



Working Alongside Care Leavers

Introduction

When a child is in care, or is a care leaver aged under 25, the local council is their 'corporate parent'. This means that they should act towards these children and young people as any good parent would to their own child. And just as other parents continue to love, support, care for and be ambitious for their children after they turn 18, so too must the state.

Care leavers often lack their own family support networks, and have to deal with managing bills, getting a first job and moving into their own home without the safety net of family to fall back on if things get too much.

Councils have a range of specific legal duties towards care leavers, such as providing personal advisors and 'pathway' plans. This information pack will explain what these are.

Reference: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2020/10/29/10-asks-for-care-leavers/>

Introduction

Unfortunately, many care leavers find it difficult to access the ongoing support they need, and despite legislation being introduced to protect their rights for support, many are forced to be independent much younger than their peers; in England 21% leave care as young as 16, 16% leave care at 17 and 62% leave care at 18.

When a Looked After Child is 15, planning should start for what will happen after they reach 16. A young person doesn't have to leave care when they are 16: they can stay until they are 18, unless they feel ready to be more independent.

If they are in foster care, they can also request a 'Staying Put Arrangement' which means they remain in their foster home until after they turn 18.

Introduction

All care leavers have a right to a needs assessment before they leave care. Importantly this should include the views and wishes of the young person as well as considering their independent living skills and ability to manage finances. The aim of the needs assessment is to ensure that the young person leaves at a time that is right for them.

The LA should start the process of creating an individual Pathway Plan sometime between the young person's 15th and 16th birthday. Working from the outcome of the needs assessment, this should make clear what help the young person will get when they are preparing to leave care and what support they will receive after they have left. The Pathway Plan should address all areas of a young person's life including accommodation, educational achievements, training, finances or getting a job

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 introduced new requirements on local authorities to plan for looked after children so that they have the support they need as they make their transition to the responsibilities of adulthood and “to improve the life chances of young people living in, and leaving care”

The main aims of the Act are:

- To delay leaving care until young people are prepared for adulthood and ready to leave.
- To improve the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care
- To provide better personal support for young people after leaving care, and:
- To improve financial arrangements for care leavers.

Local offer

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires that English local authorities publish a 'local offer' for care leavers, informing care leavers about services they provide under the Children Act 1989 and other offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for adulthood and independent living. This includes services related to:

- health and wellbeing
- participation
- accommodation
- relationships
- education and training
- employment

As advocates, find out what the local offer is in your area.

Pathway Plan

At 15, the local authority will start to create a Pathway Plan, which includes details on how the local authority will provide assistance with accommodation, higher education, spending money, and finding employment.

It must also reflect the young person's wishes and desires.

A personal adviser ensures that the Pathway Plan is followed, reviewed at least once every six months, and updated regularly.

Advocates are often asked to help care leavers to participate in creating the pathway plan and accessing services which are identified in the plan. Advocates also find themselves supporting young people when things go wrong and they want support to make changes

Staying Put

Staying put is about care leavers **continuing to live with their foster carers** when they reach the age of 18. An eligible child is someone who:

- is looked after by a local authority;
- is aged 16 or 17, and
- has been looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14.

It is a term meaning that they are eligible for support as a care leaver, and does not refer specifically to staying put support. Once they become 18 an eligible child is known in law as a 'former relevant child'. Whenever a young person continues to live with their former foster carer in these circumstances, it is referred to as a staying put arrangement.

Staying put arrangements continue until the young person becomes 21, or stops living in the household before then.

Advocacy and Care Leavers

Advocates will support care leavers on a number of issues including:

- accessing support through the Pathway Plan. This might include asking for a review of the Pathway Plan or changing things. Sometimes things do not go to plan (with young people's circumstances or their goals changing) and the young person needs different support to live independently
- housing. Accessing suitable accommodation is a big area for support.
- education - including support to go to University and help outside of term time
- living independently. for instance help with budgeting, setting up utilities, accessing and claiming benefits, paying bills and general day to day skills in running a home
- work and employment.

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