



Care Leavers Newsletter

3rd Edition May 2024

Welcome to
our Spring/
Summer
newsletter!

In this edition we have included some money saving tips, details of offers and deals exclusively for care leavers, some recipes and lots of updates about the work that we are doing at the TLC Hub and how you can get involved. As always, if you have any questions about anything in the newsletter, want to share your views or just want to check in then please give us a call – the TLC office can be contacted on 01922 650 575.

Over the coming months we will be relaunching our Local Offer for Care Leavers at a Summer BBQ event – your PA will be in touch to share more information about this. We are looking forward to seeing you all there for a relaxed afternoon/early evening where we can all eat together, hang out and think about what we want to do next to carry on expanding our Local Offer.

With the recently announced General Election, I'd also like to take this opportunity to encourage you all to register to vote. Your voice is important and you should make sure that it is heard. Registering to vote also has other benefits – it boosts your credit rating and makes you eligible for Jury Service. Please follow the QR code for more information and support to register.

Take care everyone, I look forward to seeing you all at our events and celebrations over the summer!

Andy Caville

Team Manager - TLC



**Register to
vote**



Regional Participation Training

Walsall sits as part of the West Midlands where we have a combined authority. Once a month we come together to look at how we can improve our offer to the children and care leavers that we support. We aim to create the best support and best opportunities for our children and adults we serve. Participation is something that all councils are doing and just means that the children, care leavers, parents and carers that we support have a voice and that their voice is heard and acted on to

improve the quality of the services on offer. All people should know their rights, have their views heard, be taken seriously and where possible be able to influence change within the systems that are set up for them.

As part of our West Midlands work we have co-designed some participation training that will be delivered by care experienced people in partnership with some professionals across our region.

Good News!

This week we recruited to the role of the Assistant Personal Advisor, this role was ringfenced for a care experienced young person. The role will give the person opportunity to develop skills as a PA, helping other care leavers along the way whilst progressing in their own career.

After a very competitive process we are delighted that we have been able to offer the post to ... stay tuned for the big reveal!

Corporate Parenting Board

Every other month councillors from Walsall meet with directors and managers within different parts of the council to see how well different teams are doing in supporting the needs of children in care and care leavers. Anyone working for the council is a Corporate Parent, meaning they should be doing their bit for children in care and care leavers. These meetings help shape what Walsall do and can have a positive impact on shaping the support on offer. Your voice is important too so why not give us some feedback on what you think could be done differently. If you would like to meet these councillors and managers then why not come along to some of the meetings at the TLC hub.

For more information please contact the Children's Champion David Hughes

Care Leaver Ambassador (Participation Officer)

This year we have advertised, interviewed and recruited for the next Care Leaver Ambassador post. This job role is an important part of our journey into getting it right for young people. We have just recruited a new Ambassador called Jada and who is waiting to start her new chapter with us. We hope to share a full introduction and some more details with you on how she is getting on in our next Newsletter.

Your view on Participation

Walsall are in the process of writing a new Participation Strategy. We want this to be co-designed with children, parents, carers and care leavers so we have a short survey for you to complete to give us some feedback. Please scan the QR code to tell us what you think.



Would you like to be involved in mentoring?

We have been talking to several care leavers about some support they could offer to other care leavers and children in care. This could be really beneficial for both the mentor and the mentee as both would stand to get so much from this. For example, you may be offering advice and support to someone that will soon be living independently or you could be building a young persons confidence in having a voice during meetings about their life. The possibilities and opportunities really are endless so if this is something you think is a good idea and you would want to be part of then please do get in touch.



Interviews

Walsall Council are committed to employing the right staff to work with young people and care leavers. It is now becoming standard practice for managers to ask for a care experienced panel to sit alongside managers when interviewing new staff. Some of our most recent panels include interviewing for the Executive Director for Children's Services, Principle Social Worker, Commissioning Manager and newly qualified social workers (ASYE's).

The questions and methods used at these interviews are all co-designed and delivered by care experienced people. We always make sure that there is food and refreshments for our panels and always give cash incentives to thank you for your time.

If this is something you would like to get involved with then please contact the Children's Champion David Hughes.



Care Leaver Football Tournament

Our care leaver football team, Walsall United, played in the regional tournament on Saturday 1st June which was held at Molineux Stadium in Wolverhampton. The team played excellently and were really excited to have the opportunity to play on a Premier League pitch. The lads have come together well as a team over the last couple of months to practice together for the tournament, meeting weekly at Oak Park Leisure Centre to practice. It has been really inspiring to see how they have also been opening up to each other about their lives and histories and offering each other advice and support. There have been lots of discussions not just about sports and physical health but also about topics such as mental health, masculinity, healthy relationships and aspirations.

The team played well in each match of the tournament, losing just 1-0 to both Wolverhampton and Coventry in the first games and then pulling their performance back to win 3-2 to Telford, and 2-0 to Hereford. They then played one of the final games against Solihull where they were unfortunately defeated due to the loss of their goalkeeper to injury in the previous game. The boys handled the loss well, taking time to shake the hands of the other players and congratulate them on their victory. The team reflected that this was an amazing opportunity and one that they will be talking about for many years to come. A massive thank you to Dave Hughes



for supporting in the organisation of the training and transport for the lads and to all of the staff who took time out early on a Saturday morning to come and watch the match and show some support.

The team will now continue to train over the summer and are also looking at setting up a Whatsapp group to arrange to attend gym together. If you would like to join the football team or be part of the gym group then please let us know. Children in Care and Care Leavers in Walsall are entitled to a leisure pass which gives them unlimited free access to swim and gym at the boroughs leisure centres and the boys will be looking to utilise this to ensure that there is no cost to meeting up to work out together. Contact Andy Caville or Dave Hughes for further details.

Trip to London – Co-Production

On Thursday 16th of May one of our care leavers took a trip to London with the Children's Champion to attend a co-production workshop with IMPOWER. This session was a great example of Co-Production where several care leavers from across the country were invited to share their ideas and thoughts on the Valuing Care Assessment framework. This particular framework is designed to help children's services match children to the right foster carers which, when done in the right way can make a big difference to a child's life and their journey through their time in care. Kyle had a fantastic time with an overnight stay in London, and a 5 mile walk to see some of the landmarks in the capital!

If you would like to find out more about opportunities to get involved with some national events then please contact David Hughes the Children's Champion.



'It Takes A Village' Project

Late last year we collaborated with young people and Open Lens Media to make a documentary titled 'It takes a village'. The purpose of this project was to shine a light on the lived experiences of Care Leavers in Walsall and some of the barriers that they face in their transition to adulthood. This was hugely successful and earlier this year we had a screening of our documentary at The Light cinema in Walsall.



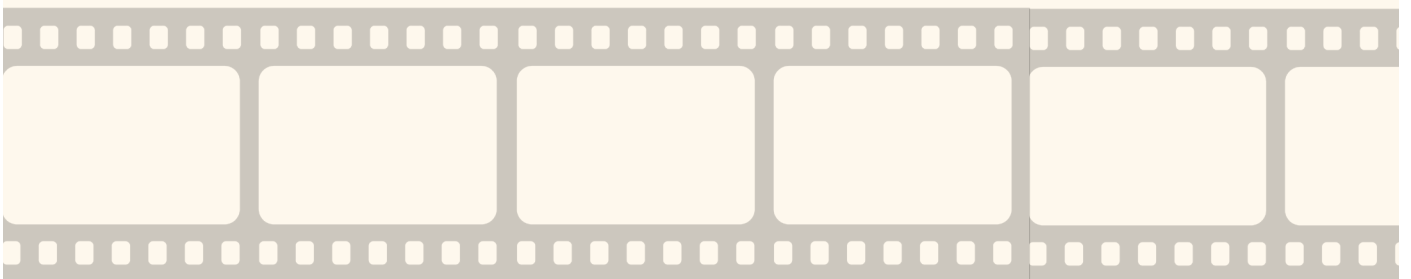
It Takes a Village
Red Carpet Premier

We were joined by over 60 people to celebrate the young people's achievements.

VIPS in attendance included our chief executive Emma Bennett and Lead Member Cllr Elson along with of course many of young people who starred in the film!

Walsall Council **PROUD** OF OUR PAST, OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

Following this screening there has been lots of work behind the scenes to collaborate across the whole council to improve our offer and support for care experienced young people in Walsall. We are now seeking new and improved commitments from all service areas to ensure that we are always doing the best for young people who are leaving our care and beginning their journey into adulthood. We will update further in our next newsletter and at events that we are planning over the summer. If you would like to be part of this movement please contact Dave Hughes.



Cost Of Living Resources

The cost of living continues to be something that a lot of people struggle with. We found the service that the Green Doctor offers has really helped some of our young people.

- Fixing causes of heat loss in your home
- Installing small energy saving measures such as draft excluders
- Help with accessing other support
- Providing advice on energy or water debt

If you would like support from Green

Doctor speak to your PA or go to the link below for more information & some great tips.



Some tips for saving energy include:

- 1) Switch off standby – You can save around **£45** per year just by remembering to switch devices off standby mode
- 2) Draught proof windows and doors – use draught excluders around doors and windows
- 3) Turn off lights when you leave the room
- 4) Wash your clothes at 30°C – This is usually enough to clean your clothes and will save around **£24** per year
- 5) Avoid using a tumble dryer – dry clothes on racks inside or outside in warmer weather and you could save around **£50** per year
- 6) Spend less time in the shower – capping your shower time to under 5 minutes can save **£55** per year
- 7) Careful with the kettle – only filling the kettle with the water you need, instead of filling and boiling it, can save you **£10** a year

South Staffs Water Discount Scheme

Are you aware of and registered with the South Staffs Water discount Scheme? Let your PA know if you need more information or support to register:



Assure tariff

We are helping to support over 40,000 of our customers with the Assure tariff. It's a two-year discount of 60% in year one and 40% in year two.

Find out more at www.south-staffs-water.co.uk/assure.

You may be able to receive help from Assure, if your yearly total household income is less than £19050 (approx. £366 per week) if you have dependent children living with you, we will add an extra £1,500 per child to that amount.

Remember if you receive the guarantee part of Pension Credit you will qualify for Assure.



Assure Assist tariff

If you have no household income at the moment (you may be applying for Universal Credit) we have Assure Assist. A 100% discount for eight weeks, if you qualify, you will then go on to the Assure scheme.

Find out more by going to our website www.south-staffs-water.co.uk/assure, there is also a really useful compare our tariffs section on the website too.





COME AND JOIN US AT THE BIG

DROP IN



**FREE
ENTRY**



**LAST WEDNESDAY OF EVERY MONTH
5-7PM**

EAT . CHILL . GAME . SEE YOUR PA

TLC HUB, BRINETON STREET, WALSALL, WS2 9EP



01922 650 575



ASK YOUR PA FOR MORE DETAILS





JOIN THE TLC RUNNING CLUB!

**5K WALK, JOG,
RUN**

MONTHLY

JOIN US FOR THE WALSALL ARBORETUM PARKRUN

Each month from March to September we meet as a group to do the 5K (3.1 mile) Walsall Arboretum Parkrun. You can walk, jog or run - the achievement is in finishing!

Parkruns take place on Saturdays. We meet at 8:30am for some drinks and snacks before beginning the run at 9am.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL/TEXT DAVE ON

07787284682

Protected Characteristic status – secured!

We have now secured protected characteristic status for care leavers in Walsall. This change will mean that care leavers have to be treated fairly and their care experience taken into account in decisions which will affect their day to day lives. It will lead to more ringfenced job opportunities in the council, ensure that you are offered interviews for jobs where you meet the entry criteria and also means that policy makers have to complete an 'equality impact assessment' to consider how any new policies in Walsall will affect care leavers. This is a huge political success for us and we will continue to ensure that we robustly challenge wherever we see discrimination or unfairness for our care experienced young people. Two of our care leavers supported us in securing this victory – massive thanks to Chanelle and Luke who sat as part of the Council Cabinet meeting and advocated for this important change.

Addressing members, Chanelle said, "...We have just as much potential as any other child or young person regardless of background – we are just as able to become the doctors, scientists, programmers – and maybe even politicians! – of tomorrow. We haven't had the easiest start in life though, so we may need some extra support and handholding along the journey."

Luke added "We are speaking to you today as care leavers but stand here with the confidence and ability to do so not just because we are care leavers, but also for the things that we are not: We are not facing homelessness, though 25% of the homeless population is care experienced, We are not in custody, though 25% of the prison population is care experienced, We are not unemployed and struggling to build skills, though care leavers are more than 3 times more likely to be out of work, education or training."

Colleen Male, Executive Director for Children's Services at Walsall Council said, "It is great news members have agreed to treat 'care experience' as

a local protected characteristic in Walsall. "In practice, this now allows us to provide this cohort of people with greater opportunities in accessing support from our partners such as work and training opportunities, and would acknowledge that these people's needs must be fairly recognised and supported in the same way as other protected characteristics.



"Both Chanelle and Luke are truly inspiring ambassadors for our care leavers and care experienced young people and spoke so well about some of the real life experience and challenges they have faced, and continue to face still to this day.

If you want any more information or feel that you have been treated unfairly please reach out via your PA for support.



Healthy Living

Be Well Walsall is a wellbeing service which can improve your physical and mental health.

Their expert team will support you to make long-lasting changes – in a way that works for you. You just have to be a Walsall resident and/or registered with a GP practice in Walsall. Follow the link for more info or ask your PA to support you to register.

It is important to keep fit and healthy and we understand that this may be difficult at times. As a care leaver there is support available to you to help you meet your fitness and health goals.



5 Tips To Start A Healthier Lifestyle

1. Book time in your diary

Just like any other important appointment, add exercise into your diary. This will act as a regular reminder to help you prioritise your health goals and make them a part of your daily routine.

2. Create a playlist of your favourite songs

Music can be great for uplifting your mood and motivating you. Create or find a playlist with your favourite upbeat songs to keep you energised while you exercise.

3. Walk everywhere for a day

Challenge yourself to walk more instead of driving or catching the bus. Whether it's walking to work, taking the stairs instead of the lift, or going for a walk during your lunch break, every step counts.

4. Start a competition with friends or family

Challenge your friends or family members to a step count battle, a race, or an exercise competition. This can make your fitness journey more enjoyable and motivate you to push yourself harder.

5. Some exercise is always better than no exercise

The most important part of any fitness journey is consistency. Even if you don't feel like exercising, show up and do what you can. Remember, any activity is better than no activity.

Remember there is support available to help you stay fit and healthy!



Walsall Leisure

Make sure you access your leisure pass. This provides FREE access to the 4 local leisure centres in Walsall: Gala baths, Darlaston, Bloxwich and Oak Park Leisure Centre. You can access the gym the swimming pool.



If you live in Birmingham – Be Active Memberships are available to access the local leisure centres at certain times of the day.

Always wanted to run but don't know where to start?

Download the FREE C25K app and start your running now, within 9 weeks you'll be running for 30 minutes non-stop. This free app, supported by the NHS, gradually increases your activity over 2 months to help you build up the strength to run 5K (3.2 miles!).



Healthy Living

Eat more healthily – within budget!

Eating healthy doesn't have to mean expensive. When cooking think about batch cooking, so you can freeze food to eat at another time. This makes your food go further, helping your budget and avoiding food waste.

There are some great recipes online, check out the following

£1 dinners https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/collections/1_dinners - £1

Budget batch cooking recipes <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/budget-batch-cooking-recipes>

Healthy on a budget <https://realfood.tesco.com/budget-meals/healthy>

Have a go and let your PA know how the meals went and send some pictures, we would love to see them!



£1 dinners



Batch cooking



Healthy on a budget



Cheesy Pesto Pasta Bake

Ingredients

- 200g pasta
- 1 scoop basil pesto
- Cherry tomatoes
- Grated cheese



How to cook

- Heat your oven up to 200°C. Place a pan of water on the heat to boil and cook the pasta. Since it's going to be cooking in the oven as well, drop a couple of minutes off the cooking time written on the back of the packet.
- Get an ovenproof dish and pour in the pasta. Scoop the pesto on top and give it a good mix. Chop the cherry tomatoes in half and scatter over the top along with the mozzarella cheese. You could also add some extra grated parmesan or cheddar.
- Put the bake in the oven for about 20 minutes (or until the cheese is completely melted and started to brown). Serve while it's nice and hot.
- If there are leftovers, allow them to cool before transferring to an airtight container and keep in the fridge for 3-5 days. You can reheat in the microwave, ensuring that you stir midway through so that the food is heated through.

Pathway Plans - learning together

What is a pathway plan?

A Pathway Plan is written to plan how Children's Services are going to support you to live independently. It is like a contract between you and Children's Services, which you both have to agree on. It is an opportunity for you to have your say about how you want Children's Services to support you, until you feel confident to live independently (Coram Voice).



Our thoughts

We always try our best to write the plans so that they are meaningful and respectful, but we want to keep improving and thought how about we can involve our young people to gather their views – after all, this is the young persons plan!

How we shared

We invited a group of young people to have a look at some pathway plans (anonymised) from across the service and share their thoughts and give us feedback. They then put together a presentation with their findings and fed this back to the TLC Team. The findings were also incorporated into an audit of TLC to look at our strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Interactive workshop

Young people joined one of our TLC Team workshops to feedback their views on what we are doing well and what we could do better. They did a great presentation on what they found during their 'audit' it was a great session where we all shared our views on what a good pathway plan should look like. We spoke about the format of the plan and how we would like to improve this (survey incoming – watch this space!).

Have your say

Did you know you could join in and help us shape future services, if you are interested get in touch with the children's champion!

Care Leaver Covenant Offers

Sign up to the Care Leavers Covenant to take advantage of great offers, below are just two of the current offers!

To encourage & promote health and fitness for care leavers, Puregym are presenting a generous 50% discount on gym memberships.



Plus, an exclusive offer for care leavers to download AA's driving theory test app for free.

How to apply

You will need will need access to a smartphone or device, either on iOS or Google. to confirm that you are a care leaver by signing up to Connects and selecting 'I'm interested in FREE access to the AA Driving Theory Test app.' Once verification is completed, an individual access code will be issued.

To join connects and get more information about offers for care leavers simply follow this link.



The local offer for care leavers

Please remember that the local offer for care leavers is constantly being updated with new offers and entitlements for you – check out our local offer website for more information!



How to get in touch

Children's Champion – David Hughes

Email: david-j.hughes@walsall.gov.uk

Tel: 07787 284682