



# Care Leavers Newsletter

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition January 2024

Welcome  
to our  
Newsletter

## Donation from a foster carer

Foster carer, Rebecca Hawkings, her daughter and the young person who she fosters, reached out to 'hey girls' (<https://www.heygirls.co.uk>) to request some period products and were kindly sent a sizeable number which they would like to donate to the Transition and Leaving Care team.

'Hey girls' is a social enterprise, their mission is 'to eradicate period poverty in the UK, improve access to quality products & increase education around period health to eliminate shame and stigma.'

They provide, quality, sustainable products, using natural materials without any hidden nasties like chlorine or toxins and the plant-based ingredients are responsibly sourced and renewable. The plant-based disposable products are made from 100% certified organic cotton, bamboo and corn starch.

We would like to say a big thank you to Rebecca and the two young people who supported her, for taking the time to think about, and help others.

These products will be available at the TLC Hub, or you can speak to you Personal Advisor (PA).



# Care Leaver Week

Care Leaver Week was a great success this year, and I want to say thank you to all of you who came and engaged in our events, and to all of the PA's and other colleagues who worked so hard to deliver the celebration! The focus of this year's event was CARE:

- Celebrate care leavers
- Amplify their voices
- Raise awareness of challenges
- Encourage change in policy and practice

Through the week, we kept this in mind as we arranged events to help us to CARE. There was a separated migrants discussion group as well as a young parents activity morning to help us get the views of these groups, as their voices are often not well represented. We had elected members (Councillors) and senior managers attending most of our events to help ensure that care leavers were having their voices heard and raising awareness of their lived experiences and the barriers that they face. We also held a 'Discover Walsall Walk' which saw a group of care leavers meet in Walsall with PA's and senior managers to engage in a discovery trail and share their views about the support they receive and how we could improve this.

Alongside this we hosted the regional care experienced football championship for the second year running (and played excellently), though unfortunately didn't win the cup this year!

We held our end of week celebration party which was excellently catered with lots of food and fun in the centre.

We took on board the views of care leavers who spoke to our senior managers and as a result we are considering how we can improve services across a range of areas to better support our care leavers. We are looking at some key areas including how we can improve mental health support and how we can help you with the 'cost of living crisis'. We are also exploring how we can make care experience status a protected characteristic in Walsall to ensure that you are not discriminated against, and that all of the council is taking the needs of care experienced young people into account when we are writing new policies and other developments – watch this space for more information in the coming months!

If any of you want to be part of our ongoing journey of improvement, then please get in touch so that we can support you in joining one of our forums to ensure that your voice is heard.



# Call for participation



***“There is power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice” – Michelle Obama***

There are lots of participation opportunities for care leavers in Walsall and we are calling on you to step forward and have your voice heard! The care leaver group meets regularly to socialise and feedback to our senior leadership about what life is like for care leavers in Walsall – both good and bad. We are also increasingly sharing drafts of new policies and publicity materials, with the group, to ensure that care leavers actively participate in shaping how the council works and the information and support that we offer. In addition, being involved with the care leaver group, gives you an opportunity to attend key events such as the;

- Corporate Parenting board which is a forum where senior leaders and managers feedback to Councillors about the work that the council is doing to support our children in care and care leavers.
- Being part of the care leaver group can also lead to paid opportunities such as taking part in engagement events and interview panels for new staff being recruited to the council.

Please consider contacting David Hughes, participation lead (contact details at end of this newsletter) to ask about the participation offer and how you can get involved. Scan the QR link below for more information:



# Care Leaver Christmas celebration

Our Care Leaver Christmas meal took place at the TLC Hub on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> December and was a huge success! We had lots of young people come to the hub to eat and celebrate the festivities with us and we all had a great time. A three-course meal was served (expertly prepared by our Gurinder and Pal) and young people ended up taking home lots of food and snacks to enjoy later. We had plenty of games (including the ever-popular tombola!) and this was a great opportunity to just sit back and enjoy some time with the TLC team. We run the Christmas meal and party each year so please keep an eye out for your invite next year. Thanks to all the young people that joined us and made the party so great – we really do cherish our time hanging out with you and getting to know you all better.

This year we were blessed with masses of gift and cash donations from our colleagues across the council and this meant that we could ensure that each care leaver was offered a gift, sweets hamper and food hamper alongside their usual festive allowance. PAs worked hard to sort through gift donations and buy in all that was needed to make this a success and we have thoroughly enjoyed bringing these gifts out to you all. Around 200 gift hampers were created and have been given out over the Christmas period (if you did not get a hamper for any reason then please give us a call to ensure that we can get yours out to you!).

The TLC Team would like to wish you all a Happy New Year and we hope that 2024 is a successful year for you. Remember that we are here if you need us – just give your PA or the office a call if you need any help and support.

We are now thinking about what we can do for our next event – maybe a summer event? Let us know what your thoughts are and what you would like to see us offer!



# SELF CARE/ MENTAL HEALTH/ SUPPORT AVAILABLE

Christmas can be a great time of year, but it can also be really tough. Its important to know that there is support out there and that there is always someone for you to talk too.

Whether its texting/calling or online support for you or for someone you may know, below are some helpful support contact details.



Mind - 03001233393/ [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk)  
Shout 24 hours a day text service: Text 'shout' to 85258.  
Samaritans 24 hour helpline: 116123  
Young minds: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)  
CALM - helpline for men 0800585858  
Kooth- [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)



Here are some tips/ tricks to help with self care.



Listen to music  
Create different playlists.  
Why not try:  
Festive favourites  
Slow sleep songs  
Dance mixes



Make a hot drink;  
Try this  
Tablespoon of hot  
chocolate, Boiling water,  
splash of milk, top with  
marshmallows, choc chips  
and stir with a candy cane.



Soak in the bath or  
shower.  
Hot water, candles,  
maybe a bit of music



Relax - Christmas can be  
busy, make time to take  
a deep breath and time  
to yourself



Random act of kindness.  
Help someone out, smile at  
a stranger, gift someone  
with your time



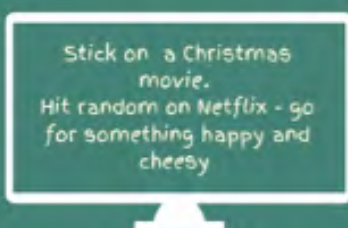
Treat yourself to  
some festive food,  
indulge a little!



Get cosy - Fluffy socks,  
blankets, PJs, its cold out so  
make yourself warm and  
cosy



Don't be afraid to say  
No. You are allowed to  
say no to plans and  
cancel.



Stick on a Christmas  
movie.  
Hit random on Netflix - go  
for something happy and  
cheesy



Don't panic if you cant buy someone  
a gift, gift them with your time and  
company instead. Christmas isn't  
about presents



Stay in touch - Speak to family,  
friends and people you care  
about.



# Household Support Fund

The Transition and Leaving Care team have secured funding to support our young people who may struggle more through this winter due to the increased cost of living. The Household Support Fund is established to support people in crisis, help with energy efficiency and ensure that food and clothing is available for those who may otherwise struggle. In addition, many care leavers with responsibility for a home will receive additional direct payments from the Transition and Leaving Care team in December, January and February – details for those eligible will be shared by your PA in due course.

If you feel that you would benefit from accessing the Household Support Fund then please let your PA or a member of the TLC team know. The fund can be used for one off expenses such as buying winter clothing, thicker bedding, draft excluders and heaters. It can also be accessed to buy new white goods where your old ones are no longer efficient and do not meet your needs. If in doubt, just ask us and we can see what support is available for you.



# Care leaver week football tournament

This year in care leavers week we played our annual tournament with our regional teams. We had over 60 care leavers from across the West Midlands. Walsall were the 2022 cup holders and unfortunately we had to hand the cup over to Warwickshire so big congratulations to them! There were 8 councils from the West Midlands which took part and this was a great opportunity to build social circles with others that are care experienced.

It has also been announced that we will be getting a new football kit from some of our partners in Walsall, so if you are wanting to get involved with this then please get in touch with David Hughes the Children's Champion.

## Care Leavers week 25<sup>th</sup> Oct-1<sup>st</sup> Nov



This week we have lots more fun activities and events for our care leavers.

On Monday over 60 care experienced young people from across the West Midlands came together to play football!

Sadly it wasn't Walsall's year and we passed the cup to Warwickshire.

Don't worry the team are back in training and we are confident we can reclaim the cup next year!



# YPBMF

The Young Persons Bench Marking Forum is an organisation that works with care leavers from all across the UK. They put on national events to engage with care leavers, and use your experience, ideas and feedback to try and improve things on a national level. They help with initiatives such as increasing the amount of money you get for your setting up home grant and asking the government for free or reduced cost transport for care leavers. They create some fantastic opportunities and ways of you connecting with other care leavers across the country so please do check out their website to find out more.

This October they came to Birmingham to deliver one of their annual events, and a special guest was invited!!

## A Royal Visit

We had an extra special guest this year, with an appearance from none other than Her Royal Highness Princess Anne in the afternoon. Princess Anne walked around the event, meeting lots of the guests including our YPBMF Champions and Sessional Team, and hearing about the work of the YPBMF. She then sat down to hear Roisa give a powerful spoken word performance titled, "The Reality of Being A Care Leaver", and listen to Joshua Williams from NYAS talk about his journey and successes as a care experienced person. Princess Anne then gave out the new 'Local Hero' award and delivered her own speech.

-Nathan Parker, a YPBMF Champion described the visit as "mind-blowing".

Throughout the day, awards were announced to celebrate the various achievements over the past year of the YPBMF members, including 'Best Performance', 'Best Public Speaker' and 'Champion of the Year'. A huge congratulations to all the nominees and winners of this year's awards!

Some Walsall Care Leavers attended the event with David and had a fabulous day out in Birmingham.

If you want to get more involved in these events then please contact him or ask your Personal Advisor for how you can get involved.

**catch  
22**

NATIONAL LEAVING CARE  
BENCHMARKING  
**FORUM**

YOUNG PEOPLE'S  
BENCHMARKING  
**FORUM**





# Corporate parenting Board

**In Walsall, like many councils we have something called a 'Corporate Parenting Board'. This is when your local Councillors, Directors and managers across children's services come together to get the views of the Children In Care Council and Care Leavers. It's the role of the Councillors to hold managers to account and make sure they are doing the best job they can for the children in care and care leavers from Walsall, no matter where you live.**

We want your voice to be represented either in person or through digital technology.

If you would like to attend one of these sessions then please contact David Hughes or, if it is not possible for you to attend in person then please scan the QR code and let us know what the service is doing well, and what may need to improve to make life better for you. We can then take this to the board on your behalf.



SCAN ME

# Parent and child event – and future plans!

As part of care leavers week celebrations we hosted our first parent and child event at the TLC Hub on the 31<sup>st</sup> October. As it was Halloween, we decided to embrace the spooky season and had a range of activities on offer including:

- Pumpkin painting – exactly how it sounds, a chance to paint a pumpkin, either freestyle or using some of our stencils.
- Crafty corner - a chance to decorate and make something to take home, including wooden pumpkins, door signs, memory boxes, photo frames and canvases.
- Sensory play - an opportunity to make completely safe edible slime and sand
- Creepy cooking - make your own biscuit dough and then turn them into witches' fingers or chocolate bats.
- Spooky selfie station -filled with props and fancy-dress costumes with the perfect backdrop to take that all important perfect selfie.
- Movie station – It had to be hocus pocus for our film of the day on our big screen.

Refreshments were provided and everything that you made you could take away with you, not forgetting that every child that attended went home with their own goodie bag filled with Halloween treats. There were plenty of toys and games all around the room, so that even if the children didn't want to do any of the activities there was plenty of other things that they could do.

The day was aimed at care experienced parents who had children under the age of 4, we had a great range in ages too with our youngest being just a few weeks old. The day was a great success and everyone who came along said that they enjoyed it. One person said "Thank you for bringing us we both had a lovely time, was really well put together and clearly a lot of effort been made".

During the day it was a great chance to chat to everyone and find out if more events and days like this would be something that would help parents and the answer that we got was yes!

So, because of the day going so well and listening to what you want, we will be looking to set up regular parent and child events aimed at care leavers and their children under 4. This will possibly be a monthly event and would have different themes/ activities going on, such as music/rhythm, sensory play, baby signing, baby/ young child first aid, story books, crafting as well as dedicated time at each event to have a chat with other parents and relax over a cup of tea/coffee and a few slices of cake.

If you're interested in being part of a new parent and child group, then please let your PA know. We will be looking at holding our first session sometime early in the new year. A huge thanks to everyone who came along, it was so lovely to see you all.





# An ask for help from Denishae Francis Transformation and Improvement Apprentice working in Birmingham

Good afternoon,

I hope this message finds you well.

As you may be aware, The West Midlands and Combined Local Authorities are currently looking at updating the current Care Leaver offer.

Care leavers across the West Midlands region have said that they would like a minimum offer proposed for all councils in their region. This is to ensure that the offer is fair and accessible for ALL Care Leavers no matter where they live in the West Mids.

Young people have identified three top priorities for the offer those are;

- 1: Discounted utility bills,
- 2: Discounted public transport
- 3: Better access to mental health support.

If you are a care leaver and you live in one of the West Midland by taking this survey you can help to decide on a minimum offer that is fair and reasonable for all

If you are not a Care Leaver, please could this survey be shared in your networks and with any Care Leavers you may know: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WTMBRKH>

Kind Regards,

**RAPS/ CP**  
**Birmingham Children's Trust**

# Inspirational Stories

**Onika Tanya Maraj-Petty (born December 8, 1982), known professionally as Nicki Minaj is a Trinidadian-born rapper and singer based in the United States. Often referred to as the “Queen of Rap”, she is known for her musical versatility, animated flow in her rapping, alter egos, and influence in popular music.**

She first gained recognition after releasing three mixtapes between 2007 and 2009. Minaj’s debut album, ‘Ponk Friday’ (2010), topped the US Billboard 200 chart; its single “Super Bass” reached number three on the US Billboard Hot 100 chart and was certified diamond. Follow-up album ‘Pink Friday’ (2012) explored dance-pop and debuted atop the Billboard 200, with its lead single “Starships” peaking in the top five of charts internationally.

Her third album, ‘The Pinkprint’ (2014), explored personal topics and marked a return to her hip hop roots. Its lead single “Anaconda” peaked at number two on the Hot 100 and became the first music video by a solo female rapper to reach one billion views on YouTube.

Minaj released her fourth album ‘Queen’ in 2018, which spawned the US top ten single “Chun-Li”. In 2019, her collaboration with Karol G, “Tusa”, became the longest-running number-one single on the Argentina Hot 100 chart.

**Minaj has an estimated net worth of \$100m US dollars.**



## How to get in touch

**Children’s Champion – David Hughes**  
Email: david-j.hughes@walsall.gov.uk  
Tel: 07787 284682

## Care Leavers Survey

**On the last newsletter we promoted a survey which takes about 8 minutes to complete. We have extended the time on this survey as we want to make sure we hear as many ideas and thoughts from care leavers as possible. Everyone that completes it will be entered into the prize draw and will get the change of winning £50.**

We will close the survey early January and we will publish the findings in our next Newsletter. Thank you to everyone that has completed already and please promote to other care leavers from Walsall.



SCAN ME