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ANNUAL REPORT



OUR VALUES



Our vision

A society where care-experienced people enjoy opportunity, empathy and respect.



Our mission

To enable care-experienced young people to achieve their full potential through sustainable and fulfilling employment.



We are visionary

We explore, learn, and thrive. We ask bold questions seeking to expand our insight and knowledge to drive leading practice, reframe mindsets, and build better futures.

We are collaborative

We know our strengths and actively pursue opportunities to work with people who make us stronger. We evolve together and build a supportive community that strives to elevate one-another.

We are people focused

People are at the heart of everything we do. We lead with commitment, champion individuals with compassion, and nurture aspiration.

We are empowering

We encourage honest reflection, cultivate self-belief, and enable our community to break down barriers to promote positive change within and around them.

» About Drive Forward Foundation

We are a registered charity specialising in supporting London-based care-experienced 16-26 year olds into sustainable and fulfilling employment, education, and training.

Since 2010, we have empowered thousands of young people to take control of their lives through meaningful careers and have developed a bespoke service package tailored to this group's specific needs and requirements.

Engaging over 1,000 young people this year, we offer tailored 1-2-1 support, intensive employability skills training, bespoke counselling service, and in-work mentoring support.

Over the past decade, we have built a robust network of business partners offering exclusive training and employment opportunities, skilled volunteering and much more, thereby fostering social mobility and inclusive working environments.

A Statement from our Chair, Sir Max Hill KCB KC



This has been a year of change and progress for Drive Forward. We said farewell to our popular CEO Anton Babey, and we have been fortunate to find Russell Winnard to replace him. The role of CEO is pivotal to success. We all thank Anton for his service and for carrying our charity forward from Martha's founding vision into a new strategy for growth.

Russell has inherited a strong and dedicated senior leadership team, supported by our excellent Career Specialists and all of our staff. This year, more than 1,000 care-experienced young people have enjoyed our support, with even greater expansion to come during 2025.

Under Russell's leadership, we launched our **Care To Career Movement** in the House of Lords, held our second Care to Career festival, achieved enhanced political influence through our Policy Forum, and have run a very successful social media campaign raising awareness about the challenges faced by care experienced young people, and the various ways we help them to achieve, for their benefit but also for the wider economy and society in general. All of us at Drive Forward are dedicated to social mobility, and to making Drive Forward even more successful.

On behalf of all of the Trustees on our Board, thank you to every member of staff, and to all of the young people we serve.



I am thrilled to have joined Drive Forward as CEO in December 2024. It has been a fantastic few months getting to know the incredible Drive Forward team, our partners, and so many of the most inspirational young people you could ever wish to meet.

WELCOME

from our CEO Russell Winnard



Our mission has always been clear: to enable care-experienced young people to achieve their potential and thrive in life beyond the care system. In 2024/25, we worked with over 1,000 young people (more than ever before), helping them develop life skills, build confidence, and ultimately achieve meaningful employment, education and training outcomes. But numbers alone only tell part of the story. Behind every statistic is a person – someone who, with the right support and care, has transformed their trajectory.

Over the last year we have taken the opportunity to invest in key areas for the future, including establishing our very first in-house Impact and Evidence team, a ground-up redevelopment of our mentoring programme, and the building of more strategic relationships with our supporting partners. These efforts all provide a solid foundation on which to further advance outcomes for the young people we serve.

The challenges facing care-experienced young people remain significant – from housing insecurity to systemic barriers in education and work. Yet, thanks to the dedication of our team, the generosity and commitment of our supporters and partners, and the courage and commitment of the young people themselves, we continue to make real, measurable and life changing impact.

Looking ahead, 2025/26 will be an exciting year, completing the final year of our current strategy and building on this as we develop the next. We will deepen our focus on evidence and impact, continue to amplify our young people's voices to shape policy, and strengthen our network so no care-experienced young person in London feels they must walk their journey alone.

DRIVING CHANGE TOGETHER

>> Why we do it

Over the last decade, England has seen a considerable rise in children in care, with a 23% increase. This means that more young people are leaving the care system every year. Doing so, they face a significant reduction in support and are expected to manage their tenancies, their careers, and their lives alone.

As such, it's not surprising that:

39%

of care leavers aged between 19 and 21 are not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to around 13% of all young people aged 19 to 21 years old

50%

of care leavers have mental health needs

25%

of England's homeless population have been in care

6×

Care-experienced young people are up to six times more likely to enter the criminal justice system

OUR IMPACT

1062+

care-experienced young people
engaged across all programmes



750+

supported through our
employment programme

339+

Education, Employment
& Training outcomes achieved

84%

of Employment, Education,
and Training outcomes completed
or sustained for at least 13 weeks

45%

of young people engaged achieved
one or more EET outcomes





» Creating lasting change

Employment success stories

Our holistic, trauma-informed approach delivered remarkable results in 2024-25. We facilitated 339 life-changing outcomes for care-experienced young people, with employment leading the way:

200+

employment outcomes secured, including 90+ full-time jobs and apprenticeships

88%

of young people either completed their placement or remained in work beyond the critical 13-week milestone

40+

dedicated opportunities brokered through our partnership network with supportive employers who understand the unique strength of care-experienced young people



» Community and connection: our events programme



80 activities facilitated



577 total participations



224 individuals reached



Our diverse events programme created safe spaces for care-experienced young people to build confidence, develop skills, and connect with peers:

» Fostering community

18

Drive Socials & cultural events –
creating belonging and
peer networks

4

Development & focus groups –
ensuring young people's voices
shape our programmes



» Building skills & confidence

22

Skills development sessions –
practical workshops covering
interview techniques, CV writing,
and workplace readiness

23

Recruitment days & interview prep –
direct pathways to employment opportunities

9

Wellness sessions –
supporting mental health and wellbeing



»» Lasting relationships drive excellence

We don't just help young people find opportunities – we ensure they have the support to thrive in them.

Our 84% sustainability rate for outcomes achieved speaks to the effectiveness of our relationship-based approach. Our holistic service model is:

- »» Based on 15 years of experience working exclusively with care-experienced young people
- »» Informed by research, expert advice and training
- »» Co-developed with care-experienced young people
- »» Flexible, consistent, and repeated access to services up until the 27th birthday



Bespoke 1-2-1 support

Our Career Specialists provide tailored, trauma-informed guidance to help young people overcome barriers and achieve their aspirations. They offer both practical and emotional support while coordinating with Local Authorities, housing, health, and education partners to build a strong support network.

Exclusive access to employers & ring-fenced opportunities

Young people connect with top employers across London, gaining access to exclusive jobs, work placements, and career pathways in industries like law, banking, construction, retail, and hospitality. These ring-fenced roles ensure care-experienced young people have a fair chance at meaningful employment in supportive environments.



Employability & personal development

Our hands-on workshops and employability training help young people develop key skills like communication, teamwork, and stress management. We tailor support to their ambitions, ensuring they're ready to succeed in education, employment, or training.



Specialist counselling & wellbeing support

Through our trauma-informed counselling service, young people access emotional and mental health support, helping them build resilience, reduce anxiety, and improve self-esteem – ensuring they're ready to engage with work, education, or training.

Professional mentoring

Young people are matched with experienced professionals who provide career guidance, networking opportunities, and in-work support. Mentors boost confidence, aid career progression, and help improve job retention.

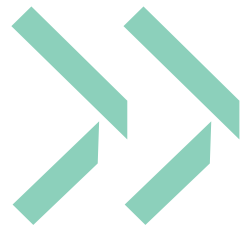


» Looking forward: the ripple effect

Every statistic represents a young person whose life trajectory has changed. When a care-experienced young person secures sustainable employment, the impact extends far beyond the individual – it breaks vicious cycles, builds confidence, and creates hope for others in similar situations.



Over 200 individuals are now financially independent and building their own futures thanks to successfully transitioning into meaningful and sustainable career paths. They're role-models to their peers and the wider community, contributing their unique perspectives and resilience to workplaces, and by doing so, actively breaking down barriers to opportunity for future generations.



DRIVE STORIES

Here are some of their stories



KELSEY

Creating my own path: from survival to self-expression through art.

My name's Kelsey, and I am 23 years old. I'm still adjusting to this age **I'm an artist**, but I am struggling to know where I am right now because I've been doing it for ten years and I haven't got that far yet. I consider myself a versatile artist. I can do realism, cartoons, collages, tattoos, and paint shoes – anything I can get my hands on, I can create.

I love that about myself.

I first started drawing when I lived in Malta, right after losing my cat. I tried creating missing cat posters like the ones I'd seen in cartoons. It's funny to think about that now – a child's drawing of a cat could be any cat – but I was determined and creative. When I was younger, art became a big distraction for me as home was very difficult. I thought my childhood experiences were normal, and I didn't realise children weren't supposed to endure what I did.

All I remember is having to grow up really early.



Drive Forward is making
a difference.
Drive Forward cares.



»» Turning point

I moved to the UK when I was six. I left my family because I didn't feel safe in Malta. I moved in with my nan and completed my education here. **When I was referred to Drive Forward, I had no clear direction.** Someone suggested that completing GCSE art would open doors to college, so I pursued that path. I completed BTEC levels 1 and 2 but dropped out midway through BTEC 3 (nearly A-levels) because I felt I wasn't learning practical skills about navigating the world. After leaving college, I explored various short courses and eventually decided to pursue tattoo work. I also worked at Chessington Zoo, an opportunity which my Career Specialist at the time helped secure for me. She was wonderful - always checking in on me. Ahmed, my current Career Specialist, and Nina, the Community Partnerships Manager, have also been consistently supportive, keeping me informed about events and opportunities.

I've been with Drive Forward for three years now, regularly attending social meetings. Due to my past experiences, sometimes I struggle with interactions with other people. I'm used to people thinking poorly of me. I wear sunglasses when I am out because I don't like looking people in the eyes anymore. It's only at home, in my personal space, that I feel comfortable enough to remove them.

»» The powerful impact of bespoke counselling

Drive Forward referred me to Richard Barnardo, an amazing therapist. Though I typically feel more comfortable with women than men, Richard is helping me overcome that barrier. I've completed three sets of 12 sessions with him. I want to start paying for my sessions myself now because I respect him so much. He's helped me quite a lot. **When I first started therapy, I would constantly apologise for my actions, but I don't do that anymore.** I feel comfortable being open with him. Richard has helped me confront my behaviour patterns and prevents me from getting lost in my thoughts - especially with my PTSD. His therapy dog was also incredibly helpful - a bright, kind presence during our sessions.

Currently, **I'm working toward building my own business.** I want to develop a solid business plan to sell my artwork as a sole trader. I'm exploring account management. All I want is to work, I want to draw and want to create the designs. I'm still learning to value myself properly. While I'm passionate about my art, expressing myself verbally remains challenging. I see the world in pictures. If I could animate my thoughts, perhaps people would understand me better. Building my confidence will take time. The journey to where I am now has been incredibly complex. I'm still learning and growing. The past three years especially have taught me valuable lessons that I'm learning to appreciate.

If I had to give advice to other care-experienced young people, it would be to use the therapy service and come to the events. I love the Drive Socials and coming to the events.

SAMMY

I know I'm worth it now: growing confidence and a career with Drive Forward.

My name is Sammy. I've just completed my Level 3 Business Admin apprenticeship at QTS and have recently secured a permanent role at QTS as the Core Administration Officer!

I was first introduced to Drive Forward by a job coach. I was doing the **Civil Service Internship** at this time. While participating in the Internship, Rachel from Drive Forward connected me with a mentor in the Civil Service. This support was so useful because, at the start, I was scared because it was my first office job. **Even the thought of replying to emails was daunting** Having a mentor was amazing, I could ask them anything and they would reassure me.

The Civil Service internship helped me realise I needed a role with more human interaction, though I wasn't sure exactly what that role might be. After completing the internship, I began working with Monique (my first Career Specialist at Drive Forward).



Since joining Drive Forward, my communication and confidence have gone up. When I used to enter a room, I used to keep myself to myself and just wait until my Career Specialist was ready to see me. But now it's very different. I can take up the space that I want to take. I know I am worth it now. I understand that my life isn't defined by what I do or what I know.

I'm worth it as I am.

“Working with Monique was great. She helped me with interview skills and introduced me to everything Drive Forward offered.”

With her support, I secured a position as a sales assistant at Heathrow. During this role, I realised that I wanted something different career-wise, so we continued working together to find the right fit.

When personal issues forced me to leave my Heathrow position, Monique was an incredible source of support. She opened my eyes to the different jobs out there. It was her little push of understanding that I wanted to be doing something that made a difference and help in some way. She was one of the first people to point it out. And even though I knew it inside, I couldn't quite put my finger on it until she mentioned it. It made sense when she put it together. **She helped me to understand that whatever career path I choose, as long as I am happy with it, that is what matters.**

When I was ready again, Monique shared an NHS QTS opportunity with me. Although I interviewed but didn't get the role initially, they liked me enough to consider me for another position three months later.

Monique helped me with this and the preparation, especially the question 'tell me about yourself'. Together we created the best answer that I have ever given to anyone. I should have recorded it. I loved the answer and my interview. As soon as I finished my interview, I was grinning and I felt confident. I called Monique, and I told her, **“I did amazing, and I think I am going to get it. And even if I don't, it was such an amazing interview”**. And the next day Monique called, and she said: “You got the job!!”. It was a long process for me to get the pre-employment checks and references. Drive Forward helped me with the references, as it can be hard as a care leaver to get a character reference. Drive Forward even gave me vouchers to travel because payday wasn't until the end of the month. It was nice to have that ongoing support even though I had got the job and started the job. I knew if something wasn't okay, I had a whole organisation to rely on.

Now, I work with Ahmed, my current Career Specialist. I call him to share good news, and we prepare for interviews together. **It's so nice to share with someone who is happy to hear my news.**

If I could give advice to other care-experienced young people about joining Drive Forward, it would be that they're there to help you. You might not know that you need the help, but they are experienced in helping. I think this matters because I didn't know help was available. I didn't even know that I needed help. **They are amazing professionals, and I wouldn't be where I am without Drive Forward. To anyone, I would say just join.”**

DERIN

From quiet to confident: becoming a voice for change and a future medic.

“I have always felt like Drive Forward is family. I don’t have a family here, so I go to Drive Forward whenever I have certain issues. I value that the most - to socialise and have a community. Before Drive Forward, I used to be a quiet person and not very social. But joining and being socialised, talking at events, attending Policy Forum events, meeting other young people, and meeting other Career Specialists has really opened my eyes. Now I communicate with other people much better.

My name is Derin. I am 22 years old and a student in the medical field. I’ve been playing music since the age of 9. In 2019, when I was in college doing my ESOL, I had the opportunity to perform at a student talent show in London. It was great, and I still have the photographs. Despite my love for music, I have always known that I wanted to pursue medicine.

Just over a year ago, **I was referred to Drive Forward through my Local Authority.** At the time, I was already a student. I told my new Career Specialist, Daniella, that at this point in time, my focus was on finding a job to support myself while at university. Finally, we came across NHS reservists programme, which was absolutely perfect for me.



» Being part of the community

In June 2024, **I became a member of Drive Forward's Policy Forum** and have been very involved in it. Since then, I have been to Parliament a few times, to the House of Lords and the House of Commons, and I've met with the Minister for Children and Families in DfE, who came to one of our Policy Forum sessions (this is a big step for the Policy Forum). The Greater London Assembly also got in touch with us. They thought Drive Forward Policy Forum members were the go-to place to ask care leavers about what we want to change! The reports will eventually go to the Mayor of London with our recommendations and suggestions, where our stories will be shared!



Drive Forward is more than just a charity. They feel like a family. You don't have to be in a set place to join the charity. You could be anywhere on your journey.

There are so many big events that I have been to with Drive Forward. I went to the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), where I met with airline managers from Heathrow and other airports. At the CAA event, I also met pilots from different places such as the **Royal Air Force** and had the chance to network with RAF members and exchange details for future consideration after graduation in my field of study. Although I am interested in specialising in either neurology or oncology, I couldn't afford losing the chance of networking with the RAF for any potential future role related to my field of study. Thanks to Drive Forward for such an important opportunity!

I love the fact that I am so busy with Drive Forward. It's not that I just want to do events; I also want to make a change for other care leavers, and that is why we have the Policy Forum, which stands for all care leavers in the UK.

Drive Forward is more than just a charity. They feel like a family. You don't have to be in a set place to join the charity. You could be anywhere on your journey I feel so free with them. My advice to other care leavers would be to join Drive Forward because they expose you to so many opportunities that you might not have found yourself. Also, it is important to make networks, meet other people, and get involved in changing the care leaver system in the UK."

CARE TO CAREER

#CareToCareer is a movement that unites public, private and voluntary sector organisations through our shared ambition of empowering and supporting care-experienced young people into sustainable and fulfilling employment, education and training opportunities.

There is immense potential among care-experienced young people, but systemic barriers limit their opportunities. By empowering them with the right resources, mentorship, and career pathways, we can break these cycles and propel them from **#CareToCareer**.



Right now, 39% of care leavers aged 19–21 are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) that's three times higher than their peers.

By age 27, only 22% are in work, compared to 57% of the general population.

» The goal

Here's how you can help:



Partner with us to open sustainable job and training routes for care-experienced young people.



Support our policy calls to create systemic change at a national level.



Fund our work and empower more care-experienced young people to move from care to career.



Help us to raise awareness of what it means to have 'been in care' and how employers can best support care-experienced young people into their workplace.

Our goal is to close the NEET gap
– ensuring care-experienced young people are no more likely to be out of education, employment, or training than any other young person.

DRIVE THE
 **MOVEMENT**

DRIVE COMMUNITY

» Care to Career: a celebration of community

We launched our Care to Career Festival, celebrating the talents and achievements of care-experienced young people while fostering partnerships to support their career journeys.

The event featured inspiring stories, including a keynote from **Fatima Whitbread MBE**, and highlighted new opportunities such as internships with Camden Council, mentoring with King & Spalding LLP, and work experiences with Candyspace and KpH Group.

With performances from young creatives and powerful panel discussions, the festival showcased the resilience, potential, and ambition of the care-experienced community. The event strengthened commitments from partners and supporters to continue creating meaningful career opportunities.



Leading with lived experience: empowering care leavers to drive leadership

Through work with our alumni network we put care-experienced young people at the heart of leadership and advocacy. Our Drive Ambassadors developed vital public speaking, leadership, and professional skills while delivering training and driving real policy and community impact.

Key highlights include their pivotal roles in our inaugural Care to Career Festival, representing the charity on an international stage and sharing their experiences with South African peers, and collaborating with our dedicated Partnerships team to secure £200,000 worth of corporate funding over the next 5 years.



Looking ahead

We're committed to strengthening our alumni community further; providing more opportunities for Ambassadors to expand their skillset and creating more partnerships to build a more inclusive future for care leavers.

Take your business to the streets 2024: empowering care-experienced entrepreneurs through market trading

In October and November 2024, Drive Forward's Partnerships team launched the "Take Your Business to the Streets" initiative, giving care-experienced entrepreneurs a hands-on, affordable way to grow by trading at market stalls. Over two days, three entrepreneurs and one "buddy business" participant gained income, confidence, and peer mentorship. One earned £200 and was invited to showcase at Lower Marsh Market's inaugural Saturday Market, now mentoring others. Operating on a modest budget, this initiative provided critical real-world experience and helped participants test and refine their business ideas.

While the food-focused market environment and limited budget presented challenges, our young entrepreneurs learned valuable lessons about strategic stall placement, marketing support, and the need for participant feedback. Building on this success, plans are underway for a structured Professional Development Programme with workshops, mentorship, and networking to prepare care leaver entrepreneurs for long-term success. This initiative is a key step toward economic independence and lasting empowerment.





Fall into action: connecting care leavers through Drive Socials

On 27th September 2024, Drive Forward hosted an intimate "Fall Into Action" edition of its Drive Socials series, welcoming 20 care-experienced young people aged 18–26.

The event created a warm, safe space for sharing stories, building friendships, and fostering community. Participants showcased talents – from photography to cooking – while enjoying home-cooked food and deep conversations. Feedback revealed enhanced well-being, stronger peer bonds, and increased motivation to stay engaged with the Drive Forward community. This gathering highlighted the power of small, intentional events in building lasting support networks.

Empowering futures: celebrating youth resilience at the 2025 Youth Appreciation Awards

Our youth-led Youth Appreciation Awards celebrated the resilience, achievements, and journeys of young people within the Drive Forward community under the inspiring theme #CareToCareer.

The event showcased powerful personal stories and milestones, with speeches by youth ambassadors and guest speaker Kimberly, whose story of success from care to career resonated deeply. With 30 young people participating and new partners like Mott MacDonald joining, the Awards fostered fresh connections and a vibrant sense of belonging.

This celebration reminds us all of the importance of empowering young people and fostering continued collaboration.



DRIVE PARTNERSHIPS

From care to kitchen:
how our partnership with salad
kitchen is cooking up careers for
care-experienced young people.



At Drive Forward Foundation, **we believe no young person should face the journey from care to career alone.** That's why our partnerships with forward-thinking organisations like Salad Kitchen are not just valuable – they're essential.

Meet Ross and Sam, the passionate team behind Salad Kitchen, a vibrant culinary initiative in the heart of London. From the very beginning, their mission aligned with ours: to offer real-world opportunities to young people who have often been overlooked – especially those with little to no work experience and those from care backgrounds.

Tom, the Youth Programme Project Manager and Head Chef at Salad Kitchen, recalls the early days vividly:

“When we were starting out, we reached out to a number of different youth work charities. Drive Forward by far were the most interested, the most engaged.”

That connection sparked what would become a powerful partnership.

Together, we launched a unique Youth Programme where care-experienced young people don't just learn to cook – they build confidence, develop transferable skills, and gain crucial work experience in a supportive environment. Through mentorship, training, and real responsibility, the programme doesn't just fill plates – it changes lives.

Yonas' journey: confidence, growth, and a taste of the future.

Before joining the Youth Programme, Yonas had never held a job and was struggling to find his footing. He'd grown up in care, facing instability and a lack of opportunity – but he had drive, potential, and a hunger to learn.

"I didn't really know where to start," says Yonas. "I wanted to work, to be independent – but I didn't have experience, and I didn't think anyone would take me seriously."

Through Drive Forward, Yonas was introduced to Salad Kitchen and the Youth Programme. From his first shift, he was thrown into a fast-paced environment – but one where he felt supported, not judged.

"Tom didn't treat me like I was less. He showed me everything, trusted me, and gave me the space to make mistakes and learn from them," Yonas says.

Over the course of the programme, Yonas developed practical kitchen skills, learned the value of teamwork, and most importantly – began to believe in himself.

"I'm proud of what I've done here. I can actually say I've worked, and that I've done something that matters."

Tom reflects on Yonas' growth: "He came in quiet, unsure, but now he runs parts of the kitchen with confidence. Seeing that transformation – that's why we do what we do."



» Partners in possibility

Our Care to Career movement thrives because of partners like Salad Kitchen – partners who see potential where others might see risk, and who understand that investing in young people is investing in a better future for all of us.

This is what true partnership looks like: collaboration, compassion, and a commitment to helping young people carve out a life they can be proud of.

Because when we work together, careers aren't just possible – they're inevitable.

POLICY - 24/25

Building on the momentum of 2023, this year has been another exciting period for Drive Forward Foundation's policy team. By strengthening our collaborative approach and broadening our strategic partnerships, we have made significant progress. Drive Forward is now firmly positioned as a trusted voice on the barriers, challenges, and solutions related to care-experienced people's access to employment, education, and training.

At the heart of this expertise is our youth-led Policy Forum, and we continue to prioritise amplifying the voices of care-experienced young adults in policymaking and advocacy.

Our care-experienced manifesto:
would you accept this
for your child?



Central to our Policy Forum activities this year was the creation and launch of our **Care-Experienced Manifesto***. Developed through a combination of in-person meetings and online sessions, the manifesto was designed to engage politicians during the 2024 general election while also serving as a longer-term strategy document. Prioritising six key policy positions, it provides a mandate to all forum members and a clear direction for our advocacy work.

*View & download here: https://driveforwardfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Conf_Care-Experience-Manifesto-DFFs-Policy-Forum.pdf

The manifesto was first presented at a high-profile roundtable event in June and formally launched at a collaborative event in City Hall during **National Care Leavers Week**. These events provided a platform for our Policy Forum to engage directly with policymakers, stakeholders, and sector experts, strengthening the crucial link between our forum and public officials.

This has already resulted in continued activities and spin-off projects. The manifesto's core proposals have begun influencing local and national agendas, with some of our recommendations included in amendments to the **Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill** – such as our call to expand corporate parenting responsibilities.

Policy Forum advocacy: ensuring care-experienced voices are heard.

This year our forum membership doubled in size, and we harnessed the energy new members brought with increased advocacy activities. Our forum continues to be an inclusive space for care-experienced individuals to share insights and co-develop policy recommendations. Through these efforts, we have engaged successfully with policymakers at various levels of government, including **Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Wes Streeting and former Minister for Children and Families Janet Daby**.

Our forum is recognised as an expert contributor to policy discussions affecting children's and young adults' social policy. Over the past year, we have contributed to numerous consultations, focus groups, and meetings with policymakers. Highlights include an evidence-giving session at the **London Assembly Committee for Economy, Culture and Skills; working with Lord Walker on the Universal Credit Upper Rate Private Members Bill; attending the Labour Party Conference**; and supporting members to contribute to a range of podcasts, videos, and research projects. This expansion reflects our ongoing commitment to empowering care-experienced young people to shape policies that directly impact their lives.



Public affairs activities: advocating for systemic change.

This year marked an exciting new chapter for Drive Forward Foundation with the expansion of our public affairs activities, significantly enhancing our ability to influence policymaking at the highest levels. Notably, we provided briefings to policymakers, including new minister for children and families Josh MacAlister MP, who used our report to advocate in the House of Commons for more employment opportunities for care leavers.

We also submitted evidence to the Public Bills Committee, contributing to scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, and to the Education Select Committee, highlighting the systemic barriers care leavers face in accessing further education and employment. These activities have helped establish Drive Forward as a credible and influential voice in public affairs and laid the groundwork for sustained advocacy efforts.

» Looking ahead

As we reflect on this year's accomplishments, we are energised by our progress and motivated to keep pushing for change. Through the launch of our Care-Experienced Manifesto, the continued growth of our Policy Forum advocacy, and the development of our public affairs work, Drive Forward has reinforced its position as a leader in care-experienced advocacy.

We remain committed to driving systemic change and ensuring that the voices of care-experienced young people resonate at every level of policy and decision-making.

Learn more about our campaigns and how to get involved on our website:

<https://driveforwardfoundation.org/political-engagement/>



DRIVE ALUMNI

Safia's journey – from care to a sustainable career.

My name is Safia, and I'm a proud alumna of the Drive Forward Foundation. Going into care was a very lonely experience. It's hard to explain all the emotions at once – I felt sad, scared, but strangely a little bit excited too.

I was excited at the thought of freedom and independence, but that was mixed with anxiety. It was just me, and I had to rely on myself to get through it.



People didn't often see what I was really feeling. I'd smile, I'd pretend I was fine, but under the surface? There were red flags. I wish someone had looked a little closer – had asked, "What are you actually feeling?" Because sometimes, all we need is someone to ask.

I left care formally at 24, and I didn't know what was next.

But Drive Forward Foundation changed that. I met Felix after I left Camden Council and was looking for something new. Through his relationship with the Jobcentre, I found out about the **Care Leaver Internship in the civil service**. Honestly, I didn't think someone like me could ever be in the civil service. But Felix believed I could.

He became my mentor. He didn't just help me with applications or job prep – he helped me realise what I was good at, where I could grow. And even after I joined the civil service, when I had doubts and called him saying, "I don't think this is for me," he was there. That kind of support doesn't fade.

Drive Forward wasn't just a stepping stone; they were a foundation. Three years on, I'm 27 now, and I can still pick up the phone and know they're in my corner.

That's rare. That's special.

”

That kind of resilience
doesn't just appear –
you dig deep to find it,
because there's no one else.
You've only got you.

”

It's okay. You've got so much
potential. You don't even
know yet how far you can go.
Believe in yourself – mind
over matter. Whatever you
put your mind to, you can do.



Looking ahead, I want to open my own charity. I want to support people who've been through what I've been through – because lived experience should be at the heart of decision-making. I want to influence policy, to change systems that didn't work for me when I was young. I dream of setting up a family independence unit – built by someone who gets it.

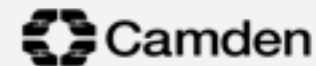
Because of Drive Forward, that dream no longer feels far away. It feels possible.

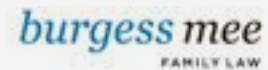
FINANCIALS

Income	Total Funds		Expenditure	Total Funds	
Dates	2025	2024	Dates	2025	2024
Donations & legacies	£648,164	£809,802	Raising funds	£60,150	£53,160
Charitable activities	£345,006	£221,761	Charitable activities	£1,168,953	£1,101,256
Other income	£15,230	£1,428			
Total income	£1,008,400	£1,032,991	Total expenditure	£1,229,103	£1,064,416
Reconciliation of funds			Total reserves	£848,910	£1,069,613



FUNDERS, PARTNERS, & SUPPORTERS







FROM CARE TO CAREER

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