Leaving Care

**Am I a Care Leaver?**

**The purpose of this badge is to help you understand what it means to be a care leaver and what you are entitled to.**

Care Leavers

**Am I a Care Leaver #1 - Are you a care leaver?[[1]](#footnote-1)**

“Don’t think that when you leave care you are going to get your own flat straight away. The Housing Association doesn’t give out flats or houses that easily anymore. I was waiting for months, and lived in lots of different places like hostels and B&B’s before I got my own place. When I got my own place, it needed a lot of work done to it. I painted it, put carpet down and bought some furniture. There was still some stuff that needed doing, but it was my place, and it felt great! I didn’t listen to my carer when she went on about bills. I never knew I needed a TV licence, or what council tax is, or that I had to pay for the water in my taps. Don’t get me wrong, having a flat is great, but it does cost a lot to live on your own. You’d better ask about bills, and listen to your carer and find out what it’s going to cost you to live when you move out”. Vanessa

When and how long you were looked after is important because it makes a difference to what support and funding you will get when you leave care.

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| **Are you a Care Leaver?** | **Description** |
| Eligible children | Children aged 16-17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who are still looked after. |
| Relevant children | Children aged 16-17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14; and have been looked after at some time while 16 or 17, and who have left care.  **Additional groups of relevant children include:**  Those who would have been relevant children but for the fact that on their 16th birthday they were detained through the criminal justice system, or in hospital.  Those who have returned home but the return has broken down. |
| Qualifying children and young people over 16 | Any young person aged under 21 (under 24 if in education or training) who ceases to be looked after or accommodated in a variety of other setting, or privately fostered, after the age of 16.  **This includes:**  Young people who leave care after October 2001, at or after the age of 16, but do not qualify as eligible children.  Young people who left care before October 2001. |

**Task**

Use this link to work out your status…

<http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/young-peoples-zone/am-i-care-leaver>

Do you know what your status is? If so, what is it?

If not, who can help you find out and when can you ask them?

Care Leavers

**Am I a Care Leaver #2 – What are you entitled to?**

**An assessment of your needs**

You have a right to have your needs assessed before you leave care to make sure that you leave:

1. At a time that is right for you;

2. Knowing what support you will be getting; and

3. Understanding what your options are if things don't work out first time.

It is important to know that you can stay in care up until you are 18, unless you agree that you are ready to leave before.

**A Pathway Plan (or 'Leaving Care' Plan)**

You should have a Pathway Plan, started sometime after your 15th birthday, that you have helped to put together and agree with. This should make clear the help you will be getting in preparing to leave care and what support you will receive after you have left.

This should say how your local authority will help you achieve the things you want in life (such as a place of your own, educational achievement, having your own money to spend, going on a training course or getting the job that you want). It is very important to get your Pathway Plan right because it will set out what help you should be getting before, during and after you leave care. Once agreed, everyone who has signed it should keep to it.

When the time comes for you to leave care, you should have been supported to learn how to look after yourself, keep yourself healthy, continue with your learning, enjoy and achieve things in life, stay in touch with family and friends, and be confident about who you are.

**Need to know more?**

If you would like more information about any of your entitlements when leaving care, you can contact the following organisations of visit their websites:

* Coram Voice, tel: 0808 800 5792, <https://coramvoice.org.uk/young-peoples-zone> ;
* The Care Leavers’ Association, tel: 0161 236 5665, [www.careleavers.com](http://www.careleavers.com) .

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**A Personal Advisor**

Children's Services should make sure that you have a Personal Adviser (or PA). This could be your current social worker or a worker from the 'leaving care' team. It is their job to keep in touch with you, check that you are alright and help you in getting what you need. To do this they must make sure that your Pathway Plan is followed, reviewed (at least every six months) and kept up to date.

From 1st April 2011, a change in the law means that care leavers up to the age of 25 who tell their council they have returned, or want to return, to education or training, will also be able to have the support of a personal adviser while they are on their course (if the course is agreed in their Pathway Plan).

**A place to live**

Your local authority must make sure that you have somewhere 'suitable to live'. This means that it has to be right for you and, above all, safe. It is important that wherever you prefer to live, you make sure that your local authority puts this into your Pathway Plan. You can decide to return home, if this is what you and your family wish.

In deciding whether accommodation is suitable for a care leaver to live in, a council must take into account the care leaver’s wishes and feelings about their accommodation, as well as whether the accommodation suits the care leaver’s needs and what the landlord is like.

If the council arranges accommodation for a care leaver, they must do a review after the care leaver has lived there for 28 days – and at least every three months after that. The personal adviser must visit in the first week, at least every two months after that and, also, before each review of the Pathway Plan.

Care Leavers

**Financial support**

Until you are 18, then Children's Services must arrange for financial support to help you pay for the things you need to live on (for example for food, clothing, travel, hobbies and for your accommodation). They have to make sure that you are not any worse off than if you were on benefits. Once you are 18 and, if you are not in employment or full-time education, you can claim benefits. However, your local authority should continue to give you financial help (for example towards the costs of your education and training), if that is what they have agreed to do. In order that Children's Services keep to their promises, they should make sure that all agreed support is written into your Pathway Plan.

Local authorities must pay the Higher Education Bursary for all eligible care leavers (a bursary is extra funding that you are given and don’t have to repay). The 16-19 Bursary scheme means that looked after young people and care leavers are guaranteed a £1,200 bursary if they stay in full-time education (and £2,000 if going to university). You can ask your school or college how to claim the bursary; your PA can help with this.

As a care leaver, you also get a setting up home allowance of £2,000. Although this sounds a lot, it needs to cover the basics you will need when you start to live on your own such as carpets, curtains, bed and bedding, white goods (washing machine, fridge, and freezer) and a television. You only get this payment once so you will need to think carefully about what you need most and shop around to get the best price.

**Support to Maintain Relationships**

Your Personal Adviser should help you to keep in contact with relatives and also friends that you have met whilst in care.

**A Voice – You are involvement in Decisions**

You have a right to be involved in all major decisions, including when you leave care, where you go to live and what support you receive.

Care Leavers

**To have your say if you’re not happy about something**

Although you have left care you are still entitled to let children's social services know and, if needed, you can complain if you are not satisfied with the support you are getting.

**REMEMBER:** You also have the right to have an advocate to help you do this. An advocate is someone, who can attend meetings with you to help you put your case across and make sure that your voice is heard. An advocate can be someone you know or a relative and if you don’t have someone but would like an advocate, you can contact NYAS (NYAS stands for the National Youth Advocacy Service). You may be able to get help from an advocate if you feel you are not being listened to about any issue, or if you wish to make a complaint. An advocate acts as a voice for you.

**To see your files**

The law says that you have a right to see information written that is about you. This includes Children’s Services files and many young people like help in getting access to these.

**To know about the service you can use**

You have a right to be told, and to be given information telling you all about the services that you are entitled to used once you leave care (for example, Connexions, Children's Services, health, further and higher education courses, housing advice). This is called the Care Leaver’s Offer.

**Activity**

Do you know who your PA/Social worker is? Do you know how to contact them? If not, how can you find out? When was your last pathway plan review?.

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| **What do you need to find out or work on?** | **What will you do? Where will you go to find out?** | **Who will you ask for help?** |
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Care Leavers

**#3 – Care Leavers in Cumbria**

Did you know that you can attend a Forum for older care leavers where you can get involved in activities, share your ideas and experiences and help make improvements to the Leaving Care Service for others who are/will be in care? This is the Cumbria Care Leavers Forum.

There is a Facebook page so this task is to join the Facebook group and check it out.

What 3 things did you find useful or of interest?

1.

2.

3.

Will you stay in the Facebook group? Yes No

Explain your answer…

Do you think you’ll attend any of the forums? Yes No

Explain your answer…

1. Source: [www.leavingcare.org](http://www.leavingcare.org) , WMTD? What Young People Have Said, Rainer, NLCAS & The Fostering Network [↑](#footnote-ref-1)