

Guide to Leaving care





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Introduction

To some young people the words 'leaving care' are very exciting and to others they are very scary. Whether it's exciting, scary or a bit of both, here are the facts. So that you know - what being a 'care leaver' actually means, what your entitlements are, what help you can get and who is there to help you.



Who are care leavers? Legal definitions.

● Your right to support as a care leaver will depend on when and how long you were in care. The words you need to look out for are 'Eligible', 'Relevant' and 'Former Relevant' which come from The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

'Eligible'

...young people are those young people still in care aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14.

'Relevant'

...young people aged 16 or 17 who have already left care, and who were looked after for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14, and have been looked after at some time while 16 or 17.

'Former Relevant'

...young people aged 18-21 who have been either eligible or relevant children, or both. If at the age of 21 the young person is still being helped by the responsible authority with education or training, he or she remains a former relevant child until the end of the agreed programme of education or training even if that takes him or her past the age of 21.

'Qualifying'

...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 settings, was privately fostered, or was on a Special Guardianship Order after the age of 16. This includes: young people who left care after October 2001, at or after the age of 16, but do not qualify as eligible children or young people.





Some questions

Question: So, I'm leaving care - what are my entitlements?

Answer: If you are an 'Eligible', 'Relevant' or 'Former Relevant' young person.

- **Involvement in decisions** - you are a young adult, those supporting you need to ensure you are fully involved in the decisions that are being made about YOUR future! If this is not happening tell your PA!
- **A Pathway Plan:**
Part 1 - An Assessment of your needs - which should be completed by your social worker with your full involvement. You are entitled to a copy.
A Pathway Plan: Part 2 - A Pathway Plan - this spells out what children's services are going to provide you with and how they are going to do it - it's your plan so you need to be at the centre of it and your views clearly represented! This is reviewed and updated with you, every six months. You will get a copy of the review minutes and a copy of your new plan each time it is reviewed.
- **A Personal Advisor.** You will meet your PA about 6 months before your 16th birthday. They do not replace your social worker (SW); you still have a social worker until you are 18. Your PA is there to act as your 'advocate'. An advocate is someone who makes sure your views get heard and speaks up for you if you want them to. This is to make sure you that you are happy with your pathway plan. They need make contact with you at least every eight weeks – unless you clearly tell them not to. You can ask for help up to age 21 and help with returning to education or training up to your 25th birthday.
- **Accommodation** - Cumbria's Care Leavers Forum (August 2014) highlighted 'Accommodation' as the most important issue for care leavers so there is more advice in this booklet about your options and who to contact if you have a problem.



- **Financial support**- this is available for lots of different things. This varies from the financial help you will get if you decide to go to university, to money you will need to get you up and running in your own home (which might be a few years yet!).
- **Contact with your family** - if that's what you want and it is safe for you to do so.
- **To have your voice heard if you are not happy about something**, you can complain to Children's Services - email childrens.complaints@cumbria.gov.uk, phone **01228221161**, text **07768553869**. You can request an independent advice or even an advocate from NYAS. NYAS is a UK charity providing specialist legal advice and assistance to young people. Have a look at their website nyas.net, or **0808 808 1001** or help@nyas.net
- **See your files** - when you are 18 you can ask to see your Children's services files. They will be edited so you will only get to see the bits about you, even so, this can be a very emotional, upsetting and difficult process and you are advised not to go it alone.

Important advice from a care leavers forum member:

'...my PA read mine first, with my permission, so she was able to assist me with anything shocking'. Ask someone you trust to support you with it. For further information about accessing your files ring Nathan Fisher on **01228 221563**.

- **Advice and information about community support and services** available for you beyond your time in care - see the 'Who can Help?' section further on.





More questions and answers

● Question: What happens when I get to 16?

● Answer: You are now officially an adult, are no longer 'in care' and you don't have a social worker. You are still entitled to support from your PA and your leaving care team. Also, all of the entitlements you had at 16 as listed above still remain.

● Question: How long do I get support from Children's Services?

● Answer: Your PA will offer advice and support until you are 21, and arrange to see you at least every eight weeks.

● Question: What happens if I am still in education post 21?

● Answer: Your PA continues to offer you advice and support and you continue to have a pathway plan which is regularly reviewed for as long as you are on an agreed programme of education (this doesn't just mean university.)

● Question: I am a 'Qualifying' young person, what am I entitled to?

● Answer: It means you are not entitled to a nominated PA or a Pathway Plan but you are entitled to advice or support from the Leaving Care team, so if there are things that you want or need help with, eg if you are returning to learning, or need other help then come and ask, if we cannot help we may be able to point you in the right direction.

● Question: What if I leave care at 21 but later decide I want to return to training or education?

● Answer: right up until your 25th birthday you can return to Children's Services, advise them of your wishes and ask for them to re-assess your needs – they have a duty to do this, they must tell you what they have decided and why they have made those decisions. If you are not happy with what you are told, you can go to NYAS and ask them for advice.

● Question: What if I am a care leaver but not from Cumbria?

● Answer: we will help you contact the Local Authority who is responsible for you.



Accommodation: who can help?

● This is the area the Care Leavers Forum (August 2014) identified as the most important to get right. Research conducted in 2012 called 'Learning Independence and After care' found that young people leaving care find issues like loneliness, budgeting and managing a house really hard and that help is needed if you are going to make a success of it.

Your SW and PA and others supporting you such as your foster parent, key worker, or mentor will be helping you develop the skills. In fact it is our job to slow down the leaving care process until you are prepared for living independently. At 16 many young people want to remain in their residential unit or foster placement until they are 18 and most young people in Cumbria are strongly encouraged to do this. For young people in foster care there is now the option to remain there (if it's what you and your carers and PA think is a good plan) until you are 21 or even beyond if you are in an approved course of training or education under Cumbria's 'Staying Put' scheme. For more info speak to your SW and PA.

If you are in residential you won't currently be able to remain in your residential unit beyond 18 but you may be interested in Cumbria's 'Homestays' scheme which means you would have your own room in an approved home - speak to your PA and SW for more information or contact the Homestays and Staying Put coordinator - Gaby Sanderson tel: **01228 227079** or **07909928278**

You cannot hold your own tenancy until you are 18 ie have a flat or house of your own in your own right and in your own name. However there are other options, which offer different levels of support, including, Staying put and Homestays, foyers or supported housing where you have your own room and cook and budget for yourself with the help of a support worker. Even when you do get your own place it can help to have a housing support worker in the early stages.

Important advice: Keep asking about your options and talking to your PA and SW and ask for advice from NYAS if you are not happy with the answers!

If you are over 18 and think you are in danger of becoming homeless, talk to your PA. You can also contact your local Housing Department:

- Carlisle: **01228 817079** or out of hours **01228 511061**
- Barrow: **01229 876332/876507** or out of hours **01229 833311**
- Allerdale: **01900 871080** or out of hours **01900 702570**
- South Lakeland and Kendal: **01539 793199** or out of hours **0870 4286905**

'You think you are ready, but you aren't because you have no experience.'
(Care Leavers Forum member August 2014)



(Accommodation continued)

If you are under 18 and worried about the security of where you are living, talk to your social worker or your PA.

Shelter, offer specialist advice about housing. Their advice line is **0808 8004444**, they can help with advice about rent arrears, threats of eviction, tenants' rights etc.



Education: who can help?

● If you stay on in education and you are aged 16-19 you are entitled to £1,200 bursary and a designated teacher in school to support your education. You should be aware of who that is and how they should help you.

If you are going to university you are entitled to bursary of £2000 (it is up to the county council how they choose to pay you this money - it's likely you will receive a proportion of it for each year of your course) in addition to any loans, grants or other funding you may receive eg from Student Finance England. You will also be entitled to some financial support toward your accommodation, the exact amounts should be in your Pathway Plan along with any other help you are going to get so you know what to expect.



Health: who can help?

● Over and above any health issues which you contact your GP about, if you are under 18 you will have a 'health review' annually with the children looked after (CLA) nurse. The CLA nurse will talk to you about any specific health issues you may have and prepare a health plan with you. When you are coming up to 18, the CLA nurse will give your 'Health Passport.' This contains important information about what illnesses you had as a child, immunisations you've had and any health issues you may have. This is important information for your future health care.

Giving Up Smoking?

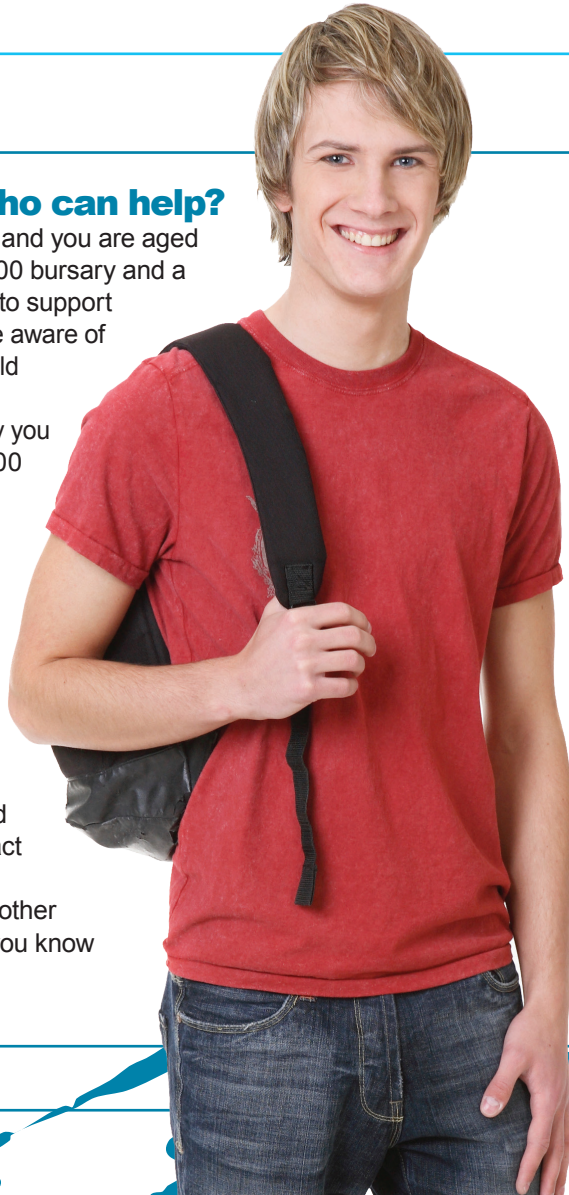
Go to [nhs.uk/smokefree](https://www.nhs.uk/smokefree)



Benefits: who can help?

● For general information on what benefits you may be entitled to at whatever age you are you can go to [gov.uk/benefits-calculators](https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators)

If you are coming up to 18 and you are going to need welfare benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance or Income Support or Universal Credit, your PA can help you to put in an 'advanced claim' so that your benefits will be up and running for you by your 18th birthday, ask your PA for details.





General advice and information: who can help?

What if you need help and advice beyond your time in care?

These are some of the agencies you can turn to during and beyond your time in care.

Citizens Advice Bureau

they can tell you about specialist resources in your area that are not on this list, they also offer specialist debt counselling.

Barrow: **01229 83171 - barrowcitizensadvice.org.uk**

South Lakeland: **01539 446464 - cumbriaruralcab.org.uk**

Carlisle: **01228 633900 - Carlislecab.org.uk**

Workington: **01900 604735 - allerdalecab.org.uk**

There are also lots of local branches, to check if there is one nearer to you, you can go to **citizensadvice.org.uk**

Care Leavers Association

Each person from care is unique and has a different experience of life in care. They also go on to lead all kinds of varied lives. The Care Leavers' Association (CLA) recognises that diversity and strives to change negative public perceptions and stereotypes of care leavers. Membership of the Care Leavers' Association is free and open to anyone, over the age of 18, who has spent time in care as a child. **careleavers.com**



Mental Health: who can help?

The **Samaritans** are available 24 hours a day to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress, despair or suicidal thoughts. Ring **08457999090** or email **jo@samaritans.org**

Counselling, do you feel scared or Panicky in certain situations? Or think you might want to talk to someone to work stuff out? Go to your GP they can make a referral for you for counselling locally to agencies such as 'First Step' or 'Safety Net'.

If you think you need emergency help NOW, go to your local Hospital Accident and Emergency department.

If you want advice about any aspect of yours or someone else's mental health you can contact:

- **MIND: 03001233393** or text **86463** or **mind.org.uk**
- **CAMHS: Children and Young People's Services** provide specialist and targeted services to promote the emotional and mental health and well being of children and young people in Cumbria, speak to your GP if you are under 18 but no longer in care, or SW or PA if you think they may be of help to you.

Tracing Family: who can help?

UK: Once you are over 18 you have the right to apply for your original birth certificate; however tracing birth family can be a very complicated and emotional journey which we wouldn't recommend you do without support. For help or advice speak to your PA or, contact your local Children's Services Adoption Support team:

- Adoption support Carlisle/Penrith: **01228 221528/221555** or **01768 812277**
- Adoption support Allerdale and Copeland: **01900 706430** or **706472** or **706473**
- Adoption Support South Cumbria: **01524 713312** or **713031**
Email: **adoption.support@cumbria.gov.uk**

Abroad: If you want to trace relatives in another country who you have lost contact with because of armed conflict, disaster or migration you can contact **The British Red Cross**, who run an international family tracing service.

For more information go to **redcross.org.uk**

Advice for Young Parents: who can help?

There are lots of local children's centres where you can go for help and advice on every aspect of child care, from baby gates to, colic and nappy rash, to mile stones, you name it - they can help! Also you will get to meet other young Parents, for the one nearest to you: go to **action for children.org.uk** or **nspcc.org.uk** or ask your PA, SW, midwife, health visitor or GP.

Some other useful places to get information for young Parents:

- National Childrens Bureau: **ncb.org.uk**
- NSPCC: **yourfamily.org.uk**
- Parentline: **parentlineplus.org.uk**

Sex and Relationships: who can help: who can help?

bbc.co.uk/radio/advice or call the BBC radio one advice line on **0800 110100** for any questions regarding sex, sexually transmitted diseases or relationships.

London Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Switchboard. They provide free, confidential advice, information and support to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities throughout the uk. Tel: **03003300630** every day 10am-11pm or go to **llgs.org.uk**

Drugs and Alcohol: who can help?

CADAS: Cumbria Drugs and Alcohol Services

http://cadas.co.uk

Carlisle: **01228 544140**

Workington: **01900 608498**

Barrow: **01229 811111**

Bullying and keeping safe on the internet: who can help?

Bullying UK, go to **bullying.co.uk**
08088002222

Rape, Sexual Violence and Domestic Violence: who can help?

Rape Crisis for women and girls affected by this issue, can go to **rapecrisis.org.uk** or phone **08088029999** daily 12-2.30pm and 7-9.30pm.

Survivors uk for men (over 18) effected by any form of sexual violence, can go to **survivorsuk.org** or phone **08451221201** - limited times.

Womens Aid for women affected by domestic violence - 24hour advice line on **08082000247** or go to **womensaid.org.uk**

Mens Advice Line for men affected by domestic violence: **08088010327** or go to: **info@mensadvice.org.uk**

Broken Rainbow for LGBT people affected by domestic violence: **08009995428** or go to **brokenrainbow.org.uk** or email **help@brokenrainbow.org**

Who to call if you have any concerns about a child: who can help?

Triage team: **03332401727**, or email **countytrriage.fax@cumbria.gov.uk**

Childline: **0800111**

NSPCC: **0808005000**

Children's Services Contact Numbers (for Social Workers)

● Carlisle and Eden: 5 Alfred Street North Carlisle CA1 1PX
01228 227025/226991

● Barrow: Craven House Michaelson Road Barrow LA14 1FD **01229 408000**

● Kendal: **01539 713562**

● Allerdale and Copeland: Blencathra House, Whitehaven Tangier Street, CA28 7UW
01946 505505

● Out of Hours: **03002401727**



Leaving Care Contact Numbers (for Personal Advisors)

- Carlisle and Eden:
5 Alfred Street North Carlisle CA1 1PX
01228 227025/226991
- Barrow and South Lakeland:
Craven House Michaelson Road Barrow LA14 1FD
01229 408000
- Allerdale and Copeland:
The Wedgwood Centre, 14 Hollins Close,
Whitehaven,
CA28 8EX
01946 595300
- Out of Hours: **03002401727**



! And finally...get involved!

The Care Leavers Forum are young people **just like you!** Want to get your views heard? Want to influence how things are for young people in care now and in the future in Cumbria? To join the Care Leavers Forum or find out more contact:

- Barrow and South Lakeland: Debbie Holt or Graham Bassett **01229407954** or **07825340551** email **graham.bassett@cumbria.gov.uk**
- Carlisle & Eden: Liz Wright **01228227471** or **07825340475** email **liz.wright@cumbria.gov.uk**
- Allerdale and Copeland: Rebecca Barnes **01900706289** or **07770938021** email **rebecca.barnes@cumbria.gov.uk**

Thanks to the Care Leavers Forum for their input and advice on the information for this guide.

Notes

If you require this document in another format (eg CD, audio cassette, Braille or large type) or in another language, please telephone

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如果您希望通过母语了解此信息, **01900 706375**
请致电

**Jeigu norétumėte gauti šią informaciją savo kalba,
skambinkite telefonu 01900 706375**

**W celu uzyskania informacji w Państwa języku proszę
zatelefonować pod numer 01900 706375**

**Se quiser aceder a esta informação na sua língua,
telefone para o 01900 706375**

**Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde görmek istiyorsanız lütfen
01900 706375 numaralı telefonu arayınız**