

Care leavers into apprenticeships **How are young people in the care system accessing apprenticeships in London?**

Local authorities have a collective responsibility as 'corporate parents' to achieve good parenting for young people in their care. They also have duties towards young people who are leaving care and making the transition to adulthood. Guidance for local authorities which was implemented on 1 April 2011 (*Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers*, Department for Education, 2010) sets out the opportunities and services which care leavers should have access to in relation to education, training and employment. These include being offered work experience, access to high quality Information, Advice and Guidance, and support for care leavers who are undertaking an apprenticeship.

The proportion of care leavers aged 19, not in education, training or employment has increased by 26% since 2006, and a third of children still in care aged 19 are not in education, training or employment.¹

In London, the picture is particularly challenging, with fewer than 40% of children in care at age 19 in education or employment, compared to 86% of all 19 year olds.² So although over 40 care leavers have been recruited by London boroughs to an apprenticeship over the last 2 years, there is a clear need for more opportunities.

Of particular concern for London boroughs is that 54% of young people in care felt that councils are doing poorly or very poorly at helping them prepare to get good jobs in the future.³

Apprenticeships represent a good opportunity for many young people to train and earn a real salary, however not all looked after children or young people leaving care will necessarily be able to enter or complete an apprenticeship without additional support.

Barriers to starting or sustaining an apprenticeship

Like many young people, those who are in care or are care leavers can be unsure of what career they would like to pursue, and so benefit from receiving practical advice on how to access training, jobs and work experience.

However, care leavers often have additional barriers to overcome if they are to start an apprenticeship, sustain their employment and complete their qualifications.

Financial

An apprentice working for the London Borough of Hillingdon is having problems coping financially as they would be better off on benefits than they are in work. The apprentice is also taking on other work alongside their apprenticeship in order to make ends meet.

The interface between work and benefits is complicated, and can affect, for example, levels of housing benefit. This is more likely to have an impact on a care leaver as they are more likely to be living independently than many other apprentices. For anyone earning an entry level salary it can make more financial sense to remain on

¹ Department for Education statistics, 2010

² Voluntary & Community Sector, *United We Stand Manifesto*, 2010

³ Reed in Partnership, *From Care to Independence: Improving employment outcomes for care leavers*, 2011

benefits than take a job and may seem to be a more secure option. For a young person leaving care who is more likely to have suffered the effects of insecurity in their personal life, this may be a significant deterrent.

DfE guidance (see page 1) requires that local authorities have a policy in place to support care leavers undertaking vocational learning, work experience, and apprenticeships. This policy “must allow for the local authority to assess whether the young person requires any additional financial contribution from the authority, so that they can benefit fully from taking part in a broad range of training opportunities or employment”.

It also recommends that local authorities consider incentive payments for care leavers to encourage them to take part in education and training, and to ensure that they are financially secure whilst they are doing so.

- Lincolnshire County Council offer financial incentives to encourage care leavers to take up their work experience placements, and purchases a starter toolkit for young people training in a trade
- Devon District Council has a dedicated housing advice worker who supports care leavers to apply successfully for the benefits they are entitled to.

Housing

A lack of stability in home life, for example frequent moves or stays in temporary accommodation, makes it harder for young people to sustain regular employment, and also for employers to keep track of their apprentices or potential apprentices. Care leavers aged 18-20 are over-represented in homeless numbers, and some leave care placements as early as 16 to live independently which can be a significant responsibility and challenge. Support to access and maintain a suitable home may be essential for some care leavers to sustain and complete an apprenticeship.

- Clear protocols and responsibilities between Children’s Services and Housing Authorities helps to avoid care leavers falling through the cracks
- Practical and emotional preparation is essential if care leavers are to adjust to living independently
- Hull City Council and Devon County Council financially support foster carers to continue to offer a placement to a care leaver beyond the age of 18, where ordinarily this may become unaffordable once the young person passes this age. Young people staying put in their existing foster homes are more likely to remain in education and training than those in other types of accommodation.

Skill Levels

Another frequently identified barrier is the standard of education normally required to start an apprenticeship. Entry requirements often include 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C. 70% of all children gain this level of qualification. However for children who have been in care for 12 months or more this drops to just 14.8%. If English and Mathematics are specified in the entry requirements then just 9.8% of children from care achieve the required standard.⁴

A number of boroughs cited this as a common barrier for young people from care trying to access their programmes. Poor literacy and numeracy skills as well as ‘soft skills’ such as communication have frequently proved to be a problem for care leavers. Again, in common with other young people, lack of experience in a workplace means care leavers can have a general lack of understanding of

⁴ DfES statistics, 2009

appropriate behaviour at work. All of these factors decrease the chances of a young care leaver starting or completing an apprenticeship.

- Pre-apprenticeship training, covering basic skills such as literacy and also work-related skills can increase the chances of a young person successfully taking up an apprenticeship or other job
- Structured plans to address young people's aspirations help to create a clear pathway. The London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham has an Education and Employment Form which care leavers complete, setting out their hopes and aspirations around education and work. Staff are accountable for the outcomes described on the form, and it also helps to manage budgets more efficiently.

If apprenticeships break down too frequently, there is a risk that support from colleagues and the wider organisation for employing care leavers and apprentices will be lost, and apprenticeship opportunities will disappear.

Andy

Andy was one of Bexley's looked after children. He started an ICT Level 2 apprenticeship in the ICT Suite at a local secondary school. Andy made a good start, enjoying the practical hands-on approach of being able to re-build computers. Sadly Andy did not complete his apprenticeship. He found working in an environment with all teenage pupils a struggle, and didn't feel that he was prepared enough before starting his apprenticeship. However, whilst with Bexley Andy achieved some good skills and his confidence improved. He is putting this into good practice with another employer.

In order to maximise the number of care leavers who are equipped to take up an apprenticeship, and to improve their chances of success, many boroughs offer pre-apprenticeship training and work experience, as well as support with making applications for apprenticeships.

Support provided by boroughs

Many boroughs have a good relationship between apprenticeship officers and the leaving care team, ensuring that young people are made aware of apprenticeship vacancies on offer. Some boroughs offer support and services above and beyond this, to ensure that care leavers are supported to access apprenticeships.

In 2007 Southwark Council's Apprenticeship programme set an ambitious target that 20% of their intake should be young people leaving care. This has been supported by Councillors on the Parenting Committee, staff from Looked After Children (LAC), line managers in service areas and managers in partner organisations.

LAC services manage an Employability Programme to develop the skills of young people leaving care in completing job applications, undertaking interviews and improving their numeracy and literacy. This programme runs for six weeks each year in the run up to the apprenticeship recruitment phase. There is an agreed recruitment and selection process, which seeks to match applicants with appropriate apprenticeships to ensure success on behalf of the participant and also the relevant department's ongoing commitment.

Since 2007 20 young people leaving care have been made the offer of an apprenticeship, 20.5% of all Southwark's apprentices.

Christopher

Christopher found out about Southwark's apprenticeship scheme through the council's adolescent and aftercare service. Having gained excellent GCSEs, he was unsure what to do next, and eventually decided on social sciences, following his own experience of the social care system. Christopher took an advanced apprenticeship in health & social care with Southwark, during which he learned practical skills such as health and safety, and also gained a lot of confidence working both as part of a team and independently. He also brought a fresh perspective to his team, and introduced a cost-saving computerised evaluation tool. He is now at university studying to become a social worker, and aiming to help children like him who leave care not knowing what path to take in life.

All apprentices working at the London Borough of Ealing have a dedicated Connexions Support Worker who helps with pastoral care, and Connexions PAs who mentor apprentices on work-related issues. Ealing will also be setting up a pre-apprenticeship programme in 2011-12 to support people including care leavers to be ready for a full apprenticeship.

Louise

Louise was attached to the Bexley leaving care team. She had many hurdles to climb during her life but she was determined to have a purpose and focus and make a difference in her own and other people's lives. Louise worked with Bexley one day per week to gain work experience with a view to becoming work-ready to start an apprenticeship. Louise loved her time working in the team and recently secured employment with a Bexleyheath nursery.

The London Borough of Newham runs a four week placement scheme for looked after children to gain work experience. They also receive interview skills training, help with completing application forms and presentation skills. So far one of the young people who completed the summer programme has progressed into the council's apprenticeship programme. The HR, Learning and Development Team work closely with the Children and Young People's Service to ensure that details about apprenticeship opportunities are known internally and sent out to relevant external services as well.

London Borough of Camden offers support to care leavers to make applications and prepare for interviews, and monitors whether any of their apprentices need extra support to succeed in their role. They also work closely with support workers who work with care leavers to provide feedback from work-related activities such as interview skills workshops. This enables the support workers to provide specific support and feedback to the young people, allowing them to improve skills relevant to their own needs.

Thomas

Thomas was a Camden care leaver living in a hostel who had been unemployed for almost 10 months when he first applied for an apprenticeship at Camden Council. The first time he applied he was unsuccessful because he wasn't well prepared, but second time around, with help from Connexions, he was appointed to the housing repairs department at Camden, studying Customer Service Level 2.

After a year, he was asked to stay on for a further 6 months to complete his Level 3 Customer Service qualification, as he had become such a respected and valued member of the team.

As he neared the end of his contract, he received advice on completing application forms and interview practice from the Camden Apprenticeship Team, and was invited to two interviews for customer service roles within the council. Thomas felt well prepared following this support, performed exceptionally well and was actually offered both positions. He is now enjoying being a permanent staff member at Camden Council.

The London Borough of Bexley offers periods of work experience for looked after children and care leavers to develop work-related skills and experience. A young woman of 19 still in the care system is currently doing very well on a work experience placement and Bexley are supporting her to progress onto a Business Administration apprenticeship.

Natalie

Natalie was one of Bexley's looked after children. Natalie's dream was to find an apprenticeship working with children and eventually become a Nanny in a foreign country. After a short period of work experience, one of Bexley's schools was keen to offer Natalie a chance. She worked in the nursery and across the foundation stages of the school for an academic year, attending college one day per week where she achieved a Level 2 NVQ in Childcare, Learning and Development.

She loved her time with the children; she managed to combine making the lessons fun whilst the children were learning both academically and socially. She had good communication skills and was keen to receive feedback on her progress to ensure she met all the milestones needed to be a success in the working environment and to achieve her apprenticeship.

Natalie finished her qualification last summer, having secured a nanny position in America.

The Steps to Success (S2S) programme was set up by Lambeth Council in 2008 to provide employment and training opportunities for Lambeth care leavers. 39 young people have undertaken a paid work placement, generally of 3 – 6 months in duration.

Young people undergo the same recruitment and selection process for paid work placements as any other member of staff. Throughout the recruitment and selection process, they are supported via their social workers, personal advisers and Connexions advisers with guidance and advice around completing application forms,

preparing for interview etc. Candidates receive ongoing support as necessary to successfully complete their placements. So far three young people who have completed S2S work placements have gone on to undertake an apprenticeship, and one has been a permanent member of staff at Lambeth since 2009.

Career Start is Islington Council's service for looked after young people and care leavers, which provides a range of opportunities including work experience, work shadowing, and apprenticeships. The scheme also organises information sessions focusing on a range of different careers. Young people are offered support tailored to their individual needs, and support is also offered to employers participating in the scheme.

Further sources of support and information

National Care Advisory Service

NCAS is the national service offering, advice, training, good practice and information on young people's transitions from care to adulthood. They provide an enquiry service, events and training and have an extensive resource library.

http://www.leavingcare.org/?page_ID=13

From Care2Work

This project, hosted by the National Care Advisory Service and Catch 22, aims to increase employment opportunities for young people leaving care by supporting local authorities to develop relationships with employers. More information is available from their website: http://www.leavingcare.org/?page_ID=219

They have developed a Career Planning Toolkit, an Employer Engagement toolkit and Employer Training Tools amongst many other resources. You can find them all on the website: http://www.leavingcare.org/?page_ID=223

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

NIACE have produced a number of resources for care leavers and employers looking at employment and apprenticeships in particular:

Guidance for Local Authorities on working with care leavers in apprenticeships

<http://shop.niace.org.uk/ruble-apprentices-2011-staff.html>

Factsheet for care leavers of their rights in education, training and employment

http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/C/a/Careleaversweb_1.pdf

NIACE also offer training for local authority managers, mentors and other staff who work with young apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds with the knowledge, skills and confidence to provide effective support to enable them to achieve and succeed within their apprenticeship. For further information contact

events@niace.org.uk.

London Councils

www.londoncouncils.gov.uk

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