

Promoting the Achievement of Care Leavers (PACL) in Lewisham

November 2022

A case study of pathways into education, employment and
training for care leavers in Lewisham

A development of

**Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children
(PALAC)**

Supported by



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Education of children in care

As of March 2021, there were 80,850 children and young people in care in England. The number of looked after children has continued to increase steadily over the last eight years.¹ Sixty-three per cent of these children are in care because of abuse or neglect and just under three-quarters (72%) are placed in foster care arrangements. Children and young people who are in or have experienced care remain one of the lowest performing groups in terms of educational outcomes. The average Attainment 8 score for children in care was 19.1 compared to 44.6 for non-looked after children and 19.2 for children in need. In 2019, the percentage of children in care achieving a pass in English and Mathematics (grade 5 or above at GCSE) remained similar to 2018 at 7.2% compared to 40.1% for non-looked after. Care leavers can experience poorer employment and health outcomes after leaving school compared to their peers. They are over-represented amongst the offender population and those who experience homelessness. However, research is emerging to show that children and young people in care can have very positive experiences of school if they are supported effectively to reach their potential academically and socially.²

1.2 What is PACL?

PACL (Promoting the Achievement of Care Leavers) is a knowledge exchange programme led by UCL Institute of Education and funded by the Portal Trust. The aim of the programme is to support the development of practice across education, employment and training (EET) to ultimately improve outcomes for care-experienced young people. It seeks to achieve this aim by providing a forum for knowledge exchange between professionals and researchers. The field of EET for this group of young people is under-researched, particularly in relation to the application of practice. If we as professionals and researchers wish to see greater improvements in outcomes for this group of young people, it is vital that we come together, over a sustained period of time, to investigate how the evidence base that does exist might be

¹ Department for Education (2021) Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2021
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850306/Children_looked_after_in_England_2019_Text.pdf
² C. Carroll and C. Cameron (2017). *Taking Action for Looked After Children in School*. London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

applied to a particular setting and then how this collective knowledge might be used to inform the wider research community.

The current programme is an extension of the successful Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) piloted in December 2014. PALAC is now at the start of its eighth year with over 100 schools from twenty Local Authorities (LA) across England and Wales having participated in the project. In February 2017 we held the first PALAC national conference and this event provided an opportunity to celebrate the projects carried out with our partners in schools, virtual schools and local authorities. We also launched 'Taking action for Looked after Children in School', the first book of case studies from the programme (Carroll and Cameron 2017).

The PACL programme has identified seven evidence-informed domains around which settings focus professional development and learning:

- 1. Putting care-experienced young people at the heart of planning and decision-making**
- 2. Identification and development of skills and talents in young people**
- 3. Sustained supported relationships and ongoing connection with key people**
- 4. Appropriate and responsive skills development and vocational training opportunities are available**
- 5. Relevant and broad opportunities available, including apprenticeships, training, entrepreneurial guidance and access to creative industries**
- 6. Whole system planning and reflection**
- 7. Integrated transition planning – housing, income, health, education and emotional support**

Settings focus their PACL projects around one or two domains that are most relevant to their organisations. To enable this, organisations are given a PACL Audit Tool, which details the domains and gives examples of how practice might look in this area.

1.3 Extracts from the PACL Audit Tool:

The Audit Tool:

<p>Putting care-experienced young people at the heart of planning and decision-making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider whole setting development plans hold the needs of care experienced young people at the core of all practice • Holistic information about the young person is gathered on entry to the setting (admissions processes) • Creative, person-centred opportunities are designed to enable the engagement of young person in decision-making • Design and planning of initiatives is based around the needs of care-experienced children and incorporates their perspectives at all elements of the design and implementation process. • Opportunities are rigorously pursued for care leavers to thrive within the community. 	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="background-color: red; color: white;">Not yet developed</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: yellow;">Developing</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: green;">Well developed</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Not yet developed		Developing		Well developed		
Not yet developed								
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<p>Appropriate and responsive skills development and vocational training opportunities are available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver timely and appropriate interventions • Develop clear pathways of support that are shared with the young person • Provide clear information and adequate reflection time to obtain the opinions and perspectives of young people. • Identification and development of skills and talents are personalised to the young person, building on interests and linking to opportunities available within the community • Ensure there is a holistic and accurate understanding of needs to identify potential barriers 	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="background-color: red; color: white;">Not yet developed</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: yellow;">Developing</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: green;">Well developed</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Not yet developed		Developing		Well developed		
Not yet developed								
Developing								
Well developed								

The Audit Tool also offers links to support practitioners, organised across each domain:

The Audit Domains and links to useful resources:

Audit domain:	Recommended Resources:
<p>Putting care-experienced young people at the heart of planning and decision-making.</p>	<p>Social Technical Educational, Environmental and Psychological (STEEP) Multi-agency Planning tool for assessing and overcoming barriers for CLA. Full guide and template available at: https://afaeducation.org/free-dt-resources/explore-our-resources/steep-identify-barriers-and-solutions-in-your-setting/</p> <p>Pathway Plan – Integrated Children’s system or forma and guidance for Pathway planning for Care leavers. Developed to support good practice in recording for Children’s services. http://www.writeenough.org.uk/formats_ics_pathway_plan.htm http://www.writeenough.org.uk/format_ics_pathway_plan.pdf</p> <p>Guidance on Pupil Voice and Person-Centred Planning: -Relevant for learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Provides differentiated materials and resources to prepare for PCP. https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/information-advice-and-support-programme/useful-resources-publications-animations/what-person-centred-planning PDF version: https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/AR.Personcentredplanningmeetings.FINAL_1.pdf</p> <p>NDTi Preparing for Adulthood – Person-centred planning resources Resources to support preparing for adulthood and person-centred planning. https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk</p> <p>This includes a Vocational Profile template and Planning my Future template https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads/person-centred-planning</p>

Organisations are encouraged to use the Audit Tool as an opportunity to reflect on their strengths, aspirations and vision for next steps. These discussions are the basis upon which the action plans are developed. An action plan template is provided to facilitate this process.

1.4 The role of the PACL Facilitator

Each group of participants was allocated a facilitator during the sixth month project. The PACL Facilitator role draws very much on the ‘specialist coaching’ role described in the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (CUREE, 2014) and also as a facilitator of knowledge exchange between practitioners, professionals and researchers at UCL IOE. The facilitator also wrote the case studies featured in this document.

Specifically, the role of the facilitator is to:

- i. support in the creation, implementation and monitoring of the action plan;
- ii. act as an ongoing resource for participants on any issues and questions;

- iii. support with the evaluation and research element of the project in settings/practice and
- iv. writing up the final project for a case study and publication.

The facilitator organised two meetings during the programme and made regular telephone/email contact to support each team to develop the programme in their setting.

2. CASE STUDIES

2.1 Lewisham Virtual School Post 16 Team

A new model of practice: The Pathways Programme

Background

In local authorities with a strong ethos of corporate parenting, the sense of vision and responsibility towards looked after children and care leavers is a priority for everyone from the Chief Executive to front line staff. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 established seven fundamental needs (collectively known as the corporate parenting principles) to which the local authority must have regard when they are carrying out functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers. One of these seven fundamental needs is to prepare looked after children and young people for adulthood and independent living³.

In line with the Children Act 1989, and the corporate parenting principles, young people transitioning from care should be supported to continue their education and achieve their aspirations. Virtual School Headteachers have an important role in this both as strategic leaders and local champions, with the duty of Virtual Schools to promote the educational achievement of a looked after child extended to looked after young people aged 16 or 17 preparing to leave care⁴. More recently, Virtual School Headteachers' effectiveness in this area has been recognised in the extension of their duties to the tracking and monitoring of all children with a social worker so that their leadership and experience can benefit other children with a social worker, targeting support earlier on and helping to improve how they engage with education⁵.

At post 16 there are unique challenges in promoting the educational achievement of looked after children and in ensuring a successful educational transition, in particular the cumulative effect of multiple transitions at this stage on young people's lives. There appears, however, to be an increasing focus on, and

³ DfE Promoting the education of looked- after children and previously looked- after children. Statutory guidance for local authorities, February 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>

⁴ DfE Promoting the education of looked- after children and previously looked- after children. Statutory guidance for local authorities, February 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>

⁵ DfE Promoting the education of children with a social worker. Virtual School Head role extension, June 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/virtual-school-head-role-extension-to-children-with-a-social-worker>

commitment to, giving care experienced young people a ‘second chance’ to embark on pathways matched with their potential at post-16⁶.

This case study describes how Lewisham Virtual School developed a distinct model of practice, The Pathways Programme, to enrich and strengthen their offer of post 16 intervention and support for all care leavers on their pathway to education, employment or training.

PACL Audit domains

Through the audit tool, Lewisham Virtual School team identified the following domains to underpin the next steps in developing their Pathways Programme:

Whole system planning and reflection

Integrated transition planning – housing, income, health, education and emotional support

What did the team do?

Virtual Schools are required to report on the outcomes of looked after children at key stage 4 including their destinations in the year following their GCSE study. This is also published at national level, derived from information collected in the census from local authorities’ statistical data and includes those children who were previously looked after who left care through adoption, special guardianship, or child arrangements order⁷. Although valuable data, it does not capture groups of care experienced young people following alternative trajectories such as those on apprenticeship schemes or those who need more time and support while engaging in other activities (e.g.: mentoring or attending youth club).

Mindful of this, Lewisham Virtual School sought to create a pathways model which would enable them to track, monitor and evaluate the progress of all young people in their care and not only those likely to achieve qualifications through GCSE study, or those following a conventional route of study at post 16. In

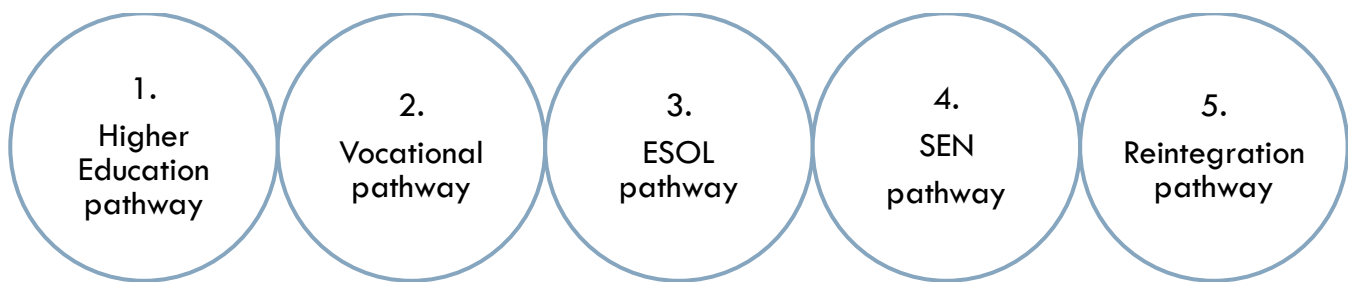
⁶ Driscoll, J., 2013. Supporting the educational transitions of looked after children at Key Stage 4: The role of virtual schools and designated teachers. *Journal of Children’s Services* 8 (2) DOI:[10.1108/JCS-09-2012-0006](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCS-09-2012-0006)

⁷ DfE. 2022. Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england/2021>

in addition, the model would identify pathways for all looked after children and those new into care from Year 10 onwards, supporting aspirations by meeting them at their starting point whatever their academic qualification level or perceived skills, to ensure that they had the most appropriate interventions and support available to achieve this whether the goal be movement into work, progressing on to higher education, gaining an ESOL qualification, or gaining entry level qualifications.

This led to the development of the Pathways Programme; a model with five strands reflecting different pathway routes into education, employment and training at post 16:

Figure 1 – Lewisham Virtual School Pathway Programme Model



This framework enabled the team to create a model of practice offering support and intervention for all care experienced young people whatever their need, skill set or level, including those young people needing support with reintegrating back into EET.

As a next step, it was important to the team that they could establish a robust information system that would enable them to draw together the following data: identify who their cohort of young people are; track and monitor their progression through each pathway; develop and put in place a package of interventions appropriate to the young person's aspirations; measure the impact of interventions and gather the voice of the young person.

This was underpinned by the following overarching questions:

- How do we gather meaningful data without adding burden to the team?
- What do we need in order to know where we are making a difference?
- What do we need in order to know where things are not effective and/or not an efficient use of time and/or resources?

- Are there any 'quick wins', e.g., by using existing tools such as Asset (IMS) in a slightly different or enhanced way?

The team decided to use their current information management system (Asset) and develop this so they could record individual's personal details, monitor their progress as they journeyed through the pathway and measure the impact of support and intervention. Triple complexity was noted: the complexity of supporting young people into life opportunities; the multi-model nature of potential data (qualitative and quantitative) and the differing inputs and outputs for each pathway.

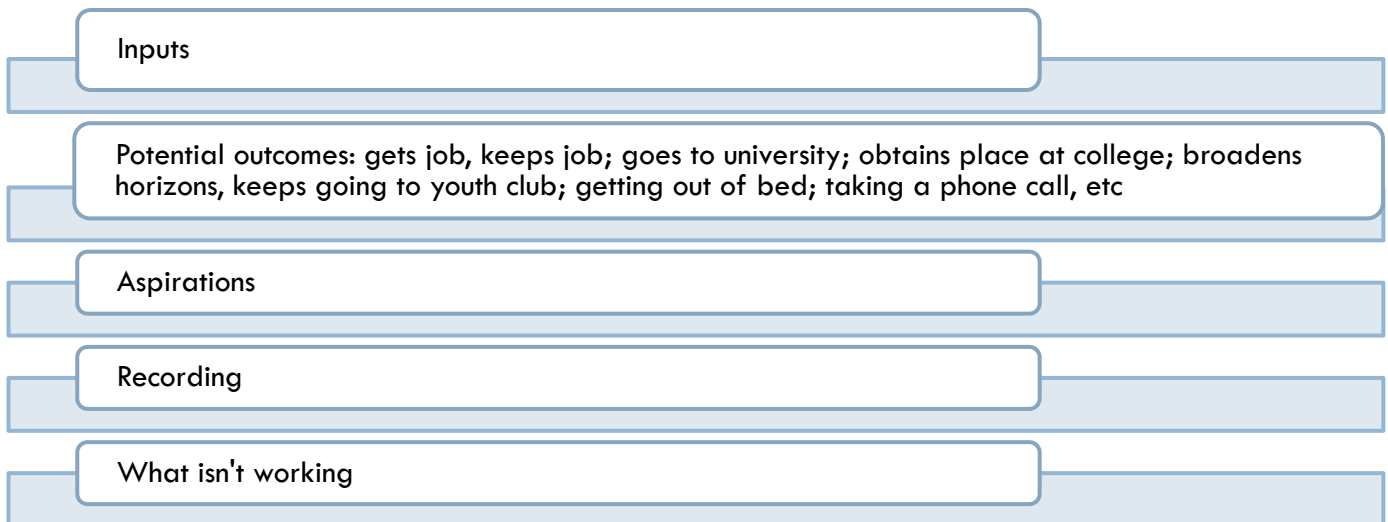
In discussion with the PACL Facilitator, the team reflected on the capacity of the information management system (Asset) to give enhanced functionality, for example, extending the drop-down menu to include multiple selection, each inputted automatically on a different cell and the use of impact measures such as the 'high/medium/low impact' drop down to code activities' effectiveness. In addition to this, the team reflected on the importance of having case notes recorded so that they were readily available for deep dive reporting. It was recognized that the qualitative narratives may be challenging to analyse as outputs are different for each pathway.

Through continued discussion it became apparent that each pathway's cohort had a unique set of needs and activities particular to the pathway, making it difficult to devise a universal data method across the Pathways Programme model. For example, the Reintegration cohort may need to measure impact in a different way through contact type, contact frequency, contact length, contact meaningfulness to understand amount of resources (e.g. time) needed to underpin successful outcomes. It was also noted that, with this pathway, outcomes may be surprising such as a 'life event' causing a change in aspiration, but that the role of the teams' input, visibility, consistency, and unconditional positive regard/hopefulness may be impactful in ways that are difficult to measure. Therefore, this may be best captured as a story or case study or narrative.

The ESOL pathway may need to measure the type of activity and intervention a young person is offered, how often that is offered and the frequency and depth of engagement. It was noted that it is not easy to analyse the number of young people in receipt of an intervention such as CAMHS or other support, e.g., mentoring or attendance at youth club. Similarly, the Higher Education pathway may need to measure the

types of relationships that are built between the Virtual School and Higher Education Institutions, young people and their potential wider community and how these support the young person into raising aspirations and accessing a wider range of opportunities.

Through discussion it was decided that each pathway would focus on different core criteria and for each pathway the team would identify:



This work would be undertaken by the Pathway Lead for each pathway and supported by the key stage 5 Assistant Headteacher.

In terms of quantitative data, it was agreed that *Level Progress* could be reported at the end of the academic year and the team would be able to report data for each pathway by examining if young people were moving up 1, 2 or 3 levels within each pathway or whether they remained static. Furthermore, outcomes could be reported at the end of the year with the team able to report on the percentage of Year 12 students remaining in EET in Year 13 and % of Year 13 students planning to remain in EET in Year 14. Pathway changes could be reported termly and broken down into a report for each pathway. In terms of qualitative data, case studies could be produced termly and demonstrate work and outcomes that might not otherwise be captured by quantitative data.

The Role of the Pathway Lead

Within the Pathway Programme model, the team planned for every young person aged 16 to 18 years to have a designated Pathway Lead. The Pathway Lead plays a central role in supporting the educational outcomes of their care leavers and works closely with young people supporting them on the pathway as they transition to post 16. The key elements of their role are to:

- have oversight of the pathway
- develop targeted interventions to respond to the needs of young people on this pathway
- identify their cohort and understand their needs
- develop a timeline of activities for the pathway
- connect to EET opportunities
- make connections with the young person and their carer

With the Pathway Leads established, the team spent time reflecting on the five different strands they had in place and the development of support and intervention for each pathway. In order to have clear oversight of the interventions developing within the Pathways Programme, they conducted a provision mapping exercise to map out each of the strands and gain an overview of how intervention and support was growing in each area. This also helped them to create a timeline of interventions across the different year groups for each pathway.

The following illustration reflects in more detail emerging criteria and provision for each pathway:

The Pathways Programme model

Pathway Strand	Pathway definition	Criteria	Role of Pathway Lead
Pathway One Higher Education	Those identified as being on this pathway will either: Have a realistic aspiration to attend university by the end of Year 13, or will be older, have earlier expressed an aspiration to attend University and have now achieved the qualifications to enable that.	Young people identified for this pathway: By the end of Y11, will have achieved L2 qualifications which enable them to progress to a L3 course in Y12. Have expressed an aspiration to attend University/study for a Degree Level apprenticeship	Examples of how the Pathway Lead will support: Offer year group appropriate support and interventions (e.g.: Year 10 and 11 University trip, Year 12 Supporting Statement workshop, Year 13 student finance advice) Advice and guidance around the Higher Education application process with the following support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - information on university open days - a university trip - information about Lewisham’s University Challenge programme - support required to achieve conditional offers - University Widening Participation events (e.g. Y12 writing personal statements events) Care package to support first few weeks at university
Pathway Two Vocational	Would like to enter the world of work, an apprenticeship or further non-advanced level study at the end of their Year 13.	By the end of Year 11, are likely to be working at L1 or above. Have expressed an aspiration to study a vocational course/traineeship or	Liaise with industry to identify reliable offers of mentoring/WEX/workshops and maintain a resource bank of these offers.

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	<p>Often, though not always, study for vocational qualifications post 16</p>	<p>apprenticeship with a view to entering the world of work.</p>	<p>Keep up to date with local providers of vocational courses and have links to those in other boroughs who have this knowledge.</p> <p>Industry specific workshops, mentoring opportunities, apprenticeship days.</p> <p>Employability sessions to develop individuals' soft skills including interview technique, CV and online professional profile support.</p>
<p>Pathway Three ESOL</p>	<p>Be in college or equivalent studying for Pre-entry to Entry Level 3 ESOL qualifications if Y11 or above.</p> <p>Be in school but needing significant English language support to access the curriculum. Likely to go onto an ESOL qualification course.</p>	<p>Will have English as an additional Language</p> <p>Will not be able to access a mainstream course because they require language support.</p>	<p>To ensure that young people/carers/SWs on the caseload who are new into care: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have school/college applications made in a timely manner - have interim outreach ESOL tuition - are invited to the weekly Study Club for games and ESOL tuition and a shared meal - have information about local support for UASC and outings to support cultural capital <p>Be based in college a day a week to support students with their courses, conduct pupil voice interviews before PEPs, and facilitate the administration and recording of PEPs for ESOL students.</p> <p>To support the network around the YP with advice and guidance, particularly around legal requirements for accessing education, work etc.</p>

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<p>Pathway Four</p> <p>SEN</p> <p>(This pathway does not include all young people with an EHC Plan as they can be on any pathway)</p>	<p>Be studying for SEN qualifications and often in a 52-week provision.</p> <p>Post 16, they may be in mainstream college but on the Supported Learning pathway, working towards SEN qualifications, including Supported Internships or mainstream qualifications (e.g., EL2 English).</p>	<p>Be working towards SEN qualifications</p> <p>Often in a 52-week provision or college supported learning environment.</p>	<p>Support participants and liaise with relevant stakeholders</p>
<p>Pathway Five</p> <p>Re-integration</p>	<p>Not on any other pathway or will have only recently moved onto another pathway and their position on it remains tenuous.</p> <p>Be in custody, where they may be accessing education but will need to move onto one of our pathways on release from Youth Detention Accommodation.</p> <p>Young people who are CLA by dint of their remand, who are CLA on remand or who are sentenced will all be on the Re-Integration pathway.</p>	<p>Not be in education, employment or training.</p> <p>Have recently returned to EET but are not yet settled in their provision and need some support to become settled.</p> <p>Be in Youth Detention Accommodation</p>	<p>Encourage to attend employability days, share information around traineeships and NEET offers.</p> <p>Meet with the young people regularly to support and mentor them to return to EET.</p> <p>Identify situations where an outside mentor may be required, put this in place and liaise closely with the mentor, reading reports and uploading them to Asset.</p> <p>Co-ordinate and support the network around the young person to formulate a plan for their re-integration to EET.</p> <p>Ensure that all agencies are working together to support the young people and not promoting different offers.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To maintain a caseload of students identified by the Phase Lead as the pathway and record all key interventions on Asset. • To ensure Asset is kept updated for all on their cohort. 			

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<p>Universal Provision underpinning every pathway</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To contact the caseload individuals during the academic year and offer year group appropriate support and interventions, both individual and cohort wide.• To support the network around the young person with advice and guidance around support for those on the pathway.• To attend PEPs, where necessary, of those on the pathway.• To ensure that those on their pathway have identified destinations at times of transition (e.g.: Year 11-12) and that all necessary applications, consultations etc are completed in a timely manner.• Attend pathway panel meetings and any other meetings as directed by the phase lead.
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Outcomes for young people

Significant work has been undertaken by Lewisham Virtual School leading to tangible shifts in practice and a demonstrably strong framework to support pathways into education, employment and training for their young people transitioning at post 16.

A key measure of impact has been the shift in contact with young people and having the capacity to work with young people in a different way through developing a direct connection with them and their network from the beginning of their post 16 transition. Historically, the team were only able to capture 30% of carers' contact details on their system; now they have all carers' contact details. On a practical level, this is now recorded on Asset; on a relational level, the young person has developed a positive connection with their Pathway Lead and their voice is central to practice.

Each of the Pathway Leads have been successful in contacting many of the young people on their pathway and/or their carers; furthermore, each pathway now has an effective programme of interventions and support in place and as a result of the provision mapping exercise, the team were able to audit their provision, develop a timeline of interventions to facilitate delivery in a timely manner, and bring together a broad programme of universal interventions to support all pathways. This has also led to them being able to develop a directory of partner agencies as well as interventions that has been quality assured by them for each pathway.

The Information Management System (Asset) is almost entirely in place and has been made bespoke so that it is fit for purpose. Outcomes for young people are now measured in ways appropriate to each pathway and the team can analyse data more methodically, as well as examine subgroups within each pathway through ethnicity, gender, and special educational need. This has enabled them to respond to the needs of their care experienced young people with interventions in a timely and meaningful way. Half termly Pathway Panel meetings have also enabled the team to discuss and review each cohort as a team; this has led to changes in thinking and practice as a team.

Particular challenges have been getting the Information Management System to work in a way that supports the work of the team and the aims of the Pathways Model, as well as obtaining essential data to enable the team to establish contact with young people, their carers and Personal Advisers. The model has been shared with wider teams such as the Leaving Care team, Social Workers, IROs, Supported Lodgings placements and plans are in place to create an information leaflet for carers. However, at times, it has been difficult to get

buy in from different professionals as the new approach has meant a shift in ways of working and the team are mindful that this is a culture change for everyone. The team will continue to develop relationships with their partner agencies to strengthen joint working and collaboration.

Other challenges that have emerged in the development of the programme have been the lack of funding to support post 16 interventions. In terms of implementing the model of practice, identifying individual pathways and being clear about the boundaries between them has been a process, as has the time needed for staff to transition into their role as Pathway Lead whilst carrying historic responsibilities (e.g., the ESOL Pathway Lead was previously responsible for all UASC).

Developing this model of practice has made significant impact on the awareness and knowledge of who the young people are and enabled the Virtual School team to establish contact with the carers and young people at an earlier stage of their transition and tailor support for young people transitioning at different transition points: Year 11 to Year 12; Year 12 to Year 13 and Year 13 to Year 14; this has also involved the network around the young person in creating their offers. More significantly, the team have been able to recognise and identify those young people who are disengaging from EET more immediately and respond in time.

Next steps include reviewing the data collection on receipt of the end of year results as well as standardising the offer and creating a universal summary of interventions and offers so this can be shared with partners, such as the Leaving Care team, to ensure onward progression for all Year 13 pupils.

Implications for practice and research

A recent DfE longitudinal research report⁸ showed children who were looked after had far lower levels of participation in post 16 education and the labour market compared to their peers. Care experienced young people were least likely to have Key Stage 5, Higher Education or employment recorded as their main activity at some point, and most likely to be claiming out-of-work benefits, particularly later in their adult

⁸ DfE Research Report (2022) Ahmed, N., Bush, G., Lewis, K., Tummon, W. Post 16 educational and employment outcomes of children in need <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-educational-and-employment-outcomes-of-children-in-need>

life. Significantly, it also highlighted the complexity of the routes taken into education, employment and training with up to 65,000 unique pathways captured through the tracked cohort of 620,000 individuals.

This case study highlights the importance of early transition planning and in widening the offer to meet the needs of all care experienced young people, particularly by allowing space and time to access bespoke activities to support preparation for adulthood. Fully inclusive models of practice, such as The Pathways Programme, allow the flexibility to move through pathways with the understanding that progress is not linear, particularly for care experienced young people, and cannot be captured through a single tactic or data method; this case study recognises the multi-modal nature of data and the importance of being able to capture softer outcomes including the types of activity the young person has engaged with on their transition, such as taking a phone call from the Pathway Lead or visiting Youth Club for the first time. These will have impacted engagement and participation, and ultimately widened opportunities and aspirations.

Care Leavers consistently report the need for practical support through their emerging adulthood⁹. A recent Ofsted research report¹⁰, which is part of a wider project looking at local authority decision-making for children in care, children on the edge of care and care leavers in England, examined the planning and preparation that happens before leaving care. Key findings from this research, highlighted that care leavers were not involved enough in plans about their future, did not feel listened to or that they fully understood their options, and some felt that plans did not match their aspirations.

The Pathways Programme is a paradigm which involves young people in their plans for the future whatever their skills, aspirations or starting point. Further research and application of these approaches would help shape future models of practice and ultimately ensure developing practice does not create a ceiling for young people but starts and focuses on their aspirations and finds ways to get them there.

⁹ Baker, C. 2017. *Care leavers' views on transition to adulthood: A Rapid Review of the Evidence*. Coram Voice

¹⁰ Ofsted (2022), 'Ready or not': care leavers' views of preparing to leave care. Research and analysis.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ready-or-not-care-leavers-views-of-preparing-to-leave-care/ready-or-not-care-leavers-views-of-preparing-to-leave-care#contents>

2.2 Lewisham College

Bridging the gap between policy and practice for care experienced young people in Further Education

Further Education colleges have a vital role to play in the successful transition to adulthood for students in care. One large-scale study of 1058 young people in care from the United States demonstrated that the longer students were enrolled in college the more education and employment outcomes subsequently achieved.¹¹ Not only have Further Education colleges an important role to play in education and employment outcomes, but they also have a role in providing a 'safe haven' for students in care who during this time are experiencing many changes in their lives.¹²

There are many strategic challenges to ensuring effective provision for students in care in Further Education (FE). Many colleges have high numbers (n=150–250) of students who are in care and often they attend from a range of local authorities. These high student numbers entail managing large volumes of information with little consistency in how the information is presented and collated, and lack of standardisation in structures and policy that exist at school level. This creates barriers to identifying care leavers on entry to the setting and in establishing support that is sensitive to the amount and type of support young people might require.

Lewisham College is a large Further Education college with two campuses: one based in Deptford and the other based in the London Borough of Lewisham, south-east London. Established in 1990, it offers a wide range of study programmes at post 16 ranging from academic qualifications to vocational courses along with supported learning. Like other large further education settings, Lewisham College has between 100-120 looked after children on roll and works with over 25 different local authorities which presents significant challenges around different ways of working and information sharing.

This case study describes how the team at Lewisham College, led by the Safeguarding and Inclusion Officer, sought to implement a college-wide initiative through reviewing policy and practice and the wider systems underpinning support for care experienced young people in their setting.

¹¹ Barnow, B. S., Buck, A., O'Brien, K., Pecora, P., Ellis, M. L. and Steiner, E. (2015) Effective services for improving education and employment outcomes for children and alumni of foster care service: Correlates and educational and employment outcomes. *Child & Family Social Work*, 20: 159–70. doi:10.1111/cfs.12063

¹² Connelly, G., Duncalf, Z., Furnivall, J., Seagraves, L. and Soden, R. (2011) Supporting care leavers in Scottish further education colleges: A research account of a pilot programme aimed at supporting looked after young people and care leavers in further education colleges in Scotland. Edinburgh: The Scottish Funding Council.

https://pure.strath.ac.uk/portal/files/27840236/SFC_Care_Leavers_in_Further_Education_Final_Report.pdf

PACL Audit domains

Through the audit tool, Lewisham College identified two key areas for their project which reflected their vision to review current processes in place for care experienced young people and place their voices at the heart of universal practice:

Whole system planning and reflection

Putting care-experienced young people at the heart of planning and decision-making

What did the college do?

Within the Student Services and Safeguarding Team at Lewisham College, the Safeguarding and Inclusions Officer works closely with a Care Covenant Worker (a former care experienced young person) who supports the work of the team, helping to provide valuable insight into the experiences of care leavers and ensuring that their voices are central to decision-making and practice.

The team were acutely aware of the challenges for young people in care transitioning into further education at post 16: an accelerated move into independence, the task of managing a new setting with new pressures, as well as the risk factors associated with transitioning out of care at a time where there is significant change (e.g. starting at college and dropping out in the first few weeks of term). Cognisant of this, they set out with the aim to develop a clear policy across the college to strengthen systems along with a best practice model for supporting care experienced young people in their setting. This led them to identify the following key priorities for action:

- To develop an Inclusion policy to underpin a best practice model to support care experienced learners (along with other identified vulnerable groups)
- Clear staff structures to provide clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Early identification of care experienced learners
- A framework with clear support pathways
- The above leading to improved outcomes and enhanced support for care experienced learners

The college has large numbers joining their setting which can make it problematic to track the numbers of care experienced young people on entry to the setting, with many arriving at different levels of education and enrolling on to a diverse range of curriculum areas. In order to mitigate against this, the team introduced an electronic pre-entry information form to be completed during the enrolment process, and a ‘Getting to know you’ form to support the team’s first meeting with those learners who identified as care experienced to ascertain what support they might need from the moment they step into college.

Alongside this, the team set about carrying out an audit of current provision and practice across the organisation to support the development of their Inclusion policy, and reflection on their pathways of support. These steps are captured in the table below:

Table 1: A summary of steps

Focus	Steps taken	Hoped outcome
Review existing systems for care experienced learners	<p>Audit of current provision and practice involving all key stakeholders, including care experienced learners</p> <p>Develop an Annual Report for Senior Leadership which captures key data, characteristics, milestones, provision, outcomes for CLAs and next steps for the coming year.</p> <p>Include the voice of care experienced young people to explore their experience of college life and the support needed in the transition to adulthood (e.g.: what went well / what helped / what would have been helpful)</p> <p>Share as appropriate with relevant staff within the organisation to raise profile of CLA as an organisational priority</p>	<p>Outline of structure and policy largely in place with implementation planned over time</p> <p>External partners collaborating well and experiencing the college as supportive and organised</p> <p>Joint process with Kitemark for Young Adult Carers – overlapping strands within the ‘Vulnerable Learner’ group</p> <p>Collaboration with Care Covenant staff member(s) using the benefit of their experience</p>

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	Develop an Inclusion Policy to provide a clear framework with processes and provision outlined	
Early identification of care experienced learners on enrolment to the college	<p>Design and create an MS Form that can be completed as part of enrolment on entry to the college</p> <p>Use a QR Code to support the completion of the MS Form at enrolment. Have iPads available for those individuals who do not have access to a smartphone and/or need support with technology.</p> <p>Roll-out the MS Form cross college</p> <p>Create an opportunity to review the MS Form with a focus group which will include staff and young people</p> <p>Create vehicle for capturing data gathered from form to support tracking and monitoring of care experienced learners (e.g., etrackr)</p>	<p>Improved collection of pre-entry student information</p> <p>Effective use of time-saving technology where possible</p> <p>Greater understanding of profile of cohort and individual needs</p> <p>Able to track and monitor cohort more robustly and measure individual outcomes</p>
Establish clear pathways of support for care experienced learners	<p>Identify key milestones that are crucial when considering support for care experienced learners, e.g., support with travelling to college (travel card), access to bursary, PEPs, etc</p> <p>Discuss and decide these with relevant staff and care experienced learners</p> <p>Create a 'Getting to know you' form to support first meeting with CLA which includes prompts to discuss these key milestones in person and ascertain what support the young person needs</p>	<p>Pathway and structure for support clear to all staff involved</p> <p>Learners experiencing the college as supportive and organised</p> <p>Support responsive to need</p> <p>Deeper understanding of potential risk factors at different milestones</p>

	Create an opportunity to review the format of the 'Getting to know you form' with young people	
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Outcomes for young people

The MS form introduced during the enrolment process has made significant impact; during the September enrolment process, the college obtained over 190 responses, an important step in helping to support the early identification of care experienced young people as well as other vulnerable groups entering the setting. An innovative part of this approach was the creation of a QR code which could easily be scanned by a smartphone and, for those without access to technology, the provision of iPads at the point of enrolment to ensure everyone was able to access the form.

The information from the MS form has enabled staff at the college to have a more accurate sense of who their care experienced young people are on entry to the setting. This has been a positive shift forward and has enhanced the information on the central college information management system, eTrackr. This means that the team are now able to track and monitor care experienced learners more closely (e.g., attendance, progress) which has allowed them to act and respond earlier at an individual level, for example, if attendance is dropping checking in with the young person to ascertain what support is needed. It has also become a central place to record interventions and where Personal Education Plans (PEPs) can be uploaded.

The 'Getting to know you' form has provided a way of inviting care experienced young people to share problems they might face during their time at college such as setting up their oyster card, accessing the bursary, unsuitable course choice, etc. In addition to this, the Care Covenant worker has helped to broaden the college's thinking by providing valuable insight into the experiences of looked after learners, such as the value of having regular 'check-ins'. This has included gathering the views of young people in care including their experiences of using Student Services within the college.

In terms of the Inclusion policy, the college have gathered information and preparation work is underway. The team have drawn upon a wide range of professionals within the setting including the Care Covenant Worker and Learning Support to audit practice in the college. Initial steps towards completion of the policy

will be captured in the Year End report with an annual overview of progress to ensure care experienced learners are a priority within the college group.

Particular challenges have been the time to fulfil all aspects of the project alongside demanding workloads and the complications of working in a federated group of colleges where there are existing ways of working in different parts of the college as well as the legacy of former structures. It has been difficult to carve out platforms to work with staff collectively to embed the changes; therefore, ensuring that Senior Leadership embrace and promote Inclusion policy as a college wide initiative is a vital next step for ongoing implementation of the project.

Knowing who their care experienced young people are will enable the college to monitor outcomes more rigorously, thereby understanding impact measures which can feed into the drive for action and change ensuring the college is responsive to need. The policy will provide college wide impact so that everyone is working together within a clear vision and framework, ultimately empowering staff, learners, and external staff towards a better service.

Implications for practice and research

In effecting successful transition and inclusivity, Davis et al. (2015)¹³ note evidence of the value of ‘communities’ where all stakeholders are included, and practice acknowledges the need to respond to learner diversity¹⁴. Becoming ‘looked after’ is just one aspect of a young person’s complex identity and experiences. There is a need to recognise the diversity and individuality of children and young people who become looked after and, within any organization or system, to consider their characteristics and needs as individuals, and the varied pathways and experiences they encounter from the point of entry into college and into adult life¹⁵.

Considering the transition of learners into post 16 provision requires recognising that this is a period of exploration and new-found independence, but one that can bring many challenges particularly for care experienced young people who will be experiencing a sudden move into independence across all aspects of their life; in further education colleges this requires taking into consideration the impact of leaving care

¹³ Davis, J. M., Ravenscroft, J. & Bizas, N. (2015) ‘Transition, inclusion and partnership: child-, parent- and professional-led approaches in a European research project’, *Child Care in Practice: Northern Ireland Journal of Multi-disciplinary Child Care Practice*, 21 (1), 33– 49.

¹⁴ Packer, R., Abbinett, E., and Morris, E. (2022) ‘Be prepared and give it a go!’ *Transitions into further education for learners with additional learning needs*. British Journal of Special Education

¹⁵ Boddy, J. (2013b) *Understanding permanence for looked after children: A review of research for the Care Inquiry* Become

at 18 on their learning, the diversity of support needs this presents and the diffuse nature of care leavers across the setting which can make it more difficult to ensure that support reaches them, particularly at the ages of 21 plus where support can become more tenuous.

This case study points to the importance of everyone in the system working together to drive forward change and develop communities which promote and value a culture of listening to care experienced young people to gain an understanding of what support works. It also highlights the importance of fostering communities that involve young people in pathway planning to ensure support is tailored and helps to keep things on track.

Although there is a paucity of research at post 16, care leavers consistently identify that good transitions are supported by quality relationships, being supported in pathway planning and decisions that connect to their lives and help with achieving their aspirations. Ultimately the most successful organisations are those that always start with, and continue to champion, the voice of young people¹⁶.

¹⁶ Baker, C. 2017. *Care leavers' views on transition to adulthood: A Rapid Review of the Evidence*. Coram Voice

2.3 Goldsmiths, University of London

Understanding routes into higher education through the lens of care experienced young people

Background

Findings from a study of pathways to Higher Education in England found that approximately 12% of students in care took up a university course,¹⁷ and whilst this was considerably higher than previous estimates¹⁸ they were still less likely to enter higher education and more likely to withdraw from their course.

Higher Education Institutions generally target care experienced young people as part of their general Widening Participation programme, as part of a series of bespoke activities or as part of a blended approach. Each approach offers specific advantages such as allowing for anonymity of care status or care leavers benefiting from tailored support. Evidence is emerging that documents the impact of specific outreach activities to support increased interest, aspiration and ultimately applications to universities. One model is the Better Futures Project developed in the USA as a programme specifically developed for care leavers experiencing mental health challenges as they prepare for higher education but offers insight into the potential benefits of the programme for other young adults with a care background¹⁹. The project includes participation in a 'Summer Institute', individual peer coaching and mentoring workshops. Findings from a randomised control trial (RCT) of 67 care leavers indicated significant gains for those who participated in the programme on measures of post-secondary education, transition preparation, hopefulness, self-determination and mental health outcome compared with the control group.

Founded in 1891, and part of the University of London since 1904, Goldsmiths offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate study options in the arts, humanities, social sciences, cultural studies, computing, and entrepreneurial business and management. Goldsmiths, formally known as Goldsmiths College, is located in south-east London in the borough of Lewisham, and plays an active role in local

¹⁷ Harrison, N. (2017) Moving on up: Pathways of care leavers and care-experienced students into and through higher education.

¹⁸ Jackson, S. and Cameron, C. (2011) Final report of the YiPPEE project WP12. Young People from a Public Care Background: Pathways to further and higher education in five European countries. London: University of London.

¹⁹ Geenen, Sarah, Laurie E Powers, Lee Ann Phillips, May Nelson, Jessica McKenna, Nichole Wings- Yanez, Linda Blanchette, Adrienne Croskey, Lawrence D Dalton, and Amy Salazar. 2015. "Better Futures: A randomized field test of a model for supporting young people in foster care with mental health challenges to participate in higher education." *The journal of behavioral health services & research* 42 (2):150-171.

programmes, part of which are their widening participation programmes for young people within the local area.

This case study describes how Goldsmiths wished to broaden their widening participation offer to develop a mentoring programme specifically for care leavers through understanding routes into higher education through the lens of care experienced young people.

PACL Audit domains

Through the audit tool, the team identified the following domains to support their aim to strengthen local partnerships and develop ways to engage an increased number of care leavers into higher education:

Putting care-experienced young people at the heart of planning and decision-making

Integrated transition planning – housing, income, health, education and emotional support

What the university did:

From the age of eighteen, care experienced young people face the abrupt loss of their familiar and professional network and can feel ‘left on a cliff edge’ with no support or guidance to hold them. Maintaining transition support at this juncture is crucial. Aware of these challenges, Goldsmiths were intent on finding ways to mitigate this through deepening their awareness of the systemic challenges within their own setting and how they could shape their response to meet the needs of care leavers within the local area.

Through initial discussions with Lewisham Virtual School and their PACL Facilitator, Goldsmiths explored the idea of introducing two pathways of mentoring support: a one-to-one mentoring programme for care experienced young people on entry to the university, and a mentoring programme designed for Year 12 care experienced young people to promote routes into higher education. It was agreed that putting the voices of care experienced young people at the centre of planning and decision-making for any new mentoring programme was essential; therefore, devoting time and space to understanding the experiences

and perspectives of care experienced young people was essential to the project to develop a mentoring programme responsive to need. This was reflected in the project aims:

Project aims	To plan and develop a Mentoring Programme to support and promote pathways to Higher Education, and transition planning
	To involve the participation of care experienced young people in the planning and decision-making when developing the Mentoring Programme

The team at Goldsmiths also wished to deepen support within the university and develop ways to widen participation and heighten awareness of the multiple and complex barriers that care leavers may face with accessing higher education within their organisation. This was undertaken in the following ways:

- an audit of current provision and support on offer through consulting with key stakeholders within the organisation
- a review of relevant departments to identify gaps in provision
- Plans to run focus groups with care experienced young people within the local network to understand the types of mentoring activities that would help on pre-entry to higher education

Through careful discussion and reflection, the team pulled together some initial ideas on how they could gather feedback and ensure young people’s voices were kept central to the aims of the project. This led to the development of a step-by-step project plan:

Step by step project plan

Vision	To put care-experienced young people at the heart of planning and decision-making To support Integrated transition planning to widen participation into higher education	
Aims	To plan and develop a Mentoring Programme to support and promote pathways to Higher Education, and transition planning To involve the participation of young people in the planning and decision-making when developing the Mentoring Programme	
Actions	1. Discover	Engage with PACL project in partnership with Lewisham Virtual School

	2. Raise Awareness	<p>Liaise with key stakeholders in the university to discuss the aims of the project and explore ways to undertake the organisational audit and gather feedback.</p>
	3. Connect	<p>Link with local and professional network to identify young people who could participate in the Focus Groups for the project (e.g. Lewisham Virtual School Post 16 Team and local colleges such as Lewisham College).</p>
	4. Implement	<p>Audit provision and support</p> <p>Undertake an audit of current provision and support currently on offer in the university across services and departments.</p> <p>Set up Focus Groups</p> <p>Liaise with local and professional network to identify care experienced young people who could continue to participate in the Focus Groups (e.g. Lewisham VS Post 16 Team, local colleges)</p> <p>Agree a structure for the Focus Groups sessions that helps to facilitate participation and supports care experienced young people sharing their views and experiences (e.g. questionnaire, survey, structure for the session)</p> <p>Use the information gathered from Focus Groups and local network to plan the structure and content for the Mentoring Programme.</p> <p>Link and build partnerships with the local network</p> <p>Gather feedback from professional network, such as Lewisham Virtual School and local further education colleges, on the key areas that care experienced young people would need support with through the Mentoring Programme, e.g. managing finances, applying for bursaries, living independently, etc.</p>
	5. Review	<p>Views of young people gathered through Focus Groups</p> <p>Feedback from local network</p> <p>Draft plans for Mentoring Programme reviewed and agreed by young people</p>
Impact	<p>Raised awareness of cohort within the university</p> <p>Strengthened partnership working with Lewisham Virtual School and Lewisham College</p>	

	Put care-experienced young people's voices central to the development of the Mentoring Programme
Next steps	Carry out all steps in implementation phase with new personnel to support plans for Mentoring Programme Continue to strengthen partnership working with Lewisham Virtual School and Lewisham College

Outcomes for young people

During the project, Goldsmiths were able to carry out a comprehensive audit of existing support and provision within their organisation. This enabled them to understand the breadth of support and provision currently in place to support their care experienced students. It also helped to identify gaps in provision within different department areas and ignite thinking around what could be done to further develop available support.

There have been challenges with the implementation of the action plan due to the impact of the pandemic as well as structural and staff changes during the delivery project. Whilst the team were not able to undertake some of the steps within their action plan, they have produced a clear framework which describes the activities that they intended to take and provides a valuable model of practice for other organisations and settings.

As part of a wider research project, Goldsmiths are undertaking a study specifically focused on the experiences of care leavers to deepen their understanding of what support is needed on entry to university. This will involve focus groups with existing students, those who have left and those who are yet to move on to higher education. An important element of this activity involves collaborative work with Lewisham College and Lewisham Virtual School which will strengthen partnerships between the organisations.

Implications for practice and research

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Framework provides a helpful paradigm for understanding the challenges facing care experienced young people and in illustrating how all development is influenced by the people and organisations around an individual and that these groups and organisations can act as either

a facilitator or barrier to development²⁰. The more encouraging and supportive these relationships and places are, the better chances for positive adult outcomes in the short and long term.

This case study points to the importance of furthering our understanding of the additional and complex barriers that face care experienced young people as they transition to post 16, and the value in deepening connections within the local network to gain insight into the type and nature of support that would encourage care leavers to move on to higher education. Furthermore, there is a commitment to the importance of creating opportunities to truly listen and learn from care experienced young people to ensure that the impact of specific widening participation activities supports increased interest, aspiration and ultimately applications to university.

It also highlights the importance of developing flexibility of support within higher education organisations where provision is understood and considered through a trauma informed lens, leading to the right changes in the system such as making connections early on, keeping in contact during the course of study or offering a personalised approach to study, such as the flexibility to complete a course over an extended period of time. It is imperative that any activities are co-produced with care experienced young people and led by what the young person is saying. This contributes to an emerging evidence base for current practice.

3. CONCLUSION

The participants in the PACL programme implemented a variety of changes in their organisations and services at young person, practitioner, and organisational level. At the young person level, changes included the development of a Pathways Programme, early identification and support, and spaces to listen to the individual voices of care leavers. At practitioner and organisational level, many of the participants used the PACL programme as a springboard to raise the profile of the needs of care experienced young people in their settings and use this as an opportunity for reflection and learning, including system-wide evaluations of policy and practice.

²⁰ Bronfenbrenner, Urie. 1977. Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist* 32 (7): 513.

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One of the aims of the PACL programme is to continue to support developments in practice after the programme has ended through ongoing review of the audit and action plan and continue to strengthen partnerships and joint working through attendance at the termly PACL Professional Learning Network (PLN). The participants in this PACL programme have continued with their focus on the development of post 16 pathways into EET for care experienced young people and in doing so are ensuring that they are helped to reach their potential and simultaneously contribute to an emerging evidence base for current practice.