

Wandsworth case study

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Contents

Wandsworth case study.....	2
1. Local Context and Strategic Positioning	2
2. Overview of delivery model.....	2
3. Targeting, referral and early engagement.....	3
4. Partnership model and roles	3
5. Support during and after participation.....	4
6. What's working: early successes and emerging strengths.....	4
7. Challenges and barriers.....	4
8. Innovations and promising practice.....	4
9. Learning and implications for broader rollout.....	5
Young Person: Lily.....	6
1. Background and referral pathway	6
2. Goals and expectations	6
3. Experience of support.....	6
4. Types of support received	7
5. What worked well and why.....	7
6. Outcomes and changes.....	8
7. Suggestions for improvement.....	8
8. Future ambitions and next steps.....	8

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Wandsworth case study

1. Local Context and Strategic Positioning

Wandsworth's Full Potential initiative is led by the Adult Learning Service. The borough has a well-established infrastructure supporting care-experienced young people (CEYP), including the Virtual School, leaving care team, and social services. Full Potential's initial focus is on CEYP who are already semi-engaged with EET progression in order to build early momentum.

Local consultation highlighted that young people want more work experience, which shaped the programme's core focus on paid internships and external placements. The borough is also leveraging its designation as the 2025 London Borough of Culture to create unique opportunities in the creative sector, including ringfenced roles for CEYP.

2. Overview of delivery model

Wandsworth's delivery model is dynamic and evolving, coordinated by a multi-disciplinary team including learning advisors, tutors, EET officers and internal partners. Key components include:

- **Paid internships and work experience placements, sourced through the Work Match team and other Council departments:** This includes two paid roles ringfenced for CEYP in the creative sector. Learning advisors support CEYP throughout the placement process, including application preparation, ready-for-work workshops and fortnightly check-ins during the internship.
- **Functional skills training, including literacy, numeracy and life skills-based English and Maths for ESOL learners:** These sessions may be delivered in-house or commissioned externally depending on learner needs.
- **One-to-one ESOL employability programme** where the young person works with an ESOL tutor to learn language skills that they can use in the workplace.
- **Customised tasters with FE and training providers aligned to CEYP's interests,** to help CEYP explore career paths before committing to longer-term learning. These include construction, personal budgeting, cooking, and AI and employability.
- **Mental health and wellbeing support, including one-to-one counselling and wellbeing action plans** to help participants take proactive steps to manage their mental health and improve chances of successful progression into EET. Additional funding has been allocated to expand specialist counselling capacity, particularly for NEET care leavers.
- **Work readiness support, such as CV writing, interview preparation and financial literacy:** This includes mock interviews and practical workshops. The programme

also includes financial literacy and planning skills, helping CEYP manage their finances as they transition into employment or independent living.

- **Enrichment activities, including museum visits, theatre trips and employer visits,** designed to support mental wellbeing and broaden CEYP's horizons.
- **Financial help:** To reduce barriers to engagement and help CEYP fully participate in learning and work opportunities, the programme provides starter packs that may include laptops, mobile phones, broadband, lunch, travel and clothing costs.
- **Governing board,** including a CEYP individual, feed back ideas to improve delivery.

3. Targeting, referral and early engagement

Young people are referred primarily through Personal Advisors (PAs) and internal teams including the Virtual School, participation team and social workers. Assessment days with block enrolment, incentives and food were useful to generate sign-ups. There are also some self-referrals and referrals from various community groups that are attended by CEYP. Staff found it surprising that despite having numerous meetings with Jobcentre Plus (JCP), they did not receive any referrals from JCP.

Wandsworth take a learner-led approach to enrolment and onboarding, finding out what young people want to do and achieve and then signposting them to the appropriate support within the Full Potential initiative.

"It's very, very learner led. So, yeah, we make them aware of the programmes that are available. But from the registration form, it's very much, what do you want? It's not about what we think is right for you. It's about where do you want to be, or what would you like to do."

(Delivery staff)

Delivery staff emphasised that initial engagement can be difficult, and that getting a CEYP to attend an enrolment meeting can itself represent progress. A major driver of engagement is the paid internship programmes available, meanwhile take-up of the mental health support offer has not been as high as expected.

4. Partnership model and roles

Wandsworth's partnership model combines internal Council coordination with external employer and training provider relationships. Internally, the Lifelong Learning team works closely with Work Match, the Virtual School and PAs to share information and tailor support. Externally, long-standing relationships with training providers and employers enable bespoke provision. Training providers work closely with the Council and Work Match to create joined-up pathways from training into paid work experience and employment.

A key example is the integration of Full Potential-funded care leaver internships into the borough's London Borough of Culture internship scheme. Arts and culture organisations receive £1,500 to support interns' needs such as laptops, training and experience days, helping engage small organisations with limited budget and capacity.

5. Support during and after participation

Support is intensive, relational and sustained beyond initial activity. Advisors conduct regular one-to-one check-ins, work closely with PAs to share contextual information, and support practical needs such as travel, clothing and lunch costs. They support progression, such as enrolling a young person from a course onto Work Match for relevant job vacancies. They complete an end-of-programme review to agree ongoing support, and follow up after three months to support CEYP who were not yet ready or able to secure work following their work experience. A distinctive feature of delivery is the balance between support and promoting accountability amongst CEYP, with staff emphasising the importance of preparing young people for workplace expectations while recognising complex circumstances.

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

Delivery staff and stakeholders reported gains in confidence, communication and self-belief. Young people often developed a more realistic understanding of their strengths and areas for development, such as interviews and workplace behaviour. Completion of courses was highlighted as a significant outcome for some young people who had previously struggled to sustain engagement. EET outcomes have included internships, apprenticeships, volunteering and further education.

7. Challenges and barriers

Engagement at referral stage remains challenging, particularly for young people who are not yet ready to participate. Advisors described enrolment forms as lengthy and sometimes repetitive, requiring staff to adapt language and pace to support understanding. Employment outcomes were described as harder to achieve than education outcomes, particularly where CEYP were far from the labour market or where accepting work was perceived as negatively impacting their benefits.

8. Innovations and promising practice

Wandsworth has **developed new bespoke programmes**, including the Jamie Oliver Ministry of Food course and AI and employability course, delivering tailored support through small-group learning aligned to individual needs and interests. Promising practice also **includes ring-fenced internships and placements for care leavers** in desirable sectors in the arts, newly funded **one-to-one English and maths support**, and the use of **youth forums** to shape provision in line with young people's priorities.

9. Learning and implications for broader rollout

Wandsworth's experience highlights the value of **learner-led, flexible delivery that can adapt to individual needs and interests**. Staff and stakeholders emphasised that confidence-building and education are often necessary precursors to employment. A key recommendation included **providing more pathways into employment**, such as funding employers to hire CEYP or creating longer internship opportunities.

Young Person: Lily

1. Background and referral pathway

Lily is a 19-year-old care-experienced young person (CEYP) who is currently undertaking a Business Administration internship within a Wandsworth Council team that she secured with the support of the Full Potential programme. Prior to joining the programme, she completed A-levels in Business, Accounting and IT but was not engaged in education, employment or training.

Lily was referred to a Skills Coach delivering Full Potential within Wandsworth Lifelong Learning by her Personal Advisor (PA). She was difficult to engage at first, and it took time and perseverance from the Skills Coach to help Lily feel comfortable reaching out.

Lily described the referral as straightforward and said she was interested in taking part because of the opportunity to access courses, improve her skills and receive help finding work. She completed an initial assessment and registration forms which largely focused on data protection.

2. Goals and expectations

At the point of joining Full Potential, Lily was primarily motivated by the opportunity to access courses, build skills and progress towards employment. She was initially keen to take part in face-to-face provision despite living some distance from Wandsworth as she wanted support that would help her improve her employability. Although Lily had some past work experience, she felt this was not really relevant, however she became more motivated when her Skills Coach explained that she has already built transferrable skills from her work experience.

"She said she's done quite a few jobs. And she said, 'Well, that's not really relevant', and I'm like every experience, every learning opportunity, every job, is relevant for your future, because you would have picked up skills and knowledge along the way, and it's just working out how you transfer them to an employer who is looking for those skills." (*Skills Coach*)

3. Experience of support

The support began with an in-person employability and skills course. Alongside this, Lily received one-to-one support from her Skills Coach via phone calls and Microsoft Teams. This included CV help, interview preparation and support to find apprenticeship opportunities. Following positive feedback from tutors on the employability course, the Skills Coach encouraged Lily to apply for a Business Administration internship, which she successfully secured. She is now also applying to an apprenticeship within Wandsworth Lifelong Learning.

4. Types of support received

- **Practical support:** An in-person employability and skills course, virtual one-to-one support with her Skills Coach, and tailored guidance to support her application for a Business Administration internship and subsequent apprenticeship opportunities.
- **Skills development:** Development of employability and digital skills, including learning how to use AI tools, as well as support to identify and articulate transferrable skills.
- **Practical assistance:** Travel costs were covered to address transport barriers, as Lily lives far from Wandsworth.
- **Delivery methods:** A mix of face-to-face provision and one-to-one support delivered via phone and Microsoft Teams, allowing flexibility to suit her circumstances.

Support was tailored to Lily's needs, and she reported having a positive relationship with those involved in delivery. She described her Skills Coach as nice and easy to get along with.

5. What worked well and why

A key factor in Lily's progress was the reassurance and encouragement provided by her Skills Coach, such as identifying transferrable skills and reinforcing her strengths. This helped build her motivation and confidence. When Lily raised concerns about barriers around coding and IT skills, her advisor reframed the Business Administration internship as an opportunity to build IT skills more broadly, rather than something narrowly focused on coding. This reassurance helped Lily feel more confident about taking the next step, and once she began the internship, she reported that she had learned a lot and was enjoying the role.

Another important factor was the voluntary nature of the Full Potential programme support, and the flexibility that this provided. Knowing that she could step away from the support if it was not working for her, and re-engage if needed, reduced pressure and made engagement feel more manageable.

"It's the knowing you can walk away if this is not for you. It's not school, it's not mandatory, but we obviously don't encourage that. You know, if you ever feel at any point that it's not working for you, give us a call and we'll find out why it's not working. We're not going to force them into it." (*Skills Coach*)

6. Outcomes and changes

Both Lily and her Skills Coach reported improvements in Lily's communication skills and confidence over the course of the Full Potential programme, particularly in her willingness to speak up and initiate contact.

"I feel like my communication with people has really improved. I don't know where that happened, but before, when I first started the programme, I wouldn't pick up the phone to [Skills Coach]. But I just felt like that's really improved now." (*Lily*)

Through the programme, Lily progressed into a Business Administration internship and is now applying for an apprenticeship, which her Skills Coach described as a positive and unexpected outcome that will make a big difference to her future progression. While the Skills Coach noted that Lily can struggle with her self-esteem, she has made progress and is expected to continue developing confidence as she completes her apprenticeship.

7. Suggestions for improvement

Lily did not have any suggestions for improvement to the support, as the support exceeded her expectations. She was surprised at the opportunities she has received and the rapid progress she has made.

"I'd only done one course. I didn't expect to be in a placement right now. It's come really fast." (*Lily*)

8. Future ambitions and next steps

Lily is enjoying her Business Admin internship and hopes to continue a career in this sector, which the programme has helped shaped her interest in.

If she were to apply for a role in the future, she felt that support with her CV and interview prep would help her to move towards her goals. Her Skills Coach expressed confidence that Lily is now in a strong position to progress from an apprenticeship into a permanent job as she will have already demonstrated her value in the role, and they can make reasonable adjustments for her during application stage due to her care experience background if needed.