

# Your Guide to Leaving Care



## *When will I leave care?*

Unless you return home to your family beforehand, you will become a 'care leaver' when you turn 18.

You will have new rights as a care leaver and we will explain these to you in this leaflet.

## *Support as a care leaver*

Support and help is available to you until you are 25. Depending on your needs, you might still have a social worker, and you will have a **Personal Advisor** who you can contact for help. They will also get in touch with you to check that you are OK.

You can get advice and help with money, housing, education and work. If you have a problem, make sure you ask for help straight away.

Ask your social worker for a copy of their "**Local Offer**" for care leavers. This will give you some information about the help and support that they can offer you.

If you think that people are not listening to you and what you want, remember that you can ask for an advocate to help you. Your social worker can put you in contact with one, or you can phone:

**NYAS** on 0808 808 1001 or

**Coram Voice** on 0808 800 5792.

You can also phone The Children's Commissioner's **Help at Hand** service on 0800 528 0731

## *Planning for your future*

When you are 16, your social worker will start to create a plan with you for your future. This is called a "**Pathway Plan**".

The planning will start with an assessment to understand your needs, and will look at:

- Your health
- Education and work
- Money
- Relationships
- Where you will live
- The support you will need

The plan outlines your goals and how you can achieve them. You will review your plan with your social worker at least twice a year.

## Where will I live?

You have several options when it comes to choosing where to live.

1. You can ask to keep living with your foster carers. This is called **“Staying Put”**. If you and your foster carer both want this to happen, and if it is in your best interests, then your social worker must support this option. You might be asked to claim benefits to cover your housing costs while ‘staying put’.
2. You might choose to **return to live with a member of your birth family**.
3. You might move to a **“supported living”** placement where you will have your own room in a shared house and there will be support staff on site to help you.
4. You might be able to move into **your own home**. This will only happen if everyone thinks you are able to look after yourself and your home.

When you are ready to move into your own home, you will have priority for social housing in your area, and you will be able to choose a one-bedroom property of your own.

You can ask to live in either the area where your birth family live or the area where your foster carers live. The *Homelessness Reduction Act (2017)* allows care leavers to claim a **‘local connection’** in either area.

5. If you go to university, you should be able to live in the **halls of residence** all year round (where these are available).

## Financial help

When you leave care, you will be responsible for your own money.

We will help you to get the qualifications you need to secure the job that you would like. If you have not finished studying when you leave care, you will be able to continue studying and claim benefits (Universal Credit) at the same time.

**Universal Credit** will help you if you don’t have enough money for housing, food and other essentials. It is not a lot of money, and if you do not have a disability that stops you from working (and you are not still studying) you are expected to find work.

When you are ready to move into your own home, you might be able to get the housing part of Universal Credit, which will help pay your rent. As a care leaver, you can ask for this to be paid directly to your landlord. We recommend that you do this so that it is always paid on time. When you move into your own home, you will receive a **“setting up home allowance”**. Your social worker will arrange this. It will help you to buy furniture, kitchen appliances and flooring. Many care leavers find that the allowance does not pay for everything they want. As a care leaver, you will receive savings that have been made for you while in care. We recommend that you use some of these savings to buy the extra things you want in your home.

## Education and work

When you leave care, you will still be able to claim the **16-19 Education Bursary** while you finish your school/college course.

Check your local authority's "**local offer**" for care leavers to see what support they can give you to continue your education after 19. They might help you with transport costs or buy special equipment that you need for your course.

You can claim **Universal Credit** as a care leaver while you continue your education. You might have to look for work in the long summer holiday, but not during term time.

If you want to go to university, you will receive a £2000 **Higher Education bursary** to help with the costs. Your social worker will arrange this. You will need to apply for student loans from Student Finance England to cover tuition and living expenses. You will pay these back in the future when you are in work. Tick the box on your UCAS application form to say you have spent time in care and you will be eligible for extra help and support. This can include financial help, emotional support and If the university has halls of residence, you should be able to live in these all year round.

If you are looking for an apprenticeship, you might be eligible for the **Care Leavers' Apprenticeship Bursary**. Ask your social worker or the apprenticeship provider about this.

## Developing your life skills

While you are in foster care, we will help you to develop the knowledge and skills that you need for adult life.

Your foster carer will encourage you to help out around the house and learn how to look after yourself, your clothes, your room, your money and become gradually more confident in your abilities. Our **Life Skills Development Booklets** will help you identify new skills to learn, especially when you are getting ready to live on your own in the future.

## Here to help

You can find helpful information and advice at our I-SPACE website.

Visit [www.i-space.org.uk](http://www.i-space.org.uk) and head for the "**Leaving Care**" page to read more about your rights, as mentioned in this leaflet. You will also find links to other organisations that help young people and care leavers, including charities that offer grants to care leavers.

On the "**Life skills**" page you will find our booklets and challenges to build your skills. Your foster carer will help you with these.

This website will always be there for you, and you can contact ISP at any time.