

This good practice example has been withdrawn as it is older than 3 years and may no longer reflect current policy.

Improving outcomes for looked after children and care leavers: London Borough of Ealing

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Brief description

The London Borough of Ealing's 'Horizons' programme is a one-stop shop that provides young people in care and care leavers aged between 11 and 24 with the range of services and support they need from a single access point in a youth-friendly setting.

Overview – the provider's message

'Horizons represents a successful approach to improving outcomes and life chances for looked after children and care leavers through engagement and participation. The programme is young person-led and constantly evolving.

We're proud of our young people's many achievements; and we're delighted that Horizons has been able to provide children and young people with a wide breadth of opportunities to develop their talents and reach their full potential.'

Marcella Phelan, Assistant Director, Children's Services

The good practice in detail

The model for Horizons originally emerged over 10 years ago. Consultation with young people identified that they wanted additional support to enable them to be successful. Now, the service includes youth work, education, health, mentoring, life skills, and advice about finance, accommodation and the law. It also provides access to college, university and employment opportunities. In short, the service provides support to young people when they need it, long after they have left care, up to the age of 25 and beyond.

This support includes:

- a place where they can meet and talk things over with other young people who have shared experiences of being in care

- additional study support to make up for the education they may have missed through the disruption of coming into care
- access to computers and a quiet place to study
- funding for Higher Education, training or employment.

The young people also requested better advice, support and preparation to help them leave care, live independently and become successful young adults. They wanted somewhere they could get support if things were going wrong or when they just felt lonely and needed some friendly company.

Facilities

The project began in a former children's home but moved to new state-of-the-art premises five years ago. Facilities include an internet café, a teaching room, counselling/one-to-one rooms, a life skills kitchen, a 'chill-out' lounge and a multi-purpose activity area that can be used for arts, drama, music, poetry, and consultation sessions.

Programme

The [programme](#) consists of education support in the mornings, careers advice, health and housing information in the afternoon and study support and youth activities in the evenings, holidays and weekends

It is aspirational and encourages young people to aim high despite the difficulties they may have related to the care experience. Positive older role models provide support to help them overcome any barriers.

Health advice is provided through the looked after children's nurse and specialist sessions are run on substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, sexual health and emotional health. In addition, fitness and sports programmes are available.

For those young people who are young parents themselves, a Family Ties parenting and early years support programme is available.

Horizons also has strong links and undertakes joint work with the youth offending service for those young people involved with or at risk of involvement in crime or gangs. This includes help to resettle the small numbers of care leavers who have been in custody and helps turn their lives around.

Half-term and [holiday programmes](#) focus on study support and catch-up, as well as fun activities and theatre and arts programmes in conjunction with institutions such as Tate Modern and Tate Britain, National Gallery and Radio 1 Extra.

Staffing

The service is staffed by one full-time Youth Work Manager, one full-time deputy and two full-time Youth workers. They run the centre and provide a range of Youth and Connexions programmes throughout the week.

A semi-independent Outreach Team helps young people to prepare to move on from care and visit to support them once they are living independently. This includes accompanying them for job and college interviews, and to health appointments.

Social workers provide supplementary group work support. They also make appointments to meet their clients in this less formal setting.

Young people's participation

Young people oversee all the programmes at the centre. They present their views at quarterly Corporate Parent Panel meetings, chaired by the Council Leader and attended by other elected members and senior managers. They also participate and express their views through the Junior Children in Care Council (for those aged up to 11 years) and the Horizons 'ShoutOut' Council (for those aged 11 to 21).

My Education (ME) peer-mentoring programme

Horizons developed a [peer-mentoring programme](#) five years ago. Older care leavers who are at university or in employment mentor younger care leavers at school in Years 9 to 11 and encourage them to raise their aspirations and to aim high. Group events and activities include trips to local universities such as West London and Imperial College, and further afield such as an annual visit to Cambridge and Edinburgh. The aim is to give first-hand experience of university life. A care leaver graduate is employed each year to coordinate the programme and act as Lead Mentor.

The post-16 teacher helps young people to access information on funding and apply to university. The London Borough of Ealing then provides all young people who gain a place with an annual grant to cover subsistence costs and a laptop. Ongoing emotional and practical support is provided through Horizons as well as support to gain work experience and employment.

Celebration events

The annual Education Awards Ceremony takes place each September at Ealing Town Hall. Over 100 children, from the age of four to Master's Degree graduates aged 24 and above, receive their certificates from the Mayor of Ealing.

'Rising Stars Day' takes place each June and is a themed summer celebration for looked after children aged 11 and under, organised by the looked after children education team. Foster carers, kinship carers, social workers and Horizons staff organise themed summer barbeque celebrations, such as 'Be Healthy' and 'Enjoy and Achieve'.

'Outerlimits' Day is an informal celebration and talent event for young people aged over 11. It allows young people in care or those who have moved on from care to catch up with other young people, foster carers and staff. It's also a great opportunity for social workers and other staff to meet with their clients informally and catch up on their progress long after they have left the care system.

Outcomes

The Horizons model has resulted in a wide range of successful achievements. These include:



- very high satisfaction levels from service users who describe Horizons as a family and a community
- 17% of care leavers going on to University, compared with the national level of 6%
- 95% graduate employment rate
- the success of the work-experience scheme, which led to the development of a council-wide apprentice and pre-apprentice scheme, for which looked after children and care leavers are prioritised
- the mentoring scheme has been used by the London Mayor's office as a model of peer-mentoring best practice
- the 'Superhero Poetry' programme in 2011 led to two young people winning prestigious Awards – The Foyle Young Poet of the Year and the Wicked Young Writers Award
- 'ShoutOut' Council members were finalists in the Community Champions Spirit of London Awards (SOLA) 2011

Provider background

Ealing is the third largest borough in London with the third most diverse community. It has a resident population of approximately 80,000 children and young people aged 0 to 18, representing 25% of the total population of the area.

Ealing has approximately 410 looked after children aged 0 to 18 and 225 care leavers aged between 18 and 24.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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