

# Bright lights and warm relationships

SCALING THE IMPACT OF  
SUPPORT FOR CARE LEAVERS  
INTO SUSTAINABLE CAREERS

*Executive Summary*

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This report is a synthesis of some of the most impactful practices we have identified in the **Bright Light** service delivered by Catch22 & **The Children's Society**, as well as those found in other innovative services within the sector. We then ask the question 'How might this impact be scaled across the UK?'

Rather than a cost/benefit analysis of the critical success factors within the Bright Light service or elsewhere, the report should be viewed as a provocation piece with recommended next steps. Some of the practices highlighted will be very familiar to those working at the frontline and yet, frustratingly, many challenges still remain in mainstreaming them. Our recommendations seek to move this forward.

The research and development underpinning the report was developed by **Deepr** on behalf of Catch22. The report itself has been jointly authored by both organisations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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You can read the full report [here](#)



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# INTRODUCTION



## INTRODUCTION

Youth employment is vital to help the next generation lead fulfilling lives, whilst strengthening the UK economy.

Catch22, a UK-based charity and social business, and Deepr, a social innovation and design studio, have come together to gain a deep understanding of a key social issue - how care experienced young people access meaningful, sustainable work and training.

**Bright Light is a partnership pilot project between Catch22 and The Children's Society, supporting 16-25 year old care-experienced people to find sustainable careers via jobs, apprenticeships and higher education.**

We know that care leavers are far less likely to be in education, employment or training (EET) than those in the general population (**NSPCC 2021**). According to **research** carried out by the Rees Centre, U. Oxford, leaving care takes a toll on young people's mental wellbeing, with a higher percentage of care leavers reporting low wellbeing than children in care. And we've known for some time that stable housing, wellbeing and other factors support care leavers to achieve good outcomes in education and employment (**Wade and Dixon 2006**). With a principle focus on Bright Light, but

including research into a number of other innovative approaches, this piece of co-design:

- Takes stock of some of the most impactful practices in current service provision.
- Identifies blockers for scaling that impact nationally.
- Makes recommendations for overcoming those blockers.

The report is based mainly on the qualitative research developed from a mixture of 23 depth interviews and four workshops with a range of internal experts at Catch22 and The Children's Society, 10 care-experienced people, local authorities, employers and external service experts at the Department of Health, **Leicestershire Cares** and **Sheffield Futures**. The findings have been further validated against the evaluation research carried out by **NFPSynergy** on behalf of Bright Light's funder, The Clothworkers' Foundation, for which we are very grateful.

We offer this work up to the wider sector, in the hope that it will open up fresh ideas, innovation and unlock impact. For ourselves, we want to know what works, why, and how we can help more care experienced young people across the UK thrive.

***" The culture needs to change so that 'care leavers' do not receive a second class service to those 'in care'. The motivation for each LA needs to be there."***

- Local authority manager

You can read the full report [here](#)



## RESEARCH INSIGHTS

As part of our co-design approach with a wide range of stakeholders, 10 themes repeatedly came through in interviews. Within the themes were two elements we consider to be the critical success factors of Bright Light.

*“ [The Bright Light coach and I] really connected. It’s good to know that someone cares about your future”*

- Care leaver

**1. The relational and holistic (R&H) approach.** The unhurried and trust-based approach that encompasses all of the young person’s holistic needs is deemed essential by almost every stakeholder we spoke to across Bright Light and the sector.

By spending real time getting to know each person (the relational), issues and needs such as housing, healthy eating, laundry and mental health (the holistic) that may affect their journeys into work, can be identified, then mitigated or met.

Additionally, there is considerable qualitative evidence that R&H supports engagement, motivation and focus whilst saving employers’ time and identifying potential challenges early.

This R&H approach has been facilitated in Bright Light by lower caseloads for career coaches (c.50% compared with

conventional approaches), lower targets into employment/training as well as budget flexibility due to Covid-related underspend (e.g. on travel).

**2. Meeting employers’ end-to-end needs.** Fulfilling the initial and ongoing support needs of employers was key for all initiatives, employers and most local authorities we spoke to.

This support is necessary from the point employers begin considering working with care leavers to at least one year into placements. The support delivered includes training managers who worry about “saying or doing the wrong thing” and ongoing ad hoc help in dealing appropriately with relational issues, mental health, time keeping and other challenges. Employers also need help with their recruitment policies and practices, which are often not fit for purpose, even within organisations with ring-fenced opportunities for care leavers.

*“ Relationships are more important than everything else - to young people, employers, local authorities and within the team - time spent and the intensity of the relationships”*

- Bright Light team member

You can read the full report [here](#)



# RECOMMENDATIONS



On the basis of these insights, we developed and tested a number of potential ways to scale some of the impact brought about by the two critical success factors. We've refined those that tested well into the following recommendations.

## RECOMMENDATION 1

### The relational and holistic (R&H) approach

The principal critical success factor we found in Bright Light (and all other initiatives researched) was the R&H approach. However, the additional time spent with care leavers, supporting their holistic needs in a warm and unhurried way - and the micro outcomes this supports - are not recognised in the dominant metric of 'placement start' with a six-month follow up. Our research highlights the many achievements and setbacks that mark the journey of a care leaver into a career, many of which are recorded to some degree in the qualitative 'distance travelled' Workstar used by Bright Light. Others are harder to chart and often have a 'two steps forward and one step back' pattern.





### **1a. A NEW IMPACT MEASURING FRAMEWORK AND EVIDENCE TOOL**

We see a clear disparity between the way support is measured and the reality of good practice towards best outcomes. The current reporting framework does not:

- Account for the long term positive outcomes attributable to R&H
- Sufficiently recognise the incremental milestones and setbacks that make up the journey towards a sustainable career.

We recommend that Catch22 convene the sector to develop, test and establish an impact framework and quantitative evidence tool that will satisfy funders, investors and the UK Government as an accurate and complete measure of the journey. Achieving this goal will bring recognition of the 'true cost' of effective long term support for care leavers and open the door to R&H approaches in and beyond the leaving-care space.

### **1b. THE TOOLS AND TRAINING TO MAINSTREAM THE PRACTICE**

We saw the R&H approach in multiple projects and it was viewed as 'good sense' by practitioners. However, across the sector, there is no standardised or codified practice guidance for it. We recommend that Catch22 develop the learning and tools to codify and disseminate the good practice of the R&H approach. We suggest that, working with a number of sector experts, Catch22 develops a suite of tools to support local authorities and VCOs to test and learn the R&H approach. We think that it is likely to consist of:

- A framework that demonstrates the key concepts of R&H
- A step-by-step guide, or 'playbook', with individual methods and their suggested usage
- A peer-orientated training that, over the course of several months enables professionals to test and implement new behaviours in their work



### 1c. DEVELOP CAPACITY WITHIN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Many funders of social sector organisations are reluctant to fund what they deem to be a statutory service. It is clear that local authorities have a role to play in bringing a R&H approach to this work at scale. However, we heard from experts and local authorities that although they recognise the R&H approach as valuable, there are several reasons that suggest developing training and tools will not be enough:

- PAs have too many cases resulting in too little time
- PAs' focus is too broad, so they are unable to specialise
- PAs don't necessarily have the correct skills or, crucially, a pathway to develop them

We recommend that with sufficient evidence, Catch22 should feed this through to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, via the NLCBF. The aim of this is to achieve national legislative change whilst influencing policy to reduce the caseloads of personal advisors within local authorities. This would enable PAs to play a more unhurried, relational role in the support of care leavers into education, employment and training.

*" I think frontline leaving-care workers know this is what will help the most but without reduced caseload and/ or getting rid of some of the structural challenges they work within, this could just increase frustration."*

- Sector expert



*“ We find it difficult to do this kind of work but really want to. What our managers worry about the most is saying or doing the wrong thing.”*

- National employer

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

### **End-to-end employer support**

We have heard from a variety of experts, local authorities, service providers and national employers that there is a need for initial and ongoing, ad hoc and varied support for employers working with care leavers. This support is needed from the point they begin considering employing care leavers to, at least, one year into employment. These challenges are idiosyncratic and often appear to be unique.



## 2a. UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT THE MARKET

In order to scale the impact of the current Bright Light work with employers, we need to provide initial support that also helps us to understand more about the employer needs and level of demand nationally.

We recommend that Catch22 develops a prototype national advice service for employers. In the first instance we recommend this is a telephone service. The service should provide information and field questions from employers, ranging from initial interest calls to difficulties relating to existing employees. Crucially, beyond the effective and low risk value that this service will provide to employers, it is a means to gain valuable strategic insights into all aspects of the market. The advice service will:

- Map viability/demand for employer support, where and how might it be best delivered
- Create a central database of problems and solutions from which to create support at scale e.g. guidelines
- Identify employers keen to work with care leavers who can then be referred to relevant Catch22 teams or external partners supporting care leavers

## 2b. DEEP SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYERS IN AN ONGOING WAY

Support delivered currently to employers is one-to-one, costly and deals with single issues. We recommend that, with sufficient evidence gathered from an advice service, Catch22 should consider scaling that service to meet demand and develop a series of regular peer groups of employers to facilitate deep and ongoing learning.

Our research suggests that the NLCBF model of peer learning with local authorities is a valuable way of developing buy-in for Pathways into Work (PIW) support at various levels of the local authority as well as upskilling key staff, ultimately positively impacting the outcomes for care leavers. There is a large body of research and practice that indicates that learning with and from people on similar journeys is a very effective way of developing skills, confidence and energy to make a change. Building on the model developed for local authorities via the NLCBF by the consultant Janet Grauberg, we recommend that one full time facilitator can run up to eight groups.

***“ It would be useful to connect with like-minded employers - virtual get togethers would be great. Then we could help each other out.”***

- National employer



## RECOMMENDATION 3

### Gather more data

Any opportunities to scale the impact of Bright Light must include a call for more data. The outcome data indicates that Bright Light is impactful in terms of engagement and placements. The financial data suggests that Bright Light is more costly than conventional approaches. These two findings are further supported by the qualitative data developed as part of this work.

However, going forward, Catch22 will want to develop more quantitative data generally around longer term outcomes for care leavers and, in particular, a cost/benefit analysis of the two critical success factors identified.

