

Black Country - Care Leavers Benefit Pilot

Led by the Department for Work and Pension (DWP) Wolverhampton Office, the West Midlands Benefit Network provides a cross agency (DWP, GOWM, Jobcentre Plus and Local Authority) resource to address issues for care leavers and unaccompanied asylum seeking young people claiming benefits.

The Care Leaver Benefit Pilot is a direct result of intelligence gathered at these meetings - suggesting that the key issue for care leavers was the complex process facing them when starting a new claim at 18. The current system is instigated by a phone 'application' (which can be confusing and lengthy) once a young person turns 18. The nature of the current process often results in missed appointments, returned claim forms and subsequent delays in payment, as a result the network wanted to try a more streamlined approach.

The Pilot seeks to address the issues raised above by offering a simplified process with a four week 'lead in' period and works as follows;

- **2 - 4 Weeks prior to 18th birthday - LA YPA to ring Jobcentre (JCP) 16/17 Advisor to arrange for claim form to be issued.**
- **YPA ensures form completed fully: Claim forms to be sent to the Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC) with evidence and a mandate for disclosure of information to YPA/Leaving Care Team.**
- **3 to 4 days before young persons 18th birthday YPA contacts JCP to book Work Focused Interview**
- **Young Person attends Work Focused Interview with evidence as requested (nominated officer at BDC will liaise) Following interview Personal Advisor to fax confirmation of attendance to BDC.**

The pilot currently operates across Wolverhampton and Dudley and although operational for approximately 18 months, is still at a relatively early stage. Numbers of young people accessing this process are relatively low (approximately thirty five referrals and thirty successful claims). However the pilot process is showing positive signs – with claims being processed more efficiently. The process has also led to a better working relationship between PAs and DWP with local 'Benefit Training' offered to Leaving Care Teams.

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