

Islington case study

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Islington case study

1. Local Context and Strategic Positioning

Islington Council has well-established infrastructure for supporting care-experienced young people (CEYP), which has a particular focus on those who are not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). The council uses a Family Business Model in supporting CEYP, which positions them as both a corporate parent and local economic driver. The model gives CEYP access to one-to-one support from a Personal Advisor, enhanced employment support from an EET officer and access to ring-fenced opportunities. Islington's Full Potential initiative builds on this infrastructure and aims to support CEYP aged 17-24 (or up to 25 with SEND) into EET, foster innovation and collaboration across boroughs, and build an evidence base for effective CEYP support

2. Overview of delivery model

Islington are delivering three 'pathways' aiming to support CEYP to access paid work experience through the development of Functional Skills, work-readiness training and by connecting participants with employers:

1. The first pathway focuses on bespoke work readiness by offering participants sector specific training and hands-on work experience with employers. Interventions on this pathway are commissioned to the King's Trust.
2. On the second pathway, participants are offered one-to-one employability support from advisors within the council and access to a 12-week internship.
3. The third pathway is delivered by the council's Virtual School, an existing support service for care leavers, which focuses on supporting Functional Skills development. It is specifically for CEYP who do not have Level 2 maths and English and comprises one-to-one sessions or a 12-week intensive programme.

Over the course of their involvement, participants may enroll on multiple pathways.

3. Targeting, referral and early engagement

Most participants are engaged through the council's existing services for CEYP, such as the Virtual School, Independent Futures (leaving care team) and the Youth Employability and Skills (YES) programme. Referrals have also been received from local schools, and some CEYP enrolled through the King's Trust.

The delivery lead explained that initial engagement work is primarily completed by the Virtual School team who have a large existing case load of CEYP. They introduce the programme and explain its potential benefits to the young person. Programme delivery staff then complete participation agreements and work through the onboarding checklist with participants. On referral to the Full Potential programme,

participants undertake a skills assessment using the Skills Builder Essential Skills Framework to identify the most appropriate progression pathway for them.

4. Partnership model and roles

Key partners involved in Islington's programme included the Virtual School, who were responsible for delivering Functional Skills training, and the King's Trust, who delivered work readiness training programme. These partners were selected for their closeness to, and experience working with, CEYP. King's Trust had partnered with Islington previously and were valued for the effectiveness of their employment programme and their range of partnerships with training providers and employers.

Other partners from within the council included Independent Futures (leaving care) and the YES programme. The council also worked to engage employers who hosted careers sessions and taster events and employed participants on internships. The King's Trust also commissioned external providers to deliver 'Get Into' industry-specific training programmes. This included a 'Get Into Fashion' programme led by the V&A.

5. Support during and after participation

The borough took a mixed approach to delivery, with each of the pathways offering a blend of one-to-one employability guidance and pastoral support, classroom activities, sector-specific training and guidance with job applications.

Delivery staff at the King's Trust supported participants furthest from the labour market to overcome emotional barriers to work and focus on soft skill development through group activities and individualised guidance. More work-ready participants were referred on to sector-specific training courses or prepared for live vacancies, apprenticeships and traineeships. Throughout this process, they have one-to-one check-ins with King's Trust youth development workers. Similar one-to-one guidance was offered by support workers in the council, which continued once participants begun internships. Through the Virtual School participants received in-person Functional Skills training in a classroom setting.

The council also organised careers fairs, which enabled participants to meet employers face-to-face and learn about their organisation. There were several examples of young people organising placements based on these meetings.

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

The partnership between the council and the King's Trust has been very successful. Key to this has been the regular meetings between delivery leads at each organisation in which they could discuss participants, what needs they have, the support they currently receive, and which pathways would be most beneficial for them. The King's Trust were vital in securing positive outcomes, driven by their experience working with CEYP and links to sector-specific training providers and employers.

Employer engagement was strong in Islington. This was driven by the proactivity of the project manager, who worked exclusively on Full Potential and was involved in identifying employers and the organisation of placements. Careers fairs also proved to be useful in matching participants with suitable organisations.

7. Challenges and barriers

The borough faced difficulties maintaining the engagement of participants furthest from the labour market. This had been most challenging on the Functional Skills pathway, where participant non-attendance at booked sessions was a common issue.

In some cases, delivery staff overestimated the work readiness of care-experienced participants on the programme, particularly regarding the extent of structural and emotional barriers to work they faced. As a result, participants required more time and resource than had been anticipated in delivery plans. The challenge was compounded by the short delivery timeline, which had been constrained by delays from central government.

8. Innovations and promising practice

In addition to comprehensive employability support, the borough offered training for CEYP in mitigating wider challenges that could impact their ability to stay in work. This included financial literacy workshops delivered by MoneyCircuit. These were not in the initial delivery plan but were introduced in response to feedback around what would be helpful for participants.

In response to feedback, the borough delivered trauma-informed training for employers hosting placements. This initiative was designed to strengthen employers' understanding of challenges faced by CEYP and create more supportive workplaces.

9. Learning and implications for broader rollout

Key learnings and practice that could be replicated elsewhere included:

- The multi-pathway programme design was effective in offering support for CEYP that was tailored to their specific needs and level of work readiness
- The experience of employers in Islington highlights the need for comprehensive information and guidance to be shared prior to the hosting of placements. This should cover the responsibilities of employers and the challenges faced by CEYP, and be complemented by in-work support delivered by the council.
- Given some CEYP worry about losing benefits by enrolling on Full Potential work placements, delivery staff should emphasise that being in work will lead to better financial outcomes overall.

Young Person: Rachel

1. Background and referral pathway

Rachel is a 21-year-old care-experienced young person (CEYP), who is currently working for a tailoring business on an internship accessed through Islington's Full Potential programme. Prior to enrolling on the programme, Rachel was NEET, having dropped out of college to focus on managing her mental health.

Rachel was referred on to the Full Potential programme by her Personal Advisor (PA) from Islington Council, who regularly shares opportunities available for CEYP through the borough and other organisations with her. Rachel's PA explained that the Full Potential programme may give her the opportunity to enrol in training or work experience related to textiles, tailoring or sewing, which is an area of interest.

2. Goals and expectations

Rachel's career ambition is to work in the clothing and textiles industry. She has always enjoyed sewing and needlework as a hobby and saw the Full Potential programme as an opportunity to turn this interest into a profession. While her long-term goal is to secure employment in this field, she recognised the importance of learning new skills and gaining experience, and so was primarily focused on training opportunities.

Having been NEET since leaving college, Rachel was also motivated to build her confidence in an educational environment. She saw the programme as an opportunity to develop her social skills and meet other CEYP.

3. Experience of support

One of Rachel's first experiences on the programme was attending a careers fair for CEYP enrolled on the programme organised by Islington borough council. This event focussed on matching CEYP with opportunities that were relevant to their interests. Here Rachel was linked with support workers from the King's Trust and signed up to a 10-day in-person 'Get into Fashion Course' course delivered by the V&A. Rachel was positive about this experience, which gave her the chance to develop specialist skills and build confidence in a relaxed classroom setting alongside other young people.

Following the training course, Rachel began an internship with a local tailoring business, which had been organised by Islington Council. Although she had initially been offered the placement before starting the training, she chose to complete the course first, recognising that this would prepare her for the role without becoming overwhelmed. This proved to be a good decision as she felt more workplace ready and was able to apply skills she had learned in her work.

Throughout her time on the Full Potential programme, Rachel was supported by a youth worker from the King's Trust. They met regularly on a one-to-one basis for and offered emotional support and employability guidance.

4. Types of support received

- **Practical support:** One-to-one support with a youth worker at the King's Trust around developing employability skills, job applications, careers planning and goal setting. Through Islington council and the King's Trust, Rachel was signposted on to opportunities in the textiles and clothing sector including the course with the V&A and the work placement with a tailoring business. On the tailoring course, Rachel received specialist training upskilling her for a career in the sector. She maintained contact with the instructor on the course who offered advice on building a portfolio of experience and finding work in the sector.
- **Social/emotional support:** Emotional support from her King's Trust youth worker focussed on building confidence. One-to-one sessions offered the opportunity to discuss Rachel's barriers to work and education in a safe space.
- **Specialist support:** Rachel was awarded funding for materials to enable her to develop a textiles and clothes-making portfolio, including a sewing machine and a dress-making body.
- **Delivery methods:** One-to-one support from her King's Trust advisor, alongside in-person classroom learning and networking events with other young people.

5. What worked well and why

The training course with the V&A proved to be one of the most valuable aspects of support Rachel received through the Full Potential programme. Rachel appreciated that the course was suitable for young people of all skill levels and amount of experience, creating a low-pressure environment. This was particularly important to Rachel, as she had been NEET for some time and was concerned about feeling overwhelmed.

"They're very patient with me and they're not expecting me to do nothing like professional off the bat. I think they're just going to work me up to it, which is like ideal and less nerve wracking." (Rachel)

Rachel developed a good relationship with her V&A instructor, who was supportive and offered helpful guidance on her next steps towards a career in tailoring. Further, through enrolling in the training, Rachel felt well prepared and confident when she began her tailoring work placement.

6. Outcomes and changes

The most significant outcome for Rachel was the industry-specific experience she gained through her course at the V&A and her internship with the tailoring business. These opportunities enabled her to develop industry-specific skills and build a portfolio to support future job applications. As a result, Rachel felt more prepared and confident in pursuing a career in tailoring, which had been a long-term career ambition.

Rachel also felt that she had more clarity about her career options following the programme. This was driven by one-to-one careers guidance and goal setting with her King's Trust advisor, alongside sector-specific advice from her V&A instructor. Access to better quality equipment also allowed to practice her tailoring skills independently. These factors contributed to Rachel feeling more confident in pursuing her education and training goals.

Rachel also built social skills through working with other young people in a classroom setting. Both Rachel and her King's Trust support worker noted that she had been able to build meaningful friendships through the programme.

7. Suggestions for improvement

Neither Rachel nor her support worker shared any suggestions around how the programme could be improved.

8. Future ambitions and next steps

Through her experience on the Full Potential programme, Rachel is feeling more confident in how to pursue her ambition to work full-time in tailoring. In the short-term, she recognises the need to continue developing her skills and is looking for further opportunities. She plans to apply for a course run by a theatre company and others offered freely by universities. Using her newly acquired materials, Rachel is also continuing to practice tailoring skills independently.