

TITLE OF REPORT: Support to Care Leavers

REPORT OF: Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning

Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to update the OSC on the provision of support offered to care leavers and to inform them of the progress and developments being made by the Looked After Children's Team.

Background

2. Performance reports have been presented to OSC on a regular basis to demonstrate how we are meeting our performance targets and how we compare both regionally and nationally in relation to Looked After Children.
3. An increasing focus is being placed on care leavers and the responsibility of Local Authorities to ensure they transition well into adulthood. As a result we are now responsible for monitoring young people aged between 17 and 21 years, and need to demonstrate how we are supporting them with accommodation, work or education and financially.
4. Within Gateshead we have embedded the principles of the care leaver's charter. The charter embodies a set of over-arching principles that are designed to improve the experiences of care leavers throughout preparation, transition and on their journey into adult life. These include
 - Respect us
 - Listen to us
 - Work with us
 - Believe in us
 - Hold aspirations for us
 - Make sure we have somewhere to call home
 - Don't forget about us
5. The report has therefore focused on
 - Support to care leavers
 - Accommodation
 - Financial support
 - How we monitor the work or education status for young people age 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 years
 - Identifying young people needing additional support
 - Working with our partners

How we monitor the leaving care cohort

6. Information is produced on a monthly basis from Care First and monitored by performance meetings with the Service Manager and Team Managers. This enables us to look at statistics and data in relation to our care leavers and to raise any concerns in relation to changes in data.

Support to Care Leavers

7. All Care Leavers have a Pathway plan, which sets out what they are entitled to and who will support them. This plan is reviewed every six months to ensure the care leaver is being supported in their transition from care. Every care leaver has a personal advisor who keeps in touch with them on a minimum of an 8 week basis. They communicate by telephone, text, letter and face to face visits. During these contacts the personal advisor supports them to achieve the things that are set out in the pathway plan. This could include
 - Help with finding employment, education or training
 - Help with claiming benefits, housing benefit or council tax
 - Support with finding suitable accommodation
 - Support with setting up their own home
 - Managing finances
 - Advising on financial assistance and support in applying for specific grants
 - Health and development
 - Independent living skills
 - Family and social networks

Accommodation

8. Without young people leaving care having somewhere appropriate to live, it is unlikely that care leavers would be able to sustain education, employment or training. Improving the quality and choice of housing is crucial to improving the stability and engagement of care leavers in education, employment and training. The service has worked hard on this and the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Panel was established in April 2015 as a joint initiative between Housing Services and the Looked after Children's Service.
9. The joint vision is that all care leavers are corporately supported in their pathway to adulthood through provision of suitable accommodation that corresponds with their needs and wishes.
10. The aim of the Care Leavers Accommodation Panel is to:
 - Bring services together to have a joint response to the accommodation needs of care leavers.
 - To enable care leavers to make smooth transitions by promoting positive rather than reactive planning.
 - To provide a range of accommodation with tenancy ready work suitable to the diverse needs of care leavers at different stages in the leaving care process and to give access to independent tenancies when required.

- To recognize that the pathway to independent living for some care leavers may be complex and to acknowledge that some care leavers may require a second or third chance at independent living and to support.
- To ensure all young people leaving care have safe, permanent and affordable accommodation

11. This initiative is proving to be very successful and was shortlisted for a Local Government Award in March 2017.

12. The service recognizes that there needs to be a range of suitable accommodation for

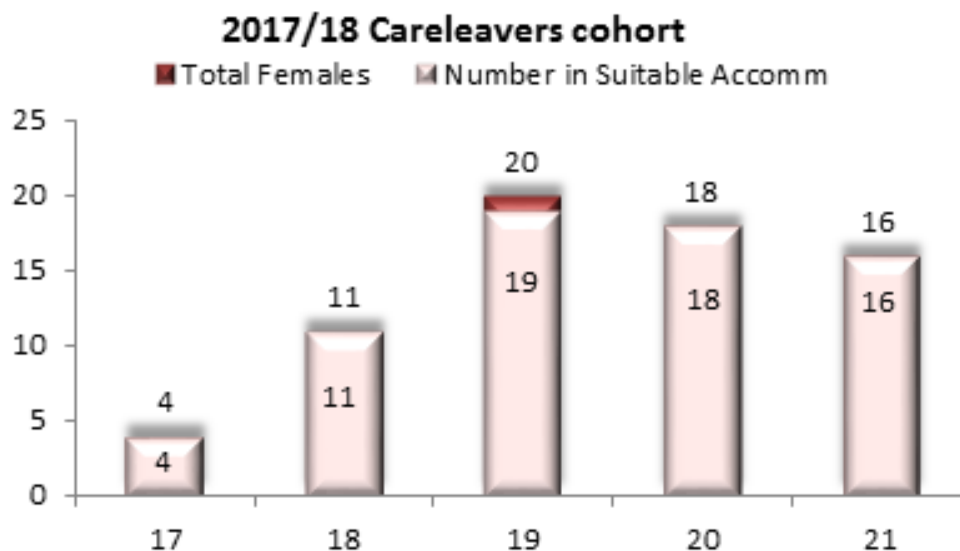
Care leavers, which include:

- Staying Put with their foster carers. This can be until they are 21 if the young person feels this is their best option
- Supported accommodation
- Own tenancies
- Individual tailored packages for children with additional/complex needs.

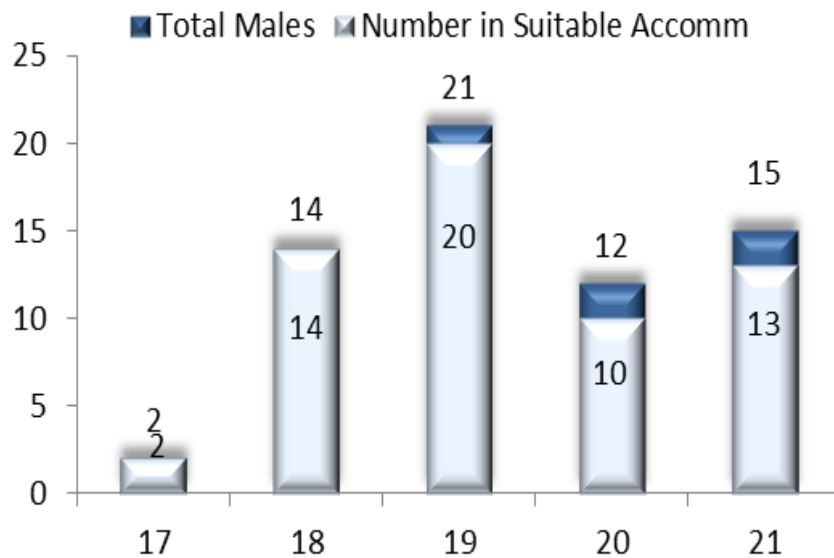
13. The range and choice of accommodation has increased in recent years and the service continues to work with housing and commissioning to try and provide an improved choice of appropriate accommodation and support for care leavers.

14. The need for additional and specialist provision for care leavers has also been embedded into the strategic plan from the vulnerable young peoples housing group and services across the council are working together to ensure that the housing and supported accommodation options are improved for care leavers.

Accommodation Data for 2017-18 Care Leaver Cohort



2017/18 Careleavers cohort



| | Total Females | Number in Suitable Accommodation | % in Suitable |
|--------------|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------|
| 17 | 4 | 4 | 100% |
| 18 | 11 | 11 | 100% |
| 19 | 20 | 19 | 95% |
| 20 | 18 | 18 | 100% |
| 21 | 16 | 16 | 100% |
| Total | 69 | 68 | 99% |

| | Total Males | Number in Suitable Accommodation | % in Suitable |
|--------------|-------------|----------------------------------|---------------|
| 17 | 2 | 2 | 100% |
| 18 | 14 | 14 | 100% |
| 19 | 21 | 20 | 95% |
| 20 | 12 | 10 | 83% |
| 21 | 15 | 13 | 87% |
| Total | 64 | 59 | 92% |

15. These statistics are measured in line with Government Guidance on unsuitable accommodation which includes

- Custody - we have 4 males in custody
- No fixed abode. We have 1 young person who is staying with family and friends but not on a permanent basis
- 1 female who is in detained in hospital under the mental health act

Financial Support

16. Gateshead Leaving Care Service has comprehensive financial procedures in place to support care leavers. The focal point of the financial support is to assist care leavers who are combining having to live independently with either being employed or in training, which includes

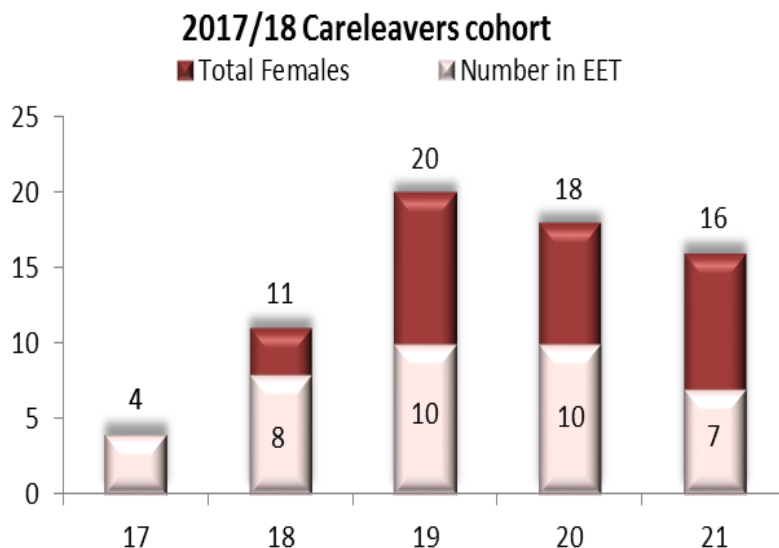
- Weekly living allowance of £60 per week where benefits are not in place or the young person is not entitled to benefits.

- Winter fuel allowances are available to young people living in independent accommodation between the months of November and March at £20 per month.
- Where our Young People who are living semi-independently or independently and are engaged in Employment, Education or Training, incentive payments are paid up to £70 per month.
- For each young person that completes a year of full-time or equivalent study, an education bonus of £25 is paid.
- Young People in further education will receive up to £6000 per year to assist with accommodation or education costs.
- Young people aged between 16yrs – 19yrs attending training courses can claim a bursary of £60 per week.
- Where our young people are moving into independent accommodation a setting up home allowance is available up to £2000 to support with this transition.
- The service recognizes the Young Person's birthday by giving them a birthday allowance of £20 between the age of 18 to 20 years with a final birthday payment of £50 at 21 years

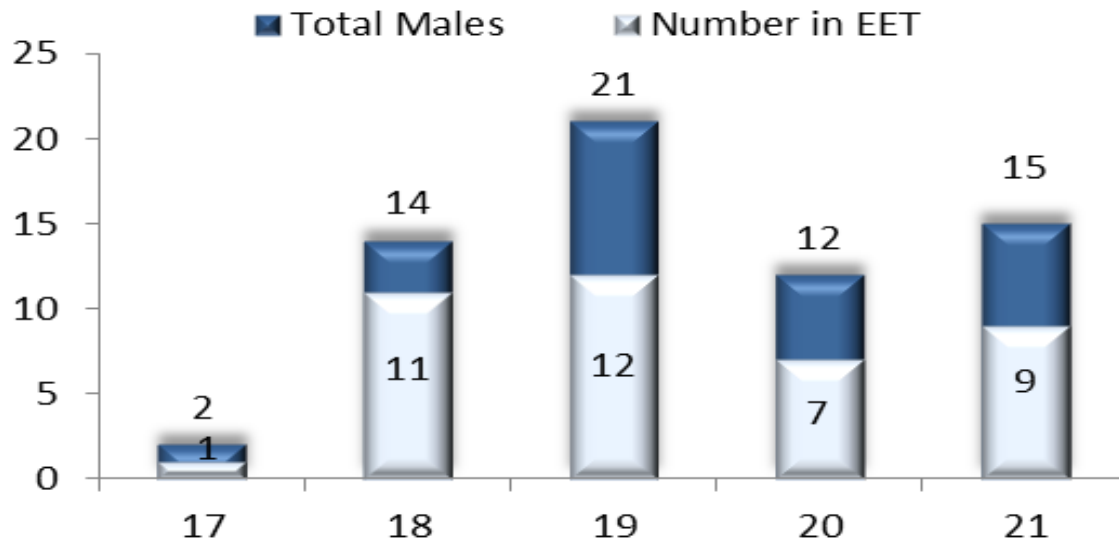
17. The Leaving Care Service complies with Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 in the financial assistance and support offered to Care Leavers and will support a young person continuing in a pathway of education and training until their 25th birthday,

Education, employment and training

18. Nationally, young people leaving care have significantly poorer outcomes than their peers in relation to education, training and employment (EET). When young people enter care, some as late as 13 to 17 years of age, their educational attainment levels are often well behind those of same age young people in the general population and therefore when they Leave Care they need additional support from the service.

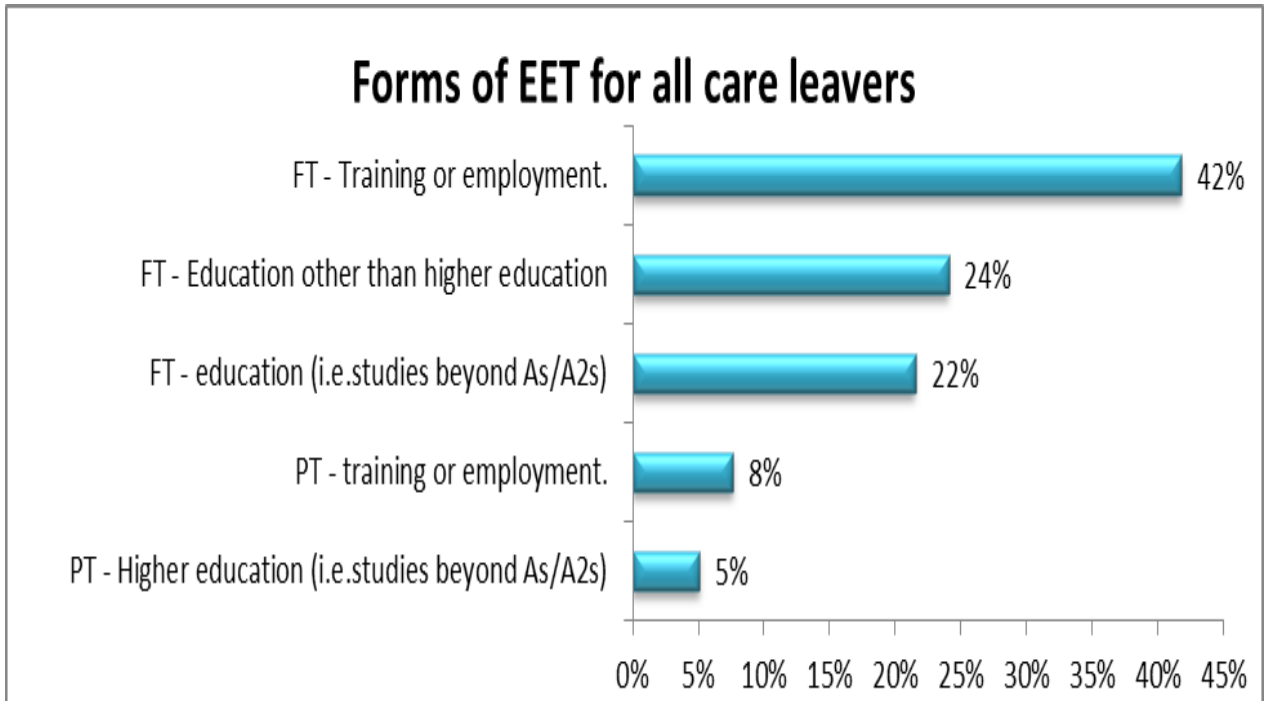


2017/18 Careleavers cohort



19. Out of the 133 care leavers in 2017-2018, 79 (59%) of them were in some form of Education, Employment and Training with the remaining 54 (41%) not in employment, education or training. This breaks down further to an engagement level of 57% of female care leavers and 63% of male care leavers within that cohort.

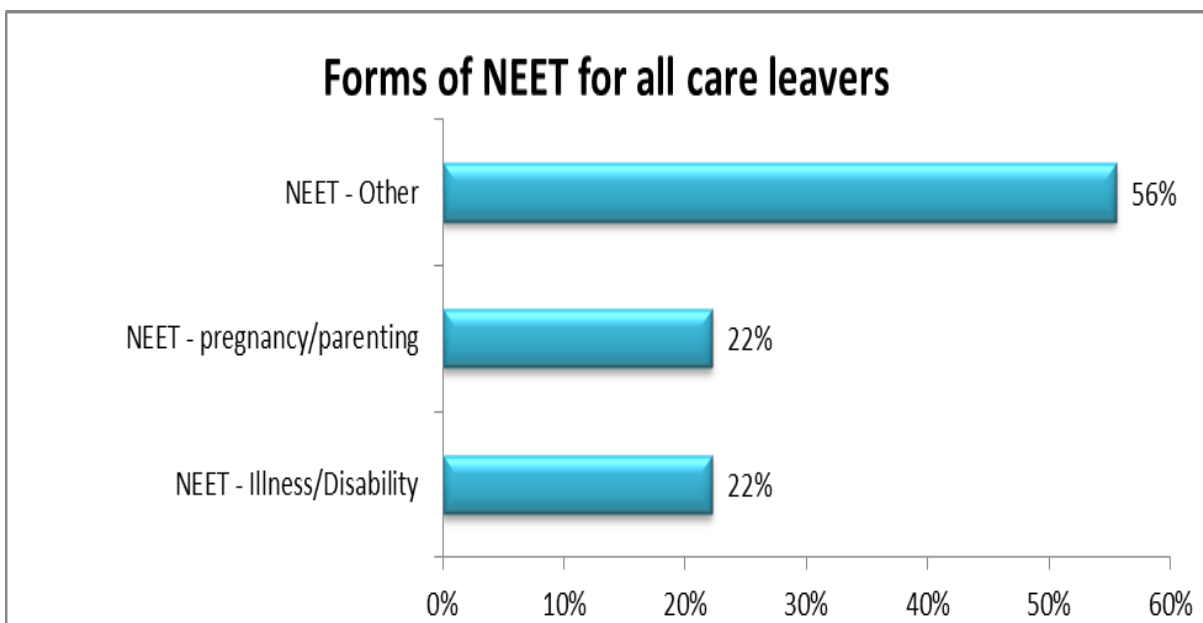
| EET | Female | Male | Total | % |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| PT - Higher education (i.e. studies beyond As/A2s) | 3 | 1 | 4 | 5% |
| PT - training or employment. | | 6 | 6 | 8% |
| FT - education (i.e. studies beyond As/A2s) | 11 | 6 | 17 | 22% |
| FT - Education other than higher education | 13 | 6 | 19 | 24% |
| FT - Training or employment. | 12 | 21 | 33 | 42% |
| Grand Total | 39 | 40 | 79 | 100% |

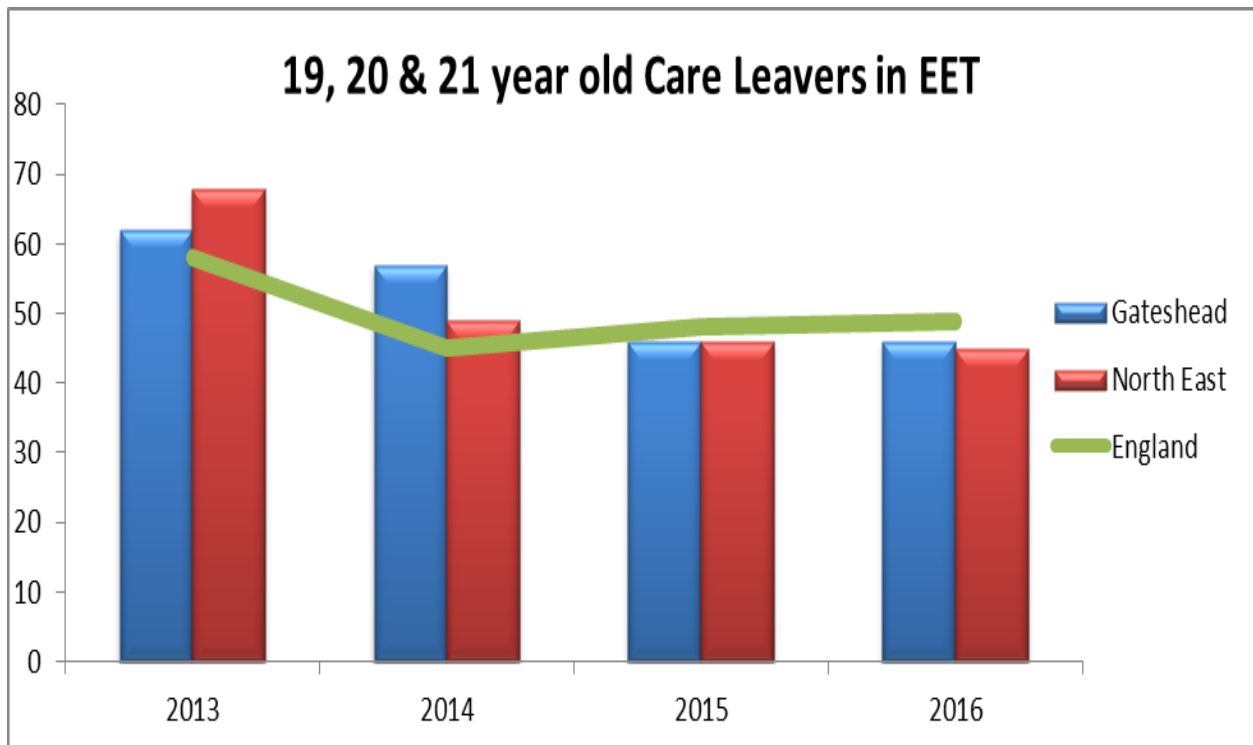


NEET

20. These young people are monitored closely by the service as we know it is important for all young people to be in some form of Education, Employment or Training. Increased partnership working between the Looked After Children & Young People Service, REALAC, Connexions and the Youth Support Services is allowing successful targeting of support and options available to care leavers and it is envisaged this will lead to a reduction in care leavers not engaged in Education, Employment and Training.

2017-18 Care Leaver Cohort





21. As you can see from the above graph, Gateshead were above both the North East and England average for care leavers who were not in education, employment and training. With closer monitoring and better partnership working we are now below the England average and in line with the North East average.

Identifying young people needing additional support

22. The service acknowledges that there has been an issue with young people leaving care refusing to engage in employment, education and training and have taken proactive steps to try and improve the statistics and outcomes for care leavers. The Education, Employment and Training (EET) panel was set up in 2015 and is chaired by the Looked After Children and Young Peoples Service. The panel meets on a monthly basis and is made up of representatives from Connexions, REALAC and Local further and Higher Education Providers. The panel looks at all looked after children and young people from the age of 15 years through to Care Leavers up to the age of 25 years and rate them as being Red, Amber or Green. The panel identifies gaps in education, employment and training for the young people that are at risk of becoming NEET and these young people are rated as red. This ensures that additional support and resources are identified and plans put in place to support young people back into EET.

23. There are also monthly apprenticeship groups being held discussing the need for increased apprenticeship provision within the council for LAC and Care Leavers. A plan from this has been developed which will see an apprenticeship event for our young people to attend where skills and abilities will be determined and appropriate pathways developed into both council and external apprenticeship providers.

24. The Service has worked with partners to try and provide a range of support for the young people who need additional support. This includes:

Building Better Opportunities - Wise Steps – Gary Green, Economic and Housing Growth

25. The Building Better Opportunities programme – Wise Steps is designed to support those furthest away from the labour market. It is expected that the participants will take longer than six months to move into a positive outcome (education/training, employment and self-sufficient job search).
26. Those young people who are job ready and will move into work quickly are not eligible for this programme. All young people will receive one to one support from a job coach for up to 18 months. Together the job search and the young people will focus on removing any barriers to work through social inclusion activities, life skills, confidence building and skills development. Activities will also include ICT training and personal money management. Once the customer is ready to enter work they will be supported through work experience, volunteering, job search, vocational training, job brokerage and in-work support. A wide range of specialist partners are available to support.

REALAC

Pathways 2 Work

27. Voluntary work experience programme for Looked After Young People between the ages of 15 yrs – 19yrs. The work experience is carried out during school holidays with expenses of £10 per day paid to the young person. The aim of this programme is to develop the skills needed for future employment, help experience the reality of what a particular job will be like before committing to it. Improve communication skills within an adult environment and improve your team working skills.
28. REALAC facilitate the Choices program where our young people will get the chance to explore Newcastle University, Northumbria University, the University of Sunderland, Durham University and Teesside University and take part in some activities and working relationships continue to be developed with further and higher education support services.

Core Assets

29. The Aspiration & Ambition for All ('Triple A') programme will increase care leavers in Employment Education and Training through an innovative and targeted mix of therapeutic and solution focused mentoring, enhanced by integrated data informed Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance approaches. A bid is currently in place to get the funding for this and if successful Gateshead will be the only north east authority to be involved in this programme. They will work with up to 100 young people and the intervention will be data and outcome driven to
- identify, target, track and nurture Care leavers and Looked After young people.
 - The young people will be offered voluntary placements/internships, education/business/training courses opportunities, and expanded access to apprenticeships/employment opportunities.

- Additionally, the therapeutic mentoring framework builds upon a systemic therapy approach.

Programme for Marginalized young people

30. Gateshead College will deliver a comprehensive range of industry related workshops alongside a Certificate in Occupational Studies for the Workplace, which will enhance learner skills and knowledge within a range of dynamic role within industry. Learners will receive guidance and support which will enhance their opportunity to move into employment.
31. Workshops will prepare learners for the world of work, developing theoretical and practical skills within hair, beauty, retail, hospitality, painting and decorating, manufacturing, warehousing, bricklaying, plastering and motor vehicle. Learners will discover the expectations of employers within a range of sectors, as well as understand the knowledge and behaviour they will need to possess in order to gain and sustain employment. There will be an opportunity to achieve accredited qualifications at level 1 in Health & Safety and Occupational Studies for the Workplace. An introduction to problem solving techniques, teamwork skills, effective communication, use of social media in the workplace and customer service will all be included as part of the programme.
32. Closer working relationships continue to be developed with further and higher education support services. The service will continue to develop relationships and packages of support with a range of providers in order to broaden the offer to all care leavers.

Issues the OSC might want to consider

33. In light of the information provided the OSC might like to consider whether it is satisfied with the level of support being offered to Care Leavers. When addressing this question the OSC might wish to take into account the following
 - Are we working proactively as corporate parents for Care Leavers
 - Have we got the right involvement from our partners
 - Are we promoting positive outcomes for Care leavers
 - Are we offering the right support to the NEET cohort

Recommendations

34. The views of the OSC are sought on:-
 - The progress and the level of support Care leavers are receiving in Gateshead
 - Whether it wishes to receive a further report on the support we offer care leavers

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