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We know that it is a big step when you move out of care and start living on your own or with family or friends. We want to make sure that you feel safe and supported and know where and who to go to for advice and help.

To be able to get the support set out in this guide, you must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 (including your 16th birthday) or for 13 weeks after your 16th birthday. If you are not sure whether you qualify for support ask your social worker or Personal Adviser.

Local care leavers have helped make this guide.

This guide is available online at:

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/careleavers

A SCULPT compliant version will be available for visually impaired readers. If English is not your first language we can make the document available in a different language so you can still access the contents.



What is the Care Leavers Service?

What we do

The Care Leavers Service provides support, advice and guidance to young people who are in care, or who have left care, aged 16 up to 25.

Who we work with

Care Leavers are Young People who have been in care for at least 13 weeks, after the age of 14 and have been in care on, or after, their 16th birthday. This includes young people who are in care between the ages of 16 and 18.

What we look like

There are two teams within the service – North and South. Each has a Team Manager, a number of Personal Advisers (PAs) and a Business Support Officer (BSO) to help with the administration.











The support we must give you by law

A Personal Adviser

Following changes introduced through the Children & Social Work Act 2017, you will be able to ask to have support from a Personal Adviser up to the age of 25.

You will be allocated a Personal Adviser when you are 17. Your Personal Adviser will work with you and your Social Worker to plan your future up to the age of 18, at which point your Social Worker will end their work with you and your Personal Adviser will become your main worker, continuing to work with you until at least the age of 21.

At the age of 21 we will ask you if you would like the continued support of a Personal Adviser up to your 25th birthday.

If you don't need support at this time don't worry, the service will remain open to you via our Post 21 Duty Service. This support can continue as long as you need it or until you reach the age of 25.

If you are over the age of 21 and contact us, but have not been in touch for some time, we will review your circumstances to help us understand how to best support you.

A Personal Adviser acts as a coordinator to ensure care leavers are provided with the correct support in making their transition into adult life.





Your Personal Adviser can provide you with advice and guidance on many day-to-day issues. They are there to help you deal with difficulties or problems and have lots of connections with other services/organisations that can offer you the help you may need. Please take the time to talk to your PA if you have a problem or just want some general advice or information because dealing with things early can help prevent issues turning into bigger problems.

You might, for example, need extra support because:

- You have special educational needs or a disability;
- You are an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC) and your immigration status is unclear;
- You are in or leaving custody or you have had contact with the criminal justice system;
- You are a young parent; or
- You are going through a difficult time in your personal life.

This can look like:

- Providing advice and support about how to manage day to day challenges and needs;
 - Supporting you to access advice about Housing; Education, Employment or Training; Health Care or Benefits; this can include talking with other agencies and services that can help you;
 - Actively trying to keep in touch with you and
 - Discussing your needs, planning for the future with you to make your Pathway Plan.

Your personal
Advisor is there
to help you to
prepare to live
independently
and to offer
advice and
support after
you leave care.



A Pathway Plan

Your pathway plan is written by the local authority after consultation with you and important people in your life. It sets out your needs, views and future goals, how often you will see your Personal Adviser and exactly what support you will receive from us. We review your pathway plan with you regularly so that it is kept up-to-date.

Your first pathway plan should be completed around the age of 16 by your social worker.

Your plan will then be updated, up to your 21st birthday, at least every 6 months (or more frequently if your circumstances significantly change).

Once completed, or updated, your pathway plan will be given to you to agree and sign. You, your PA and anyone else involved in the plan will then get on with helping you in the way that has been agreed.

Your right to be heard and taken seriously

You have a right to be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care. You have a right to support from an independent advocate if you are thinking about challenging decisions about the support we give you.

Independent advocates can inform you about your rights and help you to be heard in meetings. They are separate from Children's Services.



Our Pledge to You

The Care Leavers' Service is committed to making sure you know what you can expect from your PA. Your PA has agreed a Pledge made of 5 statements confirming how they will work with you.

As a Personal Adviser...

- 1. I will provide different ways for you to get in touch with me and endeavour to get back to you as soon as possible. I will try to be flexible with when we meet and ensure that the time is suitable for you.
- 2. I will tell you what you need to know, straight as adults. I will try to make sure we are both on the same level.
- 3. I will work with you to involve you in decisions and not make them for you, and provide the necessary information to help you make these decisions.
- 4. I will always try to be aware of your individual situation.
- 5. I will have a working knowledge of relevant topics for you and will be honest about whether I know something or not but do my best to find out or point you in the right direction.



What is discus<mark>sed in</mark> the Pathway Plan?

Accommodation

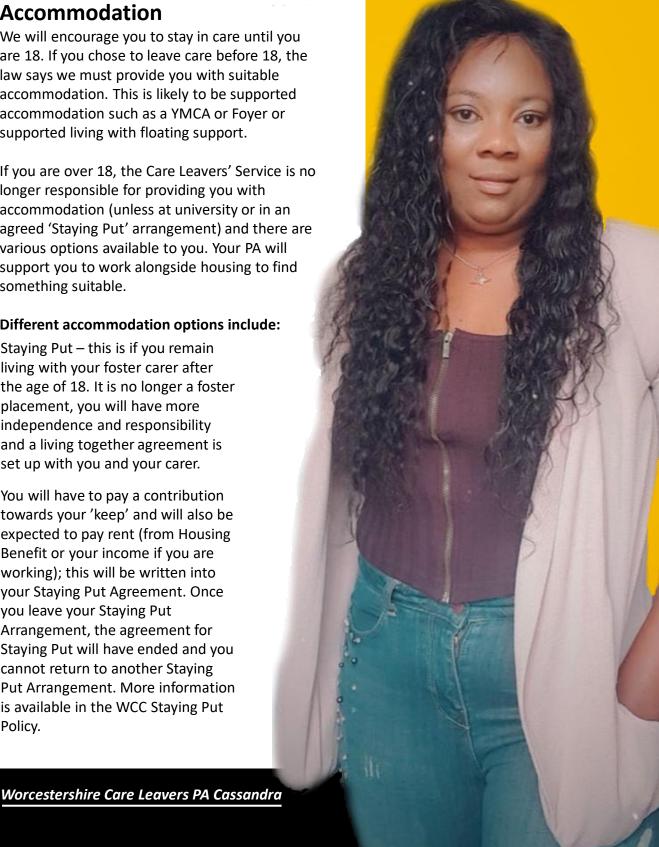
We will encourage you to stay in care until you are 18. If you chose to leave care before 18, the law says we must provide you with suitable accommodation. This is likely to be supported accommodation such as a YMCA or Fover or supported living with floating support.

If you are over 18, the Care Leavers' Service is no longer responsible for providing you with accommodation (unless at university or in an agreed 'Staying Put' arrangement) and there are various options available to you. Your PA will support you to work alongside housing to find something suitable.

Different accommodation options include:

Staying Put – this is if you remain living with your foster carer after the age of 18. It is no longer a foster placement, you will have more independence and responsibility and a living together agreement is set up with you and your carer.

You will have to pay a contribution towards your 'keep' and will also be expected to pay rent (from Housing Benefit or your income if you are working); this will be written into your Staying Put Agreement. Once you leave your Staying Put Arrangement, the agreement for Staying Put will have ended and you cannot return to another Staying Put Arrangement. More information is available in the WCC Staying Put Policy.



Supported Accommodation – where staff are on site to offer support (e.g. A Foyer or YMCA). They will also help you move-on to more independent accommodation, when you are ready.

Social Housing - with local housing authority obtained through a registering and bidding process. (As a Care Leaver, you will be given priority on housing in the district of your choice, or if out of area, supported in accessing the local housing register.)

Private – to get your own accommodation you will need to demonstrate you are able to manage your own tenancy, prove you are capable of living on your own and that you also understand both the rights and responsibilities of being a good tenant / neighbour. Your PA can give you more advice about what options and support are available on all of your housing options and can help you apply to rent deposit schemes if you need them.

The Care Leavers Team will:

- Offer practical support in helping you move. Including accessing van hire if you have a lot of things to move (available for up to 2 moves).
- Ensure you have access to suitcases to move your belongings so you don't have to use bin bags
- Be able to give you advice about holding down a tenancy, including how to avoid rent arrears, paying bills and budgeting
- Help you claim Universal Credit/Housing Benefit
- Support you in applying for a council tax exemption if you are a care leaver living within Worcestershire. (You will not have to pay council tax until at least the age of 21 and we will work with you to ensure you receive this support through your district council.)
- Support you if you have a housing crisis, including helping
 if you are threatened with eviction or lose a tenancy. The
 team also has access to a specialist housing worker who
 can step in if things start to become complicated.
- Ensure you have access to a starter pack when you move in to your own tenancy (this will include items such as tinned food, cleaning products, bin bags)
- Offer advice and support with painting, decorating and DIY



Setting Up Home Grant

Moving in to your own home should be a planned move, and as well as the things outlined on the previous page, the Care Leaver's Team also provide each Care Leaver with a Setting Up Home Grant to help you buy items you need in your new home.

This is a £2000 grant and your PA will support you in spending this.

Saving in advance will also help you buy other things you want for your home and your Personal Adviser will also be able to support you in contacting charities and organisations who may be able to offer some additional help equipping your accommodation.







Practical, Life and Independence Skills

Living independently for the first time is a big challenge so your PA will work with you to help develop your skills and knowledge, so you are more prepared when taking this big step.

Your **Pathway Plan** has a section to help identify your skills as well as areas you may need to work on or need support with.

The type of things your PA can support with are:

- How to look after yourself and stay safe
- Understanding how to keep your home clean and tidy and complete tasks such as the laundry
- Managing your money and paying your hills
- Contacting the Job Centre or utility providers
- Making and managing your own health appointments
- Having I.D and a bank account
- Cooking and shopping for nutritious food

We will also be able to provide you with the opportunity to gain **ASDAN** qualifications to prove your abilities in these areas.

For those who may have a more challenging housing situation, there will be additional support available from a Specialist Housing Worker within the Care Leavers Team. If you need extra support with managing in your new home, your PA can make referrals to other agencies who can offer that help.

There will also be the opportunity for you to spend time in supported accommodation prior to moving to your own tenancy in order to develop your independence skills further.

Interests & Participation in Society

We want our care leavers to feel like they can be active members of society, and to have the chances in life that other young adults have. A big part of staying healthy and developing individual skills is through enjoying hobbies and interests.

We can help you participate in society in the following ways:

- Provide information on groups and clubs you may have an interest in
- Encouraging and helping you to enrol on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections
- Support you in finding relevant work experience
- Informing you of any opportunities that may be available and of interest to you
- Provide you with a yearly 'Festival Payment' to help you celebrate your chosen festival (i.e Christmas, Eid, Diwali)
- We will plan and hold a variety of social activities for care leavers throughout the year which the team will inform you about

Support in learning to drive:

- We will ensure at the age of 17, all care leavers are provided with a provisional driving licence as a form of ID
- We will offer you access to a 'Match Funding Scheme' for driving lessons where linked to education or work.
 This means if you pay for 1, we'll pay for another.
 (We'll do this for up to 10 lessons so if you pay for 10, we'll pay for 10.)
- We will pay 50% of the cost of your theory and practical driving test.















Care Leaver Forums & Speak Out!

- We will update you regarding opportunities on offer through Speak Out (Care Leavers Council) and provide you with the opportunity to get involved and share your views about things that impact you.
- You can take up the opportunity to attend training in interviewing staff (and then if you get the chance to be on an interview panel you can be paid for your time!)
- We will share opportunities on offer via our facebook page, website and care leavers mailing list.

The Care Leavers Newsletter

The newsletter is published quarterly and as well as providing advice and information it offers a platform for our Care Leavers to express themselves creatively. During the two years the newsletter has been produced, we've had articles, photo essays, poems and other submissions from a great number of our Care Leavers. The newsletter has given a spotlight to our young people and given the team wider recognition throughout the service as a whole.

We have made special feature issues specifically for COVID and in support of the Black Lives Matter campaign. We are always encouraging our Care Leavers to get involved and pay a £10 reward voucher for significant contributions of 500 words or more.

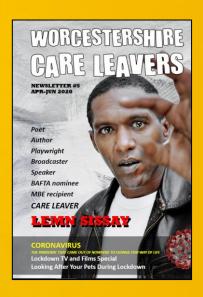
Facebook

Facebook has been an important part of the way we disseminate information to our young people and we are always looking for ways to improve our social media presence. You can access facebook page by searching for the group 'Worcestershire Care Leavers'











Education, Training and **Employment**

We want you to succeed in your education, employment and training, so in your Pathway Plan we will lay out how we can support you to help achieve your goals.

We will offer:

- Help with CV, personal statement, and job applications, alongside referrals to other agencies where necessary
- Access to post-16 virtual school workers who can support with careers advice and signposting
- A designated contact at Worcestershire Job Centres
- Reasonable financial support to meet transport costs when travelling to job /training interviews or college open days.

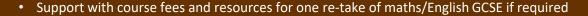


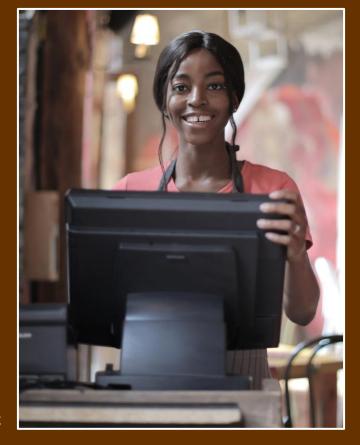


Further Education

For those who decide to pursue **College/Further Education** we will:

- Support you to purchase any books/equipment needed for your course (up to the value of £50)
- Offer a monetary incentive of £15 per week for those up to the age of 25 on full time courses which is linked to attendance. (This also includes apprenticeships.)
- Ensure you have access to a laptop and software, usually provided by WCC prior to you turning 18. We will consider further requests post-18 but these will be assessed on an individual basis.
- Help you apply for the 16-19 bursary fund if attending a college course- which pays up to £1200 a year to support you in accessing education
- Support you with funding for trips relating to your course





Higher Education

Every year we are supporting more and more Care Leavers securing places on University Courses, so for those who wish to continue studying after college and progress on to Higher Education we will:

- Fund your travel costs to and from university at the start and end of term
- Support with the initial costs of moving your belongings to university
- Pay for your term time accommodation
- Provide somewhere for you to stay during the university holidays (or provide funding for this if you would prefer to make your own arrangements.)
- Provide you with your £2000 Higher Education Bursary over the duration of your degree
- Contribute to your Graduation costs (2 tickets, gown hire and official photograph)
- Help you apply for tuition / maintenance loans and any other bursary/grant you may be entitled to.





Jobs, Careers and Training

There are many different courses, training schemes and employment opportunities available for young people. Your Personal Adviser will be able to help you get the advice and information that you need to choose what is right for you. If you are starting employment or training the Care Leavers' Service may be able to assist you with travel or living costs for the first couple of weeks, as you may have to work a period 'in hand' and not get paid immediately.

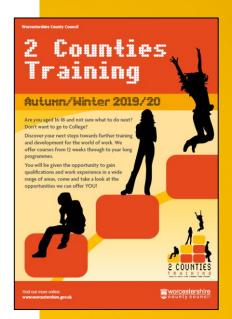
If you decide to enter paid work or complete alternative training rather than pursuing college we will:

- Support you in gaining industry accreditation or vehicle licenses needed for work (e.g CITB – Construction Industry Training Board tested) where this can not be sourced from the Job Centre's resources
- Offer support towards purchasing essential clothing/tools for your work or course of training
- Support with reasonable transport costs to the workplace if viable (eg. Support towards the cost of bus/train pass for the first month till you get paid)

We can also offer additional financial support with employment:

- Support costs associated with uniform, interview clothes & tools
- Support transport costs to interview and work if viable (e.g. for first month till get paid; or support towards cost of bus/train pass)











You can also get advice and help with education and training from:

Skills 4 Worcestershire:

www.skills4worcestershire.co.uk/

Careers Advice for Young People:

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/council-services/ schools-education-and-learning/send-local-offer/ preparing-adulthood-16-25-years/educationtraining-and-employment/careers-advice

Search and apply for an apprenticeship in England:

www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch

Worcestershire Apprenticeships:

https://worcsapprenticeships.org.uk/

Virtual School:

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/virtualschool

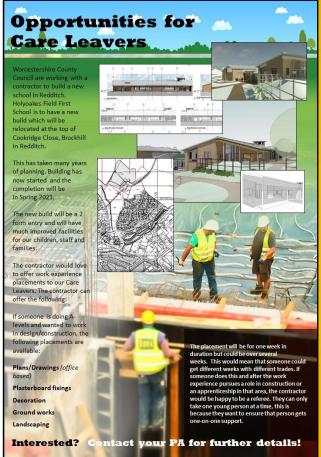
Young solutions:

www.youngsolutions.org.uk/

Department for Work & Pensions (DWP):

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/depart ment-for-work-pensions







Health and Wellbeing

Below are some of the ways our Care Leavers Team and your Personal Adviser can support you to stay healthy and look after both your physical and mental health.

We can:

- Provide you with a Health Summary which will be available once you have turned 18, which will provide some history and background to your health whilst you were in care.
- Give information around healthy living
- Support you in registering with a GP as well as advising/showing you how to book appointments with GP, Dentist and Optician.
- Support your transition from working with CAMHS to Adult Mental Health Services
- Fund reasonable financial requests in supporting you to attend health appointments
- Attend appointments with you if you feel you require some additional support
- Refer you to specialist services who may be able to offer additional help, for example counselling or substance misuse services
- Advise you on how to get financial help with prescriptions
- Take an interest in your child/children if you are a young parent and support you to do the best for them.
- Ensure you have the out of hours number for the emergency duty team in case you need their advice in an evening or at the weekend during a crisis situation.





Money and Finances

We will try and help you financially, in a similar way to how parents would support their own children. Some of this has already been included, but rounded up, this includes:

- Supporting you to spend your allocated £2000 Setting up Home Grant when you move in to your own home.
- Helping you apply for an exemption or discount on your Council Tax as a Care Leaver
- Providing you with the paperwork relating to your Junior ISA, if you have one, and supporting you to decide what to do with this money.
- Providing a £50 birthday payment on your 18th and 21st birthday
- · Support in opening up a bank account
- Support to ensure you have your National Insurance number prior to turning 18
- Financial help in gaining important identification documents before your 18th birthday such as passport, driving licence, birth certificate
- Support during a sanction period for example support with food, electricity, transport.
- Help in claiming Universal Credit ready for when you turn 18
- Annual festival payment (i.e for Christmas, Eid, Diwali or other festival you may celebrate)
- Financial help in accessing and carrying out education, employment or training (explained in previous section)
- Support with budgeting
- Exceptional financial help in emergencies



Your Personal Adviser can also:

Help you with initial benefit claims process when you turn 18 years old (this can be set up to 4 weeks before you are 18 to prevent delay in payments)

To make a claim you will need:

- Valid I.D
- National Insurance Number
- A Bank account for payments to be paid into
- You must keep all your appointments with the Job Centre, if you don't they may stop your benefit payments





Relationships

As well as support from a Personal Adviser, we may be able to offer you additional practical and emotional support such as;

- Where appropriate, continuing to support contact with the Independent Visitor you may have had whilst in care
- Helping you to maintain contact with people special to you or who cared for you in the past
- Supporting you with maintaining links with your family, this could include cost of attending family time for example
- A short written profile about your Personal Adviser before you start working together.





Support & Advice

As well as talking to your PA there are lots of other places you can go for help:

NYAS Advocacy Service

NYAS is a UK charity providing information, advice, advocacy and legal representation to children young people and vulnerable adults through a network of dedicated paid workers and volunteers throughout England and Wales. Tel: 0808 808 1001 (Freephone) or send an email to help@nyas.net https://www.nyas.net/

Catch22

Catch22's wide ranging provision delivers holistic support to looked after children and care leavers whilst in care and once they have left care to improve their life chances. Tel: 020 7336 4800 https://www.catch-22.org.uk/offers/looked-after-children-and-care-leavers/

Become

They have produced a range of resources for professional and young people. Tel: 0800 023 2033 (Freephone) or email advice@becomecharity.org.uk https://www.becomecharity.org.uk/

Care Leavers' Foundation

Small grants scheme for care leavers aged up to 29. Tel: 01678 540598 www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/grants.php

The Care Leavers' Association

National Charity run by care leavers offering support and advice. Tel: 0161 236 5665 www.careleavers.com

The Rees Foundation

Registered charity who creates networks and opportunities for people with care experiences including financial support.

http://www.reesfoundation.org/

Coram Voice

Coram advocacy services provide children with a professional adult who will listen to them, establish their wishes, opinions and fears, and ensure their voice is heard. Help them to navigate the system, challenge decisions and make certain their rights and wellbeing are prioritised.

Tel: 0808 800 5792(Freephone) or email help@coramvoice.org.uk

https://coramvoice.org.uk/

Groups and activities for young people living in Worcestershire

https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/council-services/childrens-social-care/get-safe/youth-clubs

Mind Of My Own

Mind of My Own is a participation tool for young people who use health, care and education services. Mind Of My Own enables young people to have their voices heard and to participate in decisions about their life. By using the website or the apps – Apple and Google, children and young people can say what they want when they want

https://mindofmyown.org.uk/

Access to Care Records



The Data Protection Act gives you the right to view your records. You do not have to give a reason why you want to view your files and you cannot be denied access.

You can request guidance from a Social Worker or Personal Adviser before accessing your records, and they can help when it's time to make the request.

You don't have to meet with them but it can be helpful to have someone to provide emotional support and help explain things that may be difficult to understand in the records.

To access your records you need to contact the **Information Access Team:**

Corporate Information
Management Unit
Worcestershire County Council
County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
WR5 2NP
Tel: 01905 845571

They will advise you how to apply and will send you a form to complete.

Once your request is received the timescale is 40 days for the Local Authority to respond to your written request.

We want to hear your views or suggestions for improving the service. There are several ways you can do this:

You could get involved in organising activities for young people.

Taking part in interviews to recruit Social Workers & Personal Advisers for Worcestershire.

Meeting with Councillors and Children's Services managers to share your ideas on the sorts of things that you think need to change or improve. You can do this through becoming a member of: Worcestershire's Care Leavers Council (Speak Out) or our Care Leavers Service Participation Group – see our Worcestershire Care Leavers Closed Facebook Group or ask your PA for details about meetings and regular events.

For more information on getting involved with Speak Out or our Participation Group contact either:

Speak Out on 01905 846498

Care Leavers' Service on 01905 845613

If you do not live in Worcestershire, you can still give us your feedback by asking your Personal Advisor for a feedback form so you can send us your views.



This guide is Worcestershire's Local Offer to our care leavers.



Contact:

Worcestershire County Council
Care Leavers Team
PO Box 589
Worcester WR5 4AH

RMINATION

21+ Duty Service

You can contact our Duty Personal Advisers on **01905 845613** (available Monday – Friday 9.30am - 12.30pm & 1.00pm - 3.00pm)

You can also email our Duty PA's on

<u>CareLeaversDuty@worcestershire.gov.uk</u> if you need a call back or appointment outside of these times.

Our EDT Team also offer out of hours support.

Our Duty PA's are also available to meet with you in the community. Please see our Facebook page **Worcestershire Care Leavers Closed Facebook Group** this will provide you with up to date information on drop-ins and events in your area.