

Staffordshire's local offer for Care Leavers



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Introduction

This document sets out the support and services our looked after children can expect as they leave our care. It is live and will be changed and improved using feedback from the young people that access it.

We have worked with care leavers to produce this offer, to ensure the support and services we offer are right for them, and that their thoughts, wishes and needs have been understood and included.

As Corporate Parents we have an important role, to ensure that our looked after children have the same opportunities and aspirations when they leave our care, as other young people. We will continue to develop this offer, so that our care leavers are both prepared and supported to lead happy, healthy and fulfilling lives.

Bryan Jones, County Councillor for Hednesford & Rawsley and Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

What is the Local Offer?

The support and services we offer you as a young person leaving care have been set out in this document. This is called the Local Offer.

The Local Offer is for care leavers up to the age of 25, to help you get ready to live independently in the right housing and employment so that you are well prepared for adult life.

Moving out to live on your own or with friends is a huge step; it will be exciting and challenging at the same time. The local offer will help us make sure you feel safe and supported and know where to go and who to ask for help when you need it.

Just like any good parent, we're still here for you, to help you learn the skills, and get the support you need to be healthy, happy and achieve your goals as you become independent.

The Local Offer covers five areas of life you might need support with:

1. Accommodation and Housing
2. Finances
3. Education, Training and Employment
4. Health and Wellbeing
5. Relationships and Participation in Society

Your Personal Adviser can help you understand and get the most out of the Local Offer.

Am I Eligible?

The law, The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which governs what we must do to support young people who are leaving care can be complicated to understand. Your legal entitlements depend on what type of care leaver you are, and this changes with your age. But in basic terms, if you answer yes to either of the following questions then you can get the support outlined in this document:

- Have you been in care for at least 13 weeks up to and including your 16th birthday?
- Have you been in care for at least 13 weeks after your 16th birthday?

However, this is a very complex area, so we do encourage you to speak to your Personal Adviser (PA) if you have any queries.

Our Role

Staffordshire County Council is your 'Corporate Parent', which means as you grow towards adulthood we will help you get ready for living on your own and supporting yourself.

We are committed "To ensure that looked after children and young people are prepared for independence".

What we'll do (our Corporate Parenting Principles)

- Act in your best interests and promote your health and wellbeing
- Encourage you to express your views, wishes and feelings
- Consider your views, wishes and feelings
- Help you access and make the best use of services provided by Staffordshire County Council and our partners
- Encourage you to aim high and achieve your goals including, to be safe, and have stability in your home life, relationships and work
- Prepare you for adulthood and independent living

Our Independence Programme

Our Care Leavers have told us that they don't always feel prepared for leaving care and becoming independent. In Staffordshire we want to change that, and so we're working on a training package for you called 'The Independence Programme'

It's a series of modules to help you prepare for independence and renting your home. The programme is accredited, which shows housing providers that if you have completed the programme you are ready to rent a home.

The Role of Your Personal Adviser

Your PA will help you get ready to live independently and offer advice and support after you leave care.

You can now get support from your PA up to the age of 25.

If possible, you will keep the same PA, and the amount of support you get from them will depend on what you want and your circumstances. They will talk to you about what support you need and record this information in your pathway plan.

What is a Pathway Plan?

Your pathway plan is written by us, with input from you and the important people in your life. It sets out what you need, your views, your future goals, and exactly what support you will get from us. Together, we will look at your pathway plan regularly and keep it up-to-date.

Extra Support

You and your leaving care team will look at any extra support you need. You might 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.

Accommodation and Housing

Your PA will help you find somewhere to live when you turn 18. This could be:

- Staying with your foster carers
- Supported lodgings (similar to foster care where you stay with a family, in their own home, they help you learn the skills you need to live alone, from cooking and budgeting to helping you apply for jobs)
- Supported Accommodation (such as foyers, self-contained flats and shared houses hostel type accommodation)
- Private rented accommodation (this could be taking on the tenancy at your supported accommodation placement)
- Social housing (sometimes called Council housing, which is provided by government agencies or non-profit organisations on their behalf).

Your PA will support you to get set up in your new home, and depending on your circumstances could help with bills, benefits or furniture.

Social housing in Staffordshire

If you decide to live in social housing, your Personal Adviser will help you with this. There are 8 different district or borough housing authorities you can apply to live in:

- Stafford
- Cannock
- East Staffordshire
- Newcastle
- Lichfield
- South Staffordshire
- Staffordshire Moorlands
- Tamworth

Our care leavers said...

“Help me make the right accommodation choices, manage my money effectively and learn how to take practical steps to live independently”

You might want to apply to the area you were born in or a place where you have built up links. Each district or borough has a different offer. We are working with them because we want you to get the same support and options wherever in Staffordshire you want to live.

Dependant on area, you could receive support in your tenancy from your new landlord. We are working to allow future care leavers to move into a tenancy before they're 18.

When you are in your new home your PA will help/support you to get set up, this could be help with bills, benefits, furniture etc. and will depend on your circumstances.

Staffordshire's Independence Programme will also help provide you with the practical tools needed to live successfully on your own.

Young People who are 18+ and at risk of homelessness

If at any time you are in risk of losing your home, you will be supported by your PA to work with your local district/borough council. The district/borough will;

- Assess your needs and create a personalised housing plan, this will consider any support needs you may have. You will follow steps laid out in the personalised housing plan.
- You would be expected to attend all appointments and access and actively engage with any support that could be available.
- In most cases you will be provided with temporary accommodation, this may not be in an area of your choice.
- Depending on the reason of your potential homelessness you will be in a priority need up to the age of 21.
- Once you are 21 or over you may have an assessment from the district/borough to assess if you are in priority need. This could be that you are in care.

As a care leaver you will have a local connection to every district and borough in Staffordshire up to the age of 21. If you live outside of Staffordshire you will have local connection to the area you now live in if you have lived there for more than 2 years including sometime before your 16th birthday. You should have a local connection to that area if you established links there, such as working in that area. The housing authority will then support you to find suitable accommodation.

If you do not agree with the decision made regarding your housing situation you can request a review with the Housing Provider, this will need to be done in writing within 21 days of the initial decision.

Additional Information for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

If you are unable to claim benefits because you are in an 'excluded group' due to your immigration status, help available might differ to those not classed as an excluded group.

If you are unable to claim social housing because you are waiting for your decision from the Home Office and therefore have no recourse to public funds, we will provide you with accommodation until the Home Office decide on your claim.

If you are not a 'qualifying person' in order to claim benefits we will support you to become a 'qualifying person' or to seek immigration advice where you need to.

Finances

Financial support is different for everyone depending on what you need. Your Personal Adviser will talk through this with you on an individual basis, using the Care Leavers financial regulations.

The financial regulations are currently under review to make sure that they offer everyone what they need, and so our financial offer may change in the future.

We're piloting Pre-Payment Cards as a more flexible way of supporting you financially. This will be particularly helpful if you're unable to open a bank account.

We will try to help you financially, including:

- We will give you a leaving care grant of up to £2,000, to help you buy essential things when moving into your own home.
- We will pay your council tax up to the age of 21, once all relevant benefits are considered.
- We will provide or tell you about relevant money management courses.
- We will support you to access your Junior ISA or Child Trust Fund.
- We will support you to open a bank account.
- We will support you to get your important identification documents, such as a passport and/or provisional driving licence, before your 18th birthday.
- We will support to get your National Insurance number.
- We will offer exceptional financial support in emergencies.
- We will give you a financial gift at birthdays and Christmas or other celebrations.

Claiming Universal Credit

We work in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), to support you to plan and claim Universal Credit. Your PA will work with you to prepare your universal credit claim and support you to attend an interview with an identified DWP representative. There is a 5-week delay in receiving the first payment, but we will support you to access the government loan, which will be received from your 18th birthday onwards.

Additional Information for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

If you are an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child in the care of the Local Authority you will be supported to make your claim for asylum and to access an immigration solicitor who is able to claim legal aid to support you with your claim. Your carer or

allocated worker will help you to attend your appointments with the Home Office and your solicitor and will attend with you if you would like them to.

Education, Training and Employment

We want you to have the support you need to achieve your goals in life.

The law says we must provide you with expenses linked with employment, education and training. In particular:

- We will give you a Higher Education (HE) bursary of at least £2,000 if you go to University, for every year of the course.
- 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 full time HE or full time residential further education and your term time accommodation is not available.

Our Care Leavers said:

“Help me to understand my options for Education, Training and Employment, support me to make the best choice for me and give me practical and financial help to secure employment and achieve in life”

Virtual School

We will offer you support and advice from the Virtual School until you finish your post 16 education at College or Sixth Form.

We will offer you a Mentor to help you plan your next steps in education and training.

We will support you to go into higher education by offering you the opportunity from Year 7 to take part in A2U (Aspire to University) and when you are at university we can offer advice and links to work experience opportunities.

Entrust

Entrust offers a Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) Service to support Throughcare Social Worker/PA responsibilities. Careers Advisers can offer expert, independent and impartial advice and guidance tailored to the needs of individual young people to help them reach their full potential and make the right decisions about their futures. This includes:

- A careers interview with an action plan in Year 10
- A careers interview with an action plan in Year 11
- Attendance at a Year 11 Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting to identify progression needs, or provide a current careers action plan
- Support to help 16 and 17-year olds secure an offer of education or training in the local authority area, including help with transition. The offer can include:
 - full-time education in school sixth-forms or colleges
 - an apprenticeship or traineeship
 - employment combined with part-time education or training
- Attendance at an initial Post 16 PEP meeting thereafter
- Careers guidance for 16 to 21 years not in education, employment or training, and up to age 25 for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. For over 18's this will need to be requested by Throughcare
- A guidance interview with young people who meet the required criteria and are wanting to return to learning post 21 years of age, as requested by Throughcare

Foundations to Employment

The Foundations to Employment project offer a work placement to young people who are leaving or have left care and are not employed or in education/training when they start their placement.

Benefits of the Foundations to Employment:

- A positive experience of the real work environment
- Increased skills, knowledge and self-confidence
- The learning of disciplines, routines and relationships in the workplace
- Increased levels of motivation

Open Door Staffordshire

Open Door Staffordshire is an employability programme managed through Staffordshire County Council within the Skills and Employability Team.

The purpose of the programme is to support job seekers over the age of 18 throughout Staffordshire.

We offer 12 weeks' structured work experience usually in the area that the candidate is looking for paid employment. Therefore, during the placement the candidate is gaining relevant and up to date skills and experience to add to their CV and increase employability.

Find out more at: www.staffordshire.gov.uk/community/Volunteer/Open-Door/Open-Door

Care Leaver Covenant

The Care Leaver Covenant is a new Initiative from the government aimed at improving opportunities for care leavers in employment and training. Staffordshire is one of the pilot authorities who will working with this project to provide more areas for young people to obtain employment.

Additional Information for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Our UASC Care Leavers said

"Help to support me through the complex legal processes around the right to remain in the UK and the education, training and employment opportunities available to me whilst these decisions are being made"

If you wish to attend university there are some circumstances, such as not being a British Citizen, where you may be classed as an overseas student by the student loans company and therefore unable to get a student loan. If you wish to attend university, you should discuss this with your allocated worker so that we can help you to work out what you are entitled to and how we can help as this can get quite complicated depending on your situation.

Health and Wellbeing

In partnership with Health colleagues, we will support and encourage you to be healthy and provide the help you need to achieve this. We will:

- Provide a health passport prior to your 18th birthday, which is a summary of your health information and history.
- Offer you access to sexual health services.
- Help you to register with health services, including GP, dentist and opticians when you move home.
- Help you to manage your emotional well-being with signposting to other agencies.
- If you have significant additional needs, then we can support you to engage with our in-house Adult Services for an assessment of needs beyond 18.
- Helping you to attend hospital or doctors' appointments.
- Offer you support from a Healthy Lifestyle Adviser for health improvement advice (healthy eating, being more active, drinking less and quitting smoking).
- Provide a drop-in service for care leavers.
- Offer a mentoring scheme, focusing on specific areas to support your well-being

Our care leavers said

“Help me to understand how to access physical and mental health support in my local area, who to contact in an emergency; and how to stay fit and healthy”

Breathing Space

Breathing Space Intensive Support will be offered to young people that are currently in care and pregnant with their first child; or young people that are care leavers, who are pregnant with their first child and in need of support to help them to access parenting support, advice and guidance to be able to meet their baby's needs.

One to one support will focus on the practical elements of parenting, the emotional needs of a baby, as well as supporting young parents to access community activities and groups to help them and their baby to develop their confidence and skills.

Your Emotional Health

Currently, with our partner Sustain+, we provide emotional and psychological support to looked after children and care leavers up to the age of 25. This support is in place until April 2019 and is currently being re-commissioned. Continuing to provide support to care leavers will be an integral part of the new Service.

Your PA will be able to help you to find suitable services from community groups in your local area for mental and emotional health and support

Relationships and Participation in Society

As well as support from a PA, we may be able to offer you additional practical and emotional support, such as:

- A mentoring scheme in place for young people up to the age of 18, and we are working to extend this up to the age of 21.
- Help to maintain or regain contact with people special to you or who cared for you in the past, such as former foster carers, Independent Visitors or social workers.
- Providing you with financial support to help you to re-connect and maintain relationships with your family.

We want our care leavers to be active members of society, and to have all the chances in life that other young adults have. 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.
- Offering work experience via our links.
- Informing you about voluntary work that we think you may be interested in.
- We will support you to stay healthy and fit, through financial support for leisure and gym memberships up to the cost of £30 per month.
- Giving you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver.

Our care leavers said

“Help me to stay in contact with my family network, to socialise and take part in local clubs and activities and provide support to help me to understand what makes a safe and healthy relationship.”

Our UASC care leavers said

“Help me to understand and overcome cultural and language differences so I can be a part of the local community”

We are piloting a project in one of the districts to have a nominated Care Leaver worker who will be able to signpost Care Leavers to appropriate services in that district. If this is successful it is planned to roll this out to all 8 districts in Staffordshire.

Facebook Page

We have recently created a Facebook page for Staffordshire Care Leavers to join if you want to share your experiences and help shape future services. This means that even if you have moved out of Staffordshire or transport is difficult for you, you can still get involved.

Simply search 'Carlee Vera' on Facebook and request to join if you are interested and would like to have your say.

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 want to challenge 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. Your PA can help you to access these.

The Voice Project

We offer Care Leavers up to 25 the opportunity to share their voices and experiences of being Looked After and a Care Leaver as well as the chance to help shape future services. Speak with your PA if this is something you would be interested getting involved with.

Other Help and Support

Accommodation and Housing

Staffordshire: www.staffordshire.gov.uk/community/Housing.aspx

Stafford: www.staffordbc.gov.uk/housing

Newcastle under Lyme: www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/all-services/housing or <https://nhaoptions.co.uk>

Staffordshire Moorlands: www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/article/490/Housing

East Staffs: www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/housing-and-property

Cannock: www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/residents/housing

Lichfield: www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/Residents/Housing/Housing.aspx

Tamworth: www.tamworth.gov.uk/housing

South Staffs: www.sstaffs.gov.uk/housing/index.cfm

Shelter https://england.shelter.org.uk/get_help

Finances

Your local CAB: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-we-provide-advice/advice/search-for-your-local-citizens-advice

The Capstone Care Leavers Trust (CCLT) awards grants to people aged 17-25 years who have been in Local Authority Care in England or Wales and are in need: www.capstonecareleaverstrust.org

Talisman Charitable Trust provide poverty relief grants for education, health, housing, disablement or disability: www.talismancharity.org

The Money Advice Service provide free and impartial money advice, set up by government: www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

The Trussell Trust develop, run, and enable community projects that combat poverty & exclusion including provision of food banks across the County: www.trusselltrust.org

House of bread Food Bank: <https://localgiving.org/charity/hob/project/food-bank/>

Warm Home Discount Scheme: www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme

Central Government's Benefits Webpage: www.gov.uk/browse/benefits

Education, Training and Employment

National Careers Service: <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/>

Adult and Community Learning for aged 19+:
www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/adultcommunity/home

Learning Options: www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/Learning-options-and-careers/Learning-Options-and-Careers

Central Government's Apprenticeship Webpage: www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship

UCAS supporting care leavers toolkit, providing information and advice to help support care leavers who are applying to higher education:
www.ucas.com/advisers/toolkits/supporting-care-leavers-toolkit

Nova Training, Training Provider: www.novatrainng.co.uk/about-us

PM Training, Training Provider: www.pmtraining.org.uk

Health and Wellbeing

SAVANA charity based in North Staffordshire who provide support for anyone who has experienced or is affected by any form of sexual violence: www.savana.org.uk

Arch works in North Staffordshire and surrounding areas supporting and tackling domestic abuse, helping to end homelessness and promoting social inclusion:
www.archnorthstaffs.org.uk

Brighter Futures provide a range of services for those whose emotional, physical, social or financial situation leaves them excluded and in need of support:
www.brighter-futures.org.uk/support-services

PAPYRUS is the national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide:
papyrus-uk.org/help-advice

Young Minds are a national charity supporting young people with mental health support to enable them to have the resilience to overcome life's difficulties:
www.youngminds.org.uk

Changes YP is a peer support service promoting the recovery of young people in mental distress throughout Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire:

www.changesyp.org.uk

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) self-help page, which has been proven to help mental health problems: www.getselfhelp.co.uk/index

Relationships and Participation in Society

National Youth Advocacy Service (commissioned to ensure your voice is heard when decisions are being made): www.nyas.net/contact-us

Coram Voice enables and equips children and young people to hold to account the services that are responsible for their care: <https://coramvoice.org.uk/professional-zone/about-us>

National Citizen Service (NCS) aims to develop a more cohesive, engaged and responsible society, and participants will improve their communication skills and develop as leaders: www.catch-22.org.uk/services/staffordshire-ncs

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Disclaimer

Important: In some situations, we may have to stop the support you receive from us due to your immigration status. If you have been refused leave to remain in the UK, and have no further right to appeal that decision, we will complete a Human Rights Assessment with you. We must do this because immigration laws tell us that we cannot continue to support people who do not have any leave to remain in the UK, unless ending our support would breach their Human Rights. A Human Rights Assessment being completed may mean that we can continue to support you, find different ways to help you with your immigration status or that we stop supporting you with accommodation and money and help you to return to your country of origin.