

Localised approaches to supporting care leavers

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Executive summary

The research undertaken for this project found strong justification for developing integrated local approaches to supporting care leavers and looked after children. While the data for England clearly shows that, compared to the general population, care leavers achieve consistently poor outcomes, regional variances in care leavers' experiences and outcomes demonstrate the need for more targeted local approaches to tackle the specific challenges faced by care leavers in different parts of the country.

The challenges faced by care leavers are clearly recognised and understood by government, and have been reflected in the government's cross-departmental strategy for care leavers which was published in July 2016. The strategy recognises that the nature and scale of the challenges faced by care leavers means it is difficult for them to be tackled by local authorities alone, and that there is an increasing need for organisations across all sectors of society to commit to supporting care leavers. This is even more vital in the context of devolution and combined local authorities, which create opportunities for local areas to learn from effective and integrated approaches to supporting care leavers.

Local approaches to supporting looked after children and care leavers have long been recognised as an effective way of overcoming the challenges these young people face and supporting their transitions into independent living, education and employment. The importance of partnership working in delivering effective support for care leavers was recognised by Buttle UK and included in the criteria for their Quality Mark.

Since the launch of the Buttle Quality Mark, a range of networks across England have been established to support partnership working in the improvement of support for care leavers. As the Quality Mark expanded to include further education, the networks also expanded, with many now involving a wide range of learning and skills providers, local authorities, voluntary organisations, statutory and specialist support agencies. At national level, many of these networks are now supported by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) through their National Networks for Collaborative Outreach Scheme.

Learning and Work Institute's previous research with Buttle UK to produce a guide for FE colleges found that collaborative working resulted in a range of benefits for colleges and the care leavers they supported. These included raised aspirations; smoother transitions between providers; improved engagement from the hardest to reach young people; more holistic support; improved sharing of best practice; and more effective monitoring and tracking of care leavers' achievements and progression.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the findings of this research. They are aimed at organisations looking to establish a local partnership or network focused on supporting care leavers to progress into education, training and employment.

- 1. Any local partnership or network needs clear strategic objectives and roles/responsibilities for members**

Having clear objectives and roles/responsibilities for members encourages organisations to engage in networks and ensures that members' knowledge and expertise of different areas to its maximum potential. Clear objectives are also crucial when time and resources are limited, as it can enable staff to make the case for their involvement in the partnership to senior managers in their own organisations.

2. Local partnerships or networks should consider having formal membership arrangements in place

Where organisations are required to contribute financially or sign formal terms of reference, this helps the lead/coordinating organisation to garner firm support and commitments from members and ensure that they actively participate in meetings and lobbying activities.

3. Involve a range of organisations to address multiple barriers to participation

The nature of care leavers' lives means that they often experience a range of barriers to progression into FE and HE. In order to effectively support these young people to overcome this wide range of challenges, it is important for partnerships or networks focused on improving support for care leavers to engage with a wide range of different organisations.

4. Have a designated lead organisation and individual who can be easily contacted

In order for a range of organisations to be recruited to a partnership, it is important that there is a clear contact and way for organisations to get involved. Having a lead partner and a named contact within that organisation has been invaluable to the partnerships represented in this report, in engaging new and more diverse members. The lead partner can also be instrumental in driving forward the work of the partnership and maintaining its momentum.

5. Encourage a collaborative way of working focused on young people's needs

The focus of any network should be on the needs of young people in and leaving care, and ways in which organisations can support young people to access the opportunities which best suit their needs and interests, rather than working to meet their own recruitment targets.

6. Present the network as a 'neutral' organisation which can represent the interests of all members and care leavers

A key factor in the success of the case studies presented in this report is the way in which the partnerships acts as neutral organisations to engage with external stakeholders in the best interests of members and care leavers. Members believe that external stakeholders are more likely to engage and collaborate with the partnership or network, as it is viewed as working to improve care leavers' opportunities to progress, rather than to meet organisational aims or targets.

7. Share information and practice to avoid duplication of work

Having robust ways of sharing information between members means that they can learn from one another and build on existing knowledge and initiatives. This not only avoids duplication of work and saves time and money for members, but also provides a more consistent and clear offer to care leavers within the local area.

Introduction

In 2016, Learning and Work Institute was commissioned by the Department for Education to research the ways in which local areas are developing effective and integrated local support for care leavers, which enables them to make smooth and sustained transitions in learning and work. Care leavers are young people who have been looked after by the state, sometimes for all of their childhood, and have subsequently left the care system or are in the process of doing so.

The first stage of the research took the form of a rapid evidence review, in which existing research, reports and data were identified and reviewed to develop a picture of the challenges faced by care leavers and effective approaches to tackling these. Examples of local partnership approaches were also identified, and the second stage of the research involved in-depth telephone interviews to explore these approaches in more depth.

This report presents the findings of the desk review and interviews. First, it provides an overview of the challenges faced by care leavers and policy responses to this. It then explores existing research into the effectiveness of local approaches to tackling these challenges. Finally, it presents the key success factors of the local approaches identified by this research, accompanied by a set of case studies which aim to highlight how a comprehensive and integrated 'local offer,' involving a range of agencies, can secure good outcomes for care leavers and prevent them from dropping through gaps in provision at key transition points.

Context and policy overview

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.

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.

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. When a young person suddenly needs to be responsible for themselves this can be a lonely and frightening experience – particularly when most will not have had the parental support and guidance to develop essential living skills, such as managing a home, budgeting and managing finances, finding sustainable employment and making decisions about their future education and career paths.

The following infographic highlights some of the challenges faced by looked after children and care leavers in England.

Care Leavers and Looked After Children in England



70,440 children and young people were looked after at 31 March 2016

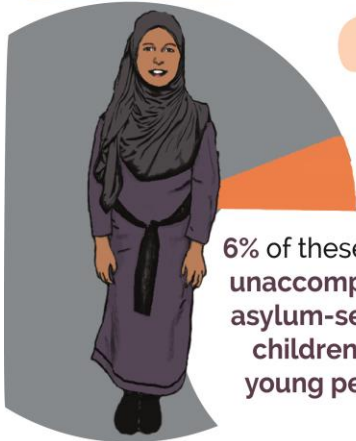
Only 14% of young people in care gained five GCSEs at grades A* - C (including English and maths) in 2016, compared to 53% of all other young people



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



Only 1 in 14 care leavers progress to HE, compared to half of all young people.



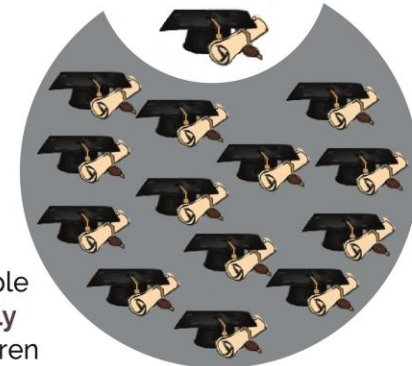
6% of these were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people



3 in 4 were in foster care



Looked after children and young people are twice as likely to be permanently excluded from school than other children



For more information about care leavers please contact
Nicola.aytward@learningandwork.org.uk

www.learningandwork.org.uk

[@LearnWorkUK](https://twitter.com/LearnWorkUK)

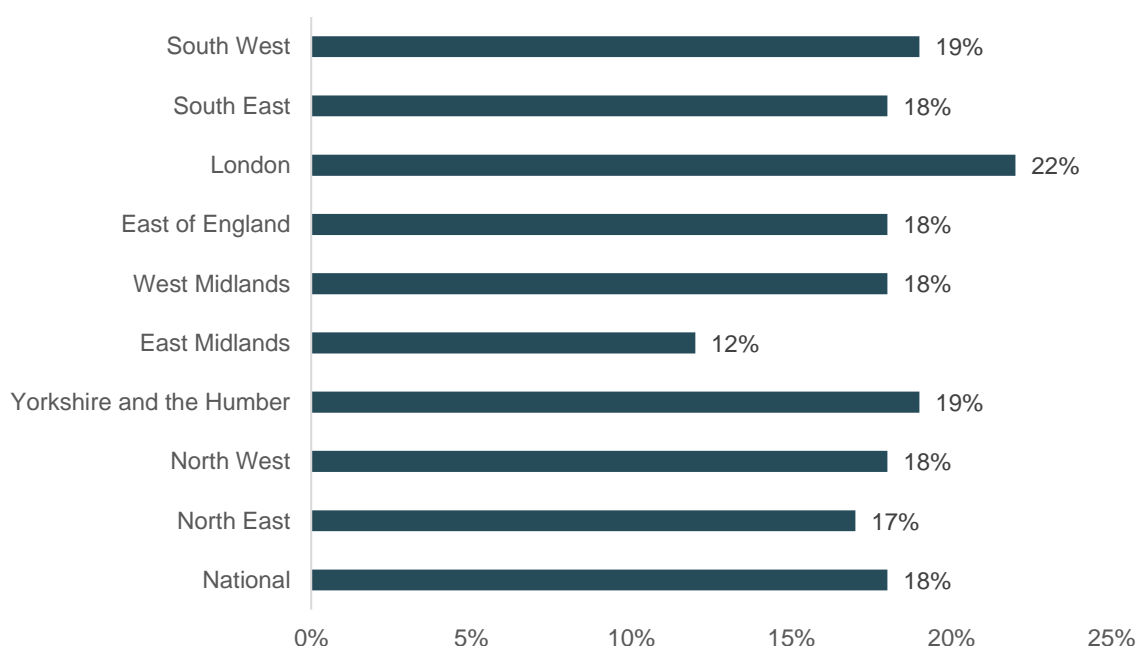
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Regional variations in outcomes

The data presented on the following pages highlights considerable regional variation in the outcomes achieved by looked after children and care leavers at GCSE level and in terms of their participation in higher education. The proportion of care leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) also shows significant variation between some regions.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the proportion of looked after children who gain five GCSEs at A* to C is relatively consistent across most regions, but is considerably lower in the East Midlands and considerably higher in London.

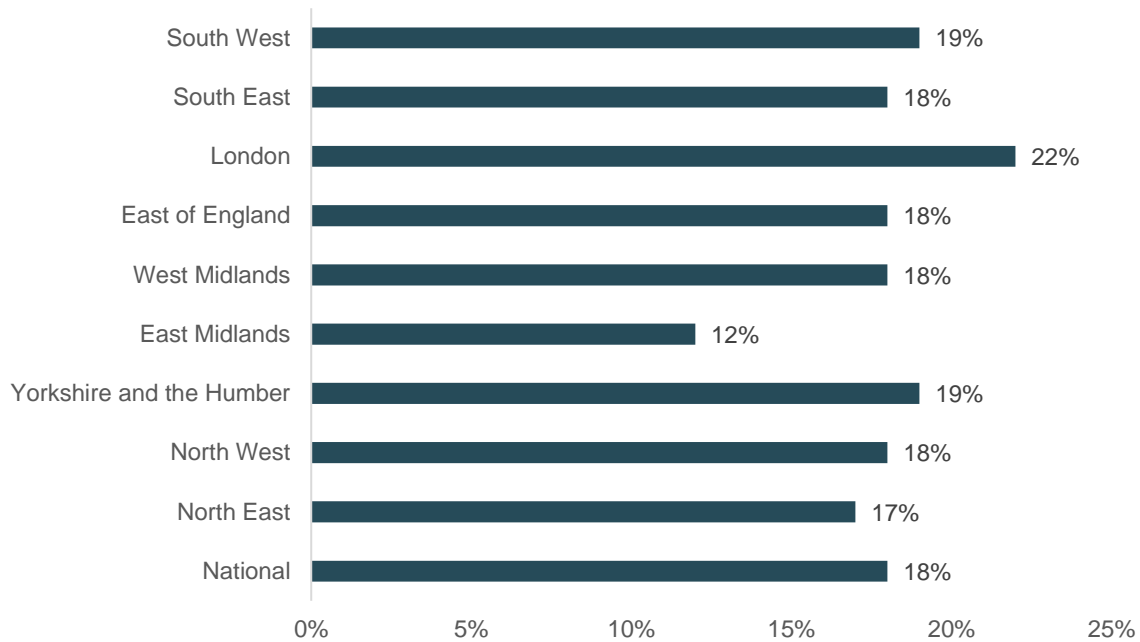
Figure 1: Percentage of looked after children who achieved five A*-C GCSEs in 2015, by region



Source: DfE Statistical First Release, Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England, 31 March 2015

The proportion of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) also varies across regions, with the East Midlands and the North West having the highest rate at 45 per cent, and London and Yorkshire and the Humber having the lowest, at 34 and 39 per cent respectively (see Figure 2 below).

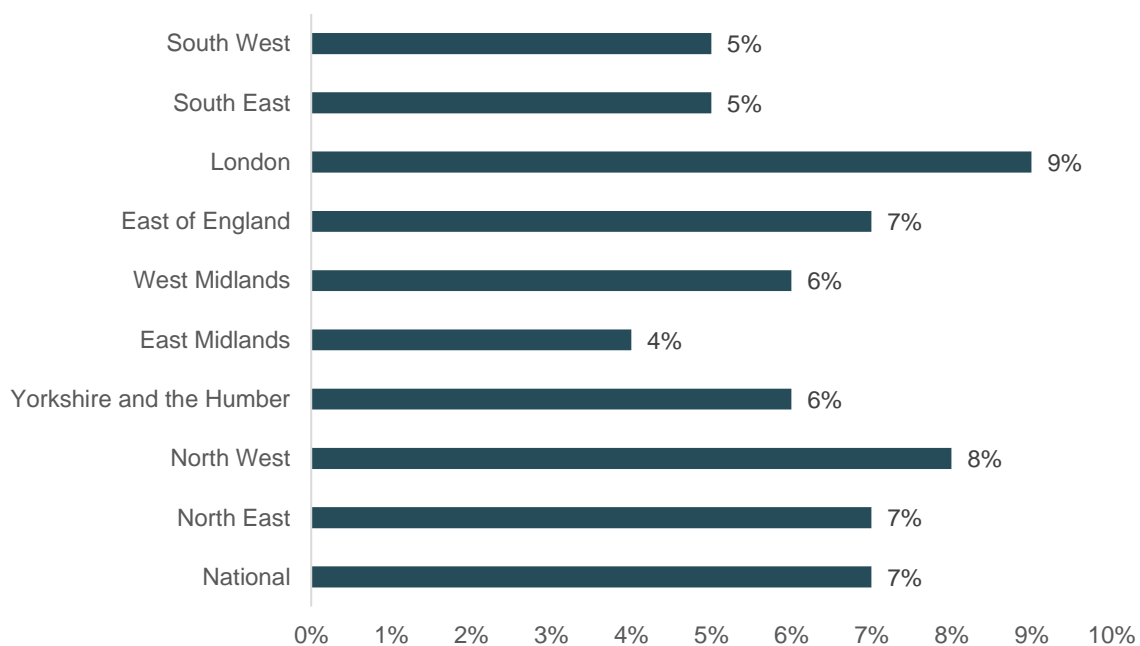
Figure 2: Percentage of care leavers who were NEET in 2016, by region



Source: DfE Statistical First Release, Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016

This variation across regions continues into Higher Education (HE). While HE participation amongst care leavers is low in comparison to the general population in all regions, it ranges from four per cent in the East Midlands to nine per cent in London.

Figure 3: Percentage of care leavers in Higher Education in 2016, by region



Source: DfE Statistical First Release, Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016

Policy

The data for England clearly shows that compared to the general population, care leavers achieve consistently poorer outcomes. This level of inequality and the impact upon generations of young people's lives highlights the need for an urgent national response from government. Alongside this, regional variances demonstrate the need for more targeted local approaches to tackle the specific challenges faced by care leavers in different parts of the country.

The challenges faced by care leavers are clearly recognised and understood by government, at the highest levels. In 2016, former Prime Minister David Cameron spoke about the need for greater support, stating that the deep problems faced by care leavers were 'not inevitable' and that a 'childhood in care doesn't mean a life of struggle':

"Children in care today are almost guaranteed to live in poverty. 84% leave school without five good GCSEs, 70% of prostitutes were once in care, and tragically care leavers are four times more likely to commit suicide than anyone else. These children are in our care. We, the state, are their parents and what are we setting them up for? The dole? The streets? An early grave."

In July 2016, in the context of a wider policy drive to achieve greater social justice and to improve the life chances of people who find themselves marginalised and disadvantaged, the Government published a new cross-departmental strategy for care leavers. Led by the Department for Education, '[Keep on Caring: supporting young people from care to independence](#)' sets out a vision for the reform of support to achieve five key outcomes for care leavers:

- To be better prepared and supported to live independently.
- To have improved access to education, training and employment.
- To experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure.
- To have improved access to health support.
- To achieve financial stability.

The strategy sets out the Government's commitments to explore different models of delivery and to embed corporate parenting responsibilities across all organisations, not just local authorities. One of the key commitments announced in the strategy is the new care leaver covenant. The covenant aims to encourage businesses and organisations across all sectors of society to commit to supporting care leavers at a local level in a way that makes sense to their organisation. This can include any support that may have a positive impact on a care leaver, such as providing volunteering and employment opportunities or discounted goods and services that help young people as they move into independent living. It will be important for leaving care services to engage with what is on offer to care leavers through the covenant and to promote it to organisations with whom they work, encouraging them to get involved if they have not already signed up.

All local authorities will soon be required to consult with their care leavers and publish a local offer of support for this group of young people. This should set out the minimum and additional support that the local authority will provide to its care leavers, for example offering apprenticeships and employment opportunities within the local authority or through local business links.

Alongside improving the practical support available, the development of strategic local approaches should provide a wide range of organisations with an opportunity to enable care leavers to make successful transitions and fulfil their pledges under the covenant. This aligns clearly with the Government's wider devolution policy. Transfer of powers and funding from national to local government is a significant shift that has the potential to deliver inclusive local growth and address key local economic and social priorities. The aim of devolution is to enable local areas to identify their own priorities and to make decisions and implement policies that deliver good outcomes for local people, communities and businesses. The movement towards combined authorities and devolved budgets, and the mayoral elections of May 2017, all create opportunities for local areas to learn from effective and integrated approaches to supporting care leavers at local level, and to implement their own networks and systems based on the needs of care leavers in their local areas.

The evidence for collaborative approaches to supporting care leavers

Local approaches to supporting looked after children and care leavers have long been recognised as an effective way of overcoming the challenges these young people face and supporting their transitions into independent living, education and employment. For example, research commissioned by Barnardo's in 1997 identified engagement with other local agencies as key in supporting care leavers to make successful transitions into adulthood, sustainable accommodation and education, training and employment opportunities¹.

The importance of partnership working in effective support for care leavers was recognised by Buttle UK and included in the criteria for their Quality Mark. Launched in 2006, the Buttle UK Quality Mark for care leavers aimed to provide a framework that enabled universities and further education colleges to improve their support for young people in and leaving care. In order for organisations to achieve the Mark, the framework required them to 'develop effective links with local authorities/Health and Social Care Trusts, schools, colleges, foster care providers and other partners to make available relevant information, advice and guidance (including financial support) about progression to and study options at FE/HE'.

Since the launch of the Buttle UK Quality Mark, a range of networks across England have been established to support partnership working in the improvement of support for care leavers. Initially, these networks aimed to bring universities together to identify the challenges that care leavers face in progressing to higher education and develop support to overcome these. As the Quality Mark developed to include further education, the networks also expanded, with many now involving a wide range of learning and skills providers, local authorities, voluntary organisations, statutory and specialist support agencies.

At a national level, many of these networks are now supported by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers ([NNECL](#)) through their National Networks for Collaborative Outreach Scheme. NNECL aims to support the continuous improvement of local practice, multi-agency partnerships and national collaboration on support for care leavers, enabling this group of young people to progress from care into and through further and higher education. They do this by providing national web-based channels of communication, an annual conference and regular newsletters, which enable regional networks of FE and HE providers to share knowledge and best practice in supporting looked after children and care leavers in their education and career progression, particularly into HE.

In 2015, Learning and Work Institute (then NIACE) worked with Buttle UK to develop a guide that would secure a lasting legacy from the Quality Mark, which ceased operating in July 2015. The guide was targeted at further education colleges and included examples of the effective practice developed by colleges that achieved the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers in the UK.

¹ <http://www.barnardos.org.uk/wwlcare.pdf>

Our research for the guide found that “partnerships and networks are absolutely key” to raising care leavers’ aspirations and enabling them to progress onto FE². This collaborative working was found to have a range of benefits for colleges and the care leavers they supported. By working with schools and other agencies, colleges could engage with care leavers prior to their application, to promote their courses and the support available for this group of young people, thereby raising their aspirations. Close partnerships with schools also meant that colleges could undertake targeted work with care leavers to ensure they experienced a smooth and successful transition into FE. Working with voluntary organisations, as well as leaving care services, also enabled colleges to engage the hardest to reach young people in their outreach activities.

Our research also showed that partnerships and networks resulted in multi-agency and holistic approaches to supporting care leavers, increasing the likelihood that all of their needs would be met. For example, colleges could liaise with local authorities to ensure care leavers received the financial help they were entitled to, and local authorities could ensure that care leavers had access to the appropriate bursaries at college. These approaches also facilitated the sharing of best practice between different organisations and different FE providers.

Finally, strong partnerships between FE colleges and other agencies allowed for more effective monitoring and tracking of care leavers’ achievements and progression. Information sharing between organisations meant that this could be fed into care leavers’ Pathway Plans, and that appropriate steps could be taken to ensure that young people were on track to reach their goals. This suggests that effective partnerships between schools, FE and HE providers can support care leavers to plan ahead, which research highlights as crucial in enabling these young people to make successful transitions³.

² http://www.learningandwork.org.uk.gridhosted.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Supporting_Care_Leavers_in_FE_Full-Report_November_2015.pdf

³ https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/Research_reports/ncb_rsched_9_final_for_web.pdf

Local approaches to supporting care leavers: critical success factors

Building on our work with Buttle UK to create a [guide](#) for FE colleges, our research for this project has enabled us to identify a number of key factors which contribute to the success of local approaches in supporting care leavers.

Clear strategic objectives and roles/responsibilities of members

In order to engage organisations in their work, it is important that partnerships and networks have a clear purpose and strategic objectives which are communicated to potential partners. This helps FE and HE providers, local authorities, employment and careers services and employers to see the value of contributing to a network and becoming a formal member. Having clear objectives and roles/responsibilities for members also means that the work of a partnership is focussed on a particular purpose and uses its members' knowledge and expertise in different areas to its maximum potential. This is also crucial when time and resources are limited, as it can enable staff to make the case for their involvement in the partnership to senior managers in their own organisations.

Formal membership arrangements

Two of the examples of best practice we identified have formal membership arrangements in place, which require organisations to contribute financially to the activities of the collaborative group or network. For example, members of the Care Leaver Progression Partnership in Kent are required to pay a membership fee each year, and the Higher Education Progression Partnership is jointly funded by Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield. Where these arrangements are in place, they have helped the lead or coordinating organisation to garner firm support and commitments from members and ensure that they actively participate in meetings, events and lobbying activities.

Involve a range of organisations to address multiple barriers to participation

The nature of care leavers' lives means that they often experience a range of barriers to progression into FE and HE. This can include financial difficulties, emotional instability, poor health and wellbeing, poor housing, challenging relationships with family members and low self-esteem or confidence. In order to effectively support these young people to overcome this wide range of challenges, it is important for partnerships or networks focused on improving support for care leavers to engage with a wide range of different organisations, such as local authority leaving care services, FE and HE providers, Jobcentre Plus, careers and employment services, housing support services, other advice services (e.g. Citizens Advice) and local youth charities. This multi-agency approach enables members to draw on their partnerships and relationships with other organisations to provide tailored and holistic support to individual learners in their own organisations. The partnerships we identified through this research tended to begin with a focus on engaging one or two types of organisation (for example, HE and FE providers) and have since expanded to include a wide range of organisations.

Designated lead organisation and member of staff who can be easily contacted

In order for a range of organisations to be recruited to a partnership, it is important that there is a clear contact and way for organisations to get involved. Having a lead partner and a named contact within that organisation has been invaluable to the partnerships represented in this report, in engaging new and more diverse members. The lead partner can also be instrumental in driving forward the work of the partnership and ensuring that its objectives develop and maintain its momentum.

A collaborative way of working focused on young people's needs

Although it is important for members to see the benefits of the partnership to their own organisation, this should not be the main focus of any collaborative network. The case studies in the next section demonstrate how a focus on the needs of young people in and leaving care can result in a shared local priority to widen participation, in which organisations support young people to access any opportunity which best suit their needs and interests, rather than working to meet their own recruitment targets. For example, a young person may contact Liverpool John Moores University if they are interested in accessing HE, as they are the lead partner in the Greater Merseyside Care Leaver Network, but they will signpost or refer them onto whichever provider in the network can offer the course and support the young person requires.

A 'neutral' organisation that represents all members and care leavers

A key factor in the success of the networks presented as case studies in this report is the way in which partnerships act as neutral organisations which can engage with external stakeholders in the best interests of members and care leavers. Members found that external stakeholders were potentially more likely to engage and collaborate with the partnership or network, as it is viewed as working to improve care leavers' opportunities to progress, rather than to meet organisational aims or targets. This is particularly the case for Sheffield Hallam University and The University of Sheffield, who find that their Higher Education Progression Partnership has had more success engaging with the local authorities' leaving care and education teams, as it is viewed as a 'neutral' organisation which represents the best interests of care leavers.

Share information and practice to avoid duplication of work

Our research suggests that one of the activities that members value most from partnerships focused on supporting care leavers is the sharing of good practice. Having robust ways of sharing information between members means that they can learn from one another and build on existing knowledge and initiatives, rather than each starting from scratch when planning activities and support. This not only avoids duplication of work and saves time and money for members, but also provides a more consistent and clear offer to care leavers within the local area. For example, if one provider has gaps in their provision, they can refer a young person onto another provider who has different activities in place. Members of the Care Leaver Progression Partnership in Kent have also found that sharing their outcome data can help them to benchmark their performance in relation to engaging and supporting care leavers to achieve, not just locally but also between regions.

Case studies

The following case studies highlight how some of the success factors identified in the previous section can be put into practice. The partnerships presented here take different approaches to engaging with local agencies in order to support care leavers into FE and HE, although each is tailored to their own individual context and the needs of their members and of local care leavers. They are:

- **The Care Leaver Progression Partnership (CLPP)**
Based in Kent and Medway, the [CLPP](#) consists of all the colleges and universities in Kent and Medway, Medway Council and Kent County Council, Virtual School Kent, Medway Youth Trust and Jobcentre Plus.
- **The Central Through Care Team**
Run by Staffordshire County Council, the [Central Through Care Team](#) runs a targeted employability programme for care leavers which engages with employers, training providers, Jobcentre Plus, youth workers and social workers.
- **The Greater Merseyside Care Leaver Network**
The [Greater Merseyside Care Leaver Network](#) brings together the six local authorities, 10 Further Education providers and five Higher Education institutions from across Merseyside to help develop their support for care leavers.
- **The Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP)**
Jointly funded by Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield, [HEPP](#) is a strategic partnership which focuses on widening participation and entry into higher education for vulnerable groups, including care leavers.

Each case study includes a visual representation of its model, activities and the resulting outcomes for care leavers and members.

The Care Leaver Progression Partnership – Kent and Medway

The Care Leaver Progression Partnership (CLPP) is a network of organisations in Kent and Medway who have committed to improving post-16 education and training experiences for children in care and care leavers. When funding for Aimhigher ceased in 2011, the organisations involved in the programme wanted to ensure that its work with care leavers would continue across Kent and Medway. In order to achieve this, the institutions that had been part of the Aimhigher group decided to set up a new organisation that would focus on supporting care leavers in their education and progression.

How it works

The partnership consists of all the colleges and universities in Kent and Medway, Medway Council and Kent County Council, Virtual School Kent, Medway Youth Trust and Jobcentre Plus. All members make a financial commitment in the form of “annual partner funding” (which constitutes the sole funding of CLPP) and sign an agreed Terms of Reference at the start of their membership. This formal arrangement, of a financial and contractual obligation, is seen as a critical success factor for the CLPP as it leads to accountability for the organisations involved.

The organisation has two groups: the “Strategy Group” and the operational “Designated Member of Staff group” (DMS). Each partner agency has at least one named representative on each group. The Strategy Group meets quarterly and their role is to set the annual strategic outcomes objectives for the year and, when needed, to liaise with high-level stakeholders (e.g. vice chancellors) to ensure that what is proposed by the network is put into action by individual organisations. For example, one challenge in the partnership is that staff at colleges and universities may have limited capacity to give time and little funding available. This, combined with potentially having a relatively low number of care leavers at an institution, can make it difficult for members to make the case for prioritising support for these learners. In the past, the Strategy Group has written to principals of institutions to ask for dedicated time to be allocated to staff members to allow them to support care leavers, rather than fitting it around other priorities.

The DMS group provides operational input and includes representation from members of staff with a pastoral support role, who are the designated leads for care leavers in their organisations. The group meets termly and members are expected to cascade information to their own organisations, to other partnerships of which they are members and to their member groups and communities.

The work of the Strategy Group and the DMS Group informs one another. The Strategy Group feeds down to the DMS group about the priorities for the organisation and what support should be implemented on the ground, and the DMS group feeds back to the strategy group regarding the strategic support and lobbying activity they need in order to achieve the organisation’s objectives.

Support for care leavers and organisations working with them

CLPP delivers its aims of better understanding and removing the barriers to post-16 education and training for local care leavers by carrying out a range of activities. The meetings of its DMS group allows members to share best practice in engaging and

supporting care leavers in post-16 education. This enables members to build on each other's work and the lessons learned from this, instead of starting from scratch each time.

Members also collect and share data on numbers of, and outcomes for, care leavers, which CLPP collates and reports on annually. The analysis covers trends in the Kent and Medway local authority areas, including schools, further education and higher education, and is broken down by gender, age and ethnicity. This gives members a comprehensive picture of where they are doing well and what further challenges need addressing in their support for care leavers. The data from Kent and Medway is presented against data from London, South East and England, allowing for comparisons regionally and nationally. The analysis also breaks down data by the different universities and colleges, giving them insight into each other's outcomes for care leavers.

The CLPP runs an annual conference for its member organisations and other local practitioners on ways to improve post-16 education experiences for care leavers. The theme of each conference is decided by the Designated Member of Staff group and is based on their view of what would be most practical help in the local area (e.g. the financial support for care leavers at transition points). These events give delegates the opportunity to identify further ways they can work together to tackle specific issues faced by care leavers.

If the partnership identifies a particular issue, for example where the introduction of a new national or local policy has negative consequences for care leavers, they can set up and run a targeted sub-group or working group to tackle this. Members of the DMS may then work with members of the Strategy Group to lobby local and central government and raise awareness of the challenges and issues faced by care leavers, and the need for organisations to work together to address these.

Benefits and outcomes

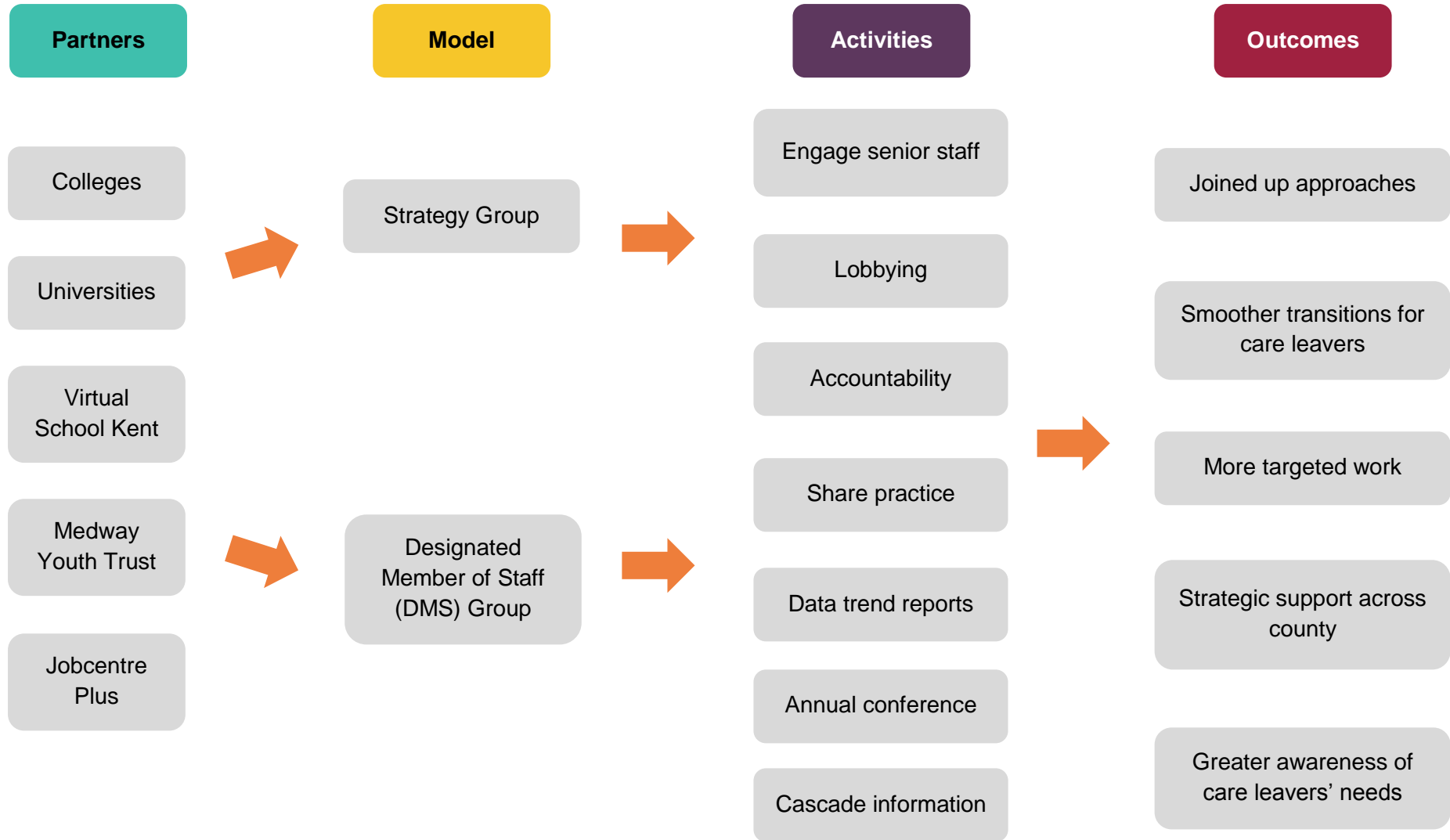
Although the direct impact on care leavers is difficult to quantify, members of the CLPP strongly feel that the partnership has improved their joint working and approaches to identifying and supporting care leavers. Members feel that fewer care leavers in Kent and Medway now "slip through the net" of their support systems, which should ensure that they are able to overcome more of the challenges they face in relation to post-16 education and training.

The collaborative nature of the CLPP is also viewed as a key benefit to members. This not only ensures that they can share effective practice and develop joint approaches to tackling identified challenges, but means that they are able to use their time more efficiently, as they are not each working individually on the same aim. This is increasingly important in a time of constrained capacity and funding.

Organisations also find the annual report produced by the partnership highly valuable, as it provides them with a benchmark for their successes and outcomes for care leavers and also highlights local gaps in provision, enabling providers to target their work more effectively.

The Strategy Group has also been successful in securing strategic support for the work of the CLPP and for member organisations' work with care leavers as a whole.

Care Leaver Progression Partnership model



Central Through Care Team – Staffordshire

The Central Through Care Team in Staffordshire County Council provides services to young people aged 13 and above who are looked after, leaving care or have left care. For the last six years, the Central Through Care Team has delivered an integrated local approach to its education, employment and training support for young people aged 16-21. This service involves a range of different local agencies and stakeholders, including employers of all sizes, training providers, FE colleges, Jobcentre Plus, youth workers and social workers, thus ensuring that it is tailored to each individual care leavers' needs.

Background to the service

The Central Through Care Team's education, employment and training programme is primarily delivered through a 10-week work placement and bespoke package of guided learning to enable care leavers to gain an NOCN employability skills qualification. It evolved from an outsourced service which brokered work experience placements between schools and employers. When these services were privatised, it was recognised that the looked after children and care leaver cohort needed specialist input, and a "Foundations to Employment Co-ordinator" role was created in the council to ensure this was provided. The service is funded entirely by Staffordshire County Council. Because funding is 'in house', employers have flexibility, in partnership with the service, to build individualised packages for care leavers to develop their employability skills.

How young people and employers are recruited

The Foundations to Employment Co-ordinator has developed a multi-strand approach to recruiting young people to the programme, developing close working partnerships with social workers, personal advisers and outreach support workers across Staffordshire. This provides a two-way flow of information, enabling the Co-ordinator to promote the programme amongst care leavers, and for these teams to inform the Co-ordinator when they have a young person who would benefit from participating in the programme. This partnership approach to recruitment is highly effective, with approximately 30 care leavers engaging in the programme each year.

Once a young person has been referred onto the programme, service workers meet with them on a one-to-one basis to explain the programme, answer any questions and fill in any gaps on the referral form, for example, by finding out from the young person what their skills are, what they want to do and what they have done in the past. Service workers also aim to identify any barriers or challenges which may prevent the young person from completing a training programme or work placement.

A critical part of this stage of the process is service workers' links with other local agencies involved in supporting care leavers in Staffordshire. They draw on these to ensure that the young person can engage with the programme and that it fits with other aspects of their life. For example, if the young person receives benefits then service workers will contact Jobcentre Plus and the service's own benefits advisers to ensure their claim is not affected by the programme. If needed, service workers can accompany the young people they support to meetings with Jobcentre Plus advisers to ensure that both care leavers and advisers are clear about what they are entitled to during their programme. Similarly, service workers have strong links with housing services, health centres and other local agencies and

can refer young people onto these services throughout the programme. This localised, partnership approach to delivering the service ensures that all of a care leaver's needs are met and that the programme does not unintentionally create barriers to their participation.

Employers are recruited onto the programme by service workers who initially approach team managers working on the ground and then liaise with HR as requested. This has been successful in engaging a range of local SMEs and national employers, from local riding stables, to supermarkets and national garage networks such as Halfords. Once employers agree to participate they are placed on a database so that care leavers can be allocated to them according to their needs and interests. Service workers then provide a training session on care leavers' lives, the common challenges they face and the reality of being a young person living on their own to the team who will be supporting the young person. This close working between the service and the employers involved in the programme ensures that young people have appropriate support throughout their placement.

How the service works

Once they are recruited onto the programme, young people participate in an accredited NOCN employability skills course. This is delivered by the service to small groups of care leavers and is designed to prepare them for work and improve their job application skills. Employers are then encouraged to put these into practice for the young people during their work experience placement, for example, by conducting mock interviews with them.

Following their employability course, young people are offered a 10-week work experience placement, which is chosen to fit their personal preferences, practical needs (e.g. available public transport) and career goals. Meeting the requirements of each individual can be a challenge, however this personalised approach is integral to the service and is seen as key to its success. Having a network of employers of all sizes and from a range of different sectors enables the service to meet the majority of participants' needs with ease.

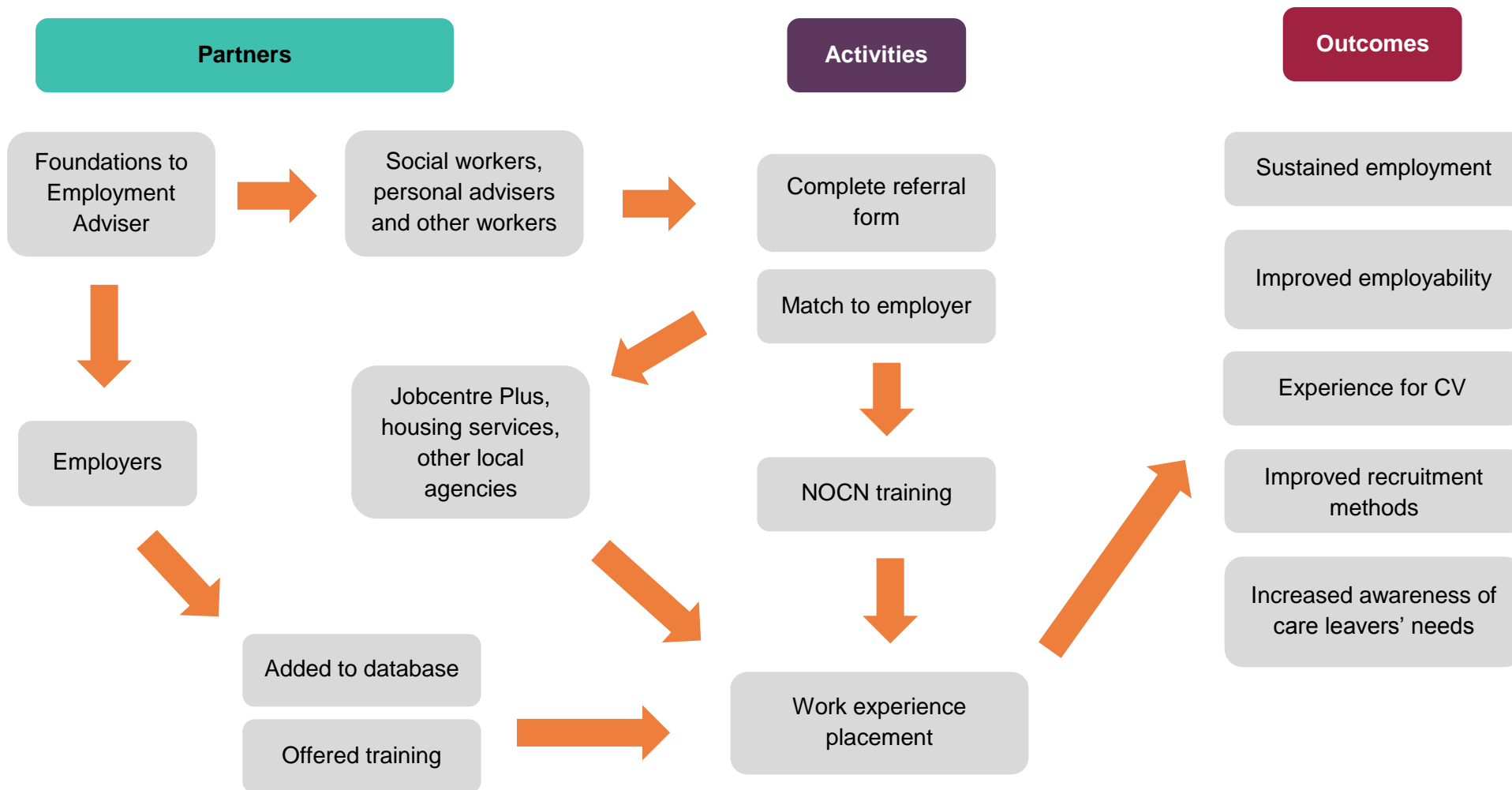
The service continues to work jointly with the employer and young person throughout the placement to address any issues. During this time, service workers can signpost young people to further support and advice from local agencies and services as and when needed. Towards the end of the placement, workers hold a review with the employer and young person to discuss their next steps. If the young person cannot continue working with the employer, their service worker will discuss other opportunities for work and training with them. The care leaver's personal adviser or social worker will also be involved at this point, so they can input into the plan and agree roles and responsibilities of individuals.

Benefits to care leavers and employers

The multi-agency approach of the service has been shown to benefit both the care leavers and employers who participate. For care leavers, this joint working ensures they can access timely and appropriate support throughout the programme, enabling them to develop their employability skills and gain some real work experience for their CVs. Some have even gained employment in the same company after their placement.

For employers, the programme offers an opportunity to broaden their recruitment base, recruit new talent into their organisation and gain an understanding of the lives of care leavers, thus leaving a legacy of knowledge which can help them in the future.

The Central Through Care Team model



Greater Merseyside Care Leaver Network

The Greater Merseyside Care Leaver network was set up in response to the introduction of the Buttle UK Quality Mark in 2006, and the commitment of Higher Education institutions across Merseyside to achieving this award. The network was originally convened by Aimhigher, which brought together local authorities, Further Education providers and Higher Education institutions to help develop their support for care leavers. The network is now coordinated by Liverpool John Moores University and involves HE providers, Further Education providers, local authorities and careers advice services from across Merseyside.

Background

Initially, the focus of the network was on enabling its members to achieve the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers. Members worked together to identify the challenges that care leavers faced in progressing to FE and HE, and to develop and implement support which could enable them to overcome these challenges. As this developed, members were supported to apply for the quality mark and achieve the Buttle UK standard.

Following this success, the network became a forum for sharing good practice in relation to care leavers across Merseyside. The membership of the network was broadened and FE colleges, schools and local authorities were invited to join. The current membership consists of the five Higher Education providers (Liverpool John Moores University, the University of Liverpool, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) and Edge Hill University); the 10 FE colleges and providers; and the six local authorities across Merseyside. The network also draws on the expertise of careers advice services, employment services and other agencies as and when required.

Aims and objectives

The main aim of the network is to support its members to review and improve their support for care leavers by providing a forum for information exchange and the sharing of good practice. The network meets on a termly basis to give members opportunities to share any new approaches to engaging and supporting care leavers and new insights from across the sector which may support the work of the group. As the coordinator, Liverpool John Moores University also circulates regular email updates and news items which may be of use to members.

The network also aims to facilitate joint working between FE and HE providers across Merseyside, in order to support care leavers to make successful transitions between the two. In particular, the network facilitates a multi-agency approach to supporting looked after children and care leavers in FE and HE, and ensures that members take a coordinated approach to delivering initiatives targeted at looked after children and care leavers, including aspiration-raising activities and events aimed at foster carers. This approach to supporting the progression of care leavers means that the focus of all providers is on widening participation, rather than meeting their own individual recruitment targets. While each individual organisation runs a range of activities targeted at care leavers, they all signpost to one another and work closely together to ensure each young person's needs are met. This benefits care leavers as it means they are encouraged to access the provision and institutions which best suit them, no matter which organisation they initially contact.

Alongside supporting the practice of and partnerships between members, the network aims to raise awareness more widely of the challenges faced by care leavers in progressing onto FE and HE and the impact that changes in policy may have on this group of young people. This includes feeding into Government consultations, sharing good practice nationally and contributing to events and conferences.

Benefits and outcomes

The Greater Merseyside Care Leaver Network has been hugely successful in embedding support for care leavers across FE and HE providers in its local area. By sharing practice and building on each other's work, members have been able to implement a range of support and activities aimed at engaging and enabling care leavers to progress in education and onto the world of work.

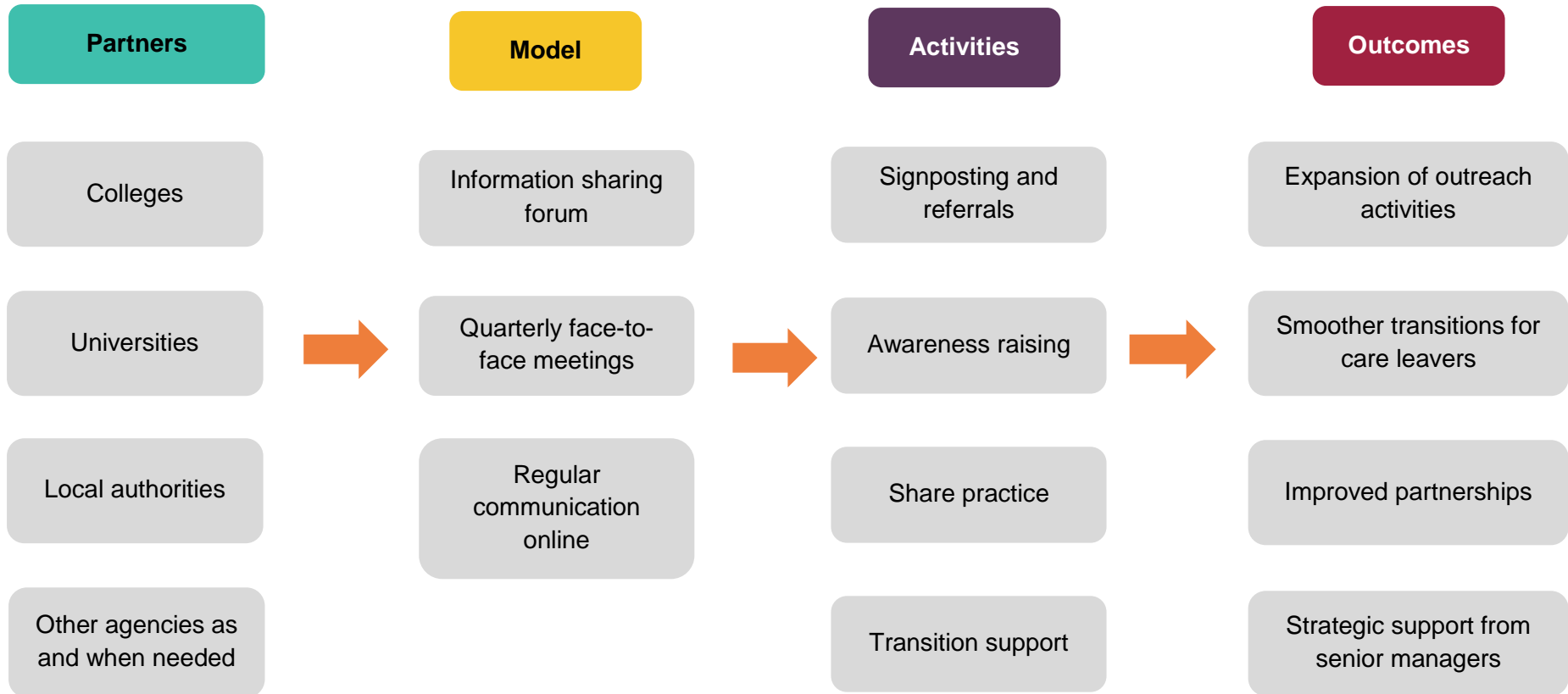
“The network has been absolutely invaluable in terms of embedding the work across Merseyside now, and Higher Education is very much on the agenda for care leavers.” Network coordinator

A particular success of the network is the improved partnership working between HE institutions, FE providers, schools and local authorities across Merseyside. Providers' close links with local authorities, established through the network, mean that personal advisers and social workers often contact support staff directly when a care leaver is considering applying for FE or HE. They can then access individualised advice and guidance on college or university life, finances and application processes to allay any concerns, and signpost care leavers to other providers if necessary, depending on their needs and interests.

The network also helps members to facilitate care leavers' transitions between their organisations. For example, colleges work with schools to organise and run taster days, deliver presentations on their courses and promote information on the support for care leavers in FE. Similarly, universities invite colleges to bring care leavers and their families onto campus for visits, open days and other outreach activities. Providers can also contact the appropriate person in the institution that a care leaver is progressing to, to explain the support they have found useful on their current course and request that similar support is put in place in their next institution. All of this work is facilitated by the close working relationships of the network members.

Finally, the network has been successful in securing strategic buy-in to improving support for care leavers in both FE and HE across its member organisations. The success of the network's activities and the subsequent improvement in the engagement and retention of care leavers means that senior managers recognise the importance of this work. This ensures that support for looked after children and care leavers remains high on the agenda of members' respective organisations.

Greater Merseyside Care Leaver Network model



The Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP) – Sheffield

The Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP) is a strategic partnership between Sheffield Hallam University and The University of Sheffield, which works with a range of organisations to widen participation and entry into higher education. The partnership was established in 2011 and is funded jointly by the universities as part of their shared commitment to the city and region.

Initially, the HEPP Board comprised of senior staff from both universities, along with representatives from the four local authorities. However, over the years the partnership has grown and now also includes staff from FE colleges which offer HE, the virtual school, Foyer Housing, Crisis centres and other local organisations who support NEET young people. Although HEPP's work aims to improve participation rates amongst all young people, looked after children and care leavers form a particular focus of their activities.

Working with young people in care and care leavers

HEPP's role in supporting vulnerable young people, and care leavers in particular, is two-fold. Its first main role is to coordinate and support the existing outreach and support work of each university. Both Sheffield Hallam University and The University of Sheffield have a long-established offer to young people in and leaving care, both pre- and post-entry to their institutions, which HEPP supports. They run regular outreach activities with schools and colleges across Sheffield to raise young people's aspirations and help them realise that higher education is a possibility for them. HEPP liaises with both organisations to check that they are reaching the full range of target groups and are not duplicating each other's activities. HEPP also acts as a third-party facilitator between the two universities and any organisations who wish to collaborate with them or host any of their outreach activities. These organisations will first approach HEPP, which explore the organisation's needs and then approach the university they feel is best suited to meet these. This streamlined process ensures that each institution's resources are used appropriately and for maximum impact.

HEPP's second role is to undertake a range of direct work to promote higher education across the region. One of its fundamental activities, which underpins the partnership's success, is to engage with external organisations and create sustained relationships. In relation to young people in care and care leavers, HEPP has been effective in establishing collaborative working between local authorities' leaving care and education teams. Historically these teams did not work together closely due to different management structures, but HEPP representatives recognised the value that each could play in raising care leavers' aspirations and supporting their progression to HE. To encourage this joint working, HEPP provides information on education participation and activities to the leaving care teams, and on social services provision to the education teams. The partnership is also represented at meetings with local authorities across the region and uses these opportunities to identify ways in which teams can work together, drawing on data on local higher education participation amongst looked after children and care leavers to support this. In turn, HEPP gathers information from these meetings which is used by its members to develop appropriate outreach and engagement activities targeted at care leavers.

Alongside working directly with partners, HEPP delivers targeted outreach activities for schools and colleges, and more widely, to help young people and adults to consider higher

level study. It also provides accurate, independent and impartial information and advice to enable potential students to make informed decisions about their futures. Examples of collaborative work include the [Go Further, Go Higher resources](#), which provide key advice and contacts for those in or leaving care considering higher education; a programme of activity for pupils in years 10-12, including young people in care, to explore their options in higher education and raise their aspirations; and individual work with care leavers to ensure they are aware of the support they are entitled to in higher education, and to encourage them to disclose their status when they apply to university. HEPP also delivers CPD on care leavers' needs and higher education to professionals who work with young people in care, such as representatives from the Fostering Network, local youth organisations and foyers or homelessness charities. The aim of the training is to raise awareness of the support for care leavers in universities and to enable other professionals to support these young people to apply and successfully progress onto HE.

The partnership is currently exploring ways of developing networks of foster carers (with input from local authorities) to support the identification of care leavers before they enter university, and to raise their awareness of the benefits and application process for higher education, as many foster carers have not been to university themselves. In this way, the partnership is planning to increase the support available to care leavers who remain with foster carers, as well as those who reside at university.

Benefits and success factors

HEPP has achieved a number of considerable benefits for both care leavers and the organisations which support them in Sheffield. For the universities and other members of HEPP, the partnership minimises duplication (and the associated financial cost) of outreach activities and information about the support available to care leavers. This also benefits care leavers as it reduces the complexity of the available information and gives them a clear set of higher education options to explore and choose from in the local region.

Both universities also feel that HEPP is an effective tool for improving their links with external agencies and organisations. Not only does it provide one key contact for organisations to approach for information about higher education opportunities, but it also acts as a neutral representative of both institutions. HEPP can work with external organisations and be viewed as providing objective advice about effective ways of promoting higher education to care leavers and supporting students, rather than only working to meet its own student recruitment or widening participation targets. This has established a level of trust between HEPP and other agencies which may not have been possible otherwise.

The CPD training which HEPP offers to staff in various local agencies has also helped to raise awareness of the support available to care leavers in the local area, and will hopefully encourage more care leavers to consider higher education as an option when they approach the end of their schooling.

Finally, the improved relationships between the education and leaving care teams within the local authorities, which have been facilitated by HEPP, means that there is more joined up working between the two. As a result, these teams are working together more closely to identify and address care leavers' needs in relation to education, and how different workers can support them to stay in education and progress to higher levels.

The Higher Education Progression Partnership (HEPP) mode

