving Care Service :**

As part of our support to our young people, Personal Advisors work closely with partners in the Virtual School, DWP, Impact and education and training providers. Our links with local colleges are good and regular discussion with them in regards to education and training options for our young people takes place. This has often led to bespoke packages of support being offered to those that require it.

Laptops have been purchased through grant funding or distributed to care leavers from the allocation received from the Department for Education. Young people at risk of not being able to access further or higher education courses were prioritised initially.

In order to strengthen our tracking and monitoring of young people not in employment, education and training we have adapted our 8 weekly "Care Leaver Contact" record to capture the young person's current activity, which informs our performance dashboard. This ensures that managers are able to review the interventions required to support and prepare young people to engage in work or learning.

Pathway Plans are more specific about work and learning and what we will do to address if there are any challenges

Monthly NAG meetings are held at which young people not in work or learning are discussed at least on a bi-monthly basis. These discussions include information about aspirations and interests for individual young people, and the practical steps that need to be put in place to support the young person into employment, education or training and monitor that the actions agreed have been followed through.

## **2.12 Peer Learning Programme - National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum - Catch22**

We are part of a peer learning which is facilitated by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, Catch22 and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. This involves 4 County Councils and 6 Unitary Local Authorities. This programme aims to raise the profile of care leavers' employability following the Covid-19 pandemic.



The programme's objective is to support leaving care teams in Local Authorities 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.

TLC staff, our Virtual School and Endless Possibilities have been involved in the peer learning events. The report of the programme will add to further learning for us to take forward.

### 3.0 **Examples of interventions to support young people in education & employment**

#### 3.1 **Example of young person C:**

C is a bright young person who has experienced long term anxiety in regards to attending education. Her school attendance has been sporadic and historically of concern.

**School Context:** In September 2020 she was enrolled onto a sports course at a local college. C found it extremely challenging to access the curriculum in the classroom. College staff attempted to resolve this issue by allowing C to work in the library or on her own so that she didn't have to be in a class room setting. However, this did not resolve the challenges for her and she was removed from the course in January 2021 due to poor attendance. C herself advised me that she felt she didn't fit in with the other young people on the course and she really struggled to build peer relationships.

**Intervention:** It was important that C remained in education for the rest of the academic year, as whilst she is bright and academically capable there was a risk of C becoming long term NEET. After discussions with other professionals it was felt that a smaller, more nurturing setting such as a training provider would provide support to help her build emotional resilience and prepare her for a larger college setting in the future.

Although C did not want to engage with education we provided ongoing support. Regular visits to C's placement took place, where we helped her rewrite her CV, apply for part time jobs and look at other courses available to her. A number of avenues were investigated, including online courses, apprenticeships and sports massage courses. C was supported to make her own decisions around these but did not engage with any of the options discussed.

After a few months of continuous support C independently found a Level 3 Sport's course at a college some distance away from where she was living. Initial concerns were raised due to her previous level of anxiety around attending college, and the fact that she would be travelling some distance to and from college. These concerns were discussed with the social worker, and C, but this was the choice she wished to make.

We maintained extremely close contact with C at the start of the academic year. She needed a lot of support in relation to purchasing her uniform, her bursary and sourcing her bus pass. She needed a lot of support around travel and how to communicate with the college when she was going to be absent or late. C can become overwhelmed by such matters, and she needed a point of contact she can talk with. C struggled with matters such as her timetable, or knowing where her class was. She had also recently moved into her own accommodation which could have detrimentally impacted upon her ability to attend education. A multi-agency close working approach was needed to support her. We ensured that close contact was maintained with the college, and her social worker, to ensure that we were all aware in regards of her attendance and that if there were any concerns we could step in at the first instance to try and support her.

**Impact of Intervention:** By building up a good relationship with C, by supporting her through a challenging time, offering her close support and being there for her whenever she needed support, advice or guidance, we helped avoid her becoming long term NEET. By fully informing

college about C's behaviours and her historic barriers to education enabled them to put in the right support to help C and resulted in them treating her with empathy, when things were not going well.

Over time, C began to rely on support less and less, and became more independent. Concerns remained around attendance, but it was a huge improvement from previous settings. College were understanding of her needs as they were fully informed, and this meant that they were able to put in reasonable adjustments, such as changing one day of her timetable to online to help reduce her travelling. She still requires reassurance, but at a lesser level. She has built trusting relationships with her tutors. Her self-confidence has increased and she has greater faith in her own abilities.

We were very concerned at the beginning of the year in regards to this young person and that this placement would fail, however it has been successful. This is of course greatly down to C herself, and she advises that she enjoys the course and likes the people. C has been able to progress in her independence due to the great support network she has had around her through all professionals and we are sure that without that support she would not have been able to manage as well as she has done. She has long-term aspirations to go to university and become a physiotherapist, and I have every faith that she can achieve this.

She has now turned 18, but both C and college are aware that we are still here to support her until the end of the academic year.

### 3.2 Example of young person S

**School Context:** S previously attended S V School which is an independent smaller setting for young people who have emotional support needs and find accessing education challenging. School reported that her behaviour was sporadic and she struggled to maintain relationships with other young people and build positive relationships with staff. S can have emotional outbursts and display inappropriate language. She finds being challenged difficult to manage and can find it incredibly difficult to work within rules and boundaries.

**Intervention:** Initially S enrolled on Health and Social care at College but experienced a panic attack on the day of enrolment and did not feel she could attend the course. She had also moved Home and been through a large period of change and disruption. This was communicated to me via the social worker, and I made contact with the home setting at this time to discuss support for S and what steps could be made to support her in regards to education. After discussions around alternative options such as training providers and other courses, S was enrolled on Painting and Decorating Level 1 from September 2021 at College as this was her pathway of choice. This transition was always going to be a challenge for S taking into account that she had previously been in a smaller, independent, specialist setting and was moving into a mainstream larger college with lower levels of support.

I contacted college and made the appropriate arrangements for S to enrol on the Painting and Decorating course. I supported home and S to ensure that she applied for bursary, bus pass etc. I contacted the college and ensured that the Looked After Children coordinator understood S's needs and to contact me if there were any issues.

Over the next 6 weeks there were some incidents of concern raised by the college in relation to behaviour, and S's unwillingness to wear safety gear and follow instructions. S was removed from college at the end of October, this was challenged by the Virtual School and a meeting was then held where college agreed S could return. However, the initial meeting with her tutor was not successful and S decided not to return to the course.

S was not in education or training and was eager to gain employment. I worked with S at this time to look at other education options available to her as she still needs to develop her English and maths skills towards gaining a grade 4 at GCSE. I worked closely with the social worker and with the support staff and home, and have also visited S in person to get to know her. I

discussed the GAP programme with S which is run by Wolverhampton College, and is a qualification to support young people to develop employability skills, maths and English, self-esteem etc.

S was not sure at first that this was something she wished to engage in, and I gave her some time to consider this. S agreed to give the course a go, and I contacted the college to make arrangements for her to attend an interview, which they agreed to on the understanding that if she didn't turn up for the appointment they would not give her a second chance. S did not turn up to the interview on the day, but college did agree to make a second appointment for her, which she did attend.

S is now attending the GAP programme, and there remains some issues around her behaviour and willingness to undertake all the work. However, I have built a good relationship with S and with her support at home, so am able to pick these up as they occur and communicate effectively with the college. S will continue to need close monitoring as she progresses through this year, and hopefully she will have the skills she needs to progress onto a level 1 course from September 2022.

**Impact of Intervention:** Initially S needed support to find an alternative course after she decided that she could not attend the Health & Social care course, and without guidance I believe she would have found it difficult to enrol on another course. Whilst there were concerns around her ability to manage the environment and course she chose, she was fully supported to enrol as this was her choice. When this was not successful I believe that without intervention S would have remained NEET long term and would have been very reluctant to engage with any kind of education. S was not in any education or training for a period of 2 months, during November and December, returning to college in January 2022. This would have been much longer without intervention and support.

### 3.3 Example of young person - J

J is 20 years old and lives with his Aunt and extended family.

J left school after staying on in year 12; he felt that it wasn't right for him as he says he had never enjoyed school. J went onto Walsall College to study health and social care; his aspiration was to be a social worker. J achieved a level three qualification and was in two minds to either continue his studies at university or find employment.

J & I talked this through – weighing up all of the pro's and con's; following several discussions around education, employment and training with appropriate information, advice and guidance J explored the opportunities around apprenticeships. J was introduced to both David Hughes, Childrens champion and Helena Baxter to further explore routes into youth participation and local authority ring fenced apprenticeship vacancies.

J attended virtual CiCC forums and was informed of the part time apprenticeship within the Council and was encouraged to apply. As part of the preparation for this we practiced interview skills, how to present yourself and talked through some of the possible questions you could be asked. J felt confident in attending 2 interviews; one that was a participation apprentice and one that was a youth justice apprentice.

J was successful in obtaining the apprenticeship and he is now working alongside professionals like probation officers, social workers and substance misuse practitioners. This is a great opportunity for J to absorb different experiences from a variety of services and how they work together. J will experience supervision, all working towards preparing J for his long term aspirations.

J has settled in well, he is really happy in his current position and has stated that he really enjoying working with young people and can see now, both sides, meaning the struggles young

people have and the professional side of the role working towards positive outcomes for young people. J says he can relate to the young people he engages with and has a better understanding of how they feel and what support can be put in place to reduce risk factors.

J & I continue to talk about his future aspirations; his passion is to work with and support young people. He wants to use his own experiences in a positive way and this could still mean that he will pursue a career in social work. J is aware of the apprenticeship levy; he feels this route suits him better as he is able to gain experience and earn money at the same time.

From my knowledge of J I agree with him; he has struggled in formal education settings in the past and albeit he is aware of the support he can receive to attend University this is just not something he wants to pursue. J is flourishing in the work environment and has a great work ethic.

#### **4.0 Conclusions**

Our aspirations for our young people are high.

We need to continue to create work opportunities and placements within the private sector and strengthen our local offer to care leavers around employment.

We continue to work in partnership with external organisations to explore not only employment opportunities but also education and training opportunities to support our young people to be able to access suitable services to bridge the gap in allowing them sources to actively engage in the labour market actively.