

Camden case study

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Camden case study

1. Local Context and Strategic Positioning

Camden has demonstrated a long-term commitment to supporting care-experienced young people (CEYP) and formally recognised care experienced a protected characteristic in January 2024.

The borough has robust infrastructure to support CEYP, including Good Work Camden, Employment support services and local job hubs, the Construction Skills Centre, the Virtual School and the Youth Pathways Finder and Education Navigator, offering targeted support for CEYP experiencing youth justice and post-16 education. The borough offers CEYP centralised support and access to digital opportunities via the Camden Care Leavers Hub and the Pocket PA app. CEYP are also given access to apprenticeship and internship programmes or enhanced support for those aspiring to higher education.

2. Overview of delivery model

Camden's Full Potential initiative focuses on personalised support for CEYP, delivered by advisors who work directly with them to identify their needs and connect them with resources and opportunities. Delivery staff conducted a comprehensive mapping exercise to identify existing services, gaps in provision and duplication. The model also focuses on bringing together existing teams within the council. Key components include:

- **One-to-one career and life skills mentoring**, delivered by dedicated Personal Advisors (PAs) working in the council.
- **Employability services** delivered by commissioned partners including Drive Forward Foundation (DFF) and the Spear Programme
- **Functional skills tutoring** in small group or one-to-one formats, with a focus on contextual learning.
- **Referrals to mental health support** offered through existing services delivered in Camden.
- **Engagement of employers** to deliver ring-fenced internships and work placements for CEYP.
- **Financial support for CEYP** via the Personal Budget fund to overcome practical barriers to participation including paying for laptops, work clothes and covering travel costs.

3. Targeting, referral and early engagement

Outreach, engagement and onboarding is the responsibility of the Future Talent coordinator. The Full Potential programme is promoted as an additional pathway for personal advisors and other teams within the council's youth centre to utilise in supporting CEYP. Referrals forms are also shared with social workers and hostels.

In designing engagement activities, the borough focused on making the programme appear relevant and relatable to CEYP. To do this, they partnered with Word on the Curb, an audience engagement agency focused on young people, in the co-design of communications. They also sought the input of a peer advocate with care experience employed on the programme.

4. Partnership model and roles

DFF were a key partner, who delivered in-person employability training for participants. The borough also worked closely with DWP work coaches. Both DFF and DWP work coaches ran weekly drop-in sessions for participants at the council's 16+ and leaving care team offices, meaning they did not need to attend Jobcentre Plus for employability support or advice around benefits.

The programme also relied on close partnerships with teams in the council including the leaving care team, social workers, mental health teams and the Virtual School. These teams referred CEYP to the programme and offered guidance to personal advisors on supporting participants to overcome barriers to engagement.

5. Support during and after participation

Camden's delivery model focuses on PAs providing one-to-one guidance for CEYP, backed up by services delivered by partner organisations. PAs had regular one-to-one contact with participants and acted as a consistent point of support. They focused on building trusting relationships with participants and tailoring support based on their needs. PAs were also responsible for referring them on to other support services and providing financial support to overcome barriers and organising their work placements.

"For each individual, and we look at it as bespoke for the individual rather than, 'This is the programme, you're going to do ABC'. The individual presents and then it's whatever they need to get them back into training or work." (*Borough delivery staff*)

6. What's working: early successes and emerging strengths

The depth and tailoring of one-to-one support offered by PAs in Camden was seen as a strength. CEYP appreciated their friendly and encouraging attitude, which was said to have been different to their experiences on other programmes.

One CEYP shared that her PA spent significant time preparing her to apply for a role with the council, including organising mock interviews. They also sat in on her

interview and were said to be a reassuring presence. They then remained in touch through regular one-to-one catch-up while the CEYP was on the placement, highlighting the offer of in-work support available to participants in Camden.

The borough has benefitted from the input of CEYP in their engagement strategies, including through the employment of a Peer Advocate. A member of the delivery team also has care experience and was able to share her experience at engagement events, which was helpful in highlighting the relatability of the team.

7. Challenges and barriers

Delivery staff explained that disengagement of CEYP from the programme had been a challenge. This had occurred at various stages in participants' journey, including once they had secured or enrolled on a work placement, which risked undermining the council's relationship with local employers. Stakeholders emphasised the need for PAs to be vigilant in assessing the barriers faced by CEYP and their level of work readiness before putting them forward for a placement.

The level of compliance required on the Full Potential programme has also been challenging. The administrative burden of these tasks for PAs could detract from time available to support CEYP.

8. Innovations and promising practice

- Employing council PAs to work solely on the Full Potential programme was beneficial given their experience working with other council services and established relationships with CEYP, which boosted engagement.
- Developing pen-portraits of participants to share with employers improved the work placement matching process, ensuring CEYP were placed in roles that aligned with their skills and interests
- Co-location of partners in the same office has been beneficial in enabling participants to utilise different aspects of the Full Potential support offer quickly
- The delivery teams utilised employers' Section 106 social value obligations, which helped secure work placements with external (to the council) organisations

9. Learning and implications for broader rollout

- Compliance processes should be streamlined for PAs
- Support workers suggested that CEYP should be offered work experience opportunities at a younger age so they are ready for work when leaving care
- Programme eligibility should be broadened to give access to unaccompanied asylum seekers, who don't have right to work

- The programme should be coordinated with DWP so that enrolment on a work placement doesn't risk a CEYP losing access to housing benefit or the level of pay for placements increased to accommodate high housing costs

Young Person: Julia

1. Background and referral pathway

Julia is a 20-year-old care experienced young person (CEYP), who was offered a placement working for Camden Council through the Full Potential programme. Prior to joining the programme, Julia worked on a zero-hours contract at a music venue in London. She also occasionally volunteers in an advisory role for a friend's charity that supports CEYP.

Julia was receiving ongoing support from Camden Council and met two Personal Advisors (PAs) who were working on the Full Potential programme when attending the office for a regular appointment. She was encouraged to take part by their supportive attitude and reassurance that the programme is focused on providing guidance to support people into work.

2. Goals and expectations

Julia's career ambition is to work in the public sector, government or the politics in a role that reflects her commitment to supporting others. She was particularly interested in working for Camden Council, which motivated her to join Full Potential after learning that the programme offered placements within council departments.

"They were like, 'What are you interested in? What do you want to do for work? What are you working as now?' I told them, and they were like, 'Oh, we have something that you would really enjoy'. I said that eventually I want to start working with Camden, and they helped me to get the job there." *(Julia)*

Julia also recognised that she had limited work experience and little experience with job applications, so she was keen to strengthen her employability skills. In particular, she wanted guidance with developing her CV and in answering application questions.

3. Experience of support

When Julia first met with the Full Potential support workers, they carried out an initial assessment of her needs, interests, and employment goals. Through these early conversations, they identified that Julia was interested in and well suited to a placement within the council. Given her level of work readiness, it was clear that she could begin a placement as soon as a suitable opportunity was identified and the onboarding process was completed.

From this point, Julia received tailored one-to-one support from a dedicated programme support worker. They focused on developing her CV, drafting strong responses to council job applications, and preparing for interviews. Her support worker also attended her job interview, providing reassurance throughout the process and advocating for her suitability for the role. Since Julia secured her placement, this

support has continued through regular check-ins, with the support worker also acting as a liaison with her line manager.

Julia was extremely positive about the support she received through the programme. In particular, she valued the personalised one-to-one guidance from her support worker. She felt that the programme took care to ease her into employment and recognised the specific barriers she faces as a CEYP, including limited work experience.

4. Types of support received

Julia received a range of support from the borough while enrolled on the Full Potential programme, including:

- **Practical support:** Support with an application for a work placement with the council. The Full Potential support worker has helped her to hone her CV and offered guidance in drafting responses to application questions. Julia has also had mock interviews.
- **Social/emotional support:** Julia has found her advisors to be a reassuring and encouraging influence which built her confidence in applying for jobs. The Full Potential advisors also offered additional emotional support through one-to-one catchups while she was on the placement.

5. What worked well and why

The personalised employability guidance provided by her Full Potential support worker has been the most impactful aspect of the support. She appreciated that they have taken time to get to know her and focused on building a trusting relationship. Together they have honed her CV and worked through applications.

Julia also appreciates the flexibility of the work placement. Her work placement managers have tailored the placement to her needs as a CEYP with limited workplace experience, by limiting her hours and reserving free time to meet with her support workers.

6. Outcomes and changes

The most significant outcome for Julia has been securing employment with the council on a Full Potential work placement. This opportunity has given her public sector work experience, which will be useful in helping her to access roles in an area of interest in future. She reported that the experience of applying for the role and the interview process has also made her more confident and comfortable in applying for roles in future.

Julia also appreciates the new skills she had been able to develop while on the work placement. For example, she was inexperienced using computers but has improved

her digital skills while on the placement. The role has also given her the opportunity to meet residents in Camden, which has helped her to practice face-to-face communication. She also appreciates the routine of regular work through the council placement.

"I think it's had positive impact on me. I think it's made me, like, happier to like, be out the house and like doing something every day." (*Julia*)

7. Suggestions for improvement

Julia did not share any suggestions of how the programme could be improved.

8. Future ambitions and next steps

Julia is enjoying her placement with the council, through which she has developed new skills and had the opportunity to work directly with residents. There have been discussions with her line manager about extending the placement beyond the original three months. In the longer term, she is open to working with Camden Council in a full-time role or working for another organisation in government or for a political party.