

Kensington and Chelsea case study

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Kensington and Chelsea case study

1. Local Context and Strategic Positioning

Kensington and Chelsea is a small borough with around 180 care-experienced young people (CEYP) eligible for Full Potential. A significant proportion are unaccompanied minors with language and confidence needs, stemming from traumatic experiences.

Strategically, Kensington and Chelsea prioritise CEYP for employment support, including guaranteed interviews and ring-fenced job opportunities within the council, and dedicated employment support. However, prior to Full Potential, these services were focused on common issues amongst CEYP rather than individual challenges. The borough viewed Full Potential as an opportunity to think more deeply about what each young person needed and work collaboratively to put this in place.

2. Overview of delivery model

Through data analysis and in-depth discussions, the leaving care team explored the individual needs of the NEET CEYP on their caseload. From this, they identified three groups at different stages in their journey into employment or learning. The team then worked with other departments in the council to implement a programme of support for each group, resulting in three strands of delivery:

1. **For those not currently thinking about employment or education.** This group received one-to-one coaching from a mentor who worked in an area of interest to them, to shift young people's attitudes and start giving them some structure to their day. They had regular, informal catch ups to talk about their aspirations and priorities around work, and the opportunities available to them.
2. **For those who wanted to get into employment or learning but faced barriers.** This group received confidence-building and resilience workshops from the participation and advocacy team, and group sessions on interview skills, workplace behaviours and communication from the employment team. The initial deep dive meant staff could tailor content and delivery to the specific needs of young people. The team also invited those still at school or college, to start "breaking down those limiting beliefs" and catch them before they became NEET.
3. **For those close to getting into employment or learning.** These CEYP were referred to the council's FACES (Families and Communities Employment Support) team to receive intensive one-to-one employability support. This included creating CVs, applying for specific jobs, preparing for interviews and making the transition into work. Financial help was provided for travel costs, interview clothes and laptops. A key offer for this group was ring-fenced six-month paid work placements, secured by the employer engagement team.

3. Targeting, referral and early engagement

CEYP were referred by the leaving care team. This often involved an informal conversation, for example, over a coffee, and drew on staff's relationships with young people to encourage them to take part. Initial engagement was a challenge, especially for those on strands 1 and 2, so staff shared information with foster carers and support workers so they could help young people get up and attend sessions.

For young people on Strand 3, the relaxed nature of their initial meeting with FACES was important to put them at ease and feel able to share their experiences. They also appreciated the focus on their own interests and goals, and felt that staff listened to what they wanted to achieve through the programme, motivating them to engage.

4. Partnership model and roles

The key partnership in Kensington and Chelsea's initiative was across the council departments involved in delivering the three strands of support. These included:

- The **leaving care team**, carrying out the initial deep dive, working with employment and skills to develop the offer and referring young people to the programme.
- **Employment and skills**, developing and delivering the employability workshops for Strand 2 and also the FACES team in delivering the one-to-one support in Strand 3.
- The **participation and advocacy team**, providing one-to-one coaching and linking young people with external mentors in Strand 1, as well as delivering confidence and resilience workshops in Strand 2.
- The **employer engagement team**, sourcing paid, ring-fenced work placements for participants with external employers in a range of sectors.

In addition, external employers were involved in offering the work placements. These included heritage organisations, charities, cafes, marketing companies and more.

5. Support during and after participation

A key strength of the model was that it provided a clear progression pathway for CEYP to work through until they secured sustainable employment. The aim was for young people in Strand 1 to progress to Strand 2, and so on. Those in Strand 3 were being supported to look for permanent work once their placement ends.

"The real beauty of this programme and what we can do... is really that planning of everyone moves the next step up... We can measure progress because we have it in those stages of delivery." (*Borough delivery staff*)

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

The collaboration between the different council teams was seen as a strength of this model, enabling different departments to bring their skills and expertise together to

create a comprehensive programme of support for CEYP. Having good quality, ring-fenced work placements for care leavers was also seen as a strength.

Reflections from staff and young people suggest that the model is enabling young people to gain a better understanding of the world of work. One staff member described "eureka moments" for young people about mistakes they were making in applications and interviews. Young people on work placements felt that they were improving their communication skills, confidence and workplace behaviours.

7. Challenges and barriers

Some CEYP disengaged from the programme, especially those in Strand 1. Staff highlighted these young people as a priority group to meet and explore what is not working, and see what they could put in place to encourage them to participate.

Young people and employers alike were overall very positive about their experiences of the programme, but did flag that they would appreciate more regular contact from borough staff following the commencement of placements.

"I think it's good to have a check-in with both parties, the employer and the young person, to see how they're doing." (*Employer*)

8. Innovations and promising practice

The key innovations in Kensington and Chelsea's model were basing its development on a deep understanding of individual young people's needs, and the collaborative approach across council teams. This could be replicated in other areas.

Ring-fenced work placements was also a new offer from the council. The fact that the placements were paid, at least six months long, included wraparound and financial support, were at an appropriate level and in a range of sectors was important in providing a high-quality experience for young people.

9. Learning and implications for broader rollout

Key learnings and practice that could be replicated elsewhere included:

- Carrying out a **deep dive of individual young people's barriers** in relation to employment and learning, and developing support based on this
- **Cross-team collaboration** to utilise the experience and expertise of departments across the council in the development of a comprehensive offer of support
- **Engaging with foster carers and other support workers** so they can also be involved in supporting young people's initial and ongoing engagement
- Sourcing a **range of ring-fenced work placements** in different sectors and at a level suitable for young people's experience and skills

Young Person: Solene

1. Background and referral pathway

Solene was 20 years old and working as a carer on a zero-hour contract when she signed up to Kensington and Chelsea's Full Potential initiative. She was searching for a job with more regular hours, as the sporadic hours of her care role was causing her significant financial issues.

Solene found out about Full Potential through her social worker, who knew she was looking for a new job and referred her to the programme. As a young person who was already in work, the borough team matched Solene to strand 3 of their delivery model, and referred her to their FACES (Families and Communities Employment Support) team.

2. Goals and expectations

While Solene was already in employment, the zero-hour nature of her contract was creating issues with her benefits, making it difficult for her to know how much money she would have to live on each month. She was therefore keen to find a more reliable job, but wanted to stay in the health and social care sector, particularly working with the elderly.

3. Experience of support

Solene described her experience on Full Potential as "really, really good". Her initial meeting with her Employment Coach at FACES was relaxed and upbeat, which Solene thought was important as this helped her to feel comfortable to share her goals and work history, and talk through what she wanted to achieve with the support.

Solene highlighted the fact that her Employment Coach started with her interests and goals as a strength of the support she received. She felt that the actions taken were agreed between her and her coach, and he genuinely took her views and opinions into account.

"It was like, 'what do you want to do? What do you think is best for you?' And stuff like that. There wasn't really, 'oh, like, this is what you should do'. It was none of that." (Solene)

After their initial face-to-face meeting, most of Solene's sessions with her Employment Coach took place over the phone, which also suited her preferences.

4. Types of support received

As part of Kensington and Chelsea's Full Potential initiative, the borough's employer engagement team secured paid work placements for care-experienced young people, both within and outside of the council. Solene's Employment Coach was aware of this and spoke to his colleagues to find out what placements were available. They had just

agreed a 10-month placement at Royal Chelsea Hospital which he felt was perfect for Solene. He talked Solene through the role, which involved supporting guided tours, working with the public, learning about the Chelsea Pensioners and meeting with residents. Solene agreed that the role sounded ideal for her career interests and was excited to apply.

From this point, the support Solene received focused on her application and interview for the placement. Her Employment Coach worked with her to research the organisation, tailor her CV to the role and prepare for her interview. Her Employment Coach also managed the communication with the placement team, which Solene appreciated.

As well as the focused one-to-one support, Solene's Employment Coach referred her to Smart Works, an organisation which supports unemployed women with clothes and coaching to succeed in job interviews. Here, Solene received additional support with interview techniques and free professional clothes for her interview. They also told her that she could access support with travel costs from the social care team. She found this "really, really helpful".

Solene was successful in getting the placement. At the time of the evaluation, she had just started and was already enjoying the role. She also appreciated that her Employment Coach checked in with her after the interview to find out how it went and congratulate her on getting the role. These regular check-ins were going to continue throughout her placement.

5. What worked well and why

For Solene, the personalised and individual support she received from her Employment Coach was key in enabling her to secure her placement. In particular, she appreciated his focus on her goals and interests, and the informal, relaxed tone he set for their meetings. This helped quickly build rapport between the two of them and meant Solene felt comfortable to share her goals, which then formed the basis of the support she received on the programme.

Having sector-specific work placements was also a key success factor for Solene. The fact that the council was able to secure a high-quality placement with a well-known organisation in her sector of interest was ideal. The fact that it was paid, full-time and also for a considerable duration was important to Solene after her experience on her zero-hour contract.

6. Outcomes and changes

A key outcome for Solene was her success in securing the paid work placement with Royal Chelsea Hospital. This was her main aim for the programme and she was pleased that she succeeded.

Solene also felt she had improved a range of work readiness skills through the programme, particularly her interview skills, which she can draw on again in future job applications.

"Just having the tips from [Employment Coach] and obviously Smart Works... even if I got a new job and I had a new interview coming up, it would help." *(Solene)*

While she had only just started on her placement, Solene felt she was already learning a lot about the history of the organisation as well as improving her confidence and communication in the workplace.

"I think also with what I'm doing now, it's definitely making me come out of my comfort zone a little bit more because I don't really like speaking to a lot of people at once either. But I have to, so I don't really have a choice." *(Solene)*

Her Employment Coach reflected that in his recent check-ins with Solene, she was very positive about the work environment and highlighted the contrast between this and her previous zero-hour contract role. He felt she was thriving in this supportive environment.

"I know what she was going through before, and she was going through a lot of like personal circumstances with her family and stuff. So having that contrast of going into a working environment and seeing everyone happy with her... what an amazing experience." *(Borough staff)*

7. Suggestions for improvement

Solene had no suggestions for improvement for the programme, as she achieved exactly what she aimed to with the support provided.

8. Future ambitions and next steps

Solene is keen to make the most of her placement and build her skills and experience. Her ambition for the future is to have a stable job that she enjoys, preferably in the health and social care sector. The Royal Hospital Chelsea had already said that if they have a role available, she would be able to apply to stay with them at the end of her placement. However, Solene was also planning to speak to her Employment Coach halfway through her placement to start applying for other permanent roles, in case the hospital could not keep her on.

"...all I'm really looking forward to and waiting for is when I'm like in the middle of the year and I'm obviously talking to [Employment Coach] about a new job and finding a new job." *(Solene)*