

Report for: Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee
25 January 2018

Item number:

Title: Level 3 and Access Courses for Care Leavers and Benefit Implications



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Ward(s) affected: N/A

Report for information

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Like any good parent, we want to help all care leavers to reach their full potential, whether that is going to college or university, taking up an apprenticeship or getting a skilled job. This requires a range of approaches, supporting those with high potential to achieve, as well as removing barriers for those who have either fallen behind or need extra support to remain in education or training.
- 1.2 There is a significant gap between the educational and employment achievements of care leavers and young people in the general population. In the year ending March 2015, 39% of 19-21 year-old care leavers were "Not in Education, Employment or Training" (NEET), an increase compared to the previous year. Of these, over a third were NEET due to either a disability, or because they were a young parent. Six percent of 19-21 year-old care leavers were in Higher Education; and a further 18% were in other types of education. Twenty-three per cent were in employment or training, an increase of three percentage points on the previous year
- 1.3 One of the key messages from Ofsted inspection reports has been that in around half of local authorities inspected, not enough support was being provided to help care leavers to find and sustain education, training or employment.
- 1.4 All 19-23 year-olds are entitled to free education and training to achieve their first full Level 2 or Level 3 qualification, and all adults are entitled to free English and maths up to Level 2. Care leavers are a priority group for financial support through the 16-19 Bursary Fund administered by FE colleges, to help with the costs of studying and to help support care leavers' retention in learning.

- 1.5 However, young people who are in further full time education (i.e. up to a level 3) and are over the age of 22 are not eligible to claim Income support as they fall outside the age criteria applied by Income Support. They are not eligible for Job Seekers Allowance as they are not looking for or available for work.
- 1.6 In turn, because they are not in receipt of benefits, they are ineligible for housing benefits or student finance for living expenses as they are not in Higher Education (HE).
- 1.7 Ineligibility for the whole range of welfare benefits requires the financial support of our Young Adults Service (YAS) so the young person will have funds for basic living and rent expenses and not incur mounting debts or leave their educational courses to seek work or sign onto benefits.
- 1.8 To remedy this the YAS is funding care leavers subsistence for the duration of their course, applying to charities to help to fund rent costs, funding rent costs where necessary and assisting the young people to seek part time work.
- 1.9 Care leavers often enter and seek higher education later in life. Unlike their peers who may still be living at home with their parents or have family support, care leavers can be at a disadvantage in terms of the financial circumstances when embarking on further education.
- 1.10 This has become more evident in the YAS as an increasing number of care leavers are entering further education after their twenty first birthday. Investigations of young people's plans and our data analysis tells us that this trend is set to increase and will place a greater financial burden on the service when the Children and Social Work Act 2017 comes into effect and our duties for all care leavers extend to 25 which explicitly sets out our duties for further and higher education support.

2. Case Studies

YAS has three care leavers directly affected by the benefit legislation:

2.1 Case Study One

- 2.1.1 This young person is aged 21 and enrolled on an access to midwifery full time course. They were working full time but gave up their job to concentrate on their studies. Unfortunately, they do not meet the criteria for Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance as they started the course after their 21st birthday. They are living in permanent accommodation and have some rent arrears due to their low income.
- 2.1.2 To manage their immediate financial needs the service are providing limited financial support whilst we work together on a solution.
- 2.1.3 The housing department are in the process of confirming eligibility for housing benefit as they started their course prior to their 22nd birthday.
- 2.1.4 Previously housing benefit would backdate payments if a positive decision is concluded, but back dates are now very time limited and the young person is finding the challenge of concluding this stressful which has resulted in them

reverting to avoidant behaviour.

2.2. Case Study Two

2.2.1 This young person is aged 24 and is currently attending Capel Manor College full-time where they study Horticulture, English and Maths (course ends in May 2018). They are unable to claim Income Support which excludes them from applying for Housing Benefit. This has resulted in rent arrears.

2.2.2 Their aspirations are to be a gardener and they have managed to access gardening work independently but because it is winter this has been sporadic – there will be more scope in the spring. In the meantime, we are supporting them to explore part time work opportunities via our employment consultant from Drive Forward Foundation.

2.2.3 The young person will turn 25 in May 2018 at which time their course finishes. They have made an application to UCAS to go on to university where, if successful, they will then be eligible to access student finance when they start in September 2018.

2.2.4 In the meantime, they will be referred for a money management course with our on-site drop in Barnardo's advisor to support financial skills.

2.2.5 The young person has been very proactive in trying to source financial assistance elsewhere and currently receives £300 every three months from a hardship fund at the college which is put towards their rent although it does not cover the total cost. YAS staff are applying to the charitable organisations for assistance from their hardship funds.

2.2.6 We are currently supporting this young person with weekly subsistence payments, and agreed to fund rent of £92 weekly whilst they seek some stable part time work. As with the previous case study, without the support from the service they will be evicted from their permanent accommodation due to increasing rent arrears.

2.3 Case Study 3

2.3.1 This young person is 22 and is currently enrolled on a full time L3 Music Performance & Production course in Brighton. Due to their age they are not eligible for benefits. At 21 their case was closed as they were not at that time in education or training and therefore did not qualify for an ongoing service. They had entered private rented accommodation at the time of the case closure as they did not wish to return to Haringey and take up their housing entitlement.

2.3.2 Following enrolment on their course the young person requested that their case be reopened in line with their legal entitlement within legislation and returned for a service.

2.3.3 They do not meet the criteria for benefits as they are over 22 years of age. We therefore began supporting them with weekly subsistence to address their immediate financial needs.

2.3.4 However, under the present circumstances unless working and earning enough to manage their rent they will be unable to meet their rental costs. The YAS will

therefore apply to charities to support and contribute to their living costs and seek to fund their rent for a short period whilst they seek stabilised part time work.

- 2.3.5 Like a lot of young people they tend only to approach when in crisis and it has been difficult to maintain consistent contact with the young person to support them to address and resolve their difficulties.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 The service is committed to ensuring that all young people can meet their potential through and a good educational outcome securing long term future security and inversely costing the public purse less in the long term. Care leavers have found themselves in an unfortunate loophole due to their age where they need to reach a particular educational standard to move on to HE but cannot do so without financial means. Children are entering care later and have often had broken educational histories, unassessed special educational needs and emotional and behavioural difficulties. This results in the need for greater help for longer in every aspect of their lives including education.
- 3.2 Our analysis shows that the number of care leavers in this position is likely to increase as they return to the service for support after they are 21 which places further financial pressure on the Young Adults Service to fund subsistence living costs and cover rent if they are to complete their courses and realise their aspirations.
- 3.3 Improvement measures are in place to train staff, review policies, procedures and entitlement documents regarding further education to ensure young people are fully aware of the impact of choices and potential pitfalls are underway.
- 3.4 Whilst we will encourage care leavers in such circumstances such as those above to be fully responsible for their living costs, in all three cases above the care leavers have continuing complex emotional needs because of childhood trauma and attachment difficulties making this a challenging area of work.