

GREATER MANCHESTER MENTALLY HEALTHY COLLEGES

School to college transition: Care leaver
support package

WIGAN AND LEIGH COLLEGE
APRIL 2021



Wigan and Leigh College is a large general further education college with three main centres in Wigan and two in Leigh. The borough of Wigan and Leigh has a population of 322,000. A higher proportion of the population in the borough is employed in manufacturing compared to the wider North West region and the rest of the country.

Unemployment in the borough is lower than in the rest of the region and the country. A large proportion of the population are outside the labour market due to long-term sickness.

The population in Wigan and Leigh has a lower proportion of people with qualifications at level four and above, and a higher proportion with low qualifications, than other boroughs in the region and the rest of the country.

School to college transition

This is part of the Greater Manchester Mental Health in Further Education Colleges programme. Due to the concentration of student numbers in a relatively small number of education settings and the short timeframes involved we recognised that a more bespoke approach to further education colleges would be needed.

The aim of this programme is to:

- Develop the capacity of further education and sixth form colleges in Greater Manchester to collaborate in support of the mental health and wellbeing of their staff and students
- Identify good practice that can be shared across the system

There are 21 colleges in Greater Manchester (9 general further education colleges and 12 sixth form colleges) and approximately 90% of 16 to 18yr olds in Greater Manchester are in colleges. During an academic year approximately 51,000 out of 56,000 16-18-year olds will study at these further education and sixth-form colleges.

The Association of Colleges (North) has been awarded funding for Year Three of this programme to deliver a wide-ranging programme across Greater Manchester to raise awareness and support development of the mental health agenda within individual colleges.

Our aim

Our aim was to support our care leavers who are transitioning or preparing to transition from their Level 3 studies in college to higher education. Having been supported through the care system, often from a very young age, many care leavers find themselves living in semi-independent or independent accommodation, and can feel a little overwhelmed with the decisions they now face, although it is acknowledged they still receive a level of support.

Our students

We specifically targeted those learners who intended to progress on to a higher education offer within the college at our university centre as these learners would have benefit of the resources for a longer time period. However, learners who intended to progress to other universities were also eligible for this support and it has organically picked up some Level 3 Year 1 students whose aspirations are to progress to higher education.

Our challenges

- Care leavers who are new to the college, particularly from out of borough, are sometimes reluctant to disclose their care leaver status. This can lead to delays in putting support in place.
- Some young people leaving the care system are making decisions with less support than they have been used to, having been supported by foster carers and professional teams for a large part of their life. These decisions may be around finances, accommodation, part time employment, or relationships.
- Care leavers may be vulnerable and may require support with anxiety or mental health because of their previous circumstances and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).
- Without the correct support, these young people may become overwhelmed and fail to achieve on their chosen academic programme.

What we did

- We spoke to young people leaving the care system to identify their main concerns and what support they felt was needed.
- Our students told us that they wanted to retain their independence, whilst acknowledging that they still needed support, but that this must be discrete and afford them privacy.
- Our students told us that they were keen to meet other students who had been on similar journeys.

What we offered

- iPads and earphones were issued on loan to identified students. These were pre-loaded with key contact numbers for wellbeing support, alongside useful contacts such as local authority housing, Citizens Advice Bureau. Messages from key support staff, peers and alumni were pre-loaded and are refreshed regularly.
- A calendar of drop-in sessions with support staff is provided as students collect their devices.

What we found

The impact of the project will be assessed as the academic year progresses but early indications from feedback are.

- Student attendance has been maintained both physically prior to lockdown, and virtually post lockdown.
- Students have remained on programme.
- Students valued the opportunity to access support in private, and at a time which is convenient for them.
- Students have valued the opportunity to speak to others who have first-hand experience of the anxieties they are facing
- The college has had the opportunity to develop an alumni and will build on these relationships going forward.
- Some students have now taken up leadership roles

Care Leavers tell us that they want to move further towards independence and not be labelled as vulnerable, whilst acknowledging that support is required, they feel that this project has been a very positive step in terms of how they feel and are recognised but in an understanding and respectful way.

Using the iPads has given them a further opportunity to engage without it all being face to face and too much too soon.

Next steps

This activity will form a regular feature of student induction in future academic years. The iPads are on loan to students so will be returned by the end of the academic year to re-issue to new students and will be reloaded and refreshed throughout the year as new information comes to light.

Motivational messages from previous care leavers have proved very popular and have resulted in a form of alumni which will be developed going forward. Students are keen to provide regular articles and contact details in the student newsletters to raise awareness and help to break down barriers.

GET IN TOUCH

gmhscp.gmmhprogramme@nhs.net

0161 625 7463

<https://hub.gmhsc.org.uk/mental-health>

 @GM_HSC

 @GMHSCPartnership

 @GMHSCPartnership