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Executive Summary

Expanding Employment Horizons for Young People in Care: An Evaluation of York Cares' Bright Futures Project

Jo Dixon and Jade Ward

Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York

This summary provides an overview of York Cares' Bright Futures Project and the main findings from the evaluation.

Leaving Care and Employment

Research and national statistics suggest that care leavers aged 19 – 21 are almost three times as likely to be NEET compared to all 19 – 21-year olds in England (38% compared to 14%). In addition to the personal costs of lower participation in EET, research highlights the wider cost to society. Research carried out by the National Audit Office estimated that the lifetime cost of the current proportion of 19-year-old care leavers who are NEET would be around £240 million. The reasons for lower participation are related to the reasons that brought young people into care and the support they receive whilst in care and leaving care.

Bright Futures Project

The Bright Futures Project aims to support care-experienced young people across York to increase and improve their employment related skills, knowledge and opportunities. The project brings together York Cares (an employee volunteering charity), The City of York Council and leading local employers to deliver work experience and skills opportunities. The project offers a menu of options for young people.

The Evaluation

The small-scale independent evaluation was carried out by researchers from the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of York. It took place between September 2016 and November 2017 and was funded by the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (<https://www.york.ac.uk/social-science/esrc-iaa/>), which supports collaborative projects that build upon existing areas of university research. Designed as a light touch approach, the evaluation utilised participatory methods to engage with young people and the Bright Futures team in the design of the evaluation and questions. Data was gathered from young people participating in the Bright Futures Project (n= 33) as well as from foster carers (n=5) and Employers (n=8) via evaluation interviews and surveys and a review of anonymised Bright Futures data. In addition, interviews and surveys were completed by staff from City of York Children's Rights and Advocacy

Service and the York Cares team (n= 5). In all, 51 stakeholders contributed data to the evaluation.

Opportunities take-up

The Bright Futures Project provided a number of stand-alone and mix and match opportunities to young people during the course of the evaluation. These included, eight Behind the Scenes (BTS) opportunities with 30 young people attending. Some young people undertook more than one BTS opportunity. Three skills workshops were delivered to six young people and seven work placements took place.

In total 63 evaluation monitoring forms were collected from young people participating in BTS, 13 feedback forms were collected from skills workshops and 11 young people took part in face to face interviews with the evaluation team to feed back their views and experiences.

Experiences and impact of the project

Young people identified several advantages to taking up the opportunities. These included gaining awareness and information about the types of jobs available locally. Opportunities also helped them to get an idea of the range of roles within organisations and how they operated behind the scenes. The workshops were delivered by Employers and helped young people to develop their CVs and understanding of application and interview processes and techniques. They reported that the experiences had increased their knowledge and boosted their confidence and interests in relation to career options. Young people welcomed the chance to try out multiple opportunities from the different options. The pre-placement meetings proved an important preparatory step for work placement opportunities and provided an informal introduction that helped young people to know what to expect and what was expected of them when they began their placement. For some young people the pre-placement meeting allowed them to change their mind if they felt the placement would not be right for them. Young people identified some

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scope for future improvement to the project, including the need for sufficient time for information sharing and preparation prior to taking up opportunities. Barriers to engagement included perceived stigma and stereotyping attached to being identified as a child in care, which some young people felt would disadvantage them in the eyes of employers, staff or other young people. There was, therefore, scope for more focused work with young people who were reluctant to engage to overcome their concerns and provide additional support to enable them to make the most of the opportunities open to them through the Bright Futures Project. This might include specific group sessions for young people considered harder to reach or engage. A peer mentoring approach might also offer support, advice and encouragement to those young people who tend to drift off the radar for these types of opportunities and yet are often in greater need of them.

Employers identified several motivating factors for participating in the project including wanting to ‘give back’ to the local community, as part of their corporate social responsibility commitments. Alongside this was a specific aim to engage with care-experienced young people to increase their career opportunities. There were also more strategic objectives, which included raising awareness of their own organisations and the range of roles open to the local labour market. In this way, Employers were able to utilise the Bright Futures Project to increase their engagement with local youth workforce and ‘showcase’ the jobs that could be on offer to them in the future. Employers were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of providing opportunities to the Bright Futures young people and expressed an interest in continuing their involvement. The highlights were working with groups of enthusiastic young people and witnessing the levels of interest and engagement in the activities they provided. The Employer group reported that they were well supported by the Bright Futures team, both in setting up and delivering the opportunities. Important to continued success of the Bright Futures Project, was ensuring sufficient time for Employers to address the logistics of setting up the opportunities, including liaising with members of their staff, setting up personnel procedures and matching young people and opportunities.

The Bright Futures team reported that the project had achieved its overall aims during the first year of operation. They had successfully established an effective model for liaising with local employers in the City of York and had succeeded in engaging and supporting just over half (n=33, 55%) of their target

population of young people in a menu of work skills development opportunities. Although the numbers were lower than expected, the number of opportunities delivered was close to target as many young people had taken up multiple opportunities. A number of learning points were identified for the on-going development of the Bright Futures Project. These included the need for strategies for engaging with a greater number and broader range of care-experienced young people and the need for increased staff time to oversee the opportunities and increase engagement from young people and employers.

Key messages

The Bright Futures model of delivery involves a supported, collaborative approach to engaging key stakeholders in the shared aim of achieving a more knowledgeable, skilled and confident future local workforce, drawn from young people in and leaving care. Learning from the stakeholders suggests that ingredients for success include:

- Raising awareness and understanding of the needs, strengths and interests of the target group
- Providing a range of different types of skills development and work experience opportunities across a variety of employers and organisations to meet the skills and interests of young people
- Sharing clear information on the project and opportunities via a range of mediums (leaflets, texts, verbal communication) for young people, their carers and other professionals such as teachers and social workers
- Having sufficient staff in place to inform, prepare and support a wide range of stakeholders including young people, employers, schools and foster carers
- Maintaining a healthy flow of eligible young people with a diverse range of needs through the project
- Benefiting from the oversight and co-ordination of an umbrella organisation, such as York Cares, that brings with it experience of project development and existing networks of employers
- Being motivated by a shared goal and the means by which different sectors can come together to work towards achieving it.

“It was just really friendly, everyone was really nice and they got me really involved with the planning meetings, so I just felt that I’d really been there as a professional” (Bright Futures young person)

Authors:

Jo Dixon jo.dixon@york.ac.uk

Jade Ward jade.ward@york.ac.uk

Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York

www.york.ac.uk/spsw

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