

Building successful careers:

Employer guide to
supporting care leavers
in the workplace

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Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. We strive for a fair society in which learning and work helps people realise their ambitions and potential throughout life. We do this by researching what works, influencing policy and implementing new ways to improve people's experiences of learning and employment. We believe a better skilled workforce, in better paid jobs, is good for business, good for the economy, and good for society.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning and Work Institute believes that we all have a responsibility to enable care leavers, many of whom have had very difficult experiences as children, to have excellent opportunities as they make the transition into independent adult life.

Employers have a crucial role to play in this.

The aim of this guide is to highlight ways in which employers of all sizes, and from all sectors of the economy, can make a difference in supporting care leavers to develop the skills, experience and confidence they need to gain, stay and progress in work. By providing opportunities and offering sensitive and effective support, employers can enable care leavers to break down barriers to employment and support them to achieve their potential. In return, employers will benefit from fresh new talent, that bring different skills and perspectives to their businesses.

For more information about L&W's work with care leavers, please contact Nicola Aylward at nicola.aylward@learningandwork.org.uk.

ABOUT CARE LEAVERS

Care leavers are young people who have been looked after by the state, some for all of their childhood, and have subsequently left the care system or are in the process of doing so. Whilst some young people have excellent experiences of the care system and receive consistent and effective support, far too many do not, and, as a result, face difficulties and disadvantage throughout their lives.

Care leavers, like all young people, are different. Each young person is unique, with different interests, talents, goals and aspirations. However, it is well known that many care leavers face serious disadvantage growing up and that this can affect their long-term life chances. Having an awareness of the challenges and barriers that care leavers often face, while not making stereotypical assumptions, will help you to offer opportunities and support that are both appropriate, effective and make a difference in enabling care leavers to take the first steps in building successful careers.

Despite the challenges they face, young people who have been in local authority care have huge potential – they often just need some extra support in the early stages of their working lives to help unleash their talents and give them the confidence to build great careers. Like all young recruits, many care leavers bring energy, enthusiasm, a fresh perspective, a determination to achieve and technological know-how. Because of their experiences, many care leavers also develop a strong sense of resilience and independence, along with good problem solving skills and maturity beyond that of many of their peers. As an employer it's important to focus on the strengths and attributes that care leavers

bring – by doing so your business will benefit from employees who offer fresh new talent, energy and a range of skills.

Who is a care leaver?

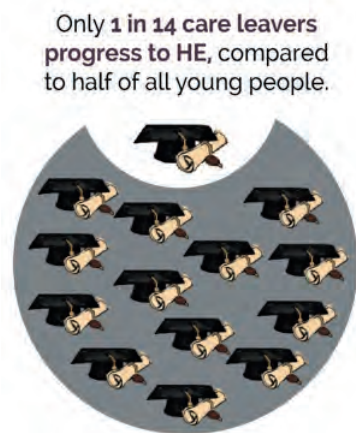
A care leaver is someone who has previously been in local authority care for 13 weeks from the age of 14 and is over 16 years old. There are around 70,000 children in care at any one time, which is around 0.6% of all children. Every year, around 10,000 16-18 year olds leave foster or residential care in England. Many young people leaving care face serious disadvantage in their lives, compared to their peers. Care leavers are one of the most marginalised and socially excluded groups in society.

Evidence shows that young people who have been in care do not have the same life chances as other young people. Frequent moves, instability and lack of positive role models can prevent young people in care from developing skills that are important in their transition to adulthood and independent living. Without parental support, this can be a lonely and frightening process when a young person suddenly needs to learn how to:

- Manage a home, including cooking and cleaning
- Budget and manage finances
- Understand benefits and entitlements
- Make decisions about their future
- Apply for courses or jobs
- Look after their own health and wellbeing

- Travel independently
- Manage relationships

These can all impact on a care leaver's ability to gain good qualifications at school, move on to further and higher education, gain an apprenticeship or secure stable employment.



Care leavers are almost three times as likely to be NEET than other young people.



Only 14% of young people in care gained five GCSEs at grades A* - C (including English and maths) in 2016, compared to 53% of all other young people



By offering care leavers the opportunity to improve their employability, gain work experience and potentially find a job, you will be

giving them the stability, focus and aspirations they need to achieve in training and work. This guide will help you to offer this support.

WHY EMPLOYERS SHOULD SUPPORT CARE LEAVERS

Here are just some of the reasons why you, as an employer, should support care leavers to gain, stay and progress in work.

1. It makes good business sense

In England, over 10,000 16 to 18 year olds leave care every year – these are your customers and potential customers. Providing good support to care leavers will improve your public profile and enable you to empathise and engage with a section of your customer base, while simultaneously helping these employees to be productive, confident and happy in their jobs.

2. It makes good use of the Apprenticeship Levy

The Government has a target of 3 million apprenticeship starts in England by 2020. From April 2017, all large employers in England are required to pay the Apprenticeship Levy. Money paid by employers is held in a digital account that they can use to recruit and train apprentices. Recruiting care leavers as apprentices is a great way for you to use your levy funding to bring new talent into your organisation. Alongside this, the government has set public sector bodies, such as local councils, hospitals and the civil service a target of employing at least 2.3% of their workforce as apprentices. This is a good opportunity for public sector employers to join up with local authorities and fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities towards care leavers.

3. You could receive financial support from the government

Employers who recruit a care leaver up to the age of 24 as an apprentice receive a £1,000 payment from the government. In addition, organisations with fewer than 50 employees will not have to contribute towards the training costs of these young people - the government will pay 100% of their training fees. For more information go to gov.uk and search for "Apprenticeship Funding".

4. It improves support for other employees

Many of the suggestions we make in this guide will be transferable to other employees. As an employer, you may not always know about the backgrounds of your staff and the challenges that employees face in their wider lives. By putting good support in place for care leavers you will be creating a working environment and culture that encourages other employees to access support. These changes can therefore have a wider benefit for all your staff.



5. It helps to create a diverse workforce

Care leavers have great potential as employees, but can sometimes be overlooked because they may not have characteristics which reflect their potential. This is because they have not benefited from the parental support which is important in equipping most young people with the skills and confidence to submit good job applications, prepare well for interviews and consider issues of travel, punctuality and appropriate and smart appearance. Providing a small amount of advice and support can help these young people become dedicated and confident employees and increase the diversity of your workforce.

6. It can make a huge difference to young people's lives

Many young people who have grown up in care have been seriously let down. A good learning or working experience at an early age will help care leavers to overcome the difficulties and challenges they have experienced and help them on their way to a happy, successful and independent adult life. It can provide opportunities to:

- Earn money
- Learn new skills
- Build confidence
- Get used to a working environment
- Understand the jobs and sectors in which they might work
- Take control of their lives and their futures

APPRENTICESHIPS FOR CARE LEAVERS

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An apprenticeship combines practical training in a job with study. Apprentices earn while they learn the skills needed for your business and receive on-the-job training from supervisors and other staff. They will also participate in off-the-job training at a learning centre to help them gain additional skills for the world of work as well as further knowledge and understanding of their job. Apprenticeships last for between one and four years and cover 1,500 job roles available in all sorts of trades like construction, catering and health care.

If you are a small employer, you would normally have to co-invest 10% of the training costs for an apprentice aged 19 or over. However, if you recruit a care leaver aged 24 or under as an apprentice then the government will cover 100% of their training fees, and you will get an additional payment of £1,000. An apprenticeship can therefore be a cost-effective way of supporting care leavers into employment.

If your organisation pays the Apprenticeship Levy then offering an apprenticeship for care leavers is a good investment of your levy funding, which should help to bring new talent into your organisation. You will also be able to claim an additional £1,000 for training a care leaver if they are aged 16 to 24.

Some organisations work with employers to offer apprenticeships specifically for care leavers. For example, Catch22 offers intermediate and advanced apprenticeships in business admin, sales and customer service. They tailor their programmes to the needs of young people, including care leavers, and ensure they have the support to succeed as an apprentice. Find out more at: www.catch-22.org.uk/apprenticeships

For more information on apprenticeships, visit the government's official website on apprenticeships and traineeships at www.getingofar.gov.uk.

For information on funding for apprenticeships, visit www.gov.uk and search for "Apprenticeship Funding".

Case study: Robin

Taking part in an apprenticeship is the best thing I've ever done. My apprenticeship with the local authority's Children's Services department allows me to experience lots of different roles that work with children. For example, I work in both the Direct Service team and the School Governors team. Because of this, I've been able to try out lots of different jobs and gain a much better idea of the career I want in the future. Being an apprentice has also given me the chance to gain a qualification while I work and I can use what I learn at college in my workplace and everyday life. I'm hoping to move onto a Level 3 apprenticeship next year and continue my learning journey.



HINTS AND TIPS FOR PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT TO CARE LEAVERS

This section gives some hints and tips for employers to support care leavers at each stage of their employment: pre-employment, recruitment and selection, ongoing support and progression.

These suggestions are exactly that, and you can pick and choose the ones which suit your workplace. You don't have to put all of this in place to support a care leaver, and not all of these tips are appropriate for every employer.

Pre-employment

Some care leavers may not feel prepared to move into formal education or employment

quite yet. They may feel they want to develop new skills or build their confidence to help them with that transition.

As an employer, you can offer opportunities which allow care leavers to prepare for the world of work. This could be as simple as offering work experience or job shadowing opportunities, or you could go down the route of a traineeship or supported internship.



Work experience

The Social Mobility Commission reports that disadvantaged young people can benefit the most from work experience, but are the least likely to receive these opportunities¹. Care leavers are likely to have even fewer opportunities than their peers, whose parents and families can open doors to the world of work by utilising their networks, offering work experience and helping them to build soft skills.

As an employer, you can offer work experience to help care leavers develop their skills, have something to include on their CV and make informed choices about their future careers. This is a low-cost, low-risk way of providing care leavers with a valuable experience of work (see below). You could offer a work placement as part of a traineeship.

Case study: Richele

Halfway through my A-levels I was moved out of my children's home. The pressure and responsibility of living independently at such a young age was overwhelming and had a negative impact on my learning. This meant my A-level grades were not particularly good. You need to have strong A-level grades to be able to apply for most graduate roles, especially in law, so even with my first class degree and all of my legal work experience behind me, I struggled to find a placement.

Thankfully, the law firm that I am now working for run a Legal Access Scheme

which the firm put in place to offer work experience placements to students from 'less conventional backgrounds', who are able to demonstrate strong potential.

Under the scheme, the firm was willing to waive its normal academic A-level criteria, due to my university and work experience achievements, as well as my determination to stay in education despite an extremely difficult time in my life. My work placement performance impressed everyone at the firm, so I was offered my current role as a trainee solicitor.

1 Social Mobility Commission (2016) State of the Nation 2016: Social Mobility in Great Britain

Job shadowing

Job shadowing can offer care leavers the opportunity to understand some of the different careers they could pursue and what each of these involves on a day-to-day basis. It also helps them to experience a workplace environment. This could be part of a work experience placement or an entirely separate activity you offer to care leavers.

Taking your expertise to a care leaver

Organisations such as charities, schools and colleges put on events for care leavers (and other young people) on a regular basis. You could get involved in these and offer your expertise to young people; it's a good way to promote your business at the same time as helping care leavers to get a realistic idea of the world of work. Some examples of events are:

HR speed dating

Interview care leavers for a few minutes and then give them feedback. Care leavers will move around the room so you get to interview multiple people. One organisation which offers this type of event with care leavers is Drive Forward (www.driveforwardfoundation.com).

Talks and presentations

You could offer to host a talk for care leavers about your profession and the routes into it. You could approach care leaver charities, schools, colleges or universities to see if this is something that they could help organise.

Visits and tours of your workplace

You could host a visit to your workplace for a group of care leavers. This could give them the opportunity to speak to employees in a number of different roles and see how your organisation works on a day-to-day basis. Again, care leaver charities, schools, colleges or universities could help you organise this activity.

Traineeships

Traineeships are an education and training programme with work experience. They last between six weeks and six months and are focused on helping young people aged 16-24 to prepare for an apprenticeship or other employment.

A traineeship gives a young person:

- work preparation training, to help ensure they are ready and have confidence to take their first step into a career;
- English and maths support, to ensure they have the skills that are needed in the workplace; and
- a work experience placement, providing them with valuable insight and real experience of the world of work.

Trainees are unpaid, but you would be expected to cover their costs (e.g. travel and lunch). If you're interested in offering traineeships to young people, a training provider will work closely with you to deliver the work preparation and English and maths elements of the programme, often before the young person progresses onto their work placement with you. However, you could provide input into their work preparation training, to ensure that they gain the

right knowledge and skills for your workplace. For more information on traineeships, visit www.getingofar.gov.uk.

Case study: Harvey

Harvey participated in Hampshire County Council's traineeship which is targeted specifically at care leavers. The qualification units on the programme helped Harvey to develop his self-esteem and demonstrate his skills. His work placement with Hampshire Transport Management (HTM) also gave him the opportunity to experience working life in a mechanics setting and he received very good feedback from his placement manager. As a result of his traineeship, Harvey has gained an apprenticeship with HTM, where he will continue to work towards his goals and achieve his English and maths qualifications.

Supported internships

Supported internships are a study programme based primarily with an employer. They enable young people aged 16-24 with a statement of Special Education Needs, a Learning Difficulty Assessment or an Education, Health and Care plan to achieve sustainable paid employment by equipping them with the skills they need for work, through learning in the workplace. Because care leavers are four times as likely to have a statement of SEN than other young people, it is likely that you could offer a care leaver the opportunity to be a supported intern with your organisation.

Supported internships are unpaid and last for a minimum of six months. Wherever possible, they support the young person to move into paid employment at the end of the programme. Alongside their time at the employer, young people complete a personalised study programme which includes the chance to study for relevant substantial qualifications, if appropriate, and English and maths.

For more information go to:

<http://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/what-we-do/supported-internships>

Participating in a national or local programme

If you want to support care leavers, or are approached by a care leaver looking for experience, but do not feel able to do this on your own, you could work with one of the below organisations which offer work preparation programmes for this group of young people.

From Care2Work

This is a national programme managed by Catch22 which helps care leavers gain the work experience and skills they need to enter the workforce. From Care2Work organises placements for care leavers and works with employers and local authorities to ensure they are supported effectively. For more information go to: www.catch-22.org.uk/care-leavers.

The Prince's Trust: Get Into programme

This is a UK wide programme which covers work experience placements and on the job training in specific sectors. These cover retail, construction, logistics and hospitality. During the programme, care leavers will benefit from one-to-one support to help them think about what they'd like to do after the course finishes, and will have the option of support either from the staff or a volunteer mentor for up to six months. The programme is free and open to 16-25 year olds who aren't in work, education or training.

For more information go to:

www.princes-trust.org.uk/help-for-young-people/get-job/get-experience

Catch-22: Sector Skills Academies

Catch-22 provides work experience across a range of sectors, including customer service, business administration/management, sales, hospitality and leisure. They have a lot of experience in supporting care leavers to reach their goals and get into work, and will always be keen to speak to employers who want to offer work experience to young people. For more information visit:

www.catch-22.org.uk/work-ready/

Catch-22: Work Ready Programme

Catch-22 also offer a "Work Ready Programme" - a UK wide programme which offers support with CV preparation, intensive job searches and interview preparation. It also provides training focused on developing skills for specific occupational roles, coaching and ongoing support. The programme is free and is open

to 16-24 year olds. For more information go to: www.catch-22.org.uk/work-experience

Local provision

Individual councils also run programmes to help young people, including care leavers, into work. This may be delivered in house by the leaving care service or other parts of the council, or by other services such as local charities. Contact your local authority to find out what is available in your area.

Case study: Barnardo's Work Preparation Programme

Barnardo's runs Lincolnshire County Council's leaving care service and has developed a Work Preparation Programme for care leavers aged 16-21. The programme is tailor-made to meet each care leaver's needs with intensive support provided throughout. Each young person has a one-to-one meeting with the course coordinator to assess their level of commitment, expectations and interests in relation to work. They then participate in a two-day course to help them think about the skills and knowledge needed to be the 'perfect employee'. Following this, care leavers have the opportunity to undertake a 13-week placement with a suitable employer. All employers are provided with clear guidance on roles and responsibilities and advice on any training needs. At the end of the programme, employers may offer the young person an employment opportunity or provide a reference for future job applications. Young people can also progress onto Barnardo's Care Leaver Apprenticeship Scheme (CLAS).

Jobcentre Plus initiatives

Jobcentre Plus also has a number of initiatives which you could get involved in or signpost care leavers to:

Jobcentre Plus Supported Voluntary Work Experience Placement

If a care leaver is 16 to 24 and receiving Jobseeker's Allowance, they can get a work experience opportunity through Jobcentre Plus. This can last between two and eight weeks, and the young person would normally be expected to work between 25 and 30 hours a week to provide a realistic experience of work.

They will remain on benefit throughout the opportunity providing they meet the requirements of their benefits. Funding is available to cover travel, childcare, replacement care and other costs involved in doing the placement.

Jobcentre Plus Work Trials

This is a trial period in an actual job – it is not a work placement or work experience. A work trial provides the chance to try out a job and keep getting benefits. The trial can last up to a maximum of 30 working days and you might offer the young person a job at the end.

This is a great way of finding out whether a young person is suitable for a job in your organisation. Care leavers can undertake a work

trial from day one of their Jobseeker's Allowance claim, so you could offer them this opportunity straight away. Explain that their participation is voluntary and they can leave early or turn down a job if offered without affecting their benefits.

Youth Obligation

From April 2017, the "Youth Obligation" will be introduced for all young people aged 18 to 21 who are unemployed. If a care leaver is in this age range, this means that:

- From 'Day 1' of their claim, they may participate in a three-week Intensive Activity Period of support, learning job- search and interview techniques, receiving structured work preparation and applying for work opportunities or work- related training;
- If they are still claiming benefit after six months, and are not in work, on an apprenticeship or participating in work-related training, they may be required to go on a mandatory work placement to give them the skills they need to get on in work;
- They will have tailored, flexible support if they are already in work but need to increase their earnings.

For more information on any of these initiatives, contact Jobcentre Plus: www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus, call: 0345 6060 234 or visit your local Jobcentre Plus office.

Case study: Squire Patton Boggs Law Firm

Squire Patton Boggs Law Firm and Drive Forward Foundation partnered in 2015 under the Movement to Work programme, propelled by a shared belief in helping young people achieve their career ambitions. Since their first meeting, the law firm have placed eight care leavers into fantastic work placements across their reception, maintenance, administration and legal departments. Two paid job offers were made, and one young person is now working full-time in Business Development at the firm. Informal careers advice meetings between lawyers and young people have taken place, providing care leavers with insight into the law sector. Professionals from the law firm have also volunteered for Drive Forward's HR Speed Dating event. Squire Patton Boggs and Drive Forward are currently looking at other ways they can work together in the future and the firm have confirmed that a legal shadowing placement for a care leaver will be offered in the next year.

Recruitment and selection

For a care leaver, the process of applying for a job may be very different from that of a young person who has not lived in care. While individual lives and circumstances vary, some care leavers will not have had the parental and authoritative advice, support and guidance that many young people take for granted and which help them to submit good job applications, prepare well for interviews and consider issues of travel, punctuality and appropriate dress.

The following tips will help you put good support in place for care leavers when advertising and interviewing for any job vacancies.

Advertising

You may not know whether an applicant is a care leaver – many will be reluctant to declare their experiences of care as they will be unsure how employers will react to this information. This can make it difficult to put additional support in place for care leavers during the recruitment and selection process.

To overcome this, you could guarantee interviews to any care leavers who apply. This could encourage young people to identify themselves as a care leaver, and will mean that they get valuable experience of participating in an interview, whether or not you offer them a job.

You should make it clear in your recruitment materials that you welcome applications from people from all backgrounds, including those who have previously been in care. You should also provide information on how applicants can declare information that may be relevant to the recruitment process – this could include disabilities or caring responsibilities, as well as experience of being in care.

When advertising a vacancy, as well as the usual routes (newspapers, your website, etc.) consider publicising the vacancy via:

- Any local organisations that work with care leavers
- 'Care Leavers' or 'Looked After Children' teams within your local authority

- Local colleges
- Social networking sites (while it can be useful to advertise vacancies this way, it is not advisable to take applications via this route).

Rees: The Care Leavers Foundation has a page on its website for organisations to advertise opportunities for care leavers. This could be anything from an open day or talk about your profession, to a full-time permanent job. For more information, visit: www.reesfoundation.org/our-services/opportunities

Interviewing

When interviewing young people, and care leavers specifically, having a relatively informal and semi-structured approach to the interview is advisable. Consider using a variety of interview techniques, such as question and answer, role play, presentation, tasks and exercises, to vary the format and to ensure people with different learning styles can take part and are provided with the opportunity to showcase their strengths.

It is also possible to put into place some additional support for all applicants that will offer enhanced support at the interviewing stage of the recruitment process. This will ensure that care leavers are given extra support to put them on a level playing field with other applicants. This support could include:

- Offering those who have been asked to an interview pre-interview support, such as details of what the interview will entail so they can prepare successfully.
- Letting all applicants know what is expected of them in terms of dress and presentation.
- Offering applicants the opportunity for an informal visit to the organisation, accompanied by someone supporting them.
- Providing a named contact for questions or concerns prior to the interview.
- Giving people a phone call before the interview or their first day to say you are looking forward to seeing them and to check they know where they are going. Some people may not turn up due to fear, but an encouraging phone call can work wonders.

If you are in contact with a support worker who is working with a young person selected for interview, it might be worth suggesting to them that they help the young person prepare, by thinking about what interview questions might be asked, considering their answers and practising a mock interview.

A greater awareness of the likely circumstances of care leavers will ensure that you are better able to understand their needs throughout the recruitment process. For example, if someone is not as well presented as you would expect, do not assume this signifies apathy towards the job - they may be living alone on a low income and/or may not have parental guidance to ensure they are smartly and appropriately presented.

Case study: Mohammad

When I first moved into my own flat, I wasn't very happy because it was in a really run down area. I didn't have much money and wanted to find a good job. I still met up occasionally with my Personal Adviser who suggested I apply for a job with a local business she worked with. They guaranteed me an interview because I was a care leaver, but I still put a lot of effort into my application. My PA helped me practise for the interview and think about the questions they could ask me. The business's HR Manager also gave me some information about how to get to their office and what I would be asked to do for the interview, which really helped. I was really nervous on the day but the people who interviewed me were very friendly and reassuring. I must've made a good impression too as they offered me the job on the same day!

Ongoing support

Young people have a range of different attitudes and needs in relation to learning and work. Staff who provide support to care leavers have a key role to play in enabling them to be a productive and dedicated employee. The following hints and tips are aimed at line managers and supervisors of care leavers to help you make the most of their talents and skills.

1. Provide support for care leavers to understand their role

This is likely to be the young person's first experience of employment and so they might

need some additional support to understand their role and the expectations of them in the workplace.

Some care leavers will have had sporadic and often negative experiences of schooling, so they may not have learned key skills such as timekeeping and meeting deadlines. Try to bear this in mind and make your expectations of them very clear as soon as they start with your organisation.

A care leaver may need enhanced support to:

- Understand their job description, their role and how to complete their work effectively;
- Understand precisely what is expected of them as an employee; and
- Feel they are valued and part of a wider team.

2. Make sure care leavers feel listened to and valued

The feeling of being listened to and valued can have a positive effect on a young person's self-esteem and confidence - which many care leavers lack. For many care leavers, being supported by their manager offers an opportunity to form an attachment, based on trust, to an adult, which creates a space in which the young person can grow and develop. For some care leavers, such attachments will have been few and far between. But it is these attachments that are so important in empowering a young person to take control of their life, fostering a sense of self-worth and moving forwards in a positive way.

Supporting care leavers will require a specific, tailored and understanding approach:

- **Be on a level with the young person.** A friendly relationship in which you take an interest in the young person, get to know them and empathise with them can be crucial in building a productive and trusting relationship.
- **Give clear directions and instructions and offer appropriate support.** The young people you are working with may initially need you to work with them to show them how to do things - don't just leave them on their own to get on with it. Provide an appropriate level of support, whilst ensuring that they feel empowered and supported to get things done, make their own decisions and recognise the small steps of achievement that they make. Focus on the strengths and the positive attributes that the young person has. Many young people will bring energy, enthusiasm, a fresh perspective, a dedication to achieve and technological know-how to their future careers. Celebrate and use these strengths and focus on how they can enhance their skills further.
- **Set goals.** Work with the young person to help them set goals and outcomes for themselves and work out the steps they need to take to achieve them. Don't just live in the here and now - help the young person start to think about their longer term goals and how they might reach them.
- **Be positive.** Identify the young person's potential, tell them what you see as their strengths, and give them praise and feedback for positive achievements.

- **Be appropriately challenging.** Part of your role is to enable the young person to develop by taking on new challenges. Don't be afraid to challenge negative or disruptive behaviour, or to guide them in terms of appropriate behaviour. If you need to pass on negative feedback do this in a non-judgemental and non-confrontational way, help the young person work out how to address issues and ask them how you can support them in this.

3. Talk them through any information you provide

Ensure they are kept well informed of their rights and entitlements related to joining pension schemes and unions, accessing childcare schemes, undertaking flexible working, etc. Be aware that, unlike other young people, they may not have parents or carers with whom they can discuss issues, seek guidance, and make decisions. This can be a lonely and difficult position. Support the young person by not just providing information but offering to talk them through it to help them make an informed decision.

4. Provide holistic support and put their actions in context

Don't forget that care leavers may need some support about things other than the job role - make sure they know what they can do and where they can go at lunchtime. Check they are able to travel to work.

If they don't turn up at work and don't phone in, try to find out why. Don't just assume the worst and discipline them. They may be extremely worried about something at work - but rather than discuss it, they avoid it. They may be going through a very difficult time with their mental health, contact from family members, or moving out to live independently. Don't jump to conclusions, but take the time to find out the situation and see if you can help rectify it.

However, you also need to make it clear that the young person is an employee and that there are certain expectations of them in the workplace. Although you should be supportive and try to find out the reasons behind any unexplained absences or negative behaviour, you also need to ensure that these are addressed and support is put in place to reduce the likelihood of them happening again. If you do not manage the young person effectively, then they will have little chance of becoming a good employee, may not perform their role to the required standard and they may come away with a negative experience of work.

Finally, at the risk of stating the obvious, don't ask them about their personal circumstances or history of being in care. They may choose to bring it up themselves, but you should never broach the subject with them yourself.

Case study: Jemima

When I finished my admin course at college I decided that I didn't want to do more education - I wanted to earn some money and gain some experience in a real job. My Personal Adviser helped me to start looking and applying for work, and I soon got a job as an admin assistant with a local estate agents. I was really nervous the day before I started but I didn't need to be - everyone is really supportive and helpful. I can be honest with my manager and trust her to keep my personal life private. I work in a very target driven business so I need to let them know if I'm going to be late, but they're very understanding if I need to take time off at short notice - as long as it doesn't happen too often! The support I get at work makes a massive difference to me. It means I can manage what's happening at home with a job that I really enjoy.

Progression

A key role of any manager is to help your employee develop. Many care leavers have low aspirations in relation to education, training and employment. Care leavers may find it difficult to think of themselves as having a career that they can progress through if they have had disjointed experiences of education. Young people are also more likely than older people to only think about their short-term futures, rather than considering their long-term trajectories.

You can play a vital role in supporting a care leaver in the first stages of their career path and helping them grow on the job. You can help the young person to view themselves as being in the early stages of their career journey, so they do not come to see their job as an isolated activity, but instead as the first rung of the ladder of their career and as part of a greater journey. There are lots of ways you can do this:

- Emphasise to the young people you support that having a job is the first and best step they can take towards having a better job. Though they may not be earning very much at first, they will be gaining valuable experience and confidence in their work which will make them more attractive to future employers.
- Help the young person to consider what they may want their long-term career to look like and what they might need to do to achieve this.
- Make sure they are not left with just menial tasks, but instead are given appropriately challenging work that enables them to develop new skills and try new things. Help them to learn how they personally learn and grow in skills so that they can reflect on these skills and apply them in other settings.
- Be proactive in seeking out tailored opportunities for formal and informal training for them, such as opportunities for shadowing more experienced colleagues, or opportunities to develop or improve skills in particular areas where an individual need has been identified.
- If your team or organisation has carried out a Training Needs Analysis, see if you can support your care leaver to develop skills identified as a need for the workplace. Liaise with the young person and human resources staff to identify suitable training and development needs and opportunities. Doing this will have the added effect of making the young person feel valued as part of the organisation.
- Keep records of the young person's goals, actions and training activities to help them see how they have progressed.

USEFUL WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

The following pages have information on care leavers, which you might find useful to read.

Barnardo's

A charity working to support children, young people and the organisations working with them.

Web: www.barnardos.org.uk

Become

Information and support for young people living in care and the professionals supporting them.

Web: www.becomecharity.org.uk

Care Leavers' Association

The Care Leavers' Association is a national charity and network which offers information and advice, runs projects and campaigns on behalf of care leavers of all ages.

Web: www.careleavers.com

Catch22

Catch22 offer a range of employability and training programmes tailored to the needs of disadvantaged young people, including care leavers, and employers.

Web: www.catch-22.org.uk

Get in Go far

The government's official website on apprenticeships and traineeships. It provides lots of information about these programmes and lets you search for apprenticeships and traineeships online.

Web: www.getingofar.gov.uk

GOV.UK

A government website providing information about a range of public services, including education and employment, money, tax and benefits, and health and well-being.

Web: www.gov.uk

Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus supports people into work and has lots of different initiatives for employers and people looking for jobs. They also provide information and advice about claiming benefits.

Web: www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus

Tel: 0800 055 6688

National Apprenticeship Service

This website has lots of information about apprenticeships and traineeships including frequently asked questions.

Web: www.apprenticeships.org.uk

Tel: 08000 150 600

Prince's Trust

The Prince's Trust runs programmes for young people aged 14-30, including young people in care and care leavers, to help people move into work, education or training.

Web: www.princes-trust.org.uk

Tel: 0800 842 842

See Potential

A government-led campaign which aims to help businesses fill skills gaps and diversify their workforces by hiring people from disadvantaged groups, including care leavers.

Web: <https://seepotential.campaign.gov.uk>

Tel: 0800 842 842

Skills Support for Care Leavers

A website with lots of information on learning and work options for care leavers and the support they should receive in education and employment.

Web: www.skillssupport.org.uk



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