

Driving lessons can improve the lives of young people leaving care

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Credit: University of Bristol

A new initiative, piloted in Bristol, has shown that providing young people leaving care with driving lessons is highly beneficial for their life chances.

A group of [young people](#) were offered up to 40 hours' tuition for free as part of the ground-breaking project, led by the University of Bristol in

partnership with Bristol City Council and funded by the AA Charitable Trust.

While not everyone passed their driving tests, the experience was shown to boost confidence, provide motivation, lead to possible job opportunities, improve relationships with adults and create a sense of pride.

The initiative has been praised by the Children's Commissioner for England. The AA Charitable Trust and the University are urging the Government to consider how these opportunities can be made more widely available.

Professor David Berridge, from the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol, led the research. He said: "Care leavers have often had a very difficult start to life and lack family support. For them, taking driving lessons seems a pipe dream due to the cost.

"This initiative showed that driving lessons provide a boost to self-confidence as well as learning a skill that could be essential to adult life, often helping to secure employment."

The project was originally set up as a pilot in 2011 between The AA Charitable Trust, Bristol City Council and the School for Policy Studies.

Following the success of the pilot, a second phase was run with multiple councils from 2015 to 2017.

In Bristol, this second round of funding was especially successful with all three of the young people involved passing their test.

This was much more successful than in the other participating councils due to the careful selection of young people and support they received

from driving instructors and personal advisers in the city.

These three young people have used their ability to drive in different ways: to advance their career in the motor industry; to access child care and attend college; and to prepare for a career in the armed forces.

Councillor Helen Godwin, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, said: "Care leavers are amongst some of the most vulnerable people in our community so we were pleased to be able to work with the AA and Bristol University to offer this opportunity to our care leavers.

"As a corporate parent, we have a responsibility to ensure that despite the difficulties many will have faced earlier in their lives, each young person is given the best opportunity possible to fulfil their potential.

"Driving lessons provide a real boost to the confidence and future prospects of care leavers and this free tuition builds on the support we already provide, including most recently council tax relief, helping them live independent and hopefully successful, happy lives."

It comes as new research from AA/Populus shows one in six (15 per cent) of 18 to 24-year-olds say learning to drive is the most valuable life experience, compared to 10 per cent of all drivers surveyed. Populus received 17,024 responses from AA members to its online poll between 16 and 23 January 2018. Populus is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules..

Edmund King OBE, AA Charitable Trust Director, said: "When we launched this project in 2011 we were confident it would have a positive impact on disadvantaged young people, but no idea it would be as beneficial as it has been.

"What has really stood out for us is not so much the benefit that being

able to drive brings in terms of independence and mobility, but the benefits that just the process of having lessons brings – regardless of whether participants actually passed their test in the end or not.

"We want support for care leavers to continue in this way and are keen for organisations who can help to come forward."

Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner for England, said: "This is an excellent initiative which has had a really positive impact on the care leavers who have taken part.

"It's really important that young people leaving care are supported as they begin living independently and I hope the Government and others will look closely at how these pilots can be extended so that many more care leavers can benefit from them in the future."

Provided by University of Bristol

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