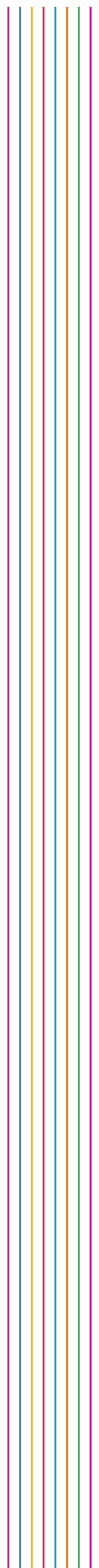
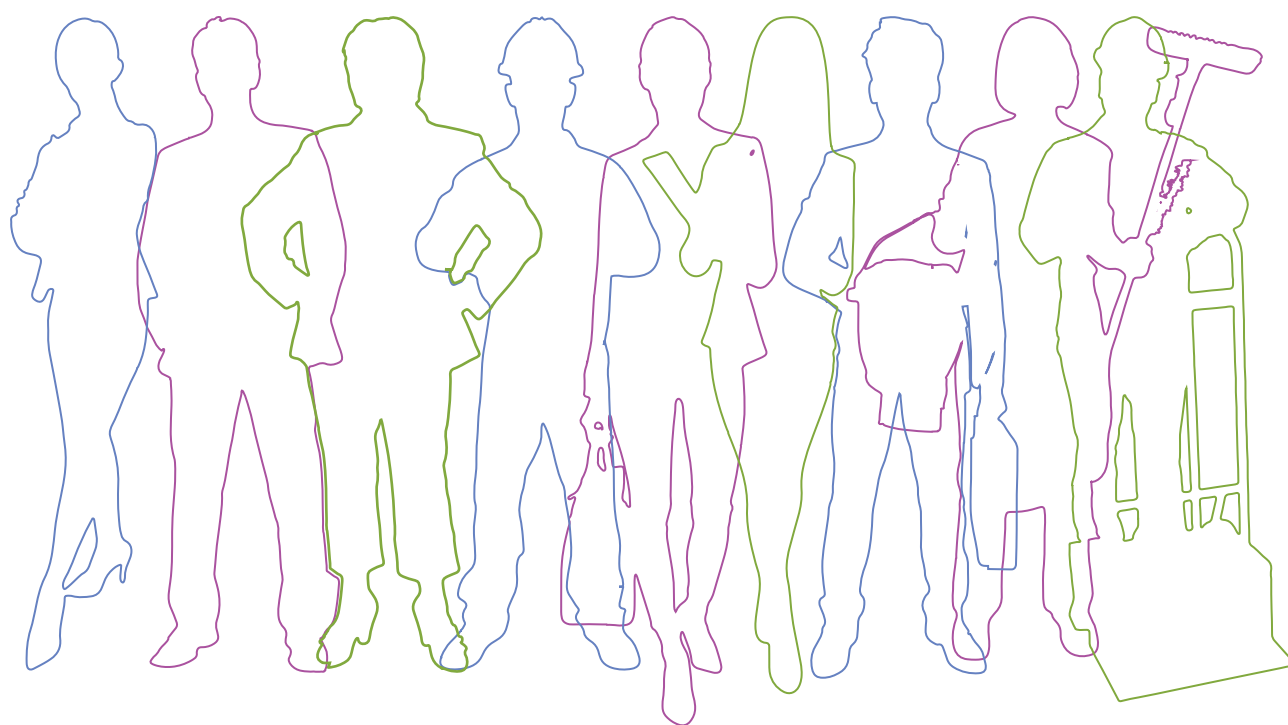


**Short Guide for West Midlands Local Authorities**

# **Creating successful Apprenticeship Opportunities for Care Experienced Young People 16+**



# Introduction

This short guide has been put together by The Participation Leads Subgroup for the West Midlands Region.

The Subgroup established an Apprenticeship Workstream to help identify best practice for supporting care experienced young people through their apprenticeship journey across the region.

The Apprenticeship Workstream collated data through a survey with professionals and young people with a view to set out areas of good practice that could be shared across all 14 local authorities.

The purpose of the guide is to encourage local authorities to work towards a consistent standard of practice across the region.

Each Local authority can use this short guide to benchmark against the (collective local authority) standards below with a view to improving on existing practice.

The guide focuses on 8 key areas.

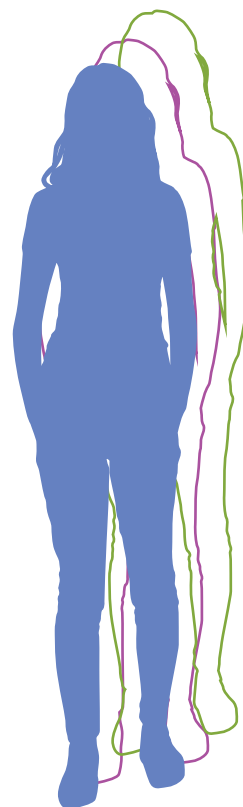
- Monitor your progress
- What have we learnt from care experienced young people's apprenticeship journey to date?
- Be clear about the apprenticeship you are offering
- What financial security and support is available to the apprentice?
- Additional support considerations for the apprentice
- Identify, Prepare & Assess young people for the apprenticeship
- Preparing and Supporting Managers to manage a care experienced Apprentice
- What to do when things go wrong

Local authorities represented on the Apprenticeship Workstream are.

- Solihull
- Staffordshire
- Wolverhampton
- Warwickshire

Members of the Lead Participation Network can contact the Chair of the Apprenticeship Workstream to seek out more detail on the short guide using the email address:

**[shinderpaulbhangal@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:shinderpaulbhangal@warwickshire.gov.uk)**



# Monitor your progress

Feedback from local authorities across the West Midlands suggests that more could be done to track the journey of care experienced young people. This in turn can inform the local authority on the areas that may require improvement.

Tracking young people's journey would require an agreement within the local authority as to who would collate this information and report on it. For example, HR, Apprenticeship Hub, Employment Team, etc

Broadly, data should be kept on young people who are,

- thinking about or
- have embarked on an apprenticeship programme

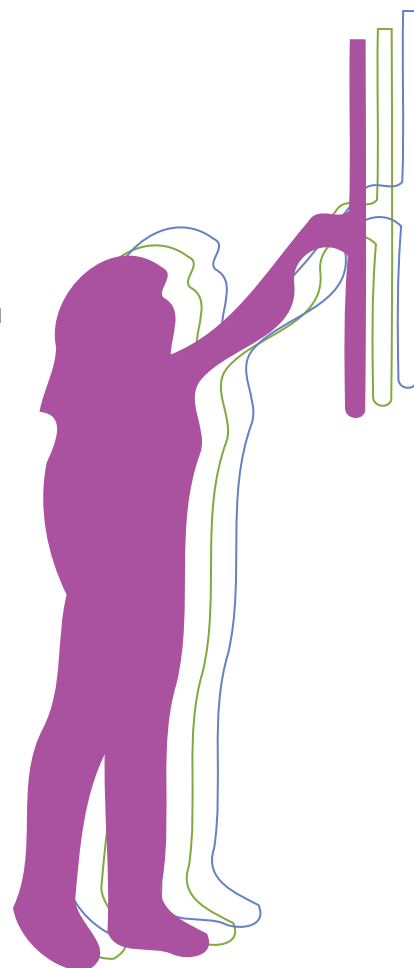
More specifically, data should be tracked and collected on the following areas.

Care experienced young people who have,

- Expressed an interest in apprenticeships.
- Applied for apprenticeships (successful and unsuccessful applicants).
- Are undertaking an apprenticeship.
- Started an apprenticeship but did not complete the programme (reasons why not completed).
- Have completed an apprenticeship.
- Have secured a full-time role following the successful completion of an apprenticeship.

In addition, the data should also record the following areas,

- Age
- Gender Identity
- Disability
- Ethnic background



# What have we learnt from care experienced young people's apprenticeship journey to date?

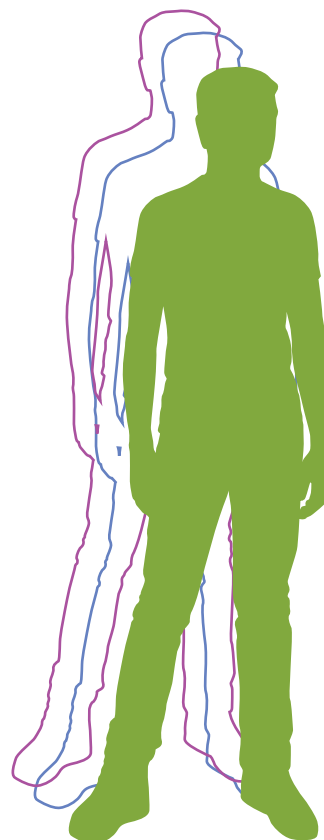
Feedback from local authorities in the West Midlands highlighted the following learning.

## Considerations before the apprenticeship

- A stable home environment is a hugely advantageous precursor for any young person who wants to apply for an apprenticeship programme.
- Transport can be an issue for young people. Not having transport can be a frustrating, limiting or restricting factor, particularly in rural Counties.
- Motivation to want a career and break the cycle is a good measure and a valuable characteristic to test in the early stages. Is the young person motivated and ready to work towards a career?
- Signs that the young person is preparing and planning for working life is a positive sign. Is the young person making changes in preparation for employment?
- Older young people (20+) appear to have more success with the apprenticeship programme than younger age groups (16 -19).

## Recruitment to an Apprenticeship

- A straightforward recruitment process may not be enough. A longer process should be adopted to test the young person's readiness.
- Check the Apprentice Training Provider enrolment start dates, in doing so, also give consideration to planning the ending of the apprenticeship.
- Remove qualification requirements around Maths and English. Bear in mind that a basic level of competency is needed. This basic competency will be tested as part of the apprenticeship qualification (if required).
- Support young people in the application process, interview preparation and pre-employment checks (not all young people have 3 required evidence documents this can cause delays).



# What have we learnt from care experienced young people's apprenticeship journey to date?

## Preparing to start for the Apprenticeship

- Anticipate that young people may struggle financially. Managing their personal finance may become an issue. Offering financial advice and additional financial support may become necessary.
- Personal issues, timekeeping and sickness should be monitored closely and managed supportively as the young person adjusts to a new working lifestyle. If it helps, adopt a phased return to work policy to increase apprentice working hours gradually...  
Be creative use/adapt HR policies accordingly.
- A bespoke detailed induction programme nurturing young people into working life is a must.
- Mentoring (volunteer schemes or staff) is a useful avenue for personal support, adapting to work and for apprenticeship studies, helping young people to identify and discuss issues important to them. Senior leadership mentors offer added benefits for young people.

## During the Apprenticeship

- Young people should be given clear workstreams to lead on
- Managers will need to have a degree of enthusiasm and offer a level of flexibility.
- Managers need to be prepared to offer extra time and support for young people.
- Working with a neighbouring local authority and sharing best practice on the apprenticeship programme will improve chances of success.
- Neighbouring local authorities could consider reciprocal apprenticeship arrangements. The advantage of such an approach is that it will not exclude young people who do not wish to work in a local authority in which they have been in care.

# Be clear about the apprenticeships are you offering?

Feedback from local authorities suggested a range of considerations that would help the define the apprenticeship programme on offer.

- Offer care experienced young people options as part of wider apprenticeship opportunities.
- Create ring fenced apprenticeship opportunities for care experienced young people.
- Guarantee care experienced young people an interview.
- Remove the requirement for English & Maths.
- Identify the qualification programme early and starting dates.
- Identify the Level at which you would need to pitch the qualification (2,3 or 4)
- Identify the qualification training providers early.
- Ensure that there is a commitment from the training provider to provide additional support for the apprentice (if necessary).
- An 18-24 month apprenticeship contract is more realistic. In some cases it may be longer.
- Approach and negotiate apprenticeships opportunities with sympathetic local businesses and employers (consider accessing the Care Leavers Covenant/Local Businesses & Charities). Access to apprenticeship levy is accessible for local businesses via the local authority

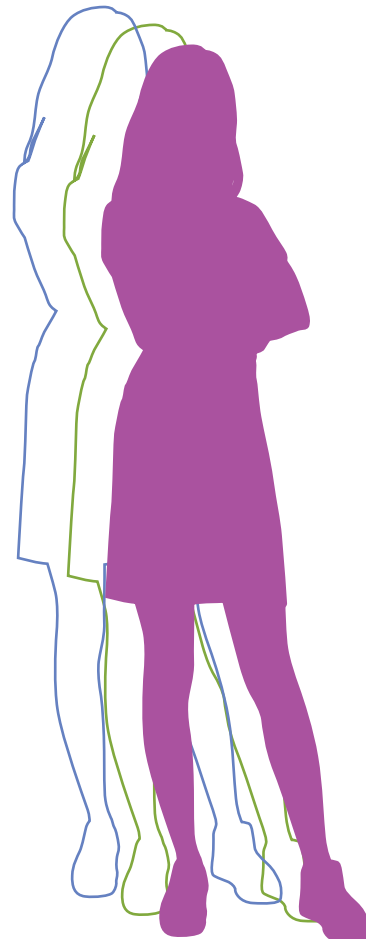


# What financial security and support is available to the Apprentice?

Observations from local authorities recognised that significant financial considerations are necessary to enable care experienced young people to access apprenticeships opportunities.

Robust financial support also increases the young person's chances to complete the apprenticeship successfully.

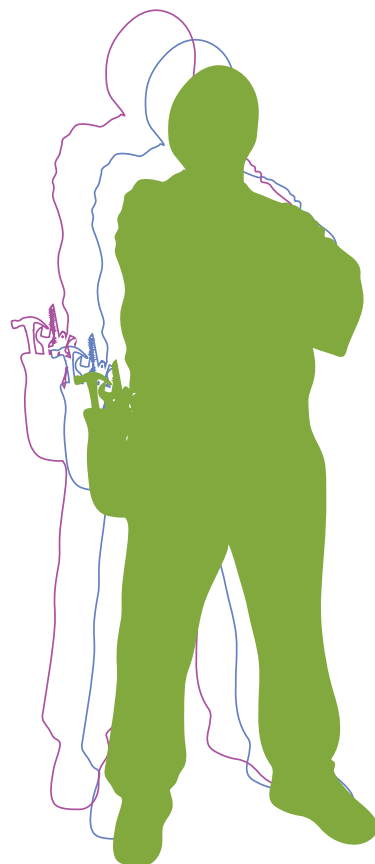
- National Minimum Wage is a must.
- A bursary of 1K can be claimed via the training provider.
- A bursary could be offered as an incentive by the local authority.
- Provide financial assistance from the apprenticeship start date covering the period up until the first salary payment.
- Cover the cost of a Bus Pass for the first 3 months as a minimum.
- Offer a bicycle as a means of local transport.
- Support the cost of an agreed number of driving lessons. Signpost young people to organisations that support the cost of driving lessons.
- Have information available on local and national grants. Support young people to access these grants.
- Give consideration to future planning and permanent roles post apprenticeship and support access to these opportunities.



# Additional support considerations for the apprentice

Local authorities shared details on other support required to enable the young person to perform their role as an apprentice.

- Adjust work times to accommodate travel.
- Provide a laptop.
- Provide a mobile phone.
- Hold weekly 1:1 meetings for the first 3 months/fortnightly 3 months/then move to monthly meetings.
- Create and discuss an Emotional Health & Wellbeing plan as part of 1:1 meetings.
- Use the Probationary period to give the young person honest feedback on their positive progress and areas where improvements need to be made.
- Introduce and set up a work buddy/work coach for the young person.
- Arrange a Mentor for the young person.
- Encourage the young person to keep their Social Worker/Personal Advisor informed.
- Offer the young person access to peer groups. Both apprenticeship and care experienced forums.
- Involve the young person in team meetings and offer significant shadowing opportunities.



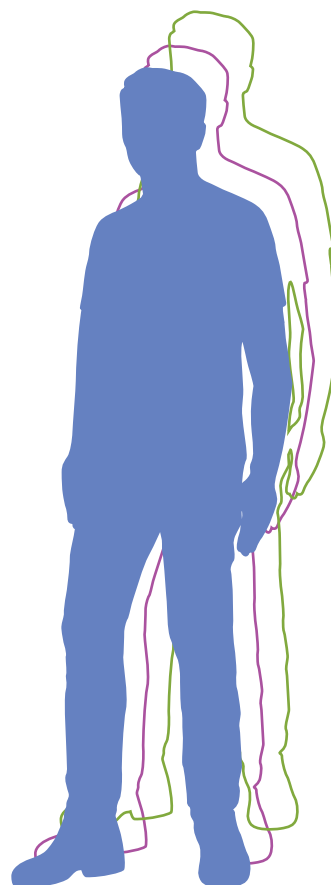


# Identify, Assess and Prepare young people for the Apprenticeship

Local authorities have used a variety of methods with which to promote apprenticeship opportunities to care experienced young people.

## IDENTIFY

- Recognise that it is more than just offering an apprenticeship opportunity to a young person.
- Think about what will give the young person the best possible start and chance to succeed.
- Send adverts via Social Workers and or Personal Advisor's.
- Put vacancies on the Leaving Care Facebook pages regularly (if one exists).
- Leaving Care Careers Advisor or Employment Teams can help identify work ready young people.
- Participation Teams play a key role in identifying young people.
- Encourage key stakeholders to identify and nominate young people. For example, Barnardos.
- Generic apprenticeship opportunities (usually) have a tick box on the application form offering applicants the opportunity to indicate if they are care experienced. Add a line next to the tick box explaining why ticking the box might be advantageous for the young person! Also explain that no one else will see that the box has been ticked within the organisation.
- Offer the opportunity to hold Informal chats with young people to help them learn about apprenticeships.
- Hold workshops for care experienced apprentices to help them understand apprenticeships and how to access them.
- Publicise online self-selection apprenticeship Open Days.
- Advertise apprenticeships via District and Boroughs (where relevant)



# Identify, Assess and Prepare young people for the Apprenticeship

## ASSESS

- Arrange an initial phone conversation.
- Arrange an hour-long online meeting to explain the apprenticeship role and expectations.
- Discuss with the young person their commitment, home and personal circumstances and work readiness.
- Invite the young person to contact young people that have completed the apprenticeship programme.
- Invite the young person to a series of work events and activities (work experience or work trial).
- Invite and support the young person to make an application.
- Explain the job description and person specification to the young person.
- Make the interview less formal.
- Invite the young person to take a basic English/Maths session.
- Assess the young person alongside other applicants as a competitive process.

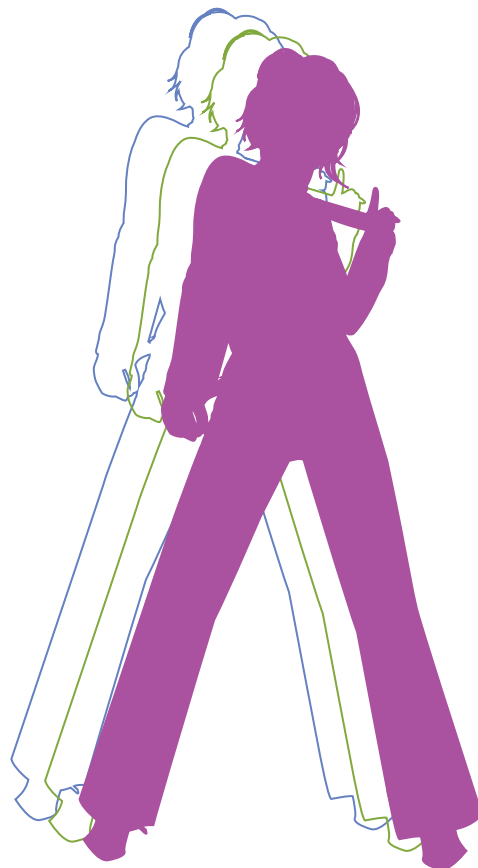
## PREPARE

- Build good links with HR
- Ensure the Team Manager has received some awareness on or help to understand what may be involved in supporting care experienced young people.
- Identify a work buddy.
- Identify a Mentor.
- Have a bespoke extended induction programme ready to go.
- Give the young person clear, simple, straightforward tasks to lead on.
- Identify staff training for the young person to attend.
- Encourage the young person to access support from their Social Worker and or Personal Advisor as and when this may become necessary

# Preparing and Supporting Managers to manage a care experienced Apprentice

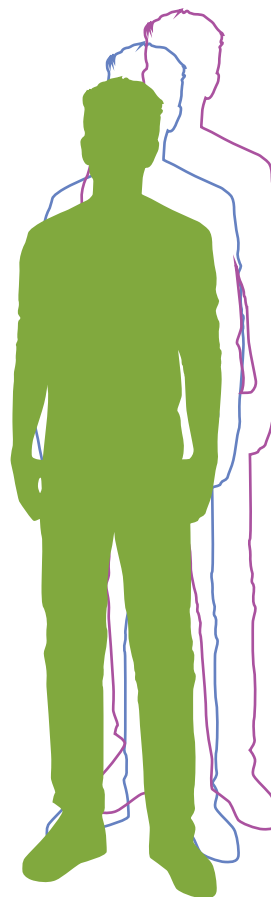
Feedback from local authorities suggests that this is the area that requires most clarity.

- Do not assume the Manager has the awareness and knowledge to support a care experienced young person in an apprenticeship role.
- Devise an information event, induction or handbook for Managers on supporting care experienced young people. For example, an E-module may be a useful start point.
- Offer Total Respect training (or something similar) and invite Team Managers to attend this training.
- Create a group for Managers supporting care experienced young people
- Alert Managers to build in capacity and time to provide adequate levels of support for the apprentice.
- Prepare Managers for their part in support the young person's qualification course



# What to do when things go wrong

- If something doesn't feel right, then it probably isn't.
- Be curious ask the apprentice how they are getting on. Consider less formal catch ups from time to time.
- It is important that line managers adopt an understanding supportive role in line with the corporate parenting approach, balancing this alongside the performance management approach.
- If the apprentice is struggling with work, study, or home then don't delay in doing something about it. Adopt creative solutions in discussion with the apprentice.
- The apprentice may just need some time and understanding to work through any challenges they are managing. For example, a break in learning for their apprenticeship can be arranged with the training provider if the time needed is significant.
- Access staff support/welfare schemes as and when appropriate.
- Give individual recognition to the apprentice. Highlight positives.
- Regularly re visit the Health & Wellbeing Plan.



# Contributions from Young People

“The document is set out well, put into sections which are easy to understand, and well read. The points are short and snappy which make it more appealing to the eyes as if it gets too long it gets boring to read”.

“It’s good that you have mentioned about the financial benefits that are there for the young apprentices as this may encourage them to apply knowing that they would be getting that extra support provided”.

“Maybe mention or write a brief paragraph about the course that they will be taking as part of the apprenticeship, this way it prepares them for what they’ll be studying and doing, and possibly motivate them to do some research into the course and where the qualification can take their career after completion”.

“it’s a good document and holds really good information about the apprenticeship scheme that’s offered to those who are care experienced”.

“If I’m going to be completely honest, I think the guide is very good, it pretty much explains everything. I also think the support we was given before we started was soo good, it was really nice to meet people beforehand as I believe it helps with nerves and for us to feel less anxious”.

“The DBS might be a good thing to include depending on the job line as that coursed some issues towards timing and became a downer for some to feel like they could enjoy their employment role”.

“It has a lot of information on how to support an apprentice, step by step system where it gives a thorough look into what is expected of a young person going on a journey to become an apprentice”.

*“I think that the guide flows very well from one section to the other, it is easy to follow and would be easy to refer to while going through the process”.*

*“(Job) References can be hard specially in the situation I was in due to being on maternity and leaving one old job on bad terms”.*

*“I love the set up and the detail straight to the point bullet points from each heading. When it comes to the area about employment data records... Is there not more than just age, gender, disability and ethnic?”.*

# Contributions from Young People

## What really worked for you?

“Having a day only for study....”

“Asking the staff for help if I got stuck with ICT or a word spell..... “

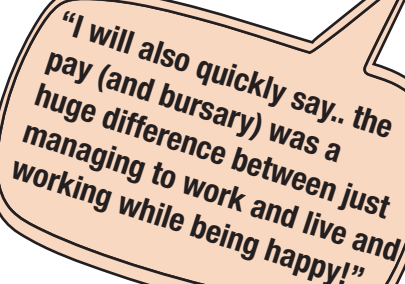
“One thing that worked well for me was the time it took, and the level of involvement I had during the interview process, going to meeting and getting more involved helped me solidify in my mind that this role is what I really wanted” .

“I remember having a lot of phone calls/ video calls before and participating in activities such as the child in care council meetings to get a feel of things you do, I thought this was really good because it helps us to know more of the job role and to keep in touch was a bonus because a lot of the time I feel people don't really know what they want as a career and to keep in touch with people wanting the job role it is good because then they will have more of an idea if it is something they want to actually do rather than just saying it is without properly knowing” .

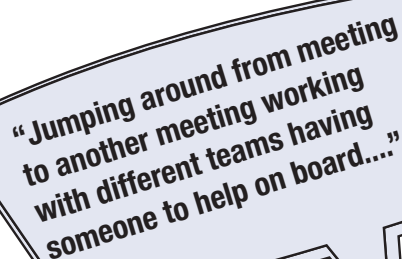
“I feel like the invite to CICC, the contact after the interview but also the 1 to 1 chat helped me understand the whole job all together because an apprenticeship wasn't affordable to take on in my circumstances but it kind of convinced me into seeing more than just the black and white”

“The support, training and teaching I received was my best part of the apprenticeship. But the 1:1 teaching and working ... before any of the others started really were to my benefit. I feel as though this gave me an extra leg up and fast tracked me somewhat (as did the 1:1) I was able to have with college (again starting before the others) because of this I learnt so much in such a small amount of time, but it also showed my very quickly that this role was something I wanted to do long term” .

“The opportunities I was and still am given is also something that has worked well for me and something I don't believe I could have had working anywhere else (I think this is where the corporate parent side kicks in).”



“I will also quickly say.. the pay (and bursary) was a huge difference between just managing to work and live and working while being happy!”



“Jumping around from meeting to another meeting working with different teams having someone to help on board....”



“Working with different organisations College, University, Charity etc ...”

# Contributions from Young People

## What do you think we could have done better for you?

"I don't have any bad points or anything, the only thing I decided I no longer wanted was a mentor as I kinda felt a bit stressed having one as I felt like I was having counselling which at first I thought would be a really good idea and I was super keen but then I felt like I didn't actually need one in the end".

"I think if Covid wasn't about, things would have been more helpful in person but considering the circumstances it was a good way to a lot of things, maybe a face-to-face induction... settle in days to get a taste would have been nice".

"It took me probably 2 meetings and one with my PA to understand what the title was because I lack on some understanding as I had to figure everything out.. physically, mentally, and financially. I worry about the little things because it was something new and different so I had to re organise my life".

"The (apprenticeship) presentation was a good step, as I could see it visually, which calmed me down a lot".

"I feel as though more preparation for other staff would have helped me with my apprenticeship when I first started. I think there were a lot of managers who welcomed me when I did my introductions, but also a lot who seemed surprised and a little offish (as though they weren't expecting someone like me or know what to do!)".

"There aren't too many things that could have worked better, as overall it was a very good experience for me, but I will definitely say that there was support and advice for me to help me understand the boundaries and the line between staff and care experienced young person with a PA, but not vice versa... I think others I worked with would have benefited from also have some of this advice".

"Short courses such as, confidence building, how to be professional, dealing with setbacks and challenges, coaching sessions etc... to improve the mind-set, wellbeing of a young person, where it will help build confidence and they can learn more life skills during the apprenticeship role".

"Would be good to get tasks and someone will check on you and see how you are doing in the beginning".

"I didn't know till probably two months of being employed that I was getting a normal wage not like £3 to £4 an hour which just shows how much I was prepared to give my all into the job as I was/ still am passionate".

"Would be so good to have someone who had experience working with young people in the beginning".



# One young person's experience of their apprenticeship journey

## What was your apprenticeship was like, were there difficulties or did it run smoothly?

- My apprenticeship was a very good experience with lots of support. It ran very smoothly and there was plenty of staff support.
- There were difficulties in my understanding of things because of my autism and because of my mental health and being care experienced there were elements of triggers – which colleagues helped me through.

*“There was support in all areas and opportunities everywhere throughout the service with placements provided throughout the departments in the council.”*

## Any particular support you received?

- Having a really good mentor helped me but also all the mentors for the other apprentices chipped in to help all 4 apprentices.
- 121 sessions for college work really helped so that you could read things through to know you were on the right track.
- Frequent mentor supervisions were really useful for talking through pieces of work or anything I was finding difficult in work.

## Who if anyone, went over and above to support you?

- My mentor went above and beyond for me with support – even after my apprenticeship finished she still supported me and was able to be my mentor for a short while, while I was settling into my administration job which was very new to me with minimal support. So having her in place helped ease me into that new transition.
- Also my mentor did transport with me for new journey's – even though she drove. She got the bus and met me and we travelled to work together so I could cope with the journey so I could eventually do it by myself.

*“My mentor also sat in with me on all my exams to make sure I had continued support in case of major anxiety in these stressful situations.”*



# One young person's experience of their apprenticeship journey

## What have you learned about yourself having been a care experienced apprentice?

- I have learned what others need when in an apprenticeship and want to make sure that they get the same support as I did and support them if they are not.
- I have learned how the working world works now as my apprenticeship was my first ever job.
- I have learned how to do things and how not to in relation to sharing information – sometimes I can be very strong minded and stuck in my way of thinking and don't always agree with others opinions or the lawful way of doing things and could get easily led. – so doing the apprenticeship gave me the opportunity to be pushed out of my comfort zone and push myself to learn new things and improve my knowledge in all areas and work with different people.

**“Being a care experienced apprentice helped me to support other children and young people with similar experiences and give something back. Which I thrived from.”**


# Another young person's experience of their apprenticeship journey

## What was your apprenticeship like, were there difficulties or did it run smoothly?

At the start of my apprenticeship I was very nervous and my anxiety levels were at the highest. I did not understand my role and felt like I was rushed into the deep end not knowing what my role or this was! I was introduced into the team and they were very lovely people who made me feel at ease and comfortable. One day I was ok and the next I was not, this was my anxiety kicking in and this made it hard for me to deal with the apprenticeship and all the work! I had difficulty in understanding my work and other tasks that were given to me.

Because of that I was losing it and felt like leaving the apprenticeship and not coming back! My confidence was low I felt very antisocial. I started missing my apprenticeship college classes because I felt that everyone else was bright and they all knew what they were talking about and doing whereas I couldn't even answer a single question nor understand any of it. Because of that I stopped doing my work and needed plenty of time out to breathe and take things in slowly as I felt pressured and overwhelmed coming into something so very different, I found it difficult to cope and adapt to change.

Slowly into the weeks I was more aware of my surroundings, my role and the organisation, and was told it is ok to ask for help. The support here was amazing and this put me at ease knowing it was ok not to know anything and that is what an apprenticeship is for, to learn, to progress and become better...



**“it is ok to ask for help. The support here was amazing and this put me at ease knowing it was ok not to know anything”**

# Another young person's experience of their apprenticeship journey

## Any particular support you received?

I had a one to one weekly session with my mentor Nav, This helped so much as every session I attended made me grow and build up confidence and skills which I never knew about. I was learning things such as communication, being more professional, setbacks and challenges, resilience, identifying skills, body language, listening skills, team work, being an effective team player and so much more! Without this I would of never knew the importance of having each and every one of these things, it made me grow into a better individual, built up my strength, I was able to feel like I have achieved something just by learning this stuff, I am very happy and feel that this should be taught in every apprenticeship role and is a vital part of life that we should know, because this is what I was lacking in and I am now able to stand up knowing I have learnt these new skills. I also had a skills barometer where I recorded where I was at up till now and saw the progress I made, which made me so proud to know how far I have come!

## Who if anyone, went over and above to support you?

My mentor, colleagues and manager I am so grateful for the support given, as it has pushed me to keep trying my best, they never give up and regularly check up to see my progress and if there is any help I need with my apprenticeship.

## What you learned about yourself having been a Care Experienced apprentice?

That it is ok to ask for help.. Everyone has different stages in life where they learn at different times, I feel more supported being care experienced and that I have been given a chance in life to be able to become someone and believe that I can achieve something. I have learned to be independent, become more motivated knowing where I have come from and given the chance to step up and do something, inspire other care experience people, and most importantly change is ok and something that will always happen in life...

**"I have been given a chance in life to be able to become someone"**

Thank you to young people who made a contribution to the production of this short guide

West Midlands Leads Participation Network

Version January 2022