



**CUMBRIA**  
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

# BRIGHTER FUTURES

Supporting care experienced  
young people



Year 1 Fund Report  
(July 2024 – June 2025)

**CUMBRIA**  
**YOUTH**  
**ALLIANCE**

**INSPIRA**  
*Inspiring you*

Brighter Futures is a three-year programme dedicated to supporting care-experienced young adults in West Cumbria and Barrow, helping them overcome the significant barriers to employment, education, and independent living that so often follow a childhood in care. Led by Cumbria Community Foundation and delivered in partnership with Cumbria Youth Alliance (CYA) and Inspira, the programme is made possible by the generous support of CCLA Investment Management, the Francis Scott Trust, the John Laing Charitable Trust, and individual Cumbrian philanthropists, with total funding exceeding £300,000.

Young people leaving care frequently face uncertainty and disadvantage. Many lack the support networks and opportunities that their peers take for granted, and must navigate complex systems, secure safe housing, and manage financial pressures alone. The quality of care received can vary widely, and too often falls short of what is needed to thrive. As a result, care leavers are at greater risk of crisis, instability, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Yet, with the right support, many show remarkable resilience and go on to build successful lives.

Brighter Futures responds to these needs with a dual-strand approach. Firm Foundations, delivered by CYA, provides intensive, trauma-informed mentoring and practical help to build emotional resilience, social skills, and aspirations. Flourish, delivered by Inspira, focuses on employability, offering personalised work placements, accredited training, and ongoing support from business mentors. The programme is shaped by strong local partnerships and a commitment to narrowing the support gap for care-experienced young people.

Since its launch in June 2024, and following local events at Lakes College in March and The Bridge in Barrow-in-Furness in April 2025, Brighter Futures has engaged over 30 young people, with numbers increasing each quarter. Holistic support has enabled 15 participants to secure apprenticeships, employment, or work placements, and 10 to move into independent living. The ME Tool, a personalised assessment

framework, tracks progress in areas such as employability, aspiration, key skills, and wellbeing, ensuring support is tailored and meaningful change is measured.

The interim evaluation highlights strong collaborative working between delivery partners, local authorities, and the Department for Work and Pensions, which has been vital in coordinating support and ensuring continuity for care leavers. Employer engagement has also been a key success, with 10 employers actively involved and three new business mentors recruited. A pilot course introduced employers to the programme and raised awareness of the Care Leaver Covenant.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain. Maintaining engagement with young people who may face instability, mistrust, or complex needs requires persistent, flexible support. Barriers such as gaps in workplace experience, communication skills, and transport are being addressed through targeted interventions. Stakeholders emphasise the importance of building trust and adapting to the changing circumstances of each young person.

Brighter Futures has established a strong foundation for long-term impact, driven by the commitment of its funders and partners. Priorities for the coming year include deepening engagement with young people facing the greatest barriers, expanding employer involvement, strengthening evidence of sustained change, and extending the programme across all areas of Cumbria to benefit even more care-experienced young people.



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Children leaving care often face significant uncertainty. Many must navigate complex systems, secure safe housing or employment, and manage financial pressures without the support networks most young people rely on.

In 2024, UK Community Foundations (UKCF), in partnership with the Local Authorities' Mutual Investment Trust (LAMIT), a shareholder of CCLA, launched the Care Leavers Programme. The multi-year initiative provides flexible funding to meet the everyday essentials of care-experienced young people, while strengthening the emotional and systemic support that helps them move confidently into adult independence.

The £3 million match-fund scheme began in April 2024, with the first three years focused on providing immediate support and encouraging wider partnerships that will sustain and grow the programme's impact. From the outset, 17 community foundations across England began working with local authorities, care leavers and support organisations, acting as trusted convenors within their communities.

Cumbria Community Foundation, working with Cumbria Youth Alliance and Inspira, developed the Brighter Futures proposal and secured £105,000 over three years from CCLA. Launched in June 2024, Brighter Futures aims to help 80 care-experienced young adults across West Cumbria and Barrow overcome barriers to employment, education, and independent living.

Costing £315,000, the programme is backed by 10 match funders, including the John Laing Charitable Trust and the Francis Scott Trust, alongside local businesses and individual donors, whose investment has shaped a strong, sustainable model.

The programme has two strands:

- **Firm Foundation** – delivered by Cumbria Youth Alliance, building emotional resilience, social skills and aspirations through tailored mentoring and skill-building opportunities.
- **Flourish** – delivered by Inspira, helping young people become work-ready through personalised work placements, training and employment opportunities, supported by mentors from the business community.

Brighter Futures is dedicated to narrowing the support gap for care-experienced young people. By providing guidance, practical help and strong local partnerships, the programme empowers participants to overcome the challenges they face and to shape brighter, more secure futures.

Led by CCF with CYA and Inspira, the programme also works closely with Cumberland Council, Westmorland and Furness Council, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), local employers and the Brighter Futures Steering Group. An independent three-year evaluation supports learning throughout and helps strengthen the programme's long-term impact.

During the first year (June 2024 to May 2025, the Brighter Futures programme engaged more than 30 young people, offering tailored one-to-one support, work placements, and collaborative mentoring opportunities. Despite challenges, 15 young people have already gained apprenticeships or employment, or passed training milestones.

The quality of care that young people receive can vary widely and too often falls short of what we would expect from good parenting. Many do not receive the support or encouragement needed to make the most of their education, and their opportunities outside school may lack the rich personal, social and cultural experiences that help other young people thrive.

Although the evidence shows that care leavers are frequently pushed to the “thin end of the wedge”, we also know - both from research and from the stories shared with us - that many go on to overcome adversity, show remarkable resilience and build successful lives despite the challenges they have faced.

This is one reason why some councils, including Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness, have recognised care experience as a protected characteristic. This acknowledges the systemic inequalities faced by care-experienced people and supports efforts to break the cycle that too often leads to crisis, instability or involvement with the criminal justice system. With the right support, that cycle can be changed, giving care-experienced young people the chance to flourish and fulfil their potential.

## CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

**Number of young people in England aged out of the care system on their 18th Birthday**

<b>2023</b>	<b>13,112</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>12,587</b>

Almost **25%** of the adult prison population have previously been in care, and nearly **50%** of under 21-year-olds in contact with the criminal justice system have spent time in care.



The number of care leavers aged 18-20 experiencing homelessness has increased by **54%** over the past five years



**26%**



**26% of care leavers were found to be 'persistent absentees' at secondary school**, compared to 9.3% for all pupils

**39%**



**39% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 in England were NEET in 2021**, compared to around 13% of the age group as a whole.

Among looked-after children **52%** were convicted of a criminal offence by the academic year they turned the age of **24**, compared to 13% of children who had not experienced care.



Firm Foundations, delivered by Cumbria Youth Alliance (CYA), is the core support strand within the Brighter Futures programme. The approach is holistic, trauma-informed, and highly personalised, recognising the complex needs and life experiences of each participant.

Key Features:

- **Intensive 1:1 Support:** Each young person is assigned a dedicated key worker who provides regular, tailored support. This includes building trust, developing action plans, and offering practical help with issues such as housing, finances, and wellbeing. The support is flexible, adapting to the changing circumstances and preferences of the young person.
- **Barrier Removal:** Firm Foundations focuses on identifying and addressing the unique challenges faced by care-experienced young people. This might involve helping them access mental health services, supporting them through periods of instability, or providing guidance on managing daily life skills like budgeting and cooking.
- **Confidence and Resilience Building:** Many participants have experienced trauma or instability. The programme prioritises building self-esteem, resilience, and motivation, often through encouragement, positive reinforcement, and celebrating small achievements. This is essential for helping young people re-engage with education, training, or work.
- **Collaborative Working:** CYA works closely with Inspira (the Flourish strand), local authorities, DWP/Jobcentre Plus, and other partners. This ensures that support is joined-up and that young people can access a wide range of opportunities, from work placements to independent living support. Regular joint meetings and warm handovers are standard practice.

- **Sustained Engagement:** Recognising that care-experienced young people may disengage due to life events, Firm Foundations is persistent and patient. Key workers maintain contact, offer flexible re-engagement, and adapt support to the young person's pace and readiness.
- **Outcome Focused:** The programme uses tools like the ME Tool, a personalised assessment framework to track progress in areas such as employability, aspiration, key skills, and wellbeing. Evidence shows that the most significant improvements occur when young people are engaged for 30 weeks or more, highlighting the value of sustained, wrap-around support.

*"Everybody knew that there were children living in care," said Claire Price, In Care and Leaving Care Project Manager for Cumbria Youth Alliance. "But until a few years ago, no one really gave a moment's thought about what happens to those young people – living in a residential home, with foster parents, maybe with a special guardianship order – when they hit 18.*



*"Our job as a society is to make sure that these young people, who through no fault of their own have been in the care system, have all the opportunities that we can give all our children. I think that's only fair."*

Flourish, delivered by Inspira, is the employability and progression strand of the Brighter Futures programme. Building on the personal support offered through CYA, it focuses on helping care-experienced young people take practical steps towards work, develop their skills, and achieve lasting success in the workplace.

At its heart, Flourish aims to equip young people with the confidence, guidance and opportunities they need to move into employment and thrive. The approach is person-centred and hands-on, shaped by strong partnerships with local employers and the wider community.

Key Features:

- **Career Planning and Brokerage:** Advisers provide tailored career guidance, helping young people identify strengths and aspirations, develop action plans, and access work tasters, placements, apprenticeships, and jobs through direct engagement with local employers and training providers.
- **Work Readiness and Skills Development:** The programme builds essential employability skills, including CV writing, interview preparation, workplace communication, and understanding employer expectations. Accredited training opportunities are offered where appropriate, and advisers support access to further education or vocational qualifications.
- **Accompaniment and In-Work Support:** Flourish advisers often accompany young people on their first day of a new placement or job, providing reassurance and practical support. Ongoing in-work support helps participants settle in, address challenges, and sustain progress.
- **Employer Engagement:** The programme delivers employer workshops, recruits and trains business mentors, and promotes the Care Leaver Covenant. Placements are tailored to individual

needs, balancing group opportunities with personalised experiences.

- **Multi-Agency Collaboration:** Inspira works closely with CYA, local authorities, and DWP/Jobcentre Plus to ensure joined-up, continuous support.
- **Outcome Tracking:** Progress is monitored using tools like the ME Tool, with sustained engagement (typically 30+ weeks) leading to the most significant improvements in employability, aspiration, and key skills.

Dave White, Skills and Development Advisor for Inspira, arranges work placements and taster sessions for Brighter Futures participants, including opportunities in garages, the NHS, and education.

*"Everyone's different and we support every young person with their set of needs. We'd never push any young person into doing anything they didn't want to do, but sometimes it's the push they need...by staying with them, checking in, or giving that little encouragement, they can keep going. There's no rule book, so letting them dictate the support they need makes it even sweeter when it all comes together."*



As well as supporting the young people, Dave and his colleagues work with employers to ensure they are well equipped to support care experienced young people in the workplace.

## CARLIANNE

“I’ve been in the real world since I was about 10,” says Carlianne, now 21. “I lost count of how many social workers I had during the eight years I was in the care system.”

Carlianne has been supported through both strands of the Brighter Futures programme. CYA helped her build confidence and resilience, while Inspira organised a series of work experience placements.

“My mind was set on catering, that was all I wanted to do. But work experience has opened more things up to me, different things.

“I’ve managed to get a train to Carlisle by myself. I also went to work experience in Drigg, at Nuclear Waste Services.

“I wouldn’t have done all of these things without the support I’ve had.”

Claire Price, of CYA, said: “The progress Carlianne has made is exponential. She’s matured so much, and made so much progress on independent living, running her own flat now.”



The voices of young people themselves best illustrate the impact of Brighter Futures, here, participants share their experiences in their own words:

**On overcoming barriers and building confidence:** “I didn’t think I could do it, but being at [placement] showed me I can help others and maybe even host young people myself one day.”

**On the impact of tailored support:** “They’re helping me build my confidence and learn how to work in a professional environment.”

**On aspirations for the future:** “I’m really excited. I didn’t think I’d get this kind of opportunity.”

**On the value of volunteering and skills development:** “Volunteering at the youth club and going to skills sessions has helped me feel more confident and ready to live on my own.”

Tyler\*, a 20-year-old care leaver, faced multiple challenges, including limited independent living skills and financial instability. With support from the Brighter Futures programme, they received guidance on setting up a savings account, managing bills and budgeting effectively. Actively participating in group activities, they contributed to presentations and decision-making processes for a peer-led initiative.

Through volunteering at a youth club and attending skills development sessions, they gained confidence and practical life skills and successfully moved into their first independent flat.

Another young care leaver, supported through the programme, was recruited as a Business Apprentice. She said, *"I'm really excited. I didn't think I'd get this kind of opportunity. They're helping me build my confidence and learn how to work in a professional environment."*

One programme participant completed a placement at a local school and now aspires to become a homestay provider, offering a room to students or visitors: *"I didn't think I could do it, but being at [placement] showed me I can help others and maybe even host young people myself one day."*

## WIDER IMPACT

As part of the Firm Foundations strand of the programme, the CYA team work with Cumberland Council's care teams and regularly attend meetings alongside the DWP and other partners. These meetings have proven vital in coordinating support and ensuring continuity for care leavers navigating complex challenges.

One young care leaver, for instance, was supported through a difficult Personal Independence Payment (PIP) application and is now volunteering with Inspira, gradually building towards employment. Her progress was made possible through multi-agency collaboration, with the local authority playing a key role in referrals and wraparound support.

Cumberland Council has also offered support at monthly caseload review meetings, highlighting the council's commitment to housing, emotional wellbeing and sustained engagement. Representatives of the Brighter Futures programme have been invited to engage with Cumberland Council's Corporate Parenting Group, strengthening its strategic alignment with local authority priorities.

Claire Price noted, *"We're seeing the benefits of strong partnership working. Seventeen-year-olds are already being referred to Firm Foundations, and that early engagement is only possible because of the trust and collaboration we've built with care teams and the DWP."*

## YEAR ONE INTERIM REPORT

The independent Year One evaluation of the Brighter Futures programme, conducted by Alterline, provides a comprehensive overview of progress, challenges, and emerging impact for care-experienced young people in West Cumbria and Barrow.

### ENGAGEMENT AND REACH

Over 30 young people participated in the programme during its first year, with engagement steadily increasing each quarter. The dual-strand approach - Firm Foundations (Cumbria Youth Alliance) and Flourish (Inspira) - enabled most participants to benefit from both holistic support and employability-focused interventions. Notably, 15 young people secured apprenticeships, employment, or work placements, and 10 were supported to live independently, reflecting the programme's focus on those closer to work-readiness.

### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING

The evaluation found that young people reported improvements in self-confidence, self-care, and practical life skills such as budgeting and cooking. Case studies highlighted the transformative effect of tailored support, with participants building resilience and independence despite significant challenges. However, impact data showed that while some young people made progress in areas like employability and aspiration, improvements in home stability and healthy lifestyles were less consistent, suggesting ongoing barriers for those with more complex needs.

### BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Maintaining engagement remains a challenge, with factors such as instability, mistrust, and life events (e.g., moving out of area, incarceration) contributing to drop-off rates. Stakeholders noted that

young people often enter the programme feeling apprehensive or disillusioned, underscoring the importance of building trust and offering flexible, persistent support. The evaluation also identified gaps in communication skills, transport, and workplace experience as common barriers to employment.

### EMPLOYER AND PARTNERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

The programme successfully engaged 10 employers and recruited three new business mentors in the first year. A pilot course introduced employers to supporting care-experienced young people, and collaborative working between CYA, Inspira, local authorities, and DWP was widely praised. Stakeholders highlighted strong partnerships and effective communication as key strengths, though further work is needed to expand employer participation and develop guidance for meaningful placements.

### LOOKING AHEAD

The evaluation concludes that Brighter Futures has established a strong foundation, with collaborative practice and participant-centred support driving early successes. Priorities for future years include deepening engagement with young people facing complex barriers, enhancing employer involvement, and strengthening evidence of long-term impact.

The Year One Interim Report can be viewed [here](#).

## THANK YOU

Brighter Futures would not be possible without the vision, generosity, and commitment of our funders, partners, and supporters.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to CCLA Investment Management, whose investment has been instrumental in launching and sustaining this programme. We are deeply grateful to the Francis Scott Trust, the John Laing Charitable Trust, and the individual Cumbrian philanthropists whose belief in brighter futures for care-experienced young people has made this work possible.

We also acknowledge the support and strategic guidance of UK Community Foundations (UKCF), whose partnership has helped shape the programme and connect us with wider networks and expertise.

Our delivery partners, Cumbria Youth Alliance and Inspira, have worked tirelessly to provide holistic, person-centred support and opportunities for young people across West Cumbria and Barrow. Their dedication and expertise are at the heart of every success story.

We are grateful to our Steering Group members, including representatives from both local authorities, the Department for Work and Pensions, and local employers, for their ongoing commitment, insight, and collaborative spirit. Your contributions ensure that Brighter Futures remains responsive, effective, and rooted in the needs of the community.

## HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED

While we have achieved much together, there remains a funding shortfall to secure the programme's future and reach even more young people in need across the whole of Cumbria.

If you, your business, or your organisation would like to support Brighter Futures and help transform the lives of care-experienced young adults in Cumbria, please get in touch:

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# CUMBRIA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

We are one of 47 community foundations across the UK, and over 1,700 similar foundations around the world. We work with fundholders to provide a permanent, flexible and growing source of local charitable funding that will directly address the needs of Cumbria's most vulnerable.

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