

Southend Jobcentre Plus – support for care leavers

Southend Jobcentre Plus employs a dedicated Care Leaver Adviser. Kerry has been in post for around ten years and is the 'single point of contact' for care leavers in Southend. She provides comprehensive and tailored support to ensure that all care leavers receive the help they need, and has a typical caseload of around 140 young people between the ages of 18-25.

Crucial to the success of Southend's support for care leavers is strong local partnerships. Although Kerry is employed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), she is physically located in key local partners' offices for some of her time, this includes the council's Social Services team and local supported housing providers. Embedding the Care Leaver Adviser role into key services helps to break down barriers and silos of support. It enables Southend's care leavers to benefit from a joined-up approach where their 'single point of contact' has the connections and leverage to provide comprehensive support.

When a looked after young person is approaching their 18th birthday, Southend Social Services team brief Kerry about the young person and provide her with their Pathway Plan. Kerry arranges a meeting with the young person to understand their circumstances, needs and aspirations. At this first meeting each young person signs a 'consent to share' agreement. This agreement enables Kerry to contact all services, across the local area, to advocate on the young person's behalf, for example – health services, housing and homelessness support, drug and alcohol services. The direct referral from Social Services means that Kerry can get a Universal Credit (UC) claim in place as soon as the young person is eligible. She can then assess a young person's 'work readiness' and provide individual support around job search, CV writing, interview skills and any other skills and employability gaps that might prevent a care leaver from progressing into employment.

A key part of the Care Leaver Adviser's role in Southend is advocacy. When a young person is considered 'job ready', Kerry takes a proactive approach to engaging employers and sourcing jobs. She highlights the difference that good opportunities can make to care leavers' lives, and the role that local employers can play in giving young people a chance as part of their corporate social responsibility. Many of the young people that Kerry works with would otherwise 'get lost' in the benefit system, but through one-to-one support and somebody advocating directly on their behalf, care leavers in Southend receive comprehensive wrap around support that can really make a difference to their experience of the welfare system and their journey into employment.

Southend Jobcentre Plus demonstrates strong strategic commitment to enabling local care leavers to overcome challenges to employment and achieve good outcomes. The clear focus of the Care Leaver Adviser role exclusively upon this group of young people enables Kerry to take a targeted approach to addressing

needs that are often complex and wide ranging. The flexibility to co-locate within key partners' offices is crucial, as is the broad scope of the support that Kerry provides. Alongside this, the skills, knowledge and passion that Kerry has is crucial to the good outcomes achieved in Southend. Kerry describes herself as *'being emotionally attached, passionate about the young people and persistent. I simply don't take no for an answer. These young people come from tough backgrounds and face multiple challenges. They deserve good support and opportunities to turn their lives around.'*

In summary, the Care Leaver Adviser in Southend has the resource and support to focus exclusively on the needs of this group of young people. Effective partnerships and joined up working with the local authority and other local services, particularly co-location, means that support can be seamless and holistic. As the 'single point of contact' the young people that Kerry supports know that they can contact her at any time, that she will advocate on their behalf, liaise with local services and employers and apply flexibilities within the system to meet their specific needs.