Preparation For Adult Life

**Description**

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Transition to adulthood is often a turbulent time: Whilst the ideal for most young people is that they leave home after completing their education and after obtaining a job which covers their expenses, this is usually not the case for children looked after.

Whilst most young adults know they can call on the support of their families to help them through unforeseen difficulties, care leavers may not be able to rely on the same level of support if things do not work out as they make their journey into adulthood.



## Ready or not: Care leavers' views of preparing to leave care

Ofsted published research 'Ready or Not' (2022), which highlighted the following from discussions with children who had left care:

- More than a third of care leavers felt that they left care too early. This was often because the move out of care happened abruptly and they were not ready for all the sudden changes. Of those who did feel that they left care at the right time, not all felt they had the required skills to live more independently. Many care leavers said that they were not taught essential skills, such as how to shop, cook or manage money.
- Many care leavers felt alone or isolated when they left care and did not know where to get help with their mental health or emotional well-being. Many care leavers had no one they could talk to about how they were feeling or who would look out for them. A third of care leavers said they did not know where to get help and support. For many, no plans had been made to support their mental health or emotional well-being when they left care.
- Although statutory guidance requires that young people should be introduced to their personal adviser (PA) from age 16, over a quarter of care leavers did not meet their PA until they were 18 or older. Care leavers saw PAs as helpful in preparing to leave care, but a fifth felt they met them too late. Two fifths of the children still in care said that they did not yet have a PA, meaning that some about to leave care still did not know who would be helping them.
- Some care leavers could not trust or rely on the professionals helping them to prepare for leaving care. Care leavers needed someone they could rely on for help when they felt scared or worried, but sometimes they felt that professionals were rude or uninterested, or showed a lack of respect, for example by cancelling meetings, turning up late or ignoring their feelings.
- Care leavers were not involved enough in plans about their future. Around a quarter of care leavers reported they were not at all involved in developing these plans. Some felt that, even when they expressed their wishes, they were not listened to, or that they did not fully understand the options. Some felt that plans did not match their aspirations. For many, this had a long-term impact on their education or career path, as well as their emotional well-being.
- Many care leavers had no control over where they lived when they left care, and many felt unsafe. Only around a third of care leavers had a say in the location they'd like to live in and even fewer (a fifth) in the type of accommodation. One in 10 care leavers never felt safe when they first left care. Many care leavers were worried about the area or people where they lived. Sometimes the area was completely unfamiliar to them or was seen as a crime and exploitation hot spot. Many care leavers also felt unsafe living on their own.
- Many care leavers felt unprepared to manage money. Some were not aware of what bills they needed to pay, or how to budget. In some cases, this led to them getting into debt, losing tenancies, or not being able to afford food or travel. Some care leavers were still in debt years later. When they were asked what made them feel unsafe when they first left care, being worried about money was the most common reason reported. A few care leavers reported getting into crime when they left care in order to get money, or because they were not able to manage their finances.
- Some care leavers said they did not find out about their rights until they were already in serious difficulties. In some cases, care leavers were already in debt or homeless before they were told about the help they could access. Only around half remembered being told about the support and services available in the local care leaver offer. A similar proportion reported being told how to

complain and even fewer were told how to get advocacy support. Care leavers (or their carers) who had engaged advocacy services had found this help to be vital.

Sparks Fostering staff and foster carers must keep this feedback in mind when developing plans for children in our care and we must do the utmost to ensure that the children we look after not only have positive experiences while they are in fostering placement, but that we also prepare the young people to go on to have successful and happy adult lives.

## Supporting the child's preparation for adulthood

Throughout their time with foster carers, children and young people should be given age appropriate opportunities to learn the skills that they need to ensure they develop self-esteem and a positive sense of their personal identity, and are prepared for adult life. As young people approach adulthood, foster carers should increasingly help to prepare them for moving into the world of work, further and higher education and training, and to develop their financial skills, capability and knowledge. They should be supported to understand how to manage the practicalities of a home and personal care, as well as understanding their sexuality and forming positive social and sexual relationships and developing responsible behaviour.

In particular, young people's plans for preparation for adulthood should consider the following elements:

- Establish positive and appropriate social and sexual relationships. When the young person has family (including siblings) or friends who can offer appropriate support, the young person should be enabled to access the capacity of this network to encourage the young person and enable them to make a positive transition to adulthood;
- Develop positive self-esteem and emotional resilience;
- Prepare for the world of work or further or higher education;
- Prepare for moving into their own accommodation;
- Develop practical skills, including shopping, buying, cooking and keeping food, washing clothes, personal self-care, and understanding and taking responsibility for personal healthcare;
- Develop financial capability, knowledge and skills. At some point a child or young person should be encouraged to open a personal bank account, and be supported to manage their savings and spending through it;
- Know about entitlements to financial and other support after leaving care, including benefits and support from social care services.
- In order to avoid social exclusion, the young person should also be supported to obtain birth certificates, passports, driving licenses and other identification documents that will be required as they make the transition to adulthood. Some or all of these documents are critical for registering for housing, employment, training and education, opening bank accounts and proving identity.
- The foster carer should work with the child's social worker to explain the 'Care Leaver Offer' for their area; further information is available at https://www.careleaveroffer.co.uk/

## Personal Advisers and Pathway Plans

Children who we look after will not be receiving the support of the children's social worker once they turn 18. The local authority must, however, appoint a Personal Adviser (PA) to support them. The PA will act as the focal point to ensure that care leavers are provided with the right kind of personal

support.

All care leavers should be aware of who their PA is and how to contact them, so that throughout their transition to adulthood they are able to rely on consistent support from their own key professional. The PA should be appointed in time to write and review the pathway plans (from age 16).

Pathway plans for transition to adulthood must be in place for all looked after children aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks after they reached the age of 14. The 13 weeks can be continuous or made up of separate episodes of care; they exclude short-term placements made by way of respite care, but must include a period of time (at least 24 hours) after reaching the age of 16.

Arrangements within the pathway plan are expected to be consistent with the young person's care plan, including their placement plan, pathway plan and transition plan for children with disabilities and special educational needs.

Whilst it is the local authority's responsibility to appoint a PA they feel has the abilities necessary to undertake this role, it may be that the young person would rather aspects of the role be undertaken by their foster carer or former foster carer. It would then be for the local authority to decide the suitability of an individual for the PA role and any appropriate remuneration for this role.

However, in these circumstances the responsible authority must be clear as to the support that the carer will be providing and how any potential conflicts of interests might be managed. For example, where the young person is living as a member of the carer's family, perhaps in a "staying put" arrangement.

The role of the Personal Adviser is outlined in The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations – Volume 3: Planning transition to adulthood for care leavers.

## Staying Put

For young people with a stable foster placement, continuing to live in their former foster home under a 'staying put" arrangement can offer a transition to independence closer to that experienced by most other young people.
Monitoring the 'staying put' arrangement will form an important part of the support package. The pathway planning process should review the arrangement on an ongoing basis and progress should be recorded as part of that process.



## Attending University and other settings away from home

Local authorities should consider how they would support a young person in a ‘staying put’ arrangement, who wishes to pursue a higher education course at a university which may be in the area or outside the area of the ‘staying put’ arrangement. Living away from the former foster carer’s home for temporary periods such as such as attending higher education courses should not preclude a ‘staying put’ arrangement.

Local authorities should also consider supporting a young person in a ‘staying put’ arrangement if they are living away from home. Such circumstances might include a residential further education institution; undertaking induction training for the armed services or other training or employment programmes that require a young person to live away from home.

All too often young people are forced to sever relationships with their former foster carers when choosing a university course or other type of education/training that often means that they have no option but to move to another part of the country. By financially supporting such arrangements, the local authority is enabling the continuation of a familial relationship which gives the young person the security and stability they require whilst they are focussing on their education.

## Supporting disabled young people to transition to adult services

Disabled young people will face many of the same experiences and challenges as other care leavers. However, the transition to adulthood for disabled young people who are looked after may be particularly challenging. They will often experience different professional languages, styles, expectations and cultures as they make the transition from support by children’s services to support from adult health and social care services. Disabled young people also have needs relating to their health, social care and education, and these may vary widely depending on the nature of their conditions.

Local authorities may provide community care services to individual adults with needs arising from physical, sensory, learning or cognitive disabilities and impairments, or from mental health difficulties. Increasingly, support is self- directed and delivered through personal budgets, following the quiz and person-centred support planning. Young people moving into adulthood and the people close to them need high quality, accessible information about personalisation from the age of 14 so that their planning can be within the context of knowing the resources that will be available for their support.

Young people generally transfer from child to adult health services at 16, from child to adult social care services at 18, from school-based education to further education between 16 and 19, and to higher education from 18.

However, there may be exceptions to these general arrangements. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services usually provide services up to age 18, and young people with a statement of special educational needs may not transfer to support from adult social care services until the end of school year 13, at age 19.

Where it is likely that a care leaver will require continuing support from adult services, it will be good

practice for the child's social worker to make a formal referral as early as possible from age 16, so that eligibility for this support is established in time for their 18th birthday.

Where disabled young people meet the eligibility criteria for adult placement schemes, the possibility of their former foster carers becoming their adult placement carers should be considered, so that both the young person and foster carers transfer to an adult social care service.

Where it is likely that a young person leaving care will need services into adulthood, an adult services worker should contribute to pathway planning from age 16 onwards, and the change of lead worker from one service to the other should be determined within the planning process taking account of the young person's wishes and assessed needs.

Where disabled and vulnerable care leavers transfer to, and become the responsibility of, Adult Care Services, local authorities' leaving care teams and PAs should ensure that young people do not lose out on any leaving care entitlements.

Care leavers should not be disadvantaged financially by transferring to a different service. Pathway plans and transition plans should be used to evidence young people's financial abilities and to provide a financial framework that sets out the allowances and benefits young people are entitled to, and who will assist them to manage these allowances and benefits.

## Moving on and staying in touch

The local authority will want to ensure that the end of a 'staying put' arrangement is not another 'cliff edge' for the young person but a gradual transition to independent living.

No young person under 18 should have to leave care before they feel ready to do so. When they do leave the foster home for greater independence, it will usually be appropriate for the foster carer to remain in contact with the young person for a period of time and to offer appropriate support, as would a good parent. This will help the young person to feel valued and avoid feeling isolated.

## Additional reading (optional)

Become charity offers free coaching to care-experienced young people aged 16-27. They also arrange virtual link-ups for care-experienced people aged 18 or older.  Become also hosts a 'care advice line' for children in care and care experienced adults.

Care Leaver Offer website compares the support offered to care leavers by the local authorities.

Care Leaver Covenant is a national inclusion programme that supports care leavers aged 16-25 to live independently.

Care Leavers: Young people say they feel 'isolated and deserted' after support stopped. Article with clips on itvX.

Citizens Advice

Helping your teen prepare for adulthood – A video produced by Family Lives

How can I help my child cope with change? An article by Action for Children.

'How the many small differences in looked-after children's lives shape the inequalities they face as adults' – A care experienced former social worker describes a 'Sliding Doors' effect that separates children in care from their peers and leaves them unsupported in adulthood.

Junior individual savings accounts for looked-after children. Statutory guidance on Junior ISAs for children and young people who have been in local authority care for 12 months or more.

Making chores fun – A few ideas to motivate children to do their chores.

Money Heroes – Money Heroes is an award-winning FREE Financial Education programme from Young Enterprise, designed for teachers, parents and anyone working with children aged 3-11

Princes Trust – Support for young people aged 16 to 30.

Propel (by Become) is a guide to higher and further education for care leavers.

Shared Lives: Helping people with support needs make the transition from children to adult care (a presentation by Social Work England)

Spark Foundation (funding for young adults with care experience) – The Spark Foundation, a charity for young people in care and care leavers, offers so they can have the same chances as everyone else.

Stepladder Plus – The Stepladder of Achievement programme provides both life skills and financial resources in order to enhance the capability and prospects of children and young people in care, who are likely to have experienced an unpredictable education.

Talking to children about money – Advice from Action for Children

This is us – Scholarships for university accommodation.

Young Enterprise Money Resources – Tools to help you speak with children about money

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