

Ben's Story



Ben is 20. He went into care when he was five and has lived with four foster families over 15 years. His background is like many in care: a violent dad who left the family home, a mum who struggled with mental illness and two brothers who lived with different foster carers that he saw maybe six times a year.

At the age of seven, having had three different foster families, Ben was placed with loving and supportive foster carers, Mike and Jan.

'Coming from our background, I knew the importance of education,' explains Ben. 'Yet at school, it was easier to act as the class clown to fit in' says Ben. 'It was hard as there so much going on, making new friends, settling in, changing schools and seeing my parent's after school.'

'Mike and Jan worked hard to encourage me and I began to believe in myself'. Right from the beginning, my Pathway Plan has focused on university,' says Ben. 'I was always told about the available support. Everyone – our social workers, the leaving care team, my foster carers - have all been behind my dream.'

Part of this support has been financial. Something Ben recognises as a crucial factor in him going to university (and staying there!). He receives:

- A Tuition Fee Grant from the Welsh Government to pay £5,535 towards his fees
- The remaining fees and accommodation is paid for by his local authority Leaving Care Team
- A £5000 grant from the government per year. (Assembly Learning Grant)
- A £1000 Care Leaver Bursary from Cardiff University in the 1st year (£750 in subsequent years and £500 in the final term of his final year.
- A £600 Cardiff University Bursary because of his low income per year
- He also has the option of taking out a Maintenance Loan of £1901 if he wishes to do so, per year
- Bus Passes and an annual book allowance, worth £150, paid for by social services.

Ben, his foster parents Jan and Mike and his Social Worker organised a support Meeting with Einir Evans once he had made the application to Cardiff University. At the meeting, Ben was informed of the above financial support and Einir assisted him in applying for the support. Ben also found out he could stay in his university accommodation for the whole year if he wanted to. Einir has kept in contact with Ben throughout his time at Cardiff.

'It's amazing. It means I can go to university and live. I can get on with my studying, relax and get the most out of my time at uni,' Ben says. 'There's help out there but you need to know about it early on, not just you- your foster carers, your social worker, your personal advisors and the leaving care team. Everybody needs to be on board'.

Questions:

- **What can you do to encourage 1) young people in care and 2) care leavers to think about going to university?**
- **How might Ben's early experiences of education impacted on his future aspirations about going to university?**