

Update from the Participation Service

Joy Bell – Participation Officer

February 2024



LONDON BOROUGH OF
HARROW

I need some support with cooking.

I would like some support to purchase winter clothing and work-wear.

I am still in touch with my previous foster carers; they care about me.

My Personal Advisor feels like family.

I really need some money to buy winter clothes.

I want an Advocate.

Food is expensive and I can struggle to buy groceries.

I am so happy to be living with my foster carers post-18. This is my home.

What we heard:

- almost all young people felt worried about the increasing cost of living – particularly the price of purchasing groceries and the affordability of bills
- most care leavers reported feeling lonely ‘within a typical week’
- several young people requested support to purchase warm clothing and a winter coat
- most young people felt uncertainty around the availability of housing
- most young people shared that their Personal Advisor was easy to contact

What we did:

- all care leavers have recently received a £100 supermarket voucher, as part of the Household Support Fund
- to date, initiatives to address loneliness have included our Care-Experienced Christmas Dinner, the Care Leavers Forum, events and outings, and the availability of Independent Visitors
- all young people who requested support with winter clothing were given a discretionary clothing allowance
- although 20 flats are made available to care leavers each year, demand continues to outstrip supply across London, and care leavers are also supported with private rent and deposit
- young people are regularly signposted to Coram Voice for support around advocacy

During 2023, we have:

- connected 62 young people with free gym memberships, including those out of borough
- delivered two training sessions, run by care-experienced individuals, for international Social Workers and Newly Qualified Social Workers
- hosted 14 events and activities for children looked after – with 40 young people attending at least one outing
- given out 691 Christmas presents to children known to the London Borough of Harrow, including care-experienced children and care leavers

Throughout December 2023, we received the highest number of brand new toys, books, toiletries and gifts donated to our Christmas campaign... **ever!**

- 546 toys, books and gifts were given to 317 children in care, children subject to Child Protection Plans and children subject to Child In Need Plans
- children received Christmas gifts from across five services – the Corporate Parenting Service, Social Workers In Schools, Children In Need Team, First Response Team and the Children With Disabilities Service
- 94 giftcards were given to 94 care-experienced teenagers
- 15 sets of toiletries were given to 15 of our most vulnerable care leavers
- 36 toys, books and gifts were given to 32 children supported by Early Support and Keeping Families Together, including those experiencing homelessness or fleeing domestic violence

Christmas Campaign



Gift-Wrapping
Events

In addition to 458 children receiving Christmas gifts...

- as part of our partnership with the Young Harrow Foundation, 10 children were able to spend an hour ice-skating at Westfield Ice Rink
- 3 children saw their first Pantomime, with thanks to the Hill Players!
- we hosted our first Care-Experienced Christmas Dinner, for young people who may be in need of a hot meal and some company during the festive season

Participation Activities



Ice-Skating
“I’ve never even seen an ice-rink before!”

This year, we will be:

- hosting our Care-Experienced Award Ceremony on 15th February
- rolling out Transport For London's travel initiative for care leavers
- continuing to embed training from care-experienced young adults into the Social Work Academy – delivering further sessions for international Social Workers and Newly Qualified Social Workers
- inducting care leavers to sit on the Fostering and Permanency Panel, ensuring experts by experience are included in the approval and/or renewal of foster carers

This year, we will be:

- endeavouring to treat care experience as though it were a protected characteristic
- offering cooking classes to teenagers and care leavers via London Community Kitchen
- supporting care leavers to apply for Apprenticeships within the London Borough of Harrow
- continuing to run events and activities for children looked after – with outings booked to Sri Lanka vs England at Lords, Wicked and Hamilton in the West End, and Topgolf
- hosting our first residential holiday for children in care, visiting the Isle of Wight for five days (during April 2024)



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