

Employer Case Study

Mentoring



CLARION
HOUSING GROUP

Using mentoring to support care-experienced young people and apprentices as they transition into independent living and employment

Clarion Futures, the charitable foundation of Clarion Housing Group, offers residents of their properties a broad range of support and opportunities. Their free national employment and training programme helps people into work, through apprenticeships, training, placements and support to start their own businesses. It also has a special programme for care experienced young people as they transition to living independently in a Clarion property.

Youth Futures Foundation spoke with **Hannah Brayson - Youth Employment Manager, Alex Dean - Apprenticeship Development Manager, and Ceri Gibbins – Communities Officer** at Clarion Futures to find out more about the services they offer young people and their latest project, a mentoring programme for residents who are care leavers.

Clarion Housing Group owns and manages 125,000 homes for around 360,000 residents, making it the UK's largest housing association. Through its charitable foundation, Clarion Futures, it offers residents a broad range of support and opportunities beyond housing including skills training, career help and financial guidance.



Why is it important to Clarion to invest in their residents and their communities?

Hannah: As a social housing provider, we have high rates of vulnerable groups in our properties, such as single parent families and people with disabilities and mental health issues, and part of our role is to support our residents in whatever way we can. The type of support is based on an analysis of what would best enable our residents to live good quality, fulfilling lives, some of which comes from our annual resident survey, The Index.

Alex: Our senior leaders see investment in the communities we serve as a great way to support our residents, and also as a sound business strategy. Helping residents to find well-paid employment improves their wellbeing, and puts them in a stronger position to pay their rent.

Hannah: This is a reflection of the changing role of social landlords. Owing to changes in legislation over the past ten years, social landlords are expected to take a stronger interest in support and services for their tenants. Clarion has worked hard to get ahead of the curve in this area. What remains to be seen is whether the recent change in government will see a continuation of this trend.

What sort of support does Clarion Futures offer care leavers?

Ceri: In March 2023, Clarion Housing signed the [Care Leavers Covenant](#) to show our commitment to supporting young people who have experienced care. The Covenant is a national programme that aims to help care leavers aged 16 to 25 live independently.

In addition to the Covenant, we set up Hometruths House, a first tenancy programme for all Clarion tenants aged 18-30. The programme provides support on managing your tenancy, financial advice and practical help such as setting up new household bills for utilities and council tax. We try to put this support in place from the beginning, when residents are setting up house to avoid them getting into rent arrears. Additional support for care leavers include supermarket vouchers and guaranteed job interviews for anyone who meets the minimum criteria.

As an organisation, we want to communicate and engage with our residents in a way that shows respect, insight and understanding. This is particularly important for housing officers and tenancy sustainment officers who work directly with residents. Over the past year, we have worked with [Break](#), a care leavers charity based in the East of England, to provide training on Adverse Childhood Experiences to colleagues across the business, particularly those working directly with residents and care leavers.

Most recently, we we have been developing a mentoring programme specifically for care leavers. We now have a team of trained mentors, and we are exploring how best to engage care leavers who could benefit from this support.

How do young people get involved in your programmes?

Ceri: Referrals for our mentoring programme come through our housing teams or through self-referral from young people themselves. The housing association is also doing a wider piece of work that supports by offering young people the option to let us know about any vulnerabilities on the housing record.

What pathways into jobs do you offer?

Alex: Last year we recruited roles for around 100 different sectors including teaching assistants, medical practice staff and procurement services. But it would be fair to say that the majority of our placements are in the housing industry, mainly in construction, finance and administration roles.

We sit down with young people to lay out a plan for their career goals, and we will help wherever we can and work with them in a holistic way to help address the barriers they have in finding work. We support young people with all of their ambitions, either by helping them access apprenticeships and opportunities within our networks, or by working in partnership with local employers and organisations.

How does your apprenticeship programme work?

Alex: We recruit about 150 apprentices every year who are mainly young people aged 16 to 25, along with a smaller cohort of people in older age groups.

Once a young person is selected for an interview, we enrol them in our pre-employment programme. This has six different elements involving interview skills, functional assessment of maths, English and ICT ability, and an introduction to the work placement team. The idea of this, particularly for internal roles, is that the successful appointee and all those who applied have an experience that they can build on. Residents of Clarion who apply and are not successful are offered further support through this programme and through our wider Jobs and Training service.

How do you make the apprenticeship programme part of the wider business?

Alex: Apprentices are a highly visible and important part of our team. Apprentices are set up on Clarion's internal network and have their own dedicated Teams chat for connecting and sharing experiences. We also hold ad hoc team building activities outside the work environment, at places like Go Ape.

We hold structured quarterly reviews and twice a year we send out a survey to hear what they think of the programme. This approach allows us the chance to look at things holistically, including off the job learning, and learning through shadowing other teams, to ensure the programme continues to develop and improve.



Tell us a bit more about the mentoring you offer to your apprentices. How do you match mentees and mentors?

Alex: As an accredited mentoring provider, we recruit and train our mentors ourselves. Staff who want to become mentors take part in a package of training to find out more about the expectations and commitments of a mentor, and about the approach we take. Clarion Futures encourages mentees to lead their own learning, rather than have the mentor lead.

We check in with mentors and mentees on a quarterly basis to find out whether the work is on track, and that those involved are finding the relationship healthy. All those in the programme come together at an annual event we call Mentors Unwrapped. They share challenging experiences they may have had and work through any specific areas that they want to discuss.

Matching is based on a couple of factors. One is about the level of mentoring the mentor wants to give and that the mentee wants, using a seven-point scale. A second consideration is geographic proximity. Clarion Housing Group is a national organisation so if we can find two people in, say, Manchester who can meet up in person, that's preferable to having to meet online. We try to avoid placing mentors and mentees who are members of the same department, so that people get the chance to mix with a member of staff outside their area of the business.

Over the years we have trained 174 staff in mentoring, and on the whole it has been a successful approach.

One of the most striking observations from our mentors is the insight it gives them into cultural diversity. The mentors have talked about how mentoring someone from another team with a different cultural background gave them a fresh experience that they do not often get in the workplace. This has been flagged as one of the key benefits of being in the mentoring programme.

On average, how many of your apprentices complete the programme?



Alex: Our completion rates are around 92 percent, against an average completion rate of 58 percent. There are some important steps in our approach that help us to maintain that outcome.

Three months before an apprenticeship is due to finish, our apprentices often end up going into a permanent role with Clarion.

Where they do not choose to do that, we use our business and social value network to help them to seek out other opportunities.

That said, whilst Clarion offer well paid apprenticeship and entry level roles, we do still see some young people choosing not to take these opportunities, which is an area of continual learning for our teams.





Find out more about
Clarion Futures' work
on their website

www.clarionhg.com

How do you support younger people around age 16 or 17 with the challenge of moving from education to employment?

Alex: We have an apprentice in the team who started at 16 years old and has turned 17 just recently. A couple of young people in our multi-trade team started when they were 16.

Our apprentices have to be self-starting and proactive. There is a big leap for them to make as they move from education, where they are told what to do, to a first job, where they lead their learning.

Ceri: With our work on the Care Leavers Covenant, it is important to point out that Clarion Futures is on a learning journey with this project and we are both hopeful and realistic about the challenges. Through our partnership with Break, we are considering ways to engage with and to gain insights from care leavers to hear what they think the barriers are to signing on to a mentoring and support programme like this.

Our interventions come during a period when these young people are already being given a lot of new information about their new accommodation, and it is important that they be given time to take it in and reflect. By stepping back and allowing them room to get their keys and settle in, our approach signals respect for their independence, balanced with an offer of practical support. This is how we are aiming to give young people leaving care the strongest possible beginning in their first home.

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