

Hackney case study

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Hackney case study

1. Local Context and Strategic Positioning

Hackney Council has formally adopted care experience as a protected characteristic, but does not have any dedicated care-experienced young people (CEYP)-specific programmes. Support is typically delivered through personal advisors in the leaving care team, who refer young people to general services based on need.

The borough council are working with the Virtual School to identify CEYP who are NEET or at risk of NEET. An initial list has been shared, but the borough is keen to expand outreach beyond those already known to the leaving care team.

2. Overview of delivery model

Hackney's Full Potential initiative is open to all CEYP, with a particular focus on those furthest from the labour market. The Trailblazer aims to fill Hackney's gap in services specifically for CEYP with tailored interventions.

Hackney's Full Potential programme is built on tried-and-tested models used with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) cohorts, particularly supported internships. The programme offers stepping stones to employment, starting with work experience and job tasters for younger CEYP, and progressing to internships, apprenticeships, and employment for older participants. The delivery model is designed to be individualised and flexible, responding to each young person's interests, aspirations, and barriers. Hackney's interventions for CEYP include:

- **One-to-one career and life skills mentoring**, delivered by Drive Forward Foundation (DFF).
- **Short-term work placements** for CEYP including internal council roles and with external partners.
- **Council-led awareness raising about care experience as a protected characteristic** and the reasonable adjustments among employers, Further Education (FE) colleges and schools.
- **Incorporating the voices of CEYP in programme design** through the Hackney Care Leavers Employment Forum.
- **Co-locating DFF with the employment and skills team**, creating a hub of integrated support and shared learning.

3. Targeting, referral and early engagement

The delivery team are primarily relying on referrals to the programme through the Virtual School and the leaving care team, who work closely with CEYP in the borough. Many CEYP have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), so there is significant overlap with SEND support. The Trailblazer will extend existing SEND-focused support

to the wider CEYP population. Programme referrals also came directly from DFF or outlined via other organisations, including the Young Hackney, Circle Collective and the King's Trust.

4. Partnership model and roles

DFF are the key delivery partner, who provide one-to-one specialist support to CEYP. They are also able to source opportunities through their existing network of employers and training providers.

The borough has a longstanding relationship with DFF, but through Full Potential they are now contracted to deliver support. As a result, the DFF personal advisor is more closely integrated with teams in the borough. For example, he now has access to opportunities secured by the council's job brokerage teams to share with CEYP and worked at the council offices twice per week where he could meet and engage CEYP accessing other services.

5. Support during and after participation

Hackney's delivery model focuses on bringing together existing services involved in a CEYP's care. Personal advisors organise weekly drop-in sessions where they meet with CEYP, their parent/carer and professionals involved in their care. They are then referred to a careers officer from DFF and, if required, other support services offered by the council.

The DFF support worker conducts an initial assessment of the young person's aspirations, interests, skills and barriers. Based on this assessment they develop a tailored support plan focused on overcoming their barriers to work and securing employment. This support continues once a young person on a Full Potential work placement. The employer engagement team then share opportunities with CEYP based on their career interests and needs.

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

The support provided by DFF was one of the key successes on the programme. CEYP benefitted from the regular contact with their support worker and level of tailoring to their employment goals. This included help in refining their CVs and drafting applications for specific roles. CEYP were also able to tap into DFF's wide network of employer and training contacts. For example, one CEYP interested in a career in the public sector was introduced to a civil servant by her support workers, with whom she organised a mock interview.

The Full Potential programme has been pivotal in establishing a package of support specific to CEYP for the first time in Hackney. Initiatives include, HR work to address accessibility barriers to CEYP using services, and establishing partnerships between social workers, the virtual school, council employment teams and DFF which will continue beyond the programme.

7. Challenges and barriers

Delays in funding approval for the Full Potential programme limited delivery and CEYP outcomes. Hackney's financial controls prevented spending without confirmed funding, delaying recruitment of a Programme Manager, pausing commissioning, and limiting preparatory work such as stakeholder engagement and internal coordination.

Insufficient join-up in council services involved in delivering Full Potential was a challenge, as well as a lack of clarity on the programme aims and stakeholders' roles and responsibilities on the programme. This issue may stem from the delays in recruiting a dedicated Full Potential programme manager and reflect that this is the first time the borough's services have worked together on a CEYP-specific programme.

8. Innovations and promising practice

Stakeholders shared several examples of innovations in the design and delivery approach in Hackney:

- **Co-location of services** has been successful in engaging CEYP and benefitted the partnership between DFF and delivery teams in the council.
- **Social value obligations** have been a useful tool in engaging external employers
- **Employers are required to develop an employment plan for** participants around the tasks they will be performing, their hours and working practices, to ensure that role the is appropriate for each CEYP.

9. Learning and implications for broader rollout

Key learnings and practice that could be replicated elsewhere included:

- Programme delivery in Hackney highlights the need for early engagement and integration of Full Potential with teams already delivering associated services in the council.
- Engagement could be boosted by offering financial incentives to CEYP for enrolment or by sharing success stories of participants who have benefitted from the Full Potential.
- Engaging employers that have established, trusted relationships with CEYP to host placements could help mitigate the challenges participants face when entering a professional environment for the first time.

Young Person: Millie

1. Background and referral pathway

Millie is a 24-year-old care-experience young person (CEYP), who recently graduated from the University of Bristol. She has had a personal advisor from Hackney Council for years, who had regular check-ins with her throughout her time in school and during university. She currently lives with her foster family.

While attending school she worked with Hackney's Virtual School who offered her tutoring while taking her A-Levels. They then supported her while applying for university and throughout her degree, where they organised her receipt of education grants. The Virtual School shared with her the opportunity to apply for a care-leavers internship with the civil service. They recommended accessing support offered by Drive Forward Foundation (DFF). Millie wasn't aware that 'Full Potential' was a distinct programme but was encouraged to enrol based on the specific support with job applications that was available through it.

2. Goals and expectations

Millie has a clear ambition to build a career in the public sector or voluntary and community sector (VCS) that reflects her values and interests, while giving her the opportunity to support others. Through the programme, she was particularly keen to receive support with her application for the Civil Service's 18-month internship for care leavers, which Hackney's Virtual School had encouraged her to apply for.

At the outset of the programme, Millie was open to accessing any support available to her. She explained that she has always been proactive in seeking out opportunities for care leavers, available through the council and more widely. Through DFF, she hoped to receive help with written job applications and develop her interview skills.

3. Experience of support

Having enrolled on Full Potential, Millie had a phone call with her support worker on the programme, who conducted an initial assessment of her needs and career interests. Through this conversation Rico was able to gauge that Millie felt relatively confident about securing work and had a strong set of qualifications that put her in a good position to secure work in her career of interest. From this point, they organised regular one-to-one check ins and Rico was able to share with her relevant opportunities.

Most support Millie has received has related to EET rather than support needs around mental and social barrier to work. Millie is positive about the support she has received through the programme. In particular, she was pleased with how tailored the one-to-one employability guidance has been. Rico has been able to send her job

opportunities that aligned with her interests and helped her in drafting responses to application questions.

"I suppose it's nice to have that, you know, extra point of contact that you can check in with about whatever just I suppose random questions and nice to have that encouragement...almost like a careers person that you'd have at school, but just sort of for you." (*Millie*)

It has been useful for Millie to have an individual dedicated support worker who was committed to her needs. She reflected that while support is often available to CEYP, it's not always clear what they are entitled to. On Full Potential however, support workers are much more transparent in communicating this.

4. Types of support received

Millie received a range of employability-focussed support while on the Full Potential programme, including:

- **Practical support:** Support with an application for the Civil Service internship scheme from a DFF careers advisor, as well as for an application for a job with the probation service. The careers advisor helped to hone her CV and gave her guidance drafting responses to application questions. Millie also had two mock interviews, including one with a civil servant, who was a contact of DFF.
- **Social/emotional support:** Increased self-confidence in her abilities to find work through regular encouragement in one-to-one sessions and interview practice.
- **Specialist support:** Once Millie was invited to interviews, she was given financial assistance in paying for interview clothing, which was identified as a barrier.

5. What worked well and why

One of the most valuable aspects of support Millie received through the Full Potential programme has been the personalised employability guidance provided by her careers advisor. By taking the time to understand Millie's career interests, her support worker has been able to identify and share tailored job opportunities that align with her goals. Together, they have worked through applications, building practical skills and confidence. Although Millie was initially unsure about how beneficial the support would be, she gradually developed a strong working relationship with her support worker and has come to trust their recommendations.

Millie also highlighted the importance of the mock interviews she completed as part of the programme. These sessions gave her the opportunity to practice interview technique, including with a professional in a sector-of-interest. Through feedback from her support worker and the professional she was able to recognise areas of weakness and built confidence in her interview technique.

6. Outcomes and changes

The most significant outcome for Millie was securing employment on the Civil Service internship scheme for CEYP. This had been a long-term ambition and the key reason for her enrolment on Full Potential. She also secured a full-time role with the probation service, which had been identified by her DFF careers advisor. On both these applications the support worker guided her on answering the application questions and prepared her for interviews.

Both Millie and her support worker reflected that Millie's confidence talking about herself and in securing employment has grown significantly over the course of the programme.

7. Suggestions for improvement

Millie suggested that she would have benefited from more guidance or training around workplace skills. She recommended that either the borough or DFF could run workshops for CEYP, for example, on public speaking or negotiating salaries.

8. Future ambitions and next steps

Millie is focused on succeeding on her Civil Service internship and utilising this opportunity as a stepping stone on to longer-term roles in the public sector. In general, she is interested in pursuing a career that enables her to help others.

"I think my purpose in general is just to be in a position where I'm able to make a difference to vulnerable populations and things like that. And I think the civil service is kind of a root into that. So hopefully to be in a spot where I'm either researching policy or, you know, just involved in something that helps." *(Millie)*