

Annual Report 2023-24



 **drive
forward**
FROM CARE TO CAREER

Our Vision

A society where care-experienced people enjoy opportunity, empathy and respect.

Our Mission

To enable care-experienced young people to achieve their full potential through sustainable and fulfilling employment.

Our Values

We are visionary – We explore, learn and thrive. We ask bold questions, seeking to expand our insight and knowledge to drive leading practice, reframe mindsets and build better futures.

We are people-focused – People are at the heart of everything we do. We lead with commitment, champion individuals with compassion, and nurture aspiration.

We are collaborative – We know our strengths and actively pursue opportunities to work with people who make us stronger. We evolve together and build a supportive community that strives to elevate one-another.

We are empowering – We encourage honest reflection, cultivate self-belief, and enable our community to break down barriers to promote positive change within and around them.

About Drive Forward Foundation

Drive Forward Foundation is a registered charity dedicated to supporting care-experienced young people aged 16–26 in London into sustainable and fulfilling employment, education, and training. Since 2010, we have empowered over 4,000 young people to take charge of their futures by building meaningful careers. Our services are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of this group, offering personalised 1-2-1 support, intensive employability training, professional mentoring, and a bespoke counselling service.

Exclusively working with care-experienced young people, we enable them to gain the skills, confidence, and resilience needed to thrive in the workplace. Over the past decade, we've built a strong network of employer partners, offering exclusive training, work placements, and employment opportunities. Together, we are driving social mobility and creating more inclusive working environments that unlock the potential of care-experienced young people.



Welcome from our CEO



Anton Babey
CEO of Drive Forward Foundation

Last year showcased the transformative power of opportunity, as we supported over 600 care-experienced young people on their journey towards fulfilling and sustainable employment, laying the foundation for a brighter future.

The true measure of our success lies in the stories of the remarkable young people we serve. Later in this report, you'll meet Kadisha, Ikra, and Aalaysia—just a few examples of the life-changing impact we witness every day.

But our impact goes beyond individual achievements. By integrating care-experienced young people into the workforce, we help shape a more diverse and inclusive business landscape. Employers benefit from the unique skills and perspectives these young people bring, and our economy gains valuable contributors eager to make a positive difference.

However, the need for our services remains pressing. Many care-experienced young people continue to face significant barriers to employment and remain underrepresented in the job market.

Moving forwards, we are determined to expand our reach and impact. Our goal is to support over 1000 young people by 2026 while strengthening our partnerships with employers who share our vision. I would like to express my gratitude to our dedicated staff, employers, mentors, and supporters. Their unwavering commitment is crucial in helping us create a future where every care-experienced young person has the opportunity to thrive—not defined by their past, but empowered by the opportunities ahead.

Together, we can build that future.

Introducing our New Chair



Sir Max Hill KCB KC

Chair of Drive Forward Foundation

Sir Max Hill was Director of Public Prosecutions for England & Wales 2018-23 and was knighted for services to law and order in the New Years Honours List 2024. A barrister since 1987, his career spans every aspect of criminal justice, acting in equal measure for the prosecution and the defence. He held several leadership positions at the Bar and was the UK Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation 2017-18. He has also worked as a volunteer in the charity sector throughout his adult life, previously chairing two charities working to empower young people through education and employment.

"It is my pleasure to contribute to the first Annual Report since becoming Chair of the Board on 1st February 2024. After a career in private practice as a lawyer, followed by years in public service, it is a privilege to join the team at a time of consolidation and expansion. We have a committed and dynamic team, with dedicated Career Specialists working directly with our young people across London boroughs with further expansion on the way.

Importantly, in a General Election year, we also have a thriving Care-Experienced Policy Forum where our young people themselves develop practical policy recommendations to improve the life chances of so many more like them. The Board of Trustees is proud to serve in support of all of this work.

Throughout my career, I have worked towards diversity, inclusion and social mobility in my profession. There is no better place than Drive Forward to make these goals a reality in the wider population because we live in a world where care-experienced young people experience disproportionately worse outcomes than their non-care-experienced peers. This must change.

Drive Forward is here to make the difference."

Driving change together

Over the past year, we continued to build upon our successes, collaborating with incredible partners—many of whom we worked with for the first time.

One of our highlights was our ongoing partnership with the John Lewis Partnership's Building Happier Futures Programme, with which John Lewis aim to be the employer of choice for young people with care experience. We expanded on last year's initiatives by launching a comprehensive pilot across London. This included interactive taster sessions at our office, followed by engaging store visits and two-day work experience placements. We are thrilled to announce that in 2023, **12 of our young people were offered roles in retail and warehousing** at various locations throughout London, further enhancing their career prospects. Two were offered fantastic jobs within John Lewis headquarters.

Our **annual Partner Appreciation event on Tuesday, 28th November 2023** marked a significant milestone as we celebrated the achievements of the year and recognised the tremendous contributions made by individuals and organisations alike. This year, we invited not only our partners but also our funders, making the event a remarkable success. We were excited to see the return of our "Above and Beyond" award, which was jointly awarded to two outstanding finalists: The Crown Estate, who once again provided valuable internships, employment opportunities, and site visits, and Central and North West London NHS Trust, who continued their commitment by offering **permanent roles** in business support. Both organisations received well-deserved recognition for their support.

In the last quarter of 2023, we hosted a **partner breakfast event** designed to showcase models of best practice, providing a valuable learning experience for our newest partners. Attendees heard inspiring stories from participants in the Civil Service care-leaver internship scheme and young people employed by our partners. Thames Water shared insights on the benefits of collaborating with DFF, while others outlined their ambitious plans for the upcoming year. This event reignited our partner focus groups, who generated numerous ideas and strategies aimed at enhancing our support for young people in 2024.

Looking ahead, a key focus will be on increasing our network of employment partners to create even more opportunities for our young people. By providing tailored training and fostering ongoing communication between employers, young people, and our team, we aim to enhance understanding of care experience, cultivate supportive work environments, and establish the best conditions for success.

Together, we are committed to driving positive change and empowering our young people as they navigate their future careers.

Our impact

649

Individual young people engaged

118

Participants secured 122 opportunities
with employer partners

347

First-time participants

232

Additional employment outcomes

48% Sustained

53% Sustained EET
outcomes

798

Total programme engagements

343

Employment, education, and training
(EET) outcomes achieved



Why we do it

The number of children going into care keeps on rising.

In 2023, the number of children going into care in England rose to 83,840, up 2% from last year.



38%

of care leavers aged between 19 and 21 are not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to around 11% of all young people aged 19 to 21 years old.



50%

of care leavers present a mental health needs.

25%

of England's homeless population have been in care.



Yanas' journey with Drive Forward

Yanas, a 21-year-old from Eritrea, joined Drive Forward with a clear goal: to build a career in construction. But there was a significant hurdle — English, his second language.

"The team was helpful," Yanas reflects. "They found me the CSCS [Construction Skills Certification Scheme] course I needed to get a construction job. But during the course, some words were tough. I practised them again and again, and Justin was always there to help."

Justin, a dedicated Careers Manager at Drive Forward, recalls, "Yanas is a testament to resilience. Initially reserved, he flourished during the course, engaging with his peers. However, English continued to pose a challenge."

Yanas adds, "Justin encouraged me to practise at home, sending me practice questions. It made a big difference."

"I knew English wouldn't be easy for Yanas and others like him," Justin says. "They had to learn industry-specific terms while grasping the overall

content. There were moments of doubt. Yanas once called me, discouraged by his scores. I reminded him of his journey from Eritrea. "You've overcome so much already; this test won't defeat you." We laughed, but it resonated."

Through persistence, Yanas not only passed the exam but also caught the attention of employers like Berkeley Homes. "He's an exceptional individual," Justin proudly notes.

Yanas' journey underscores the growing need for English language support among care leavers. Many, like Yanas, face language barriers, and Drive Forward is committed to breaking them. His story inspired us to secure funding for an English tutor for future in-house courses, ensuring no young person faces this challenge alone.

Young voices

Sarah's journey to becoming a nurse



"When I was younger, I had dreams, but no drive and the realities of life hit me when I turned 18.

I was unhappy with where I was.

I confided in my PA [Personal Adviser working with the Local Authority], who referred me to Drive Forward Foundation. That is when Daniel, my Career Specialist at Drive Forward, contacted me. I told him "I want to get a job as an NHS nurse, but I don't have relevant work experience or qualifications". He instantly reassured me that we could navigate this journey together one step at a time.

My dream of working in healthcare stemmed from my past experiences. I used to get very stressed when I was a teenager. It got to a very bad phase where I was passing out in public, and I would wake up in the hospital.

The hospital was like my second home.

The nurses were always there for me and felt like my most extensive support system. They were kind to me and always ensured I was physically and mentally alright. Since then, I have always visualised myself in that role and that position.

Daniel and I went through so many applications together. I was applying for nursing associate's positions and nursing degree apprenticeships. I kept applying to different roles with Daniel and kept getting rejected.

I wanted to give up, but he continuously encouraged me to persevere.

Finally, I got accepted for an interview — for the highest-paying nursing associate position in the UK!

I was more scared than happy when I got accepted for my interview. I was actually quite afraid.

With Daniel, I built my confidence, as I had someone to go through the interview questions, test me, and share my concerns.

I knew that if I didn't get this role, I would stop looking at healthcare positions altogether.

When I turned up for my interview, there were 100 to 200 other candidates there for the same position. I looked like one of the youngest. Everyone else had a grey hair or two. Everyone seemed experienced. I asked people what they used to do, and the typical response was, "I worked in a hospital for 20 years".

I was the eighth applicant to be called in.

I went in, and the interviewer started asking me questions. I was stuttering and looking at my hands, but I answered all the questions she asked, still stuttering. I said, "Listen, I want to do this job". She told me that I lived pretty far away, and I replied by telling her, "I am driven;

please give me this opportunity, and I will give you results. Give me this job, and I will show you why I deserve it".

I didn't hear anything back for a month. During this time, I was still actively looking at other jobs, but none were related to healthcare. I thought that I would never get into the NHS.

Finally, they contacted me... I got the job!

I am proud of myself. I am now at university, as my new job enrolled me on a fully paid-for nursing course on my second day of working there! Once I qualify, I will be a band four nurse, just one band away from being a qualified nurse.

If I could give my previous self some advice, it would be "Don't give up. Believe it or not, it will happen one day. You don't know when that one day will be; I know it sounds cliché, but if you do the work, it will happen. Care doesn't define you; nothing defines you. Only you define yourself."

Drive Forward Foundation and Daniel have had a massive impact on my life. Daniel helped me so much; I can't thank him enough; he is excellent. Daniel was the first person I called when I got my job and house. Last year, I told Daniel, "I hope to get a job in the NHS, and I hope to get my own place", and Daniel said, "You will. You will if you believe you will". I am happy to say that Daniel was right!"

Kadisha's journey of getting into the Civil Service



"My name is Kadisha, I'm 23 years old and a care leaver.

From a young age, my passion has always been dance. My grandmother was my carer, and she would bring me to dance school, where I had professional ballet and theatre training.

When I was older, I went to Kingston University to study dance, but after that, I was still determining my next steps and where I wanted to go.

Despite loving dance, I needed to be realistic and focus on finding a job that would give me stability, as I can't guarantee that I will get support from others. I needed to think of money, so I started trying to find employment.

I decided I'd go into retail. I liked my job until I started to feel uncomfortable because my shifts were at night, and I didn't feel safe going home at this time through London. I asked them multiple times to switch my shift times, but they didn't listen. When it got too much, I spoke to Barnet Council about it, and they referred me to Drive Forward.

That's when I met Shereen, my Careers Specialist. She sent me so many opportunities, jobs and services that Drive Forward could help me with. After my previous experiences, I needed to be in a job with a standard work schedule – maybe in an office or as an estate agent.

In the summer, Shereen told me about a 12-month paid internship with the Civil Service. This sounded perfect and I told her I was ready to apply.

It's competitive, and thousands of other young people applied. Shereen helped me the whole way through. We did my personal statement and then sent off my application. With Shereen, I did so many practice questions and practice interviews. She would pretend to be the interviewer, and we did this multiple times. Being a dancer, I hadn't learned these skills before; it was mainly body movement, so I had no real experience of being in an interview. However, this allowed me to practice.

When I attended my actual interview, I was nervous. I remember my heart beating fast. But the interviewers were very calm, and though I wasn't expecting it, I even managed to make them laugh.

After weeks of waiting, I got the confirmation that I had the position!

Shereen informed me that the next steps were DBS checks and security checks. For the Civil Service, there are, of course, lots of security checks. It was hard because, as a care leaver, they asked me questions about my family that I didn't know, including about my parents and grandparents and all their details. Shereen spent so much time contacting them, finding solutions and explaining the situation. The process took so long that I wanted to give up, but Shereen's patience and support kept me going. I am so grateful to her; she helped me enter a very secure industry, which is exactly what I needed.

I love that I have the Civil Service opportunity, and I'm so grateful for it. It is also the perfect stepping stone to allow me to plan for my big dream - to open my own dance school. When my grandmother used to take me to dance school, it was in a predominantly white area, I was the only coloured girl, and I felt it. I want to have my own ballet school because I want it to be an inclusive environment for everyone.

If I could give advice to someone else, I would say everyone's timeline is different. So, try to avoid comparing your situation to others. A job doesn't define you, but the right one can make life easier. Also, be patient and use organisations like Drive Forward.

Before I was introduced to Drive Forward, everything in my life was dormant; I was in a stagnant phase, which was irritating me. For a care leaver, life's brutal because they throw you into the deep end when they close your case. So, if you have support, take it.

Right now, I'm in a happy position; I have a secure job, live independently, and still have my future dreams of opening my dance studio."

Ayda's journey to becoming a Lawyer



"I have found Ayda to be one of the most focused, hard-working, and dedicated young people I have ever met. I know she will go far in her career"

- Ahmed, Ayda's Career Specialist at Drive Forward Foundation.

"My name is Adya, I'm 24 and have just finished a three-year LLB Law degree. I love sleeping, eating, binging on Netflix, and reading good books. Right now, I am reading a book about Indira Gandhi. She was a fascinating woman and one of my female role models. It's nice to read it because she was also a lawyer, and I am learning a few lessons from her. Without a mum and a dad, I find it useful to get advice from other places.

I am originally from Iran. I moved to the UK when I was 12, where some family members adopted me, but later, I moved into care. When I came to the UK, I could not speak any English. Obviously, in Iran, they teach you English words like 'water', 'book', and 'father' but not conversation. When I came to school in England, I couldn't get administrated because of my English and because the school had already started. So, I had to self-teach myself English at age 12. My adopted family wasn't that nice to me, and so I would use my time to write about spring and autumn in English. I was writing essays and translating children's books. It was a complex process, but I learnt how to speak and write in English in six months.

At the time, I didn't feel impressed with myself because I didn't have a support system that told me I was doing well.

Now that I think about it, I have completed a law degree in English! I'm so proud of myself.

I was told I should look into law because I talk so much, which is how my career started.

Before I went to university, I did an apprenticeship in Immigration Law, which I enjoyed. I liked that I was helping people and making change. It felt nice to do something rewarding for other people. It just sparked this feeling that I wanted to do this for the rest of my life.

I was introduced to Drive Forward Foundation during my second year of university through someone at my university who knew I was a care leaver. They asked if I'd be interested in extra support, and I told them of course I would.

That's how I met Rachel, my initial Careers Specialists at Drive Forward. She was one of the most amazing people I have ever met. She would find me various opportunities such as, in Burgess Mee Family Law Firm or a law internship at Superdrug's head office.

Even the positions I knew I didn't want to pursue helped immensely. One time, through Rachel, I had the opportunity to shadow a judge in

the Crown Court. An amazing Judge! After Rachel left Drive Forward, Ahmed became my new Careers Specialist. Ahmed was equally supportive, helping me with my CV, cover letter and future plans! He consistently checks up on me and helps me find new opportunities. I am so grateful to them both for all the work experiences and support that they gave and continue to give me. I wouldn't be where I am today without them.

Right now, I can proudly say I am an Admin Officer at the Royal Courts of Justice. In September, I will start my Barrister Training Course, BPP Masters, which will bring me one step closer to my dreams! I am interested in human rights and criminal law.

I would not have had the experiences I did without Drive Forward. I know I must give myself credit, too, but law is so competitive, and without work experience and connections, it's 10 times harder to get your foot in the door. If I was talking to my former self, I would say, 'Don't give up'. I wish I knew that instead of trying to go for the big fish, go for the small fish instead and work your way up from there. I couldn't get a paralegal job initially, so I decided to do an administrative law job, as a stepping stone to my next position. To other care-experienced young people, I strongly suggest connecting with organisations such as Drive Forward Foundation."

Ikra's journey with Therapeutic Support

"It has been an absolute pleasure to be a part of Drive Forward's work. The organisation has enabled our young people to continue to benefit from attachment-orientated psychotherapy, which has been successfully delivered for the last five and half years. It continues to offer what our clients have asked for, namely specialised one-to-one in-person support. Although the service is a small, part-time operation, we've ensured that we continue to provide a flexible service that allows clients to access it alongside their employment commitments. We've helped over 100 young people and delivered over 1,700 hours of therapeutic support."

- Richard Barnardo, Barnardo Counselling

"I believe therapeutic support is essential to anyone leaving or in care."

My name is Ikra. I'm 20 years old, and I'm currently doing my foundation year at university. In September, I will begin my undergraduate degree in Law and Arabic.

It's a pervasive pattern in foster kids that their opinions are dismissed. So, they use storytelling to explain their feelings to their social workers so that they understand their point. I used to habitually express my feelings through storytelling. I could say I'm feeling sad, but I wouldn't feel it. I would waffle around my emotions instead of dealing with them. I knew I needed to change.

A year before I was introduced to Drive Forward, I used to have therapy sessions. But my counsellor left, and so I became 'counsellor-less'. I searched for a new counsellor for quite a while, and I put myself on a waiting list for NHS services.

I was first introduced to Drive Forward through a work experience opportunity they hosted. After that, I met Shereen, who became my Careers Specialist. When I met her, she seemed so caring and interested, and she genuinely wanted to help me, which naturally made our relationship grow. After that, I started getting more involved in the opportunities at Drive Forward. I like that it's a small charity because there's more dedication and care there. There's a willingness to meet your needs, and I value that.

When I was introduced to Drive Forward, I still didn't have a therapist. Shereen asked me if I wanted to receive 12 weeks of free counselling sessions from a trauma-informed therapist. Of course, I said yes and since then, I have been signed up for Richard Barnardo's counselling service.

When I first met Richard, I went in with an open mind, and that's important for something like therapy. I told him what I wanted to achieve, and we frequently refer back to this. Growing up, I thought that my feelings were pointless, and because of this, I've had a lot of problems with relationships and friendships. With Richard, I've been working on listening to myself, and it's been tough because I am trying to change the way I have been thinking for the past 18 years. It's a challenge, but we've made a lot of progress. Richard is also care-experienced, and this 100% helps. He gets it.

I initially used the 12 weeks of free sessions provided by Drive Forward. When that finished, I added another 12 weeks of discounted sessions, which Barnet Council and Drive Forward funded. I have now added on my third set of 12 weeks at a reduced price. I just knew that Richard was so good and that it was something worth paying for. For the sessions, I prefer to have them in person as I feel I can express myself better in person. However, I like the flexibility of the sessions and I do them online some weeks if I have things going on.

If I were to advise someone considering using Drive Forward's

counselling services, I would say to go in with an open mind. It's a common occurrence amongst care leavers that at some point in their life they have received a non-trauma-informed, underfunded counselling service, which has limited resources and does not give them what is needed. Because of these bad experiences, some may be scared and anxious to go near therapy again. For me, going in with an open mind to Drive Forward's counselling services has been excellent, and I recommend trying it out. I will continue to use Drive Forward's counselling service, and I know that Drive Forward will be there for me if I need additional support."



Aalaysia's journey - transitioning out of University

"When I was 17, I went into care because my mum became ill. At that time, I was doing my A-levels, but I had little motivation, and I didn't really care about them.

Luckily, I had other people in my life who supported and encouraged me, and because of this, I decided to go to university. I went to Kent University to study Marketing. Not many women on my mum's side have graduated from university. And so, I feel proud to have my graduation pictures framed on their walls.

During my second year at university, I had to decide between going into a year in industry or continuing into my third year. Although I wanted to do the year in industry, my situation with living and being a care leaver meant that I would find it hard to find accommodation in London to be able to do that. My PA (Personal Advisor from the Council) suggested that I go into my third year and then, when I graduate, look for an internship. I went that route because I had to think about finding housing and affording to live.

In my final year, my PA introduced me to Felix, my Careers Specialist at Drive Forward. At that time, I was open to any opportunity. Felix told me about an Internship with the Civil Service, and we applied together. His impact on my journey was massive. During the application and security process, he would email them about the documents I didn't have and ask

for alternative methods. He would also chase them up to help get me into the role quickly.

Being in the Civil Service has been great. I have such a good team; they're friendly and helpful. I have noticed a change in myself. I'm more confident speaking to the team because they push me to talk. They're pushing me to contribute, which is good.

I still use Drive Forward, and Felix helped pair me with a mentor at the Civil Service. He also continues to send me helpful events to attend. If I had not had the help of Felix or Drive Forward when I was in university, I know I would not be in the position I am in right now.

My advice to someone who may be going through the same things that I was going through would be to take all the help you can get. If anyone's trying to help you, even though sometimes you might not want to attend the meeting, just go because it will help you, and there may be a new opportunity. After university, I needed a career where I would feel secure. Otherwise, I would be coming out of studying with no job and no money.

In the future, I am considering doing a Master's in International Business because I would like to travel and work abroad. Travel is possible within the Civil Service, so this could be an option."

Rasharntae's journey - try and try again

"If I could give a message to my previous self, it would be to take your time and not force it. It will be hard if your mind is not in the right place to get a job. But, when you are in a better place, try again.

When I was 18, my PA introduced me to Drive Forward, where I met Justin, my initial Careers Specialist. Justin was great; he tried to help me wherever he could, but I wasn't in the right mental state at that time. I wasn't being serious about the process, and because of this, I didn't get anywhere.

I stopped using Drive Forward's services, but after a few months, I was ready to turn my life around. This time, I was prepared to commit fully.

I messaged Justin and told him I was serious about my future.

Justin connected me with Daniel, my new Careers Specialist at Drive Forward. Daniel was also so friendly. I told him I wanted to get a job, and this time, I would put in the work. He sent me an opportunity for a three-day work experience position with Waitrose, and I went.

After three days, Waitrose asked me if I wanted a permanent job, but I would still need to attend an interview. The job was exclusively for those who had completed the work experience.

As soon as I told Daniel he began to help with my interview preparation; he guided me and gave me points and examples of how I could answer questions.

The day of the interview arrived, and I was nervous. Sometimes, I struggle with confidence, and I find it difficult to make eye contact. My interviewer could tell I was nervous, but he told me I did well – he gave me the job!

Waitrose has been a perfect source of stability in my life. They pay me well, and they are also supportive of my ADHD. They understand that I find it difficult to focus when multitasking.

My manager said the person I was when I first came to now has changed massively. I never used to smile; I never used to talk to anyone; I just used to do my own thing. Hopefully, whilst working at Waitrose, I can continue to develop these skills so that one day I can pursue my dream of becoming an actor, preferably on Eastenders. Through Waitrose, I have already been able to practise acting, as I was selected to be a secret shopper at another store! Here, I had to act as a customer, but instead, I observed the operations.

Drive Forward, Justin and Daniel have all helped me on my journey. Through their support, guidance and encouragement, I now have my job, my confidence is growing, and I'm excited by my future possibilities."

Events section

At Drive Forward Foundation, we have been buzzing with activity this year, all aimed at equipping young people with the tools and opportunities they need to thrive.



BOOSTING CONFIDENCE WITH ASOS COLLABORATION

ASOS have generously provided work attire for our young people. This seemingly small gesture significantly impacts their confidence, ensuring they feel prepared for job interviews and workdays. It's not just about the clothes; it's a message of belief and support that empowers them to step into the professional world.

CAREERS WEEK – THE BRIDGE, COCKTAIL MAKING

During National Careers Week, we empowered our young people to explore future possibilities through engaging events that fostered creativity and valuable work skills. A mocktail and pastry masterclass at the Hilton London Bankside, co-organised with The Bridge – Health, Fitness & Wellbeing, provided participants with critical skills in catering, events, and hospitality. This hands-on experience ignited interest in these fields for many.





CELEBRATING CARE DAY WITH JOHN LEWIS

In partnership with John Lewis, a valued collaborator for over two years, we celebrated Care Day with a special event. Young people participated in an engaging cooking masterclass led by Waitrose chefs, learning essential life skills and building their confidence. As Sharon White, former Chairman of the John Lewis Partnership, remarked, "Our team of chefs made sure that the cooking masterclass went beyond the kitchen—empowering care-experienced young people with confidence and the feeling of independence in mastering an essential life skill."

BUILDING FUTURES WITH IN-HOUSE CSCS COURSE

Following an increase in young people asking for opportunities in the construction sector, Careers Manager Justin Sesay Barnes rose to the challenge. Going above and beyond, he not only contacted potential employment and training partners, but went out of his way to obtain the necessary qualifications and be able to deliver appropriate training to interested young people. He successfully ran his first in-house Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) course in October 2023, giving young people a fast track to this vital construction industry certification. In collaboration with Wates Group, Runaway Training, and Back2Work, our participants gained their CSCS qualifications, opening doors to local construction firms and equipping them with essential skills for stable and rewarding careers. Remarkably, out of the 12 young people who began the course, 11 completed it, earning their Level 1 Health and Safety certificates. Following their interviews, four participants received one or more job offers on the spot! We're looking forward to continuing working with our partners in construction to support more motivated young people to kickstart fulfilling careers.





INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY – TALK WITH AMELIA DURKIN

On International Women's Day, we hosted a virtual talk with Amelia Durkin, a remarkable care-experienced individual from Bolton, who shared her inspiring journey to becoming a lawyer at Squire Patton Boggs. Amelia's story exemplifies the transformative power of support and opportunity, showcasing how access to Drive Forward's services and an insight day at Squire Patton Boggs led to her securing a training contract with the prestigious law firm. Her determination and positive outlook resonate deeply with our mission and the potential within every care-experienced young person.

EXPLORE YOUR CAREER OPTIONS WEEK

Our Community and Partnership Manager, Nina, organised a series of insightful events for #ExploreYourCareerOptionsWeek. A standout session featured Channel 4's Lowri Roberts, who enlightened our young care leavers about apprenticeship pathways in the broadcasting and media sectors. Another captivating session led by Afra Sarrafi and Rohan Mistry from BDO UK LLP provided an authentic look at career pathways in audit and advisory, igniting genuine interest among attendees.

The week concluded with Lauren Crawford from ASOS hosting an engaging session, where young people learned about ASOS's impressive reach and vibrant company culture. These invaluable insights equipped our participants with essential knowledge, empowering them as they prepare for their future career journeys.

Each of these events not only fosters skill development but also builds a community of support and encouragement, setting our young people on the path to success.





Pathways for Success: Camden Council's Internship Scheme

In 2018, Drive Forward Foundation (DFF) and Camden Council joined forces to support care-experienced young people in the borough.

Building on the success of initiatives such as the Civil Service Care Leavers Internship Scheme and the Government's Kickstart Scheme during COVID-19, Camden Council took a bold step in 2023 by launching six paid 18-month internships exclusively for care leavers. These internships, spanning various departments—including strategy, HR, refugee support, and HS2—have demonstrated how hiring individuals with lived experience can offer invaluable insights and significant benefits to the council.

This programme marks a major milestone in Camden's journey to create more equitable opportunities for care leavers. It serves as a blueprint for how local government can harness the potential of care-experienced young people to create meaningful, transformative careers. And we're only just getting started. We hope this initiative will inspire other organisations across London to follow suit, offering similar pathways for care leavers to thrive.

"Camden's first internship scheme has been a positive learning experience for all involved, helping us better understand the challenges faced by those with care experience and the actions we can take to create smoother journeys into employment. We now aim to grow the scheme and run it on a rolling basis, having seen the value our interns have brought to the organisation, as well as the impact this has had on their confidence and future career prospects. We'll continue fine-tuning our model as we gather feedback and learn from participants,

their managers, and the care-leaving service. Looking ahead, we hope to promote best practice and influence other large organisations to replicate our scheme so many more care-experienced young people can showcase their talent on an equal playing field."

— Camden Council Apprenticeship Team (joint statement)



CREATING THE CAMDEN COUNCIL INTERNSHIP SCHEME

DFF's collaboration with the Department for Education began in 2016, launching an internship programme for care leavers that offered paid entry-level roles—similar to fixed-term appointments—without requiring formal qualifications. One of our young people participated in the inaugural cohort, which eventually led to the highly successful Civil Service Care Leavers Internship Scheme. Today, this initiative offers ring-fenced opportunities for care-experienced young people across the UK, with DFF supporting 50 individuals in the programme annually.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, care-experienced young people were particularly impacted by social isolation and limited access to employment. In response, the Government introduced the Kickstart Scheme in 2020, creating six-month entry-level roles paid at the London living wage, with no prior qualifications required. Camden Council was one of the first London boroughs to engage with the Kickstart Scheme, and three DFF young people gained placements within Camden Council departments, including Children's Services and Special Educational Needs. Two of these participants transitioned into permanent contracts.

Building on these successes, Camden Council recognised the potential to create its own dedicated programme. This new initiative leverages these proven models, offering targeted opportunities for care-experienced young people. Camden Council's role as a corporate parent means it has a unique responsibility to care leavers, and through this internship programme, it is actively investing in their growth and development.

"This project has been a win-win experience for both the interns and Camden Council. It's fantastic to see skills, knowledge, and confidence developing before my very eyes."

— *Felix Fry, Careers Specialist with Drive Forward Foundation*

"I was introduced to the Camden Council Internship through Felix, and it has been the best job I've had. It's been a great experience. It's the best opportunity I could have asked for because it's getting your foot in the door rather than waiting for your degree to be finished. It's a way to start climbing the career ladder. Honestly, I have nothing negative to say about the internship. The opportunity benefits care leavers, as they may have experienced certain hardships that might set them back a bit. It just gives you that boost and push forward and puts you on the same playing field as everyone else."

— *Rose, Camden Council Intern*

Click to view (opens browser window)





"The Camden Council Internship allowed me to get my foot in the door and grow my career. Even though my team was small, they had a lot of experience, and I learned so much from them. From IT skills, writing emails, and answering the phone to handling face-to-face encounters with the community, this internship has set me up for what I'm going to do in the future."

— Jamieleigh, Former Camden Council Intern

Rose's role spans two teams: the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion team, and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. This variety of experiences, she explains, has been a "game changer" for her.

"It's helped me figure out what I want to do and what areas I want to grow in. Right now, I feel like the world is my oyster. I just want to keep trying new things and finding my niche."

Jamieleigh is a former intern who now holds a permanent position as Operations Coordinator with Camden Council.



THE ROAD AHEAD

As Camden Council's Care Leavers Internship gains momentum, the hope is that other boroughs will take notice.

"I'm impressed by Camden Council's commitment, and we've all learnt a lot from this pilot project for next time," says Felix Fry. "It would be great to see other boroughs follow Camden's example. There's no doubt in my mind that, with Drive Forward Foundation's support and a proactive commitment to diversity and inclusion, other London boroughs could replicate Camden's success."

The Camden Council Care Leavers Internship is not just another programme—it's a roadmap for how local governments can offer real opportunities to those who need them most. As Camden Council looks to refine and expand this initiative, we hope more organisations will join this movement, creating a level playing field for care-experienced young people to build their futures.

"I definitely think it's beneficial to have care-experienced individuals working in the Council. Many of us know the services well from going through them ourselves. I'm actually shocked it isn't a thing in other boroughs because I can already imagine how many care-experienced people could benefit from this. There's no better voice for people in care than someone who has lived and experienced it."

— Rose, Camden Council Intern



My Journey with Richard Barnardo's Counselling Services: A Reflection by Lorraine Makuvaza



Click to view (opens browser window)



My name is Lorraine Makuvaza, and I work for the Civil Service in the Department of Education, specifically within the Exams and Qualifications Division. I've been living in London for the past six years, having moved here from Shropshire, where my family is based. I was born in Zimbabwe, a detail that adds a layer of complexity to my story.

I found out about Richard Barnardo's counselling services through the Drive Forward Foundation. They recommended this option to me when I expressed a desire to transition from being in care to integrating into adult life. I had already experienced therapy before and understood its potential to be beneficial. At that moment, I wasn't in a position to afford the service myself, and the support I received from Drive Forward was invaluable.

I've been engaging with the counselling service for over a year now. Initially, I was struggling as a postgraduate student who was unemployed, feeling lost and unsure about my future. Being in care often feels like standing at the edge of a cliff, waiting to take a leap into the unknown. Richard's therapy has been instrumental in helping me process these feelings and navigate this

transition. He created a space where I could share my emotions, allowing me to come to terms with my past and appreciate the strength I've gained through my experiences.

One of the most significant turning points in my therapy was recognising the collaborative nature of my sessions with Richard. He allowed me to express my thoughts and feelings, providing insights while also giving me the space to reject or accept them. This dynamic empowered me, making me feel like an active participant in my healing journey rather than a passive recipient of advice.

As we progressed, I began to realise that Richard's role was not just to guide me, but to hold space for my growth. I was initially apprehensive about having a male therapist, as my previous experiences had all been with women. However, Richard created an environment where I felt safe and supported, enabling me to open up about my struggles.

A crucial aspect of our work together has been addressing my feelings of uncertainty. Growing up in the care system, I faced many uncertainties, and Richard helped me find security in that chaos. He equipped me with tools to handle uncertainty

in a safe and stable way, fostering a sense of self-love and resilience that I hadn't fully embraced before.

His guidance helped me acknowledge the traumas I had experienced and allowed me to appreciate my journey more deeply. I learned to celebrate my resilience and recognise that overcoming obstacles, both big and small, is part of life.

To young people across Britain considering counselling, I would strongly encourage them to seek out these services. It has been life-changing for me, providing me with control over my emotions and a sense of agency in my life. In a city like London, where it's easy to feel isolated, the support of a caring professional can make a significant difference.

My experiences with Richard have reminded me that, even in moments of overwhelming stress, there are avenues for relief and understanding. The connection I've built through this counselling journey has been transformative, and I've come to value the power of sharing my story with someone who listens, understands, and empowers me to move forward.

Reflecting on this past year, I can confidently say that my journey with Richard Barnardo's counselling services has shaped who I am today. It has been a path filled with challenges, but through those challenges, I've found strength, purpose, and a deeper understanding of myself.



Stories from our partners and mentors

Bradie and Andron's Journey

At the Drive Forward Foundation, we are dedicated to helping care-experienced young people build sustainable careers and achieve their full potential. Our partnership with Andron, a leader in facilities management, exemplifies the power of collaboration in transforming lives. Over the past ten months, Andron has welcomed four of our young people into their team, providing them with valuable opportunities to thrive in a supportive and values-driven environment. One of the standout success stories from this partnership is Bradie, who has found her calling as the Community and Training Manager at Andron.



BRADIE'S JOURNEY: FROM CLIENT TO CAREER LEADER

Bradie's journey with Drive Forward Foundation began when she sought guidance and support to find a career that aligned with her passions. With the help of her Careers Manager, Heaven, Bradie was able to identify her interests and aspirations. Heaven's attentive listening and tailored support ensured that Bradie was presented with opportunities that matched her goals, one of which was a role at Andron.

Reflecting on her experience, Bradie shared that Heaven "listened when I told her what I was passionate about [...] and streamlined opportunities accordingly." This thoughtful approach led her to the position at Andron, which immediately resonated with her values. With further guidance from Felix, her Careers Specialist, Bradie prepared extensively for the interview. Felix, she noted, was "incredibly helpful in opening my eyes to the realities of managing during interview prep" and encouraged her to conduct thorough research.

The interview process was not just a formality for Bradie; it was a moment of growth and self-realisation. She approached it with calmness and confidence, feeling "grounded during the interview" and inspired by the alignment between her values and those of Andron. The result was a successful placement in a role that not only matched her passion but also allowed her to contribute meaningfully to a company that upholds the principles she believes in.

A MODEL FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

The success of Bradie's placement is part of a broader, fruitful partnership between Drive Forward Foundation and Andron. This marks the second time our organisation has connected Andron with an ideal candidate, demonstrating the strength of our collaboration.

Anton Babey, CEO of Drive Forward Foundation, emphasised the importance of this partnership, noting that Andron's clear communication and understanding of the unique challenges faced by care leavers were key to the successful placements. "Their team was clear in their requirements," Anton observed, adding that Andron's collaborative approach made the entire process "efficient and enjoyable." He also highlighted the value of the interview experience and feedback that Andron provided to our young people, which was instrumental in helping them succeed.

Patricia Billings, Sustainability Manager at Andron, echoed these sentiments, describing the partnership as "invaluable." She praised Drive Forward Foundation's commitment to empowering care leavers, which aligns perfectly with Andron's values. Together, Patricia noted, they have "found great talent" and look forward to continuing the collaboration for future roles.

Neil McLaren, National Account Director at Andron, shared his positive experience with the recruitment process, stating that he was "greatly impressed by the quality of the candidates" from Drive Forward. He expressed confidence that Bradie would be an excellent addition to their team and recommended Drive Forward to other employers based on their successful collaboration.

LOOKING AHEAD: EXPANDING THE IMPACT

As the partnership between Drive Forward Foundation and Andron continues to grow, both organisations are excited about the future. Cheryl Stewart, Director at Andron, reflected on the impact of the collaboration so far. She remarked that in just ten months, Andron has welcomed four members from Drive Forward into their business, including Bradie, who is now taking on the role of Community and Training Manager. Cheryl sees this as just the beginning, noting that there are "plenty of collaborative opportunities for positive social impact" on the horizon.

Andron and Drive Forward are not only focused on employment but are also planning joint events to raise awareness of the barriers faced by care leavers. These initiatives aim to create positive change within the facilities management industry and beyond. Cheryl expressed her enthusiasm for the future, stating that they "can't wait to see what the future holds" for this partnership.

Finally, Nina Dei, Community and Partnerships Manager at Drive Forward Foundation, highlighted the transformational impact of Bradie's experience at Andron. She noted that Andron has "fostered her creativity and embraced her ideas," empowering Bradie to see herself as both a professional and a potential advocate for others.

Policy Forum

2023 was a pivotal year for our youth-led policy forum, marked by meaningful initiatives and significant achievements. At the forefront was our focus on the **Criminalisation Campaign**, which included co-creating Dare to Care—a comprehensive guide designed to help judges, lawyers, and other legal professionals better understand and reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers.

We were thrilled to launch Dare to Care in Parliament, with the event hosted by Emily Thornberry MP and co-chaired by the Director of Public Prosecutions at the time, Sir Max Hill KC.



DARE TO CARE: REDUCING UNNECESSARY CRIMINALISATION

In the UK, care-experienced young people are disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. They are six times more likely to be criminalised than their peers (Prison Reform Trust, 2016) and ten times more likely to receive a custodial sentence (ONS, 2022). In 2023, an alarming 59% of children and young people in custody were care-experienced (HM Inspectorate of Prisons), with approximately 25% of the adult prison population having spent time in care.

The Dare to Care guide aims to tackle this injustice head-on. Developed in collaboration with our policy forum members, the guide equips legal professionals with the tools and knowledge to better represent care-experienced young people entangled in the criminal justice system. A focus group session with legal experts Dr Laura Janes and Kate Aubrey-Johnson ensured that the voices of our young people were central to the guide's development, bringing their lived experiences to the fore.

The launch event in Parliament featured powerful speeches from six forum members, addressing an audience that included criminal justice representatives, charity leaders, and campaigners. Sir Max Hill KC reinforced the CPS's commitment to a "child-first" approach, emphasising the importance of diversion, restorative justice, and reparation. He stated: "The CPS is committed to understanding the unique

circumstances of care-experienced young people, prioritising welfare, and diverting them away from the system whenever possible."

Forum member Kadiatu, a long-time campaigner, captured the room's attention when she said: "The more you hear our voices, the more you understand us. I'm here to make sure that those in the criminal justice system know how to support care-experienced young people."

Emily Thornberry MP echoed these sentiments, stating: "The best events, like this one, are about delivering practical solutions that can bring about real change. I'm delighted that this guide will help lawyers better represent care-experienced young people."

The guide's success has already spurred further action, with a follow-up training session held for the Ministry of Justice's Youth Policy Unit, reaching over 60 civil servants. These efforts underscore the urgency of policy reform to protect care-experienced young people from unnecessary criminalisation.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY: STRENGTHENING OUR VOICE

Throughout 2023, our policy forum broadened its influence, forging key partnerships and advancing advocacy work. A highlight of the year was a meeting with Children's Minister David Johnston to discuss mental health support for care leavers. Forum member Farhia raised the critical issue of the "Care Cliff"—the sudden withdrawal of support services when individuals turn 18—and presented a compelling case for a dedicated mental health intervention tailored specifically for care leavers.

Looking ahead, our policy forum plans to launch a Housing Campaign in addition to continuing its work on mental health and criminalisation. This expansion reflects our ongoing commitment to tackling the structural challenges faced by care-experienced young people.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF CAMPAIGNERS

Alongside our policy work, we have prioritised building a strong community of care-experienced campaigners. We held monthly policy meet-ups and rounded off the year with a celebratory dinner in December. This growing community plays a vital role in driving policy changes and raising awareness of the unique challenges faced by care leavers. As we look to the future, their collective efforts will continue to shape and strengthen our advocacy work.

Financial

Statement of financial activities incorporating income and expenditure account for the year ended 31 March 2024

	Unrestricted funds 2024 (£)	Restricted funds 2024 (£)	Total funds 2024 (£)	Total funds 2023 (£)
INCOME FROM:				
Donations and legacies	581,120	228,682	809,802	910,638
Charitable activities	221,761	-	221,761	117,671
Other income	1,428	-	1,428	4,366
Total income	804,309	228,682	1,032,991	1,032,675

EXPENDITURE ON:				
Raising funds	53,160	-	53,160	52,134
Charitable activities	708,375	302,881	1,011,256	869,756
Total expenditure	761,535	302,881	1,064,416	921,890

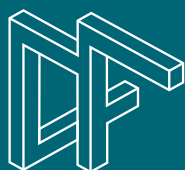
Net movement on investments				-94
Net movement in funds	42,774	-74,199	-31,425	110,691

RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS:				
Total funds brought forward	1,026,839	74,199	1,101,038	990,347
Net movement in funds	42,774	-74,199	-31,425	110,691

Total funds carried forward	1,069,613	0	1,069,613	1,101,038
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