

Increasing Employment Opportunities for Young People with Care Experience

Report of a NCLBF Peer Learning Programme February – December 2021

**catch
22**



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1.1 Programme Background

- The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) is funding 35 voluntary organisations across the UK through their Young People Leaving Care funding stream. A number of these focus specifically on care leaver employability. Catch22 host the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, which works with over 125 Local Authority leaving care teams to share best practice and outcomes for care experienced young people.
- During the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, Catch22 and the charities on the EFF programme began working together, concerned about the impact of the pandemic on care leavers' employment outcomes in England. They worked together on:
 - A campaign on care leavers' access to devices and broadband (Summer 2020)
 - A Ministerial Roundtable with DfE, ADCS, LGA (Spring 2021)
 - A briefing session for Ofsted inspectors (Summer 2021)
- The LA Peer Learning programme grew out of a desire to offer Local Authorities more sustained support to improve care leavers' employment outcomes, drawing on the expertise of the organisations within the EFF leaving care funding stream.

1.1 Programme Objective

- **Programme Objective:** 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.
- **Desired Outcomes (Local Authority):**
 - Each Local Authority set out at the beginning of the programme the issue that they want to work on, and what they hope to achieve
 - At the end of the programme each LA was invited to reflect on how far they have made progress, and to set out a plan for future action.
- **Desired Outcomes (System):** The programme is also intended to add to the body of knowledge about what works in supporting care leavers into employment, and the end-of-project report is being produced with a view to support discussion with the wider NLCBF, EFF programme grantees and beyond.

1.2 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. Each LA brought two or three staff from different departments, including Virtual School Heads, Enterprise & Regeneration Teams, Children’s Services, Youth Work. 6 of the 10 LAs attended throughout; 9 of the 10 provided a final report.
- 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

1.3 Programme Approach

- Five half-day facilitated online sessions took place between February & November 2021, with a review session held in February 2022.
- Participating authorities were also asked to join an initial briefing for DCSs/ Heads of Service to encourage senior buy-in.
- Each half-day online session involved:
 - Reflections on progress and sharing of challenges and solutions.
 - Input from a “case study” on a topic related to care leavers’ employment. These came from VCS organisations in the EFF programme, other LAs and young people.
 - Opportunities to discuss the issues raised with other participating LAs, and ask questions of the case study presenter. The case study presenters often followed-up with additional resources.
 - Action Planning for the periods between the sessions.
- The programme also made the offer of 1-1 conversations or small-group Action Learning sets between the first, second and third sessions.
- Participants prepared a “one-page plan” setting out their goals for the programme, and a “one-page report” at the end of the programme.

2. Participants' Goals & Programme Case Studies

2.1 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.

2.1 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.
 - Developing a formalised apprenticeship offer within the Council, and a work experience programme for UASC unable to undertake paid work and for young people not ready for an apprenticeship.
 - 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.

2.2 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.

2.2 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.

2.2.1 Understanding the local economy (Alex Latham, Care Leaver Covenant)

- Alex Latham from the Care Leaver Covenant introduced their work. He highlighted the need for a “Whole Council Approach” to supporting care leavers.
- Councils could use their procurement processes to require external organisations to offer support for care leavers through the “Social Value” approach – for example requiring large contractors to offer internships for care leavers. (More information about the Whole Council Approach and the Social Value Toolkit at <https://mycovenant.org.uk/support-the-covenant/local-authorities-engagement/>).
- **Case Study: Manchester City Council** had established a Care Leaver Board across the Council to focus on improving support for care leavers (employment & education, health, financial support, safe and stable places to live).
- They had used the Social Value Toolkit as part of their approach to supporting young people not in Education, Employment or Training, including young people leaving care, and this was now being adopted across the 10 Greater Manchester LAs.
- Case Study: MCC worked with Engie, the city’s energy provider, who supported care leavers in a variety of ways – they offered handyman support for accommodation, provided driver & van support for MCC’s clothing events, trained young people to get the CSCS card and had taken on a young person via a ring-fenced recruitment exercise.

2.2.1 Understanding the local economy (Discussion)

- **How to engage District Councils in a Whole Council approach?** The Covenant had been working with Counties to identify Districts keen to help as “Champions” who could lead by example.
- **How to find resources & capacity for this work?** A “Whole Council Board” helped to motivate other departments. One Council had created an apprenticeship opportunity within the team for a care leaver to work on this agenda and provide extra capacity. It had been funded by small contributions from across the council.
- **How to find businesses that might be interested?** The Covenant worked with businesses to find opportunities – look on the website or get in touch. In addition local colleges often had “progression workers” whose role was to support care leavers and other groups, and they often had good links with local businesses.
- **How to start with the Social Value Toolkit?** Just start where you can – you don’t have to cover every procurement contract at the same time. The Covenant can identify businesses that have signed up locally or nationally. Social Value principles can also be applied to sub-contractors working for bigger companies.

2.2.2 Understanding the world of work (Charlotte Robey-Turner, Leicestershire Cares)

- Charlotte Robey-Turner from Leicestershire Cares introduced their “Promise to Care” programme, engaging local businesses in Leicester and Leicestershire. The charity had spun out of Business in the Community, and supported business engagement, including with young people leaving care.
- Leicestershire Cares worked with young people referred to them to identify and address practical barriers to employment (housing, mental health etc), develop their skills and experience, and offer meaningful encounters with employers.
- They worked with over 80 employers to offer a wide range of opportunities: Work tours, Mentored work placements, Mock interviews, CV clinics, Careers talks, Life skills, as well as discounts etc.
- Key success factors for their work were: strong relationships with young people based on trust and placing them at the centre of our work; effective partnerships with businesses who support our work; matching employee volunteers with young people; clarity of expectations for all involved; having a creative and agile team and approach.
- **Case Study: Thermo Fisher Scientific** offered “World of Work” tours and mock interviews. They saw engaging in programmes like this as part of their business purpose, linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and as responding to customer demand for ethical businesses. It was also a way to develop their staff (eg giving them interview practice) and to improve employee engagement – staff felt a greater loyalty to the company if they worked with others on this type of project.

2.2.2 Understanding the world of work (Discussion)

- **How to find funding for projects like this?** Leicestershire Cares is a charity. It fundraises and applies for grants (eg a grant from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funds this work)
- **How do you incorporate youth voice into your work?** We worked with a group of young people to find out what they wanted. They developed the logo of the programme and did a video for the business launch. They join webinars for businesses to explain first-hand what they want from the opportunities.
- **How to manage expectations when young people are specific with their job interests?** Try to find out what it is about that job that is engaging them, sit with them to research routes in, or find alternatives that tick those boxes. It is about helping them find their purpose. For example, one person wanted to work in a Zoo, and they got a placement with the Council Parks team to explore outdoor work.
- **How to keep businesses engaged if a placement doesn't work?** It's about the leg-work beforehand. Leicestershire Cares visits the workplace, talks to the employer beforehand. If something goes wrong staff from Leicestershire Cares are available straight away. There are also quarterly check-ins with all of the businesses signed up to the programme to discuss what they can realistically offer.
- **Reflection – businesses see this as an opportunity, not a burden.** They can offer a range of things that are light touch (eg a 20 minute virtual tour) even if they can't offer a placement. Businesses value a really specific request – eg “can you do a mock interview on this date and time?”.

2.2.3 Supporting young people towards employability (Nicholl Hardwick, Drive Forward Foundation)

- Nicholl Hardwick from Drive Forward Foundation described the work of their organisation in supporting young people in London towards employability. They worked with Corporate Partners in the private and public sector (including the NHS) to offer opportunities to young people.
- Young people were referred to them by Local Authorities or self-referred. The offer to young people included
 - An allocated 1-1 employment consultant who built a relationship with the young person and was their key point of contact
 - Group sessions involving speakers, cultural events, “Pizza & Preparation” sessions to work on CVs
 - Work Placements including job opportunities from Corporate Partners, Insight Calls with industry professionals
 - An Industry Mentoring Scheme with mentors from the industry/ career the young person wanted to enter
 - In house counselling for young people facing mental health challenges.
- **Case Study: Camden Borough Council** offered ring-fenced internships for Care Leavers, which paid the London Living Wage. This was led by the Council’s apprenticeship team and funded by a contribution from each Directorate (proportional to its size). Camden worked with Drive Forward Foundation to advertise the opportunity and to host an information session for potential applicants during the application window. The young person spent 8 weeks in each of 12 different council services, although there was flexibility if it wasn’t working out.

2.2.3 Supporting young people towards employability (Discussion)

- **Sources of funds for this project?** The Local Authority contracts with Drive Forward Foundation (DFF) to undertake this work. In some places the DWP contract DFF. Drive Forward also has grant funding (such as from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation).
- **How to find industry-specific mentors? What do you expect of them?** The mentors come from the companies that are Corporate Partners, often as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility volunteering programmes. They have training on issues such as boundaries, and the impact of trauma. Some might do a regular monthly session, or others might do a more intense, shorter programme if that works for the young person and the mentor.
- **How to engage young people and match them to their internship placements?** Young people are referred by their PAs, DWP or the Virtual School. The employment consultant's role is to build a relationship with the young person and understand what they want, what's inspiring for them. And then to draw on DFF's relationships with Corporate Partners to find the right internship, apprenticeship or job. Not everything goes right first time – the employment consultant is there to help iron out any blips, and to be there if it doesn't work out.

2.2.4 Supporting young people with specific needs (Nicholl Hardwick, Drive Forward Foundation; Alexandra Capitani, Coventry Children's Services)

- **Supporting young people with mental health needs.** Nicholl Hardwick from DFF said that all young people were invited to join group sessions, including London cultural visits, a regular lunch club, and more focused sessions such as interview prep. These helped to reduce isolation and make connections.
- Young people could also access up to 12 free therapeutic counselling sessions from a care-experienced BACP counsellor. The sessions helped to understand their strengths and work towards their goals.
- **Supporting young people with insecure immigration status.** Alexandra Capitani from Coventry City Council described their programme. Her key points were
 - Take time to understand the young person's status and specific conditions relating to employment – recognising that the young person may not understand this themselves.
 - Take time to understand the young person's strengths. For example they may have cared for an elderly relative, or helped on a family farm before leaving their home country.
 - Be creative in finding opportunities, including volunteering, that match interests and skills. For example – young people with little English helped to give out leaflets at staff conferences.
 - Understand the risks – for example a young person may say they are volunteering, but are they really doing unpaid work?

2.2.4 Supporting young people with specific needs (Discussion)

- **How to engage young people with the mental health offer?** The employment consultants encourage the young people to see the counsellor if they think it would be helpful. The counsellor has an “open door” policy – young people can leave and come back in a few months’ time. So young people can take it at their pace and don’t get refused if they don’t attend an appointment.
- **Who should be finding out about young people’s immigration status? Was it too much to expect from a social worker?** A young person’s social worker should know, but it is always good practice to ask the young person themselves. If a young person is in the immigration system they will also have a solicitor who can advise on work implications. Always ask for more information if you aren’t sure, as it could have consequences if the young person was working when they were not allowed to.
- **How do we prevent exploitation of young people seeking asylum?** This was a growing area of concern, particularly among the Vietnamese and Albanian communities, or when a young person was placed out of borough with family or friends who didn’t understand the constraints. Barnardo’s ran the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Scheme in most of England and could support the young person and connect with the employers. In other areas there were often local refugee centres. In case of concern professions should make a referral to the National Referral Mechanism Scheme.

2.2.5 Learning from young people's experiences – the Civil Service Internship Scheme (Danielle June & Karina Lelonkiewicz)

- What works during recruitment:
 - Communicate at every stage, and also when nothing is happening!
 - Think about how to reach to young people who need the most help – not just graduates
 - Offer a lot of guidance around the role and what it entails
 - Ideally have previous interns help in the sifting and interviewing.
- What works in the early stages:
 - Focus on building relationships for the first two weeks & have a plan of structured induction chats
 - Have a clear plan of action for when it is time to get stuck in. ific conditions relating to employment – recognising that the young person may not understand this themselves.
- What works throughout:
 - Link to other care leavers in the organisation if possible, or if not links to previous interns
 - Have regular performance conversations and give constructive feedback
 - Be empathetic to home lives – have a shared plan in place in case difficulties emerge
 - Don't ignore the elephant in the room – the impact of trauma. Know where to access mental health resources and support.

2.2.5 Learning from young people's experiences – the Civil Service Internship Scheme (Reflections)

- What struck us about the presentation:
 - Encouragement to think about how to reach beyond those who might immediately respond to opportunities
 - The value of communication throughout the recruitment process – especially if there are gaps in the timetable
 - The value of a peer network for care leavers in or who have recently left employment/internships
- What we can take away and apply in our own organisation:
 - Review our line management processes for the Care Leavers who apply – are they getting enough feedback and support?
 - Do all our managers know what mental health support is on offer?
 - Really powerful to hear from young people themselves – we should take current apprentices with us when we try to persuade a manager to have a placement!
 - Thinking about the first day and first impressions – good practice for everyone but even more important for someone who might be anxious
- The challenge of temporary opportunities
 - Risks replicating instability – why should I build work relationships if I'm not going to be here for long?
 - Be clear about progression routes to reduce anxiety about what is going to happen next.
 - Can managers be given permission to keep in touch with interns?

3. Participant Reflections on Progress

We feel we have established beneficial, long term relationships with employers on a local and national level

We have a written commitment from [Company building the new Civic Centre] to ring fence opportunities for our Care Leavers

10 Care Leavers are currently live on the sessional employment programme and placements have been agreed in principle for 10 more

We have increased support from the DCS who has started to ask services to think about what more they could do to support our young people.

Produced an employability offer specifically for Year 10 & 11 students

Re-designed our Care Leaver Pre-Apprenticeship programme

We have created more opportunities for our care experienced young people in our LA & we have great buy in from internal teams for this to be an annual offer

We have hit our targets regarding university applications for NRPF care leavers being enrolled and starting university

We have given a platform to amplify our young people's voice within the LA.

Organised online employer sessions for young people to attend

DWP links – EET team attending regular meetings in districts, looking at data, provision, raising awareness of the needs of our Care Leavers

We now have social media where we share EET opportunities

Had two offers from departments within the Council looking to offer EET support for CLs (SEN and Finance)

Although some young people are reluctant, we have managed to sign up 11 people. 3 secured jobs and 5 are still actively engaging.

Changed approach to collaboration with the PAs – EET team now have booked 1-1 to discuss NEET cohort. Having a positive impact of PA knowledge and data recording.

We have adapted sign-up processes to provide a more inclusive service.

3. Reflections on Progress from LA 1

Participant's Goal	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.
Progress made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built positive relationships with local organisations and raised the profile of young people leaving care with them. We have identified 13 potential apprenticeship offers. • Developed a bespoke week-long hands-on project with Groundworks to introduce our young people to the different roles available in construction. • Raised awareness with social workers and PAs of how they can support young people towards careers in the construction industry. • Secured funds for four years to support young people eg with travel costs, PPE.
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid – a live event with employers was repeatedly delayed, and then had to be held online • Finding time for the project alongside our day jobs • Turnover among senior managers and retaining support
What enabled progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting with a focused project (construction), and developing knowledge. • Identifying a sector with a variety of entry points at all levels. • Keeping our managers informed of progress to ensure continued support.
What's next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepening our relationships with local organisations and reaching to related sectors. • Developing a career map especially for UASC young people • Work with local organisations and Colleges to develop work tasters and work experience

3. Reflections on Progress from LA 2

Participant's Goal	Partnering with the DWP to promote Kickstart placements and developing a tailored and supported "Pre-Apprenticeship" programme.
Progress made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesigned Care Leaver Pre Apprenticeship programme, which includes support from a learning mentor for every young person • Developed an Employment, Education & Training Group via Teams for Personal Advisers so that opportunities can be shared, and undertaken joint working sessions with them to develop a shared understanding of when a young person is ready for work. • Connected with a recruitment agency to provide 1-1 interview preparation support
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding internal work opportunities when staff were working from home during Covid • Limited team resources
What enabled progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close working relationships with internal teams and sharing good practice • Support offered by the Corporate Parenting Board and Senior Leaders • Taking a more tailored approach to matching young people to different schemes • The peer group injected new enthusiasm into supporting young people and helped us keep on track with our plan
What's next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend our reach to more employers and do more to share best practice

3. Reflections on Progress from LA 3

Participant's Goal	Partnering with the construction company contracted to redevelop the civic centre to create employability/ work experience/ apprenticeship opportunities
Progress Made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secured a commitment from the construction partner to create 22 opportunities over the next 18 months • Held an industry-specific insight session to a group of young people. • Two positions started in January. • Also increased the number of internal Care Leaver Apprenticeships to 8.
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readiness of young people – extended the induction period • Specifying care leavers within the Social Value KPIs when this was not explicit in the original procurement contract
What enabled progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership working with the HR team, and a longer induction period for young people. • Working with the economic development team to use the Social Value framework to ensure the social value criteria were met and to agree KPIs specific to Care Leavers with the construction partner
What's next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 positions are due to start in 2022. • Supporting the 8 internal apprentices to sustain their employment and make progress with their apprenticeship qualification.

3. Reflections on Progress from LA 4

Participant's Goal	Improving engagement with local businesses, including training and support for them on the issues faced by young people leaving care.
Progress Made	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set up a multi-departmental team to review progress and agree actions• Created a presentation including the voice of young people to give to local businesses• Developed an employability course – 5 of the 6 starters will progress to EET.• Created at least 8 internal/ external opportunities for young people
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engaging young people in the employability course in the first place – to get them to see the benefit.
What enabled progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A multi-agency team with direct access to senior managers to resolve issues quickly• Relationships with social workers and PAs to engage young people and encourage them to join the courses and take up the opportunities
What's next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Setting up a Care Leavers drop-in hub with multi-agency staff to provide ongoing employability-focused sessions, as well as cooking and clothes-washing facilities• Running an entrepreneur challenge – a group is given £60 and a table in the local market to develop & sell a product. The first one was a great success and will be repeated.

3. Reflections on Progress from LA 5

Participant's Goal	Develop a programme of paid sessional opportunities within the Council, to complement existing apprenticeship offers. Includes progression pathways following sessional opportunities.
Progress made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a sessional employment programme including co-ordinator, application process, internal promotion, and data recording process. • Participants get Durham Living Wage and have a “benefits check” from Welfare Rights. • 10 care leavers have started the programme with placements agreed for 10 more.
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time – recruitment to the co-ordinator post took longer than expected • Young people’s circumstances change and plans have to be adjusted • Covid – staff are less able to visit young people, go with them to interviews etc. We have been supporting them on TEAMS and promoting independent travel
What enabled progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for the co-ordinator and for paid employment • Close working with HR to develop an adjusted recruitment process, and with Children’s Services to identify and support young people to apply eg with CV preparation.
What’s next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building up to 40 placements by reaching to new DCC departments • Developing joint support to young people in placement from Virtual School, Social Care and Progression & Learning teams • Reaching beyond DCC to other employers.

3. Reflections on Progress from LA 6

Participant's Goal	Develop a formalised apprenticeship offer and other work experience opportunities within the Council, and support care leavers without Level 2 functional skills in Maths & English
Progress made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six successful applications to the Civil Service internship programme, and improved rates of young people with No Recourse to Public Funds starting University • Identified a training provider for in-house Maths & English training, so that young people can be supported by social workers and ETE staff on course days.
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for University attendance – supported students to apply and gain scholarships • Long wait for allocation of Civil Service internship posts – 9 months after job offer.
What enabled progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better use of data to identify young people without English & Maths qualifications • Listening to care leavers to get feedback on their courses and what is working. • Constant communication with young people waiting for news from the Civil Service.
What's next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a care leavers hub as a space where they can achieve accredited courses throughout the year, as well as meet their PAs and other young people. • Revise & publish the local offer, including via an app, so that it is relevant and up to date. • Build on what we have learnt to support more young people with NRPF to go to University.

3. Reflections on Progress from LA 7

Participant's Goal	Reinvigorate a cross-Council Education/Training/Employment Care Leaver working group, and adopt the "Whole Council" approach promoted by the Care Leaver Covenant.
Progress made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-established cross Council group with increased participation from Council & partners. Focus has been widened to 16/17 year olds; now engages HR, Virtual School & Youth Hub. • Director of Regeneration has taken on Strategic Lead for Care Leavers & DCS has begun to ask services to consider what more they can do for care experienced young people
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on safeguarding and Ofsted within Children's Services. • Covid restrictions • Limited knowledge / support from senior managers at the start
What enabled progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relaxing of Covid restrictions • Visit from Mark Riddell
What's next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed Regeneration Champions • Increase support from Personal Advisers/Social Workers • Engage more young people • Develop the programme of work with partners and reach to the local business community

3. Reflections on Progress from LA 8

Participant's Goal	Increasing employability-related engagement in Years 10 & 11 through the Virtual School and existing careers support work in schools
Progress made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pilot programme of engaging with young people through their Year 10 Personal Educational Plan (PEP) meetings started in September 2021. • Created an activity pack to enable young people to identify their future aspirations • Raised awareness of our "Step Forward" programme for 16+ students
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time – attending all Year 10 PEP meetings was time-consuming. We will review the effectiveness of this after Spring Term 2022. • Engagement of young people – they don't always attend the meetings so dependent on colleagues, carers, teachers to pass on information
What enabled progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership working with the Virtual School and Area Learning Advocates to enable us to attend the PEP meetings and engage with the young people directly and at the right time for them.
What's next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a way to send information about the Step Forward programme to Yr 10s & 11s. • Offer work experience within the Step Forward team to Year 10 students.

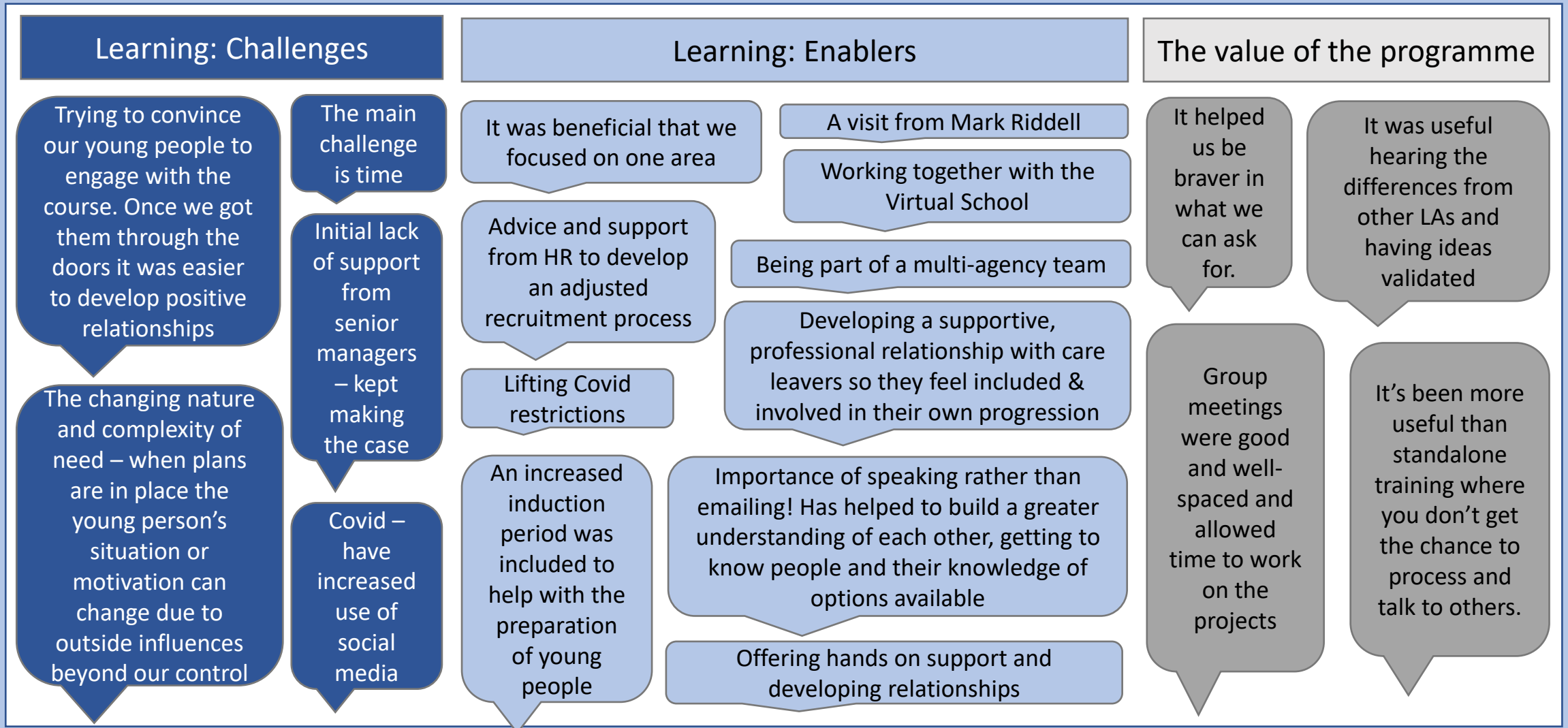
3. Reflections on Progress from LA 9

Participant's Goal	Increase reach to Care Leavers by piloting different forms of communication (eg workbooks, drop-ins, social media) with a specific focus on reaching UASC who may need ESOL support.
Progress made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up social media channels (FB & Instagram) to share EET opportunities. • Increased communication & collaboration with PAs 1-1 to discuss NEET young people. • Started EET drop-ins in four locations across the county. • Started the EET workbook – still developing in partnership with external providers. • Been approached by two KCC departments to offer EET support to care leavers.
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid – Created a MS Teams EET channel to share information with PAs. PAs can use their mobile phones to show young people.
What enabled progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building personal relationships with PAs – not just emailing them. • Working with existing partners to widen their offer – eg ESOL + vocational opportunities • Having Apprentices within the team to increase capacity and connect with young people • Using information from the Peer Learning programme to brief senior managers on what other LAs were doing to support young people leaving care.
What's next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have agreement to an EET event in April within the Council, attended by Mark Riddell. • Continue the programme of engagement with PAs through team meetings and 1-1s. • Increase the number and locations of EET drop-ins. • Launch the EET workbook with partners.

3. Reflections on Progress from LA 10

Participant's Goal	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.
Progress made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built a strong relationship with Sefton at Work and identified additional funding streams • Adapted our sign-up processes to enable more young people to engage • 11 young people signed-up to Sefton at Work – 3 secured jobs and 5 are still engaging in training, volunteering, in short-term work and undertaking work experience.
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustaining motivation by the young people – sometimes they sign up one week and aren't contactable the next. • Some young people at risk of gang exploitation aren't safe / don't feel safe to travel to the office location because of where it is based.
What enabled progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working closely with Sefton at Work to smooth out paperwork • Building relationships with the young people and communicating regularly • Offering sign-up at a young person's home or other address so they did not need to travel to an area they perceived as unsafe.
What's next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing additional paid work placement opportunities within the Council. • Developing our ability to support young people when they are in training or work.

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



4. 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.

4.1 Learning: Challenges faced by young people, and how they were overcome

- **Changing Circumstances:** Young people were not always able to attend planned meetings (for example within school). This was overcome by using teachers/carers to communicate information. In addition, their lives were often volatile – they could sign up to a course/opportunity one week and be uncontactable the next. This was overcome by consistent communication from those working with them.
- **Understanding employability offers:** Projects reported that 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
- **Understanding the world of work:** Projects reported that a longer induction time period was helpful in enabling young people to settle into a role.

4.2 Learning: Challenges from the system

- **Senior Manager Focus:** Some projects faced considerable turnover of senior management, and some with limited knowledge of care leavers. This was felt to add challenge to the work.
- **Time & funding:** A number of projects highlighted the challenge of undertaking focused work on care leavers' employability on top of their day job. Recruitment of additional staff also took a long time. Intensive work with young people, for example attending PEP meetings, was also time-consuming.
- **Priorities within the Council:** One project noted that Senior Managers had, at that time, a high focus on safeguarding and Ofsted readiness, and they needed to keep making the case for young people's futures to stay at the top of the agenda.
- **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.

4.3 Challenges Posed by Covid

- The Peer Learning Programme was conducted during a period of fluctuating Covid restrictions. This posed a number of challenges to the projects:
 - Not being able to visit young people directly, and relying on online communication or key workers to inform them of employability opportunities
 - Supporting young people to undertake interviews online, or if they were face-to-face, not being able to travel with them
 - Fewer internal opportunities such as Pre-Apprenticeships, with Council staff working from home
 - Not being able to visit employers so easily. A number of the projects had planned to hold employer events which had to be delayed, or moved online.

4.4 Learning: Enablers within the Council

- **Partnership work within the Council:** Projects were successful because they engaged a wide range of council departments to focus on supporting care leavers into employment. These included: Human Resources Departments; Economic Development Teams; Social Workers, Personal Advisers, & Team Managers; and Virtual School Heads. Close collaboration (personal meetings rather than emails) between the EET teams and Social Workers/Personal Advisers was particularly important.
- **Senior Manager Support:** Managers who could resolve problems quickly, or make links across the Council, were valuable in enabling progress.
- **Dedicated time or funding, including to pay young people:** Some of the projects were able to bring in a part-time worker to take things forward, and this was felt to enable quicker progress. The programme heard examples of how a care leaver apprentice could add capacity to the team as well as providing an opportunity for a young person. Many projects found that being able to fund paid work experience, internships or apprenticeships at the local living wage was critical to being able to engage young people.
- **Good use of data:** The projects gave examples of how tracking data could help to identify gaps and issues – for example identifying care leavers without the necessary English & Maths qualifications for courses or employment routes.

4.5 Learning: Other Enablers

- **A focused project – don't try to do everything at once:** Participants found it helpful to identify a focused project (for example a defined group of young people or a specific employment sector), rather than trying to address every issue.
- **A variety of entry points and employability offers:** Many of the projects looked for industry sectors or approaches that offered a variety of entry points (including those requiring very few qualifications) and a range of opportunities from short-term work related experience to longer placements. Particular attention was paid to those with insecure immigration status who might not be able to take up work.
- **Listening to young people's views:** This was important in identifying, for example, training courses that young people liked. Projects reported changing their usual approaches, for example a training provider delivered in a location where social workers /PAs could attend with the young people and offer them support, and sign-up processes were altered so young people could sign-up at home, rather than attend a location which they perceived to be unsafe.
- **Recognition of the need for time and support for young people:** Participants reflected on the importance of constant communication with young people while opportunities were finalised, and on the need to keep offering support to resolve issues as young people's circumstances changed.

4.6 Reflections: The role of the Peer Learning Programme

- In reflecting on the value of the peer learning programme participants highlighted:
 - **The value of sharing experiences and ideas with other LA in a safe & honest space.** It was reassuring to find others facing similar challenges, good to bounce ideas off other people, and helpful to bring back ideas from other places to influence senior managers.
 - **Contributions from specialist VCS organisations** – with time to unpick and process the information. Follow-up resources (eg draft job ads for apprenticeships) and follow-up conversations (eg with the Care Leaver Covenant) were useful.
 - **Creating a one-page plan** at the start was felt to help with focus, and **regular meetings** provided enough time to work on the projects, encouragement to keep on track with the plan, and a prompt to action. It was good to have dedicated time in a busy day.
 - **The contribution from the two young people on the civil service internship** was particularly valued in reminding participants about the importance of the basics – communication, induction and regular feedback, and the challenges young people with care experience faced every day.

4.6 Reflections: The role of the Peer Learning Programme

- In discussing what would be “even better” if the programme ran again, the participants suggested:
 - **Continuing the offer of 1-1 conversations between the group sessions.** These were felt to be useful, focused discussions which gave people confidence and ideas to take issues forward. It was also felt that these might have helped LAs where there was staff turnover and new people were trying to get up to speed.
 - **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 the plans on the day when people didn’t attend.
 - **Mixing up the breakout groups in different ways** – for example to bring together LAs with large numbers of young people who had been Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

5. 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

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