

Care Leaver's Guide – Update Report

Purpose of the report and Summary

The previous A-Z Guide is now out of date and requires updating. Since May 2016 we have been working with the Care Leavers group to explore how we should proceed to develop information, advice and guidance which is useful, accessible and useable. We have been mindful that the piece of work also coincides with LCC strategically discussing and exploring the 'digital front door' to services.

We know from work with care leavers in Lancashire that the crux of the challenge they face in gaining relevant information is an understanding of their **Legal Status** as a care leaver. Without an understanding on their legal status then it is very difficult for them to access information which is tailored to them.

Key messages from young people:

- They want information which is tailored and relevant to them and timed to suit them, giving all the information at once is not useful.
- They want to be able to access bite sized information and used the example of Netflix.
- They want most information to be online but think there should be some printed material.
- They feel that Personal Advisers/other LCC staff they work with should have to use this information as a starting point.
- They want information which is relevant to them at that time.
- They explored key tenancy information which is particularly relevant to them.
- Many of the national examples included both information and also activities. The young people liked activity sheets which helped them explore particular areas but felt that and work books/ activity sheets should be separate and should be something they worked on with their PAs.

Key lessons from young people 'mystery shopping' for information:

In early July we asked a group of care leavers to show us how they would obtain key bits of information from the web about leaving care. Some of our findings are particularly relevant and interesting:

- The care leavers did not dwell on sites, they did not read long pages, and they did not 'search' for the information. If the information was not readily and obviously available, if the pages had too much writing and/or were very long and if the information was not easily identifiable they moved on.
- There is conflicting and contradictory information of LCC's website.
- The young people all use Google as a search engine and readily sought LCC/Youth zone pages.
- The young people liked the gov.uk website.

- The search criteria/language used has a big impact on the results i.e. if you do not know what you're looking for, what it is called for example, then you cannot search for it.
- We were also reminded of the importance of support and reassurance from staff. The young people all got frustrated with the search, they got confused and most got bored, they sought reassurance from staff that they had found the information, they asked for help to understand what was written and/or how they should proceed.

Recommendations

- Care leavers have to be informed about their legal status as this is the key to unlocking relevant information, advice and guidance. It needs to be every member of staff understanding that this is their responsibility (particularly if they are social workers in the leaving care team and PAs). A 'key' to unlocking ones legal status will be developed (in line with other national/international).
- Staff who work with care leavers must be better informed and updated about entitlements offered to care leavers (see above).
- LCC need to cleanse and update its online information and ensure that the information is up to date and accurate.
- We should 'test' this information with care leavers to see if it's better so if it is easier to understand, useful and useable.

Next Steps

- Preparation for independence pack/curriculum is being developed with key stakeholders including care leavers, housing, health, foster carers and residential carers, this could also be linked into the Zone. Will be a useful resource for CLA, carers, PA's and SW's.
- Changes to the LCC website will be made by the end of October. This will involve a separate 'tab' which can be accessed from the Youthzone home page. This tab is currently called Being in care/ Complaints.

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