

Top tips for foster carers



Supporting looked after young people and care leavers in education, employment and training

As a foster carer you have the opportunity to make a really positive impact on the young people you look after, including the choices they make as they navigate their way through education and towards employment. Research suggests that care leavers face significant barriers to education, employment and training. However, good and empathetic support from foster carers is essential alongside local authority staff and other service providers and can make all the difference in enabling care leavers to excel in their learning or their chosen career path, and achieve positive outcomes.

As a foster carer you have an important role to play in:

- Supporting good attendance at school or college.
- Helping the young people you look after to value learning, throughout their life.
- Creating a culture where learning is the 'norm'.
- Encouraging young people to have high aspirations and to work towards achieving their goals.
- Spotting opportunities for looked after children and care leavers and encouraging and supporting your young people to apply for them.
- Advocating on behalf of the young people you look after with education and wider professionals.
- Ensuring that young people understand their rights, entitlements and the options available to them.

We hope that these simple top tips will help you to provide good support to the young people you look after.

1

Support young people to consider and pursue their options and dreams



- **Young people's hobbies, interests and strengths** are a positive starting point for exploring further education, training and employment options. *The Really Useful Book of Learning and Earning* (RUBLE) – learningandwork.org.uk/care-leaver-resource – includes a range of information and activities to help you support young people to think about where they are now, what they'd like to achieve in the future, and how they can work towards achieving their goals.
- **Understanding the full range of education and employment options** available to young people can be daunting and confusing. Visit skillsupport.org.uk to find out about further education, higher education, work-based learning opportunities (such as traineeships and apprenticeships) and informal learning. This website will help you, and the young people you look after, to understand the pros and cons of each option, and which is most suitable for them in enabling them to achieve their goals. Visit learningandwork.org.uk/care-leaver-resources to find out about apprenticeships and the £1,000 bursary available to care leavers, during the first year of their apprenticeships.
- **Help the young people you look after to gain hands on experience of different options** by visiting colleges, universities, training providers and careers fairs, or by doing work experience. Schools and personal advisers should have good links with local providers and employers. Local careers, information, advice and guidance services – sometimes called Connexions – should also be able to offer you advice and support. Many specialist local services have established links with different providers and employers, and may be able to arrange small group visits, or work experience. Colleges and universities often run 'transition' or 'experience' days just for looked after young people and care leavers. Find out about the different types of support that colleges and universities offer by visiting propel.org.uk or visit the Care Leaver Covenant website at mycovenant.org.uk to find out about local opportunities available for care leavers in your area.

2

Raise the value of learning

Looked after young people may come from a background where few members of their family of origin are employed or go on to further or higher education. Alongside this, overwhelmingly negative stereotypes about care leavers may create low expectations. As a foster carer you can play a part in transforming young people's attitudes to learning and what they can achieve.

- **Create positive assumptions and expectations** about education and work to counteract negative stereotypes about care leavers. For example, praise positive qualities and attributes and link these to different jobs, for example 'you are really good at

explaining things, you would be a good teacher' or 'well done for mending that bike tyre. You're good with your hands, you'd be a great engineer or mechanic'. Talk about future jobs and learning as a 'when' rather than an 'if', for example 'you could do a great apprenticeship and have a really good career' or 'what do you think you'd like to study at university'.

- **Encourage learning within the home** – both formally through showing interest and enthusiasm about schoolwork and helping with homework; and through informal learning – for example watching documentaries together or visiting museums.



3 Rights, entitlements and the 'local offer'

Care leavers need to have a good understanding of their rights and entitlements if they are to access the opportunities and support they need. Some of the support available to looked after young people and care leavers is decided by the local authority in which they live, while other rights and entitlements apply across England.

- **Local offer** – all local authorities in England should publish a 'local offer for care leavers'. The local offer should outline the statutory and discretionary support available, across six areas of a young person's life, including education, training and employment. Visit [skillssupport.org.uk](https://www.skillssupport.org.uk) and click on the 'find your local offer' heading. Use the map or the search box to find your local authority, which will then take you to the local offer for your area (if one has been published).

Rights and entitlements – across England

Local offers should include the statutory support that local authorities are legally required to offer, alongside additional discretionary support that they choose to offer. Below is a summary of care leavers' key legal rights and entitlement, linked to education and employment, that apply across England:

- Care leavers should continue to receive support from the local authority Children's Services department, where they were last in care, until they are 25.
- A social worker or personal adviser should work with a care leaver to create a 'pathway plan' to help them plan their future. This should include assistance around education and employment.
- Access to a £2,000 bursary if a care leaver is going into higher education.
- Access to the 16-19 Bursary, of up to £1,200 per year, if a care leaver is 16-19 and in full time further education.
- Access to a £1,000 bursary if a care leaver starts an apprenticeship.

Individual colleges, training providers and higher education institutions may provide care leavers with additional funding such as bursaries to cover fees, living expenses or travel costs. This is not a right or entitlement, but it is always worth asking whether there is additional financial support available.



4

Work with other organisations and services

Looked after young people often benefit from 'wrap around' support. This means working with others to 'pool' your skills and ensure consistent support and advice:

- **Be proactive in establishing positive relationships with schools** – it's important that teachers understand the needs of the young people you look after. Clear and open communication, and regular contact, will enable you to work together to address any problems that may arise, and to support the young people you look after to achieve their full potential.
- **Work closely with social workers and personal advisers** – agree how and when you'll keep in touch. Consider attending pathway planning/personal education plan (PEP) meetings and agree what your role will be in supporting the young people you look after to develop goals and progress towards them.
- **Establish links with your virtual school** – a virtual school is not a physical building that children and young people attend. It's a collection of professionals, across a local area, that work together to enable looked after young people to have good experiences of education and achieve good outcomes. Your young person's personal adviser or social worker will be able to signpost you to your local virtual school. Many virtual schools offer training and support to foster carers. Find out more at navsh.org.uk.
- **Identify local services that can offer support** – many areas have local services that offer tailored support to looked after young people and care leavers. These services are often run by charities and can provide support with a whole range of things, from preparing to live independently, through to managing mental health, employability skills and financial capability. Support may be provided on a one-to-one basis, or in small groups. The informal and holistic support provided by these services is often effective at engaging young people and responding to their individual needs. It also often includes opportunities for young people to share experiences and gain support from peers. Your young person's personal adviser or social worker should be able to signpost you to local services, or search for 'support for looked after young people and care leavers in [Birmingham]'.



Useful websites and resources

Visit the Care Leaver Covenant website at mycovenant.org.uk or download the Care Leaver Covenant App to find out about local opportunities for care leavers

The Really Useful Book of Learning and Earning (RUBLE) provides information and activities to help you to support young people to make decisions about education and work. Visit learningandwork.org.uk/ruble-for-care-leavers

Our skills support website has information on the different learning, training and employment options available to care leavers. Visit skillssupport.org.uk

Find out about the 'local offer' for care leavers in the area in which you live at skillssupport.org.uk/find-your-local-offer

Visit learningandwork.org.uk/care-leaver-resources for information about apprenticeships and the £1000 bursary available to care leavers

Find out about the support offered to care leavers by colleges and universities at propel.org.uk

Find out about training and support for foster carers at navsh.org.uk



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