

Care Leavers Annual Report

Date: April 2018 – March 2019

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Introduction

Cheshire East has 234 Care Leavers (end Feb 2019) open to the team. This is an increase of 33 young people since last years report. Of those 105 are eligible (16/17yr olds) that remain cared for and 2 are relevant meaning they are 16/17yr olds but have left care. There are 127 young people who are 'Former Relevant (18+).

We also have a statutory duty to support young people aged 21-25yrs if in full-time higher & further education. Presently we support 10 young people over the age of 21yrs in this area.

In April 2018 further statutory duties were placed on Local Authorities from the Children & Social Work Act 2017 to expand their offer of support to 21-25yr olds who are not in education but want and require support. This support may be a one off intervention such as helping them contact the benefits office or it may require a series of interventions and the re-allocation of a worker to help them through a crisis. In the past 12 months 37 young people have had some form of intervention and currently we have 14 young people who have remained or been re-opened to the service.



Cole and the leaders of the Council with their pledges to Cared for young people and Care Leavers

Personal Advisors continue to be dedicated and go above and beyond statutory requirements for Cheshire East Care-Leavers. We have good compliance rates on Care-Leavers having meaningful face to face contact with their worker. Of the 234 care-leavers open to our service only 3 are currently not being seen by their worker. Their whereabouts

are known and the workers continue to make efforts to engage each young person. Case loads are on average around 21 young people for each worker this is lower than regional neighbours and allows the workers to dedicate significant time for each young person.

Key Headlines

Since the team's last report in March 2018 the service has worked tirelessly and tenaciously to support and improve the outcomes of care-leavers. In the past 12 months we have:

- Developed and published a joint working protocol with the Department of Work & Pensions. This is to make it smoother for care-leavers to access benefits and receive individualised support from the job centres.
- Published our Local Offer to Care-Leavers in October 2018.
- Held a Pledge event which was run by 6 care-leavers to develop pledges from corporate parents to include in the local offer.
- Welcomed back Mark Riddell (DfE's National Care Leaver Implementation Advisor) – Mark was pleased with the authorities improvement in regards to corporate parenting and felt the Care Leavers service was functioning at Good or Outstanding in regards to Ofsted's scale of judgements.
- Ran two tenancy readiness courses across the borough.
- Set up a weekly refugee and asylum seeker support and activity group in Crewe.
- Increased our Ignition training properties from 4 to 6.
- Developed a bespoke job for a care-leaver in the participation team.
- Changed our housing allocations policy to give Care Leavers more of a voice in terms of their banding.
- Had two care-leavers attend a National Leaving Care Benchmarking Event in Birmingham.
- Had three Care-leavers attend our takeover day where they got to experience being a Personal Advisor for the day.
- Ignition Panel continues to grow, since the last report 35 young people have attended or been discussed. Ignition Panel has been shortlisted for a participation award at the LGC (Local Government Chronicle) awards.
- The Care Leavers football team were semi-finalists in the 2018 North West Leaving Care Football Tournament.

For the remainder of the report I will split the service's development and progress in relation to the governments 5 key outcomes which form part of the national care-leavers 'keep on caring' strategy.

1. Better Prepared and supported to live Independently / Engagement and Participation

Independence packs

Our independence packs are aimed to assess or identify areas a young person needs to work on. They also support a young persons housing applications when completed.

We re-designed our Independence Packs in 2018 to jazz them up and be more meaningful for teenagers since they voiced they felt they looked childish. We have also developed a Platinum Independence Pack to go along our Gold, Silver and Bronze packs. The platinum pack is aimed at young people who are now in their own tenancies and building on their already high level of independent skills.

Since last year 18 Independence packs have been recorded as being completed. The actual number of completed packs in the year will be higher. This is due to how we record completed packs, we are looking at improving our recording by putting the data directly into Liquid Logic from now on.

Tenancy Readiness Course

The tenancy readiness course is now a well established course. Taking place two to three times a year across the borough. It is a 4 week course to educate young people about the realities of living independently and giving them an overview of tenancy expectations.

In the past 12 months there has been two courses run. One in Macclesfield and one in Crewe. 12 young people successfully completed the course.

One of these young people has gone on to obtain his own tenancy.

Mentoring

Cheshire East has seen the value of young people accessing mentors. Mentors can offer a different relationship and longer lasting than professional relationships. The charity Pure Insight has been commissioned to recruit, train and deliver mentors for Cheshire East Care-Leavers. They successful do this in Stockport and initially successfully set up with National Lottery funding. The mentors commit to a two year relationship but it is hoped that some of these become life long.

Currently there are 33 young people receiving support from Pure Insight with 20 of them matched to a mentor and receiving 1:1 support.

Participation / Activities

Since the last report the in-house Participation Team is well established following the local authority no longer tendering this work area out. The team is working closely with the Care-Leavers Service. They have offered a bespoke job for one of care-leavers to work in their team as a care-leaver voice and to help develop surveys and be involved in the design and delivery of the annual cared for celebration awards.



Josh and his Personal Advisor at the Pledge Event.

A group of 6 care-leavers have been involved in developing the Care-Leaver local offer. They have frequently given up their time to grill heads of services and to also meet and speak to Mark Riddell on his visits to Cheshire East. Due to continued participation of Cheshire East Care Leavers in the development of the service the team is likely to be awarded an 'Investing in Children Award'.

Two Care Leavers were part of the interviewing panel for the new Childrens Home contract. Their input and opinion was really valuable and made up 25% of the total marks for the providers interview score. It was reassuring to know that the care-leavers opinion of the best provider was the same as the senior managers who were also on the panel.

Our Facebook Page now has over 50 members and means we can interact with care-leavers outside of the borough and with ones who feel uncomfortable in attending groups.

Current and former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs).

Cheshire East continues to see an increase in the amount of UASCs it supports.

The service employs a specialist UASC support worker on a fixed term contract to ensure their needs are being met. The Local Authority is supporting them with their asylum claim and supporting them in accessing education. 87% of our current and former UASC's are engaged in education, employment or training.

Currently we support 39 current and former UASC's (as of 6th March 2019). Last year we were supporting 31.

10 UASC's have come into care within the past year. The UASC's usually arrive illegally and

clandestinely via the M6 corridor. We have not received any UASC's from the National transfer scheme in the past year.

From the 39 UASC's we have 12 that reside within the Cheshire East area. Usually once a young person is granted leave to remain they then choose to move to more culturally appropriate areas such as London and Stoke.

Due to increasing numbers and to try and create more of a community for our UASC's within Cheshire East we have set up a fortnightly support group in partnership with the YMCA in Crewe. The group has been running since November 2018 and brings together all our UASC's in the area for food, music and games but also brings in support workers should the young people have any worries and questions.



Playing pool at our fortnightly UASC evening.

Foster Carers

On 13th September 2018, Sam Ankers and Greg Stuart delivered specific training around independence, pathway planning and 'staying put' to 14 Cheshire East Foster Carers. The training was well received and can now form part of the foster carers training calendar.



Foster Carers at the training event on 13th September 2018

2. Experiencing stability and feeling safe and secure / 3. Achieving Financial Stability

Ignition Panel

The panel continues to grow and grow. The panel is has now been shortlisted for two prestigious national awards and local authorities across the North West are eager to observe and understand the concept.

The concept is simple, in that the panel empowers young people to make their own decisions in regards to their future accommodation. Decisions made with them rather than without them and all providers taking a corporate parent approach to the housing needs of young people.

Since the last report 35 young people have either presented or been discussed at the panel and all have left with some form of plan.

Placement sufficiency

There are a number of properties available for 16/17yr old care-leavers. These include:

- 6 YMCA ring fenced flats through Ignition panel.
- 2 x 2 bedroom Ignition flats.
- 5 ring fenced beds at Watermill House, Macclesfield.
- West Street – 4 beds secured in Crewe for our UASC's.

Although accommodation is good for cared for young people there is a lack of supported accommodation available via the single Point of Access (SPA) for 18+ young people with complex needs.

Housing & Cheshire Home Choice

In Cheshire East care-leavers are granted band B status when bidding for properties on



Cheshire East Home Choice. This means that they are given a priority. If a care-leaver had some recent criminal offence, anti-social behaviour or rent arrears on a previous property they would become band D for 12 months. Band D means that this young person is unlikely to get a housing offer for those 12 months.

The team was unhappy with this broad stroke approach and so housing has agreed to look at each case individually and allow the young person to have the right to reply on the issues. It is hoped that the young person will agree to an action plan to increase their banding or they may appeal and challenge the decision immediately. We have had one young person so far meet and have his banding changed. This young man is now happy and has his own flat rather than living in temporary unsuitable accommodation

24yr old Tyler outside his new flat in Macclesfield

Universal Credit / Department of work & Pensions (DWP)

In July 2018 the team and the DWP developed and published a joint working protocol. The DWP agreed to have a dedicated single point of access (SPOC) for each job centre to have knowledge of care-leavers. Care-Leavers can begin starting their claims early and have access to APA (Advance Payment Arrangements).

There has been some recent guidance that stipulates job centres should not sanction care-leavers until they have spoken to their Personal Advisor to see if there are any extenuating reasons not too. Unfortunately this is not in our joint working protocol so it has been requested to be updated.



Universal Credit requires a person to wait 5 weeks for their first payment. They can claim for an advance but then they are deducted a significant amount of money each month. Cheshire East continues to financially support each care-leaver for the 5 weeks until their claim is active as we do not want our young people to suffer hardship and be in debt. This is an aspirational approach by the local authority and not replicated by many.

Due to our supportive approach we have seen less workers in destitution and less sanctions being made by the DWP.

3. Improved Access to education and Training

EET Champion Role

Last year the team had additional funds from the Innovation Bid and we were able to employ a full-time worker specifically to work with NEET (not in education employment training) young people. This funding has now ceased however we were able to employ the person in post to one of our Senior Personal Advisor positions. This specialist advisor was able to address NEET issues quickly and find young people work experience, traineeships almost instantly.

This worker now has a small caseload so is unable to dedicate as much individual time to the NEET cohort as he previously did. To address this gap the virtual school, youth support service and care leavers service have made an application to the European Support Fund for salary costs for specialist workers to work with NEET young people across the borough. We are awaiting the outcome of this bid application.

EET figures / NCP Panel

Our current figure of 16-21yr old care-leavers engaged in education, employment or training is 63.2% (end Feb 2019). This is an improvement of around 10% since our last full Ofsted inspection in 2015 however a drop since last year.

The increase in figures over the last 12 months can be attributed to no longer having a full time EET worker within the team but also we have become better at recording changes in EET status's in a timely manner. So today our records are more accurate.

We now hold a monthly NEET Challenge Panel which is attended by the Care Leaving Service; the youth support service and the Virtual School. EET status's are checked and young people are 'rag' rated in regards to how long they have not been in employment, education or training. Workers are then given advice in regards to opportunities available and options available for their young person. The aim is to move NEET young people into a positive activity and ultimately employment or training by various routes.

Apprenticeships

We have 12 young people who are on apprenticeships. None of these apprenticeships are within the Local Authority. There has been the offer of x 3 ring fenced apprenticeships within the youth support service and the Business Intelligence Team however we have yet to match any care-leaver to these opportunities.

This time last year we only had 6 young people engaged in an apprenticeship. This is a 100% increase since last year. This follows trends of more young people looking into apprenticeships but is also attributed to the options in our area.

University

Cheshire East continues to be aspirational for our care-leavers and supports them to fulfil their potential. Currently we have 11 young people at University; one young person is studying a Masters in Criminology and will soon undertake a work based placement within our own legal team.

At this time last year we had 13 young people at University the decrease this year is due to two care-leavers graduating.

Cygnnet

Our commissioned Cygnnet program with M-Ploy continues to be successful and gets those young people who are not ready for an apprenticeship or full-time work to a level where they may be able too. It offers supported work placements for period of 6 months in a chosen field of interest.

Since April 2018 we have had 14 young people involved in the Cygnnet Program. Young people have mentioned the program *“has given me the confidence to look for full time work”*

4. Improved access to health & support

Emotional Well-being

We have identified that there are over 50 young people in the service who suffer from some form of emotional health issue which affects their day-to-day living.

Predominately this is stress and anxiety. Having unresolved emotional health difficulties has a knock on effect for all aspects of a young persons life and can be a catalyst to homelessness, unemployment, drug use, debt and poor social relationships.

Unfortunately lots of services in the community are not proactive in engaging care-leavers. There are also long waiting lists for services provided by IAPT and Talking therapies. CAMHS support cease at 19yrs of age and not all young people transition directly into adult mental health services

To address the gap the Care-Leavers service has a specialist emotional well-being worker who works two days per week solely supporting our care-leavers.

Since April 2018 she has had 34 referrals to work with young people. The worker uses the NHS's five ways to wellbeing (be active, connect, keep learning, give to others and be mindful) in her work. Interventions can be one off but she has worked with some care-leavers for over 12 months. She attempts to encourage young people to make small changes, creating new habits focusing on wellbeing and also look at techniques to reduce anxiety, improve mood and improve their sleep pattern.

The team is also supported by an externally funded full time worker from the charity Pure Insight. This worker works with higher need care-leavers and has access to trauma counselling.

So far:

- 43 young people have been referred to the service for support
- 18 young people are currently receiving a weekly 1:1 service from the psychological wellbeing worker. This includes emotional regulation techniques, psych-education about specific diagnosis such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, BPD
- 4 young people are receiving weekly counselling
- 3 young people have completed counselling with the service.

Parents Group

The Care Leaver Parents group has been running for a couple of years now. It was started as some care-leavers felt uncomfortable in generic family centre groups. It was also felt that they would benefit from peer support.

We have run 7 cared for children and care leavers parents groups since April 2018. We have had 8 parents and 9 children attend these groups within that time, though numbers vary on a monthly basis.



Sexual Health Training

On 31st May 2018 eight Personal Advisors were trained in sexual health and C-Cards. This means that they can then offer sexual health advice and support with testing for sexually transmitted infections. This is a great move forward as some young people are reluctant to access the local health centres so testing can now be completed at their home.

Pregnancy and Parenting

We currently have 23 mothers in our service that we support and 3 young women who are currently pregnant.

Unfortunately due to the parenting received by some of our care-leavers they are not yet ready or equipped to be parents which means they can receive support from our early help services or child in need/child protection services. On some occasions their children need to be removed and placed with new families.

Currently there are 8 children of our mothers who are receiving some form of intervention from our partners in Cheshire East's Early help, child in need & child protection services. We have identified that we need to improve communication between our colleagues and an agreement has been made that our service will be invited to all safeguarding meetings in relation to the children of our care-leavers. It is hoped that earlier interventions and better communication will mean that less families are separated and care-leavers have support to become successful parents. This is also an aim of our Care-Leaver parent group.

We have 3 identified care-leaver fathers in our service. Support is available to them via the 'Dad's stuff'. This is a service run by two male Family Support Workers in the early help service who will support dads to groups to help them with the practicalities of being a dad (learning how to make a bottle, change a nappy etc) and also offer the dads emotional support. So far one of our fathers has received support from 'Dad's Stuff' in the past year.

Substance Misuse

We are aware that substance and alcohol use is an issue for 16-25yr olds. We have identified 30 young people who either recreationally or problematically engage in substance and alcohol use. 3 are receiving specialist support from a drug or alcohol worker however many are accessing emotional health support as they use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate.

Predominately it is cannabis that is being used. Personal Advisors complete direct work with their young people around drug and alcohol use and if required can refer for specialist support from CGL (Change, Live Grow).

CGL are now also offering drop in sessions at the YMCA in Crewe and Watermill House in Macclesfield where many of our young people reside. It is hoped that with education and harm reduction young people can then make informed choices around their substance and alcohol use.

Challenges for the next year

The challenge for the service over the next year will be the continued increase in returners (21-25yr olds) to the service, which we have a statutory duty to support (Children & Social Work Act 2017). We may also continue to see a rise in UASC's which is a national issue. Increasing numbers of cared for children and care-leavers mean increasing demands on resources and staff. Due to the nature of these cases it is difficult to predict what the numbers will be.

There are many complex young people in our service that would benefit from Adult Social Work support and some require specialist accommodation. We work with adult services to understand whether our young people meet the eligibility criteria for care and support under the Care Act 2014 and where young people are eligible we work on transitioning these young people straight into adult teams. However there young people who are not eligible for support from adult services and we work hard to link these to universal and targeted services. There are also supported accommodation providers who are housing these young people with complex needs.

A further challenge will be the current unknown impact that will follow Brexit and how we will continue to support EU Nationals who we have responsibility for. We already have difficulties in obtaining citizenship or settled status for some of Care-Leavers and Brexit may make this situation even more complex.