



Pathway Team and Service for Care Leavers

Update for Corporate Parenting Board: February 2020

The Pathway Team is made up of;

- 1 practice manager
- 5 Personal Advisors (known in York as Pathway workers)
- 1 Accommodation officer
- 1 Education, Training & Employment officer (ETE).

The Team works with young people previously looked after by the Local Authority, City of York Council. Currently the Pathway Team is working with 121 young people.

73 care leavers age 16-21

38 care leavers age 21-25

10 young people in Care age 16-18 preparing to leave care.

This update is to provide information about the main areas of the work: Accommodation; ETE; Health; Young People's Voice and the 'local offer'.

Accommodation

The Local Authority offers a range of accommodation options based on the assessment of individual need and ability.

Staying Put

Staying Put is well established and embedded as the first consideration when planning future accommodation for young people post care.

Currently 12 care leavers are Staying Put with their foster carers. This is a valuable period for the development and consolidation of key skills in preparation for future independent living, with many more young people making positive moves into their own tenancies and a greater proportion maintaining positive education, training and employment.

Taster & Trainer flats

The taster flat offers a 4 to 6 week fully supported opportunity to experience living in the community. This flat has been in constant use throughout 2019 and is currently booked up to July 2020. We have recently added Wi-fi to enable young people to do college work and communicate with friends and family.

The trainer flat provides the opportunity to live in a council property for 6 months, giving a very real experience of independent living. At age 18 the young person can either sign up for the flat or move to a different property. Taster & trainer flats have been hugely popular and successful in 2019.

Independent Living

Care leavers when ready for independent living are awarded gold band status for allocation of Local Authority housing. Currently 45% of the former relevant population are in Local Authority or private rented accommodation. The team continue to work hard to support young people to maintain their tenancies and to be a valuable part of the local community.

Other options

In addition to Staying Put and independent options the Pathway Team and Housing colleagues have developed a range of accommodation options for our young people. This includes Howe Hill for young people, SASH supported lodgings, Robinson court and Scarcroft Road.

Care leavers requiring 24hr support are referred to Howe Hill for young people (HH4YP) a 26 bed Hostel which provides daily youth education sessions to develop independence skills. We currently have 3 care leavers resident at Howe Hill.

Howe Hill also provides crash pad beds for emergency accommodation.

The Local Authority, in partnership with NYCC has commissioned bespoke accommodation from SASH for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and refugees. This is in addition to the existing supported lodging arrangements with SASH. Currently 5 young people are in SASH arrangements.

Quote from a Care Leaver

"It's a scary time but the Pathway Team know tons about housing and help you with everything".

The team are proud of their work supporting young people in their transition from foster care / residential care to supported and independent living arrangements in the community

Education, training & employment

The team have high aspirations for care leavers with 68% currently engaged in education, training and employment this is significantly better than the national average of 49%.

The Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) figure 32% includes 13 % who are young parents and 5% who are unable to work due to health or mental health conditions leaving 14% actual NEET.

NEET

We acknowledge the NEET figure has risen this year. In real terms this equates to 3 young people and includes 2 uasc who have made the decision to move to London. It also reflects the end of the Lottery funded Springboard project and York Universities Starting Blocks programme.

On a positive note Starting Blocks has recently been awarded new funding and Future goals are offering tailored support to prepare young people for education & employment. Additionally we have now developed a good relationship with the Job centre who are also now signposting care leavers for courses to help them into employment. One young person has recently passed a course to enable him to work as security at events.

Higher Education

We currently have 6 care leavers at Universities across the country, studying degrees from nursing to law. To support young people in Higher education we pay their accommodation fees and provide a £2000 bursary. We arrange for them to return to their staying put placement in holiday periods or support them with other vacation accommodation if required.

In 2019 three care leavers gained degrees with one starting a PGCE course in September. One of the care leavers was 27 when she achieved her degree having started it at age 23, giving strong evidence of the Local Authorities role as a good corporate parent. (The LA supports care leavers to complete their education / training which they started before they were age 25)

Apprenticeships

Due to its size the Local Authority is able to support apprenticeships on case by case bases. Our children in care and care leavers, upon assessment of being ready, are guaranteed an interview. In such circumstances the Pathway Team support with interview skills, appropriate clothing and travel to the interview.

The Local Authority is working closely with business and partners across the city including York and York St John Universities, to promote and provide ETE opportunities for care leavers.

The team are planning an event with the Director Amanda Hatton to encourage and invite the local business community to offer their support to our care leavers.

Health

The roll out of the Health passport has now been achieved. The first wave has started with those coming into LA care however has not yet reached the older teenage group leaving care, therefore continue to write to them detailing how to access their health records.

Care leavers are supported to access community health resources via their GP however there is no bespoke mental health resource for care leavers within the Pathway team. This is an area of priority for both the ISM and SMTIM groups who consistently flag the emotional difficulties faced by care experienced young people. Further evidence of this is an increase in young people coming into care at 16 & 17 struggling with mental health issues.

The Local offer & the voice of care leavers

The Team has a real and genuine investment in consultation and participation with care leavers. The team support the I Still Matter forum

(ISM) to have a voice about the service they receive and how it can improve and evolve to meet the changing demands of the society and environment they live in. This is very evident in the ‘Local offer’ and was highlighted at a National Leaving Care Conference for including the voice of care leavers across all the area topics.

The local authority care leaver offer (see attached) has now run a full year and is currently under review with the ISM and care leaver population. We are very proud of the local offer which shows a real commitment from the Local Authority as a corporate parent and the team in facilitating it.

The Local Offer 2019 outlines the support the Local Authority provides and reassures care leavers they are not alone and their future matters to us. Some of the main issues discussed and responded to for 2019 were, mental health, isolation and accommodation. The Local Authority agreed:

- A bus pass for all care leavers to age 21, this reduced isolation , enabled travel to family, friends, social events, appointments and importantly providing safe travel home at night. The feedback from care leavers informs this provision has been invaluable to them.
- Accommodation, the corporate parent agreed to decorate Care leavers first flat, this has provided a blank canvas for care leavers to move into and create their own identity.
- From April 1st 2019 the LA agreed to pay the first year’s Council tax for care leavers 18-21.
- From April 1st 2019 an increase in the setting up home grant to £2500, in recognition of the rising cost of carpets, white goods and furnishings.
- The ISM were supported to provide a newsletter to all care leavers to inform of social events and services.
- The team recently hosted an excellent Christmas celebration at the Dean Court Hotel whose staff and management also fully supported the occasion. Care leavers all received Christmas presents and all had somewhere to be on Christmas day. To reflect the team and corporate parent commitment for care leavers this was checked out personally by the Director, AD, and Group manager to ensure no one would be alone.

Future work

1. At the last inspection 2016 Ofsted assessed the City of York Leaving Care service as 'good'. They commented positively on the standard of pathway plans, the team has continued to work hard to improve to ensure individual plans are aspirational and have SMART actions to achieve the young person's goals. The team are currently reporting an average of 94% plans in date. The plans are recorded on Mosaic but are not very young person friendly when printed and this is an area the team would like to develop in 2020 with the care leaver forum 'I Still Matter'. The team feel this will give the care leavers more ownership of their plans.
2. The team have an excellent record of developing relationships and keeping in touch with care leavers, however we live in a digital world where young people communicate and work in many different ways. The current number care leavers living independently age 16-21 is 22. We will explore with procurement and IT colleagues the cost of supplying Wi – Fi for all care leavers living independently.
3. Enhancing the local offer to care leavers around mental health in 2020, is clearly an area of need and consistently high on the agenda of both the children in care and children leaving care forums. We will explore all options including those requiring investment.

David Purcell