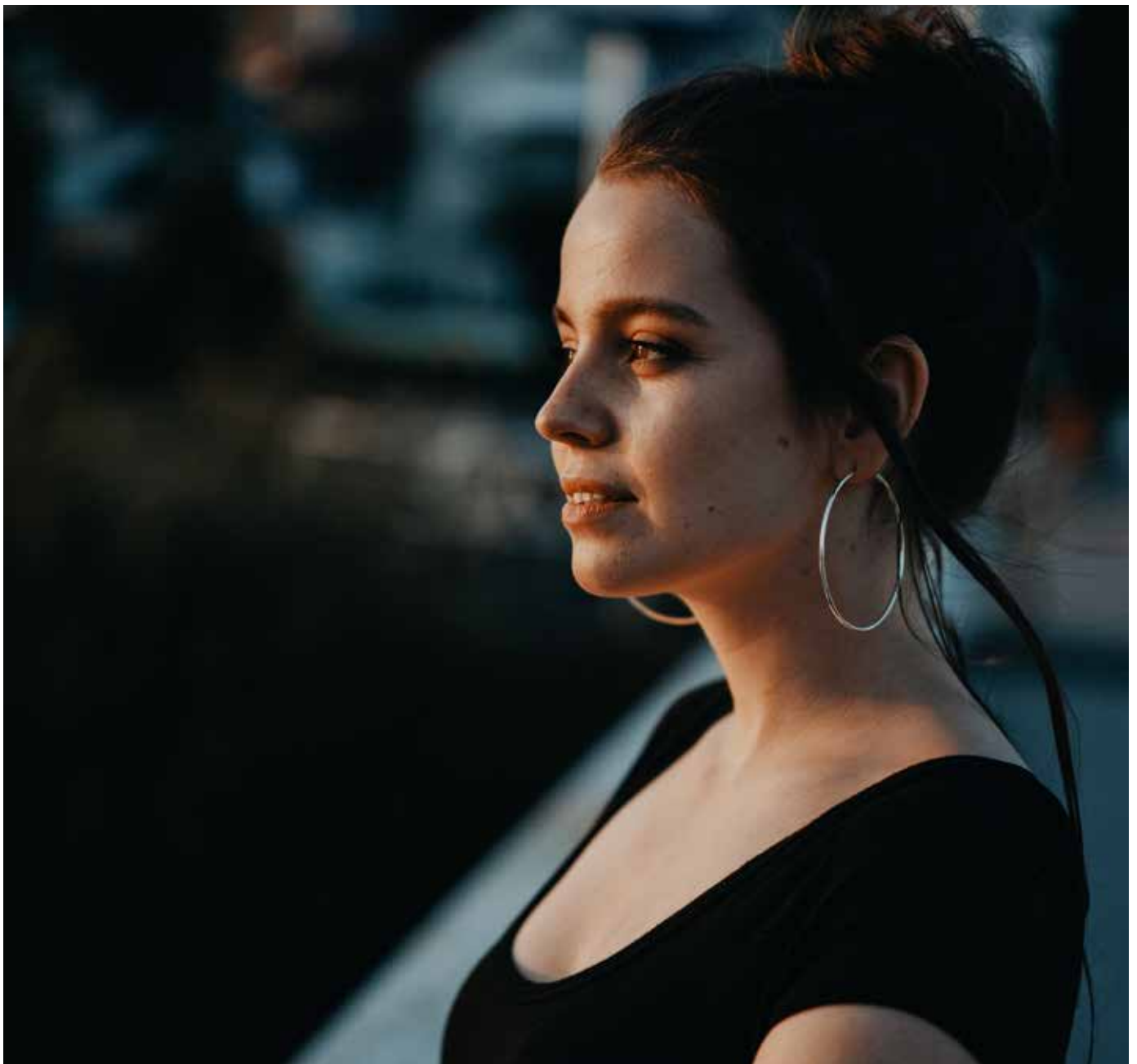


Expanding Employment Horizons for Young People in Care: A Learning Guide for Practitioners Based on the Evaluation of York Cares' Bright Futures Project

JADE WARD and JO DIXON



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the young people for contributing their views and experiences of the Bright Futures Project and sharing their ideas on employment support. We are particularly grateful to Amy for working with the evaluation team on a three-week placement and presenting findings from the project at an international conference on leaving care.

Thank you also to the employers that responded to our requests for information and to Holly, Georgia and Helen at York Cares and Angie and Nikki at York Children's Rights and Advocacy Service and the Bright Futures Steering and Operations Groups for their support with setting up workshops, gathering information and contributing their views.

Thanks also to Professor Christine Skinner for her support and to the University of York IAA for funding this co-production work.

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 were 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 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 the 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)

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BRIGHT FUTURES: Guide for young people

The Bright Futures Project brings together the York Cares Employee Volunteering charity, City of York Council Children's Rights and Advocacy Service and leading local employers and opportunity providers under one umbrella to provide employment readiness support for local young people who are in care and leaving care.

It aims to provide care-experienced young people in York with opportunities to gain work experience and employment related skills. The project provides an introduction to the different types of jobs available to young people, the range of skills needed and an honest and first-hand look at what the working world is like. Bright Futures seeks to expand young people's horizons by encouraging them to test out different employment options, including jobs they may not have thought about, thereby allowing young people the

opportunity to explore which career options they might (and might not) want to pursue and what they need to do to work towards their goals. The project supports employers to provide valuable insights and skills to the future local workforce and to build stronger links with their community. Here are some of the views of young people who have taken part:

DIFFERENT TYPES OF OPPORTUNITIES

1. Behind the Scenes Group activity

These activities allow a group of young people to see what it's like "behind the scenes". Young people get the opportunity to spend the day with different employers. A group activity during the visit gives young people a chance to find out more about a wider range of roles within an organisation and an opportunity to have a go at tasks and learn new skills.

2. Work Experience Placement

Placements are arranged on an individual basis to best meet your needs. Placements are started gradually with you meeting the employer and having a taster session to see if it is right for you! If you would like to continue, Bright Futures will arrange your placement, which can be as flexible as needed in regards to length to the needs of young people and employers.

3. Skills Workshop Delivered by Employers

Skills workshops allow young people to gain skills such as learning interview and presentation skills, how to write a good CV or personal statement and learning how to work as a team.

4. Taster session

A taster session may take place as a group or on an individual basis. It gives young people the opportunity to meet an employer, find out more about the different roles and have some hands on experience.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON THE BRIGHT FUTURES PROJECT

Projects like Bright Futures not only give young people in care opportunities to develop, but, it also provides them with a network of other young people in their situations allowing them to share their experience and not feel alone.



It was quite fun to be with like other people who were in the same situations as me."

YPM



It just let me like get all my thoughts out and like...of being in care, it just like it made my confidence go up cos I was speaking in front of a lot of people that were there and, they all knew what I meant because they're in my situation"

YPF

THE EVALUATION OF THE BRIGHT FUTURES PROJECT IN YORK

Researchers from the University of York carried out an evaluation of the first year of the Bright Futures Project to explore how it was working in practice from the perspectives of all participants. A co-production approach was used to ensure that young people were fully involved in developing the research questions and interpreting the findings. This included running six research workshops and training events with local care-experienced young people. One young person attended an international leaving care conference to talk about their experience of the project and raise awareness of the importance of such opportunities.

The views and experiences of young people taking up opportunities in York were gathered by feedback surveys and interviews. Information was also gathered by surveys with employers and interviews and surveys with foster carers, York's Children's Rights and Advocacy Service and York Cares staff. The findings showed which factors contributed to successful experiences and what could be improved upon for future success of the project.

The main findings from the first year of the Bright Futures project suggested that: young people liked to try several workshop and work placement opportunities, rather than just one; that opportunities should reflect young people's interests and the range of local career options available; that more help was needed to include a wider group of care-experienced young people, for example those that might not usually take part in these types of projects. A wider benefit of the project was that Employers were helped to have a better understanding of the needs and the strengths of care-experienced young people.

TOP REASONS TO GET INVOLVED IN A PROJECT LIKE BRIGHT FUTURES

The young people that took part in the York Project highlighted the top reasons why young people should get involved in a project like Bright Futures!

- Diverse topics - to suit young people's interests
- Practical activities that are a fun way to learn
- Open minded companies that really do care about working with young people
- Personal development opportunities to support your future

WHAT BRIGHT FUTURES HAS DONE FOR ME



Bright Futures has done so much for me, since getting involved I've had the opportunity to attend multiple skills workshops and behind the scenes visits. Following these skills workshops Bright futures has given me to confidence to present in front of other people, try something new and get involved. Alongside learning new skills I've also had the opportunity to do 2 placements both of which have taught me vital skills for my future. From taking part I now have a clearer idea of not only what I want to do in my future but how I can get there."

BRIGHT FUTURES: Guide for Employers



Brilliant experience and the attendees are very receptive, just make sure you know what is needed and that you can commit to it."

(Bright Futures Employer)

The Bright Futures Project brings together the York Cares Employee Volunteering charity, City of York Council Children's Rights and Advocacy Service and leading local employers and opportunity providers under one umbrella to provide employment readiness support for local young people in and from care. It aims to provide care-experienced young people in York with opportunities to gain work experience and employment related skills.

The project provides an introduction to the different

types of jobs available, the range of skills needed and an honest and first-hand look at what the working world is like. Bright Futures seeks to expand young people's horizons by encouraging them to test out different employment options, including jobs they may not have thought about, thereby allowing young people the opportunity to explore which career options they would (and would not) want to pursue and what they need to do to work towards their goals.

The project also supports employers to provide valuable insights and skills to the future local workforce and build stronger links with their community.

TYPES OF OPPORTUNITIES

1. Behind the Scenes Group Activity

These activities allow a group of young people to see what it's like "behind the scenes". Young people have the opportunity to spend the day with an employer to learn more about what goes on within the organisation. A group activity during the visit gives young people a chance to find out more about a wider range of roles within an organisation and an opportunity to have a go at tasks and learn new skills.

2. Work Experience Placement

Placements are arranged on an individual basis to best meet young people's interests and needs. Placements generally include a gradual introduction including a meeting with the employer and member of staff responsible for overseeing the placement, having a taster session to see if it is right for the young person and the employer and if so, Bright Futures will arrange a placement, which usually lasts for several days over four to six weeks.

3. Skills Workshop Delivered by Employers

Skills workshops allow young people to gain skills first hand from potential employers on things such as interview and presentation skills, how to write a good CV or a personal statement as well as providing an opportunity to develop team work skills.

4. Taster session

A taster session can take place on a group or an individual one to one basis. It gives young people the opportunity to meet with an employer and to have some focused time to find out more about the different roles and gain some hands on experience of the work.

EVALUATION OF THE YORK CARES BRIGHT FUTURES PROJECT: EMPLOYERS' VIEWS

Researchers from the University of York carried out an evaluation of the first year of the Bright Futures Project to explore how it was working in practice from the perspectives of all key stakeholders. A co-production approach was used to ensure that young people were fully involved in developing the research questions and interpreting the findings, via six research workshop and training events with local care-experienced young people. One young person attended an international leaving care conference to talk about their experience of the project and raise awareness of the importance of such opportunities.

The views and experiences of young people taking up opportunities were gathered by feedback surveys (n=70) and interviews (n=5). Data was also gathered via surveys with employers (n=8) and interviews and surveys with foster carers (n=5), York's Children's Services (n=4) and York Cares (n=4). The findings indicated what factors facilitate successful experiences and what could be

improved upon for future success and sustainability.

Eight of the 12 employers (66%) responded to the survey. All provided positive feedback and expressed commitment to continuing the project. The key highlights were: working with enthusiastic young people and seeing the impact that the opportunities had on them; the sense of 'giving back' to the local community; 'showcasing' the range of jobs within their organisations; and being able to offer different types of opportunities to meet their needs and those of the young people. The challenges centred on finding sufficient time for preparation, planning and delivering the opportunities and engaging some young people, though most managed to overcome these with flexibility, understanding of young people's changing commitments and help from the Bright Futures team. The employers offered encouragement, tips and recommendations for other employers who might consider joining Bright Futures.

TOP TIPS FOR NEW BRIGHT FUTURE EMPLOYERS:

- It requires time, resources and support. Ensure sufficient time 'to devote to the young person' and that 'colleagues are willing to assist'.
- It requires good preparation, planning and commitment but 'don't overcomplicate it or reinvent the wheel', 'commit to what you can do'.
- Make it 'interesting', 'interactive' and 'real'. 'Don't be afraid to show them all aspects of the role, good and bad'. 'Deliver a practical element...allow young people freedom of expression in groups..or working on their own...listen to what they want', 'take their steer'.
- Make it an enjoyable and valuable experience for young people, 'you are really making a difference to them', and also for your organisation 'enjoy the experience', 'it's good to create links...for apprenticeships'.
- Make the most of the project to 'show your business off' to young people, 'be prepared to answer questions' and 'highlight future job opportunities'.
- 'I would recommend asking what the students are interested in before the so the session can be tailored to ensure the students (and your colleagues) get the most out of the time'.
- Give the programme a go...don't be afraid to help. It's rewarding to see the impact it has'. 'Go for it; ask for support from York Cares'. Build good relationships and 'get support from York Cares and Children's Rights staff 'who were pleasant and efficient...and supported throughout'. 'Everyone who has been involved with the 2 sessions in 2017 thoroughly enjoyed it'.

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(Bright Future's Young Person)

WHAT BRIGHT FUTURES HAS DONE FOR MY ORGANISATION:



The main achievement [of Bright Futures] is engaging, supporting and broadening the minds of looked after young people who through no fault of their own haven't had the best start in life. The project has been facilitated by York Cares who are as always very professional, approachable and knowledgeable about coordinating projects such as this."

(Bright Future's Young Employer)

BRIGHT FUTURES: Guide for Local Authorities

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options, including jobs they may not have thought about, thereby allowing young people the opportunity to explore which career options they would (and would not) want to pursue and what they need to do to work towards their goals. The project also supports employers to provide valuable insights and skills to the future local workforce and build stronger links with their community

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(n=70) and interviews (n=5). Data was also gathered via surveys with employers (n=8) and interviews and surveys with foster carers (n=5), York's Children's Services (n=4) and York Cares (n=4). The findings indicated what factors facilitate successful experiences and what could be improved upon for future success and sustainability. Over the first year of the Bright Futures project all staff working for the local authority responded to the evaluation survey and face to face interviews. The key highlights of the project for local authority staff were: engaging young people who previously do not engage with the service and seeing young people gain knowledge and skills from the project.

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(Bright Future's Young Person)

TOP TIPS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES


- Engage young people in the design of the opportunities
- Include young people in identifying areas for Behind the Scenes and Workshop opportunities
- Employ a young person to support in the engagement and participation of other young people
- Utilise young people's experiences in sharing success of the project at events and recruitment
- Have experienced young people involved as mentors for younger age groups

THE EVALUATION OF THE BRIGHT FUTURES PROJECT IN YORK

In order to provide this Opportunity City of York Council partnered with York Cares to bring together the young people and employers.

 *The partnership working for this project was a must but between the two main services and then external services such as schools, foster carers and employers the project has become a success in the city and young people are getting the opportunity to participate in so many different areas which is exactly what we want"*

Having staff willing to participate from other service also ensured the success to providing positive activities for young people.

 *I feel partnership working with York Cares has been very successful. I feel this is largely down to meeting regularly with the staff member and her always keeping me in the loop. It has also been great that she has supported activities and is great with young people; this has made a huge difference to engaging young people whilst on activities rather than someone who isn't keen to get involved."*

AUTHORS

JO DIXON is a research fellow in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work. She has been carrying out research involving young people in care and leaving care since joining the University of York in 2000. Jo was co-principal investigator on the Bright Futures evaluation and a member of the Bright Futures Strategic Steering Group.

JADE WARD is an experienced young people's participation and research worker. Her work focuses on empowering care-experienced young people to have their voices heard through participation in activities such as forums, consultation and research. Jade was responsible for contacting young people in and from care in York and engaging them in the Bright Futures evaluation through the facilitation of focus groups, skills development workshops, surveys and face to face interviews.

Jade worked with local in care and care leaver groups to test out the research questions, issues related to careers support and interpret the emerging findings from the evaluation. Young people's feedback was incorporated into sections throughout the report as part of the co-production activities.



Department of Social Policy
and Social Work

