WORCESTERSHIRE CARE LEAVERS

Information on what support you are entitled to as a Care Leaver in Worcestershire

Our Local Offer to our Care Leavers

http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/careleavers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is the Care Leavers Service?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The support we must give you by law</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Personal Advisor</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Pathway Plan</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What is discussed in the Pathway Plan</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical, Life and Independence Skills</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Training and Employment</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Wellbeing</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money and Finances</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests and Participation in Society</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Support and Advice</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Care Records</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

This guide tells you about all the support that we have in Worcester for you as a care leaver. 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.

Just because you are leaving care, or have already left care, we haven’t stopped caring about you. We want to make sure that you feel safe and supported and know where and who to go to for advice and help.

Local care leavers have helped make this guide. We will continue to listen to your views to make sure the services we offer are what you need.

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 Advisor.

This guide is available online at:

http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/careleavers

Your personal Advisor will talk with you about the information in this guide.
2. 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; each has a Team Manager and Personal Advisors (PAs).

  A Personal Advisor acts as a co-ordinator to ensure care leavers are provided with the correct support in making their transition into adult life.
3. The support we must give you by law

A Personal Advisor

Following changes introduced through the Children & Social Work Act 2017, you will be able to ask to have support from a personal Advisor up to the age of 25. This is to try to make sure care leavers receive similar support to young adults who have grown up with their families.

You will be allocated a Personal Advisor when you are 17. Your Personal Advisor 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 Advisor 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 Advisor up to your 25th birthday. We understand that you may wish to be more independent and may not necessarily want routine visits from a Personal Advisor.

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.
Your leaving care team will consider with you what extra support you may need. 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.

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

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.
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 Advisor 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.

In order to write your pathway plan both your social worker and your PA will want to understand as much as possible about your circumstances and what you want to achieve.

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). This is necessary to check how things are going and to add to or make changes to your plan.

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.

You have a right to see the information we keep about you, including the files and records written about you when you were in care.

Please see the Contacts section at the end of this guide for further details.

Leaving care before turning 18

We will encourage you to stay in care until you are 18.

If you choose to leave care before age 18, the law says we must provide you with suitable accommodation. This is likely to be supported accommodation such as a YMCA or Foyer, or supported living with floating support.
4. What is discussed in the Pathway Plan?

➢ Accommodation

➢ Practical, Life and Independence Skills

➢ Education, Training and Employment

➢ Health and Wellbeing

➢ Money and Finances

➢ Relationships

➢ Interests and Participation in Society

Accommodation

If you are aged over 18, your personal Advisor will help you to find suitable accommodation. This might involve:

- Working with Housing Services to come up with suitable housing options for you, including supported accommodation if you are not ready (or don’t want) to have your own tenancy.

- If it is what you and your foster carers want, supporting you to remain with your foster carers under what’s called a ‘Staying Put’ arrangement. This can last until you are 21.

- Support to access different housing options, including social housing (this is accommodation managed by a housing association).

- Advice about holding down a tenancy, including avoiding rent
arrears, paying bills and budgeting. We know it can be very hard having your own place for the first time. We will do whatever we can to ease the pressures on you.

- Helping you to claim housing benefit/universal credit.
- Practical support with moving into and furnishing your new home.
- Supporting you if you have a housing crisis, including helping if you are threatened with eviction or lose a tenancy.

Your Personal Advisor will discuss and help plan your housing and accommodation needs as part of your Pathway Plan.

At 18, the Care Leavers’ Service is no longer responsible for providing you with accommodation (unless you are at University or in an agreed Staying Put arrangement). There are various options available to you in different settings and levels of support which we can support you to access.

**Different accommodation options include:**

- **Staying Put Arrangements** - 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 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.

• Your own accommodation - options include:
  - Social Housing with local housing authority obtained through a registering and the bidding process.
  - Privately rented accommodation

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.

Getting your own flat, particularly in the private rental sector, can be difficult under 21 years of age. Your PA can give you more advice about what options and support are available on all of your housing options.

Support you setting up your first home:
Moving to your own home should be a planned move. It requires lots of organising and having help with this makes it easier to manage. Your Personal Advisor is there to help you with this.
**You may need support at first with:**
- Arranging how rent, gas, electric, water and TV Licence will be paid.
- You may need to claim benefits to help with rent and council tax payments. Even if you are on Universal Credit, Job Seekers Allowance or Income Support. Rent does not automatically get paid unless you apply for Housing benefit.

The Care Leavers’ Service provides a Setting Up Home Grant to help you buy items that you will need in your new home. This is £2000 and Your Personal Advisor is there to support you with spending this. They will ensure you purchase the essential items that are needed in a new home.

- Saving in advance will also help you buy other things you want for your home.
- Your Personal Advisor will also be able to help with contacting charities or organisations that may be able to offer some help equipping your accommodation.

**Practical, Life and Independence Skills**

Living independently for the first time is a big challenge. Your Personal Advisor is there for you to talk to about this. They will also work with you to help develop your skills and knowledge so you are prepared for when you are living more independently.

Your Pathway Plan has a section to help identify your skills as well as areas that you may need to work on or need support with.
Some of the independence skills needed to enable you to live a happy, safe and healthy life-style include:

- Looking after yourself and staying safe
- Keeping your home clean and tidy, how to do laundry and other household tasks
- Cooking and shopping for healthy, nutritious food
- Managing your money and paying bills
- Having I.D and a bank account
- Contacting Housing, the Job Centre or utility providers
- Making your own health appointments
- Attending meetings / appointments on time
- Reporting repairs or resolving issues with your accommodation
- Knowing how to access local facilities, and be a good neighbour.
- Asking for support when needed
Education, Training and Employment

We want you to succeed in your education, training and employment. We will ask you how you are doing and be ready to celebrate your achievements with you.

We will offer you:

- Careers information and advice
- If you attend University, a bursary of £2,000 to help with the cost of books and materials

Care leavers are a priority group for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund administered by FE colleges, which pays a bursary of up to £1,200 a year to support vulnerable young people to participate in education

Find out more:

- Support to meet your transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews.
- Support to buy tools, equipment, essential clothing, and books.
- Support if you choose to go to university, such as helping you obtain tuition fees and maintenance loans, travel costs at the start and end of term, and making sure you have somewhere to live during the holidays. We will help you make informed choices about the right course and university that matches your talents and interests.
- We will provide somewhere for you to stay during University holidays (or funding for this if you would prefer to make your own arrangements) if you are in Higher Education or in residential further education.

- Opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships and employment within the council.

- The chance to attend and help organise celebration events when young people achieve education, training and employment milestones.

**Further Education Support**

- We will pay an education incentive to all Care Leavers’ undertaking an agreed course of Education or Training of £60 per month, dependent on good attendance.

- Your Pathway Plan should set out exactly what you would like to achieve educationally and how you are going to be supported to do it.

- We will support you with additional costs (over £50) related to equipment, materials or clothing that are essential for your course.

**Higher Education Support**

Every year, we are supporting more and more Care Leavers who have obtained places at University and are studying for Degrees / Higher Education Courses at universities all over the Country.
The Care Leavers’ Service can support you with your agreed course of education, potentially up to the age of 25; this can include help with your accommodation costs. Your Pathway Plan should set out your agreed course of study and your aspirations and goals and how you will be supported with these.

There are a number of different kinds of financial support available for young people applying to study in higher education. These include loans, grants, bursaries and scholarships.

You will also receive a £2,000 Higher Education Bursary paid in instalments throughout your course. Find out more about HE support available to you online:

**Jobs, Careers and Training**

There are many different courses, training schemes and employment opportunities available for young people. Your Personal Advisor 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.
You can also get advice and help with education and training from:

**Skills 4 Worcestershire:**
http://www.skills4worcestershire.co.uk/

**Careers Advice for Young People:**
http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20290/careers_advice_for_young_people

**Search and apply for a traineeship or apprenticeship in England:**
www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/traineeshipsearch
www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch

**Worcestershire Apprenticeships:**
https://worcsapprenticeships.org.uk/

**Virtual School:**
http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20062/schools/1103/the_virtual_school_for_looked_after_and_adopted_children

**Young solutions:**
http://www.youngsolutions.org.uk/

**Department for Work & Pensions (DWP):**
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions
Health and Wellbeing

Below are some of the ways our care leaving team and your personal Advisor can support you to stay healthy and look after your physical and mental health. We can:

- Give information on healthy living
- Give information on getting help to pay for prescriptions
- Support you to register or book with a GP, Dentist and Optician
- Support you to move from CAMHS to adult mental health services
- Give information about counselling services that are available locally
- Give you help with transports costs when attending health appointments
- If you are a young parent, take an interest in your children and support you to do the best for them. We will help you arrange childcare, if this is what you want
- Offer free or subsidised access to the leisure centres we run
- Give you information about health drop-in centres
- Work with you to make a ‘health passport’ containing key information from your childhood (for example, when and if you have had immunisations) and your current health needs
- Provide information about local activities and events
Money and Finances

We will try to help you financially, in a similar way to how parents would support their own children. Our help includes:

- Providing a Setting Up Home Grant to help you buy essential things when moving into your own home, which government recommends should be a minimum of £2,000

- Exemptions or discounts on paying Council Tax for care leavers age 18-21 who are on low income.

- Providing or telling you about relevant money management courses

- Information on how to access your Junior ISA, if you have one (a fund of money set aside by the government and the council)

- Support to open a bank account

- Support to gain important identification documents, such as a passport and/or provisional driving licence, before your 18th birthday

- Support to get your National Insurance number.

- Exceptional financial support in emergencies

- Providing a £25 gift voucher on your 18th and 21st birthdays.

There have been many changes to the Benefits System recently. This can be confusing, overwhelming, and frustrating. Your Personal Advisor can give you some basic information relating to benefits but it is best for you to seek specialist advice from the Job Centre on any benefits you are entitled to claim.
Your PA can help you to do this and can also speak to the Job Centre on your behalf if you give them consent to do this.

**Your Personal Advisor can:**
Help you with initial benefit claims process when you turn 18 years old (this can be done 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 Advisor, we may be able to offer you additional practical and emotional support, such as:

- Linking you in with a Peer Mentor or Buddy (Peer Buddies help reduce isolation and loneliness by developing social connections and Mentors help with CV preparation, looking for employment, education and training and or accompanying you to interviews or meetings;
- Where appropriate, continuing to support contact with the ‘Independent Visitor’ you had while you were in care;
- Help to maintain or regain contact with people special to you or who cared for you in the past, like former foster carers or social workers.
Interests & Participation in Society

We want our care leavers to be active members of society, and to have all the chances in life that other young adults have.

A big part of staying healthy is enjoying hobbies and interests

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

- Providing information on groups and clubs you may wish to join

- Informing you about relevant awards, schemes and competitions you can enter, in line with your talents and interests

- Encouraging and helping you to enrol on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections

- Supporting you to find relevant work experience

- Informing you about voluntary work that we think you may be interested in

- Informing and possibly helping with the cost of leisure activities

- Helping you apply for a Leisure card, which offers reduced prices for entrance into Worcestershire Leisure Centres

- Giving you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver.

- If you do not live near Worcestershire, we can make an agreement through your Pathway Plan about how we can support you to get involved in sporting activities or other leisure activities near where you live
5. Support and Advice

Your Personal Advisor 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.

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

As a Personal Advisor...

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.

6. 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.
Further Support & Advice

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

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

Voice
Offers advocacy support to care leavers and children in care, including a national helpline.

Tel: 0808 800 5792 (Freephone)
wwwVOICEYP.org

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/directory/18/positive_activities_for_young_people
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/

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 Advisors 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.
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 can’t be denied access if you don’t want to disclose your reason. Although you are likely to be offered guidance from a Social Worker or Personal Advisor about accessing your records, you do not have to meet with them. However it can be helpful to have someone available to provide emotional support and help to explain things that may be difficult to understand in the records. Accessing your files can begin to offer explanations about your life in care and help you to put your past and present circumstances into perspective.

To apply for access to 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 84 5571

They will advise you how to apply and will send you a form to complete. There is usually a fee of £10 for the service, (this may be waived in some circumstances). Once your request is received the timescale is 40 days for the Local Authority to respond to your written request.
This guide is Worcestershire’s Local Offer to our care leavers.

Contact:
Worcestershire County Council
Care Leavers Team
PO Box 589
Worcester
WR5 4AH
Tel: 01905 845613

21+ Duty Service
You can contact our Duty Personal Advisors (available Monday – Friday 9.30am - 12.30pm & 1.00pm - 3.00pm) on 01905 845613
You can also email our Duty PA's on CareLeaversDuty@worcestershire.gov.uk if you need a call back or appointment outside of these times.

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.