

Financial Support and Services



Information for Care Leavers in Northamptonshire



This booklet describes the support and financial help you should receive from Northamptonshire County Council to help you live independently if you are a Care Leaver, or if you are 16 or 17 years old and still in care.

The support you'll get will depend on how long you've been in care and how old you are, and may include help with housing, education and training.

Who can we help?

There are four categories of care leavers:

- Eligible Child
- Relevant Care Leaver
- Former Relevant Care Leaver
- Qualifying Care Leaver

You are an Eligible Child if:

- You are aged 16 or 17; and
- You are currently a child in care; and
- You have been in care for a period of 13 weeks (or periods amounting to 13 weeks) which began after you reached 14 years old, and must include at least 1 day whilst you were 16 or 17 years old.

You are a Relevant Care Leaver if:

- You are no longer being cared for by the Local Authority but you have been 'Eligible' and;
- You are 16 or 17 years old

You are a Former Relevant Care Leaver if:

- You are aged between 18 and 21, and before you reached 18 you were or had been a 'Relevant Care Leaver' or;
- Before you stopped being looked after you were an Eligible Child.

- At age 21, or before age 25 you continue to be in full time education and/or training. You will remain a Former Relevant Care Leaver until the end of the agreed programme.

You are a Qualifying Care Leaver if:

- You are aged at least 16 but under 21 and;
- You were a cared for young person prior to the making of a Special Guardianship Order which was in force when you reached 18 or;
- If at any time after you reached the age of 16, but while you were still a cared for child, you were no longer looked after, accommodated or;
- You were privately fostered and assessed to be in need
- As a Qualifying Care Leaver you are able to access advice and assistance based on a needs assessment carried out by the Leaving Care Team.

The type of help you can expect to receive

| | Eligible Child | Relevant Care Leaver | Former Relevant Care Leaver | Qualifying Care Leaver |
|---|----------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Needs Assessment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | If required |
| Pathway Plan (& review) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | If required |
| Personal Adviser | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Keep "in touch" | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ (as appropriate and if assisted with education / training) |
| Primary income/maintenance | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Provide/maintain in suitable accommodation* | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Financial support to maintain education, training or employment placement | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ (as appropriate and if assisted with education / training) |
| Vacation accommodation (in higher education or residential further education courses) | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Advice and assistance | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* required to safeguard and promote the child's welfare

Other Financial Entitlements - Care Leavers

| | |
|--|--|
| Driving Lessons | £100 contribution towards licence and test fee + cost of 10 driving lessons. |
| Birthdays (age 19 and 20) | £50 subject to remaining "in touch" and engaging in your pathway plan. |
| 18th Birthday | £100 |
| 21st Birthday | £100 subject to being "in touch" and having engaged in your pathway plan. |
| Christmas/Festivals | £50 If you are non Christian, you will be given the choice of when you will receive your allowance, and offered the opportunity to split your allowance between Christmas/Festival. Following an assessment of need the Christmas/Festival allowance can be paid directly or given to your Foster Carer/Key Worker/ Personal Adviser or Social Worker to purchase a gift or to contribute towards a celebration. This allowance will be subject to you remaining in contact with social care and actively engaging in your pathway planning. |
| Leaving Care Allowances | Up to £2000 to spend on essential items and cost of 1st year insurance. |
| Security | Up to £100 for locks/bolts etc. |
| Initial Food Stock | £40 – one off payment. |
| Smoke Alarm, Fire Blanket and Carbon Monoxide Alarms | Following assessment and consultation with Landlord. |
| First Aid box | £10 |
| TV Licence | Full cost – One off payment for first licence. |
| Payments for Consultation Work | £10 per hour + travel expenses. |
| Bursary | £2000 spread evenly across the length of the course. |

Preparing for Leaving Care

Needs assessment and pathway planning

Northamptonshire County Council has a responsibility to prepare you to leave care and this will start when you are nearly 16 years old (15 years and 9 months). You should expect to receive the same level of care and support as others would receive from a reasonable parent. Your Social Worker will arrange a meeting called a Pathway Planning Meeting where important discussions will take place about your future and the support you will need to become independent. You will be fully involved in this.

A Needs Assessment will be started and completed within three months of your 16th birthday. Your Social Worker should consider what advice, assistance and support is appropriate taking into account your:

- Health needs
- Education or training
- Need for accommodation and financial help
- Family relationships and the need to maintain these
- Race, religion and culture

You will be fully involved in discussions and plans for your future and completing the Needs Assessment.

The next step will be for you to help record your Pathway Plan. This is a plan about your future.

The purpose of the Pathway Planning Meeting is to:

- Agree an action plan of responsibilities for the Assessment of Need and Pathway Plan
- Prepare you for leaving care
- Identify a Personal Adviser for you

Your Pathway Plan will be reviewed:

- At six monthly intervals (if you are an Eligible Child this will take place alongside your Looked After Review)
- At your request, or that of your Personal Adviser
- If there are any significant changes in your circumstances including a change of placement
- Northamptonshire County Council must review the plan until you are 21 years old (or up to your 25th birthday if in education or training)



Preparing for Leaving Care and your Personal Adviser

As an Eligible Child, Relevant and Former Relevant Care Leaver, you will be allocated a Personal Adviser when you reach the age of 16 years. Your Personal Adviser will assist you to develop skills and put into place the things in your life that will enable you to live independently in your own accommodation when you are ready to do so and will coordinate the support that you will need to live in your own accommodation.

The support will begin when you are still in care and you will be encouraged to develop skills relating to such things as cooking, budgeting, cleaning and self-care skills. Your Personal Adviser will provide you with support and advice on a range of issues including:

- The development of independence skills
- Access to training and employment opportunities
- Finding and managing suitable accommodation
- Managing your finances and claiming benefits

Your Personal Adviser can also help you to access specialist support when you need it, including counselling and advice on issues such as drugs and alcohol and sexual health.

Post 18 and Accommodation

Once you have reached the age of 18 years you will no longer be in care. There will be a range of options available to you depending on how ready you are to live independently.

In some cases, especially where you have been living in a foster placement, it may be possible for you to remain in your care placement for a period of time after your 18th birthday in a Staying Put Arrangement including returning to this arrangement during vacation and holidays if attending university. This will be explained to you and information provided and discussed with you and your carer as part of your preparation for independence well before your 18th birthday.

Where you will live will depend on your needs and what support you need. It may be possible for you to live independently in a flat or house or in accommodation with other young people, totally independently with limited support from your Personal Adviser.

Many young people, however, in the early stages of leaving care, require additional support to live in their own tenancies and are provided with support staff who will visit on a regular basis or in supported accommodation where staff are based on the same site to offer support.

Information for you

In preparation for your Pathway Planning Meeting your Social worker (or Personal Adviser if identified before the meeting) will provide you with information and will talk you through the process and your rights as a care leaver.

You will also be provided with the Leaving Care Guide which has helpful guidance for you on:

- Education, training and work
- Money
- Housing
- Taking care of yourself
- The law

Financial entitlements

The type of financial help you receive from Northamptonshire County Council will depend on whether you are an Eligible Child, Relevant Care Leaver, Former Relevant Care Leaver or Qualifying Care Leaver.

Your Social Worker / Personal Adviser will provide you with a copy of the Guide to Financial Support and talk you through the kind of help you could receive. Your Personal Adviser will assist you to understand how Northamptonshire's allowances and benefits system works.

How payments will be made

If you are entitled to Maintenance and Accommodation Payments, your Social Worker / Personal Adviser will make arrangements as follows:

- Payment of maintenance will be made to a bank / building society account of your choice (no overdraft facility must be stipulated).
- Payment of rent will be to the Landlord directly whilst Northamptonshire County Council is responsible for providing you with a placement or accommodation as an Eligible Child or Relevant Care Leaver.



- Payments to your account will be made weekly in advance. The cash will be available for withdrawal on Tuesday of each week. An initial payment may be made from petty cash.
- A birthday payment will be made in the week before your birthday. This will be up to and including your 21st birthday and after your 18th birthday. This is subject to you keeping in touch and engaging in your Pathway Plan.
- A Christmas / festival payment will be made in early December or at a time suitable to your cultural needs.

Education, training and employment

During your preparation for independence, your Personal Adviser will help you to achieve the best possible opportunities for education, training and employment and will liaise with Prospects.



Help with the Cost of Going to University

Your Personal Adviser will discuss the financial and other support that the Leaving Care or Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) Team will provide you with and advise you about your decision to go to university. If you are a Relevant or Former Relevant Care Leaver and you enter a higher education or university degree course, then the Leaving Care Team will provide you with financial support. Your Personal Adviser will discuss what support is available and assist you to apply for any grants/loans or bursaries you may be entitled to receive.

Following an assessment of your needs, we will ensure that you have a minimum weekly allowance of £60 after your rent has been paid. If your income is less than this we will provide you with an add-on payment as a top-up whilst you continue on the course. You will also be provided with:

- A bursary of £2000 divided over the length of your course
- Help and support with vacation accommodation
- Communication with a nominated support worker at the university to ensure all necessary support is accessed

Your Personal Adviser will also assist you to apply for any grants/loans or bursaries you may be entitled to.

Feedback, Comments, Complaints and Compliments

Complaints and advocacy

We always try to give a high standard of service, but if you are unhappy with the service you receive, you should talk about this first with the people who are working with you, for example your Social Worker or Personal Adviser. They will want a chance to help put things right for you.

If you can't solve the problem this way, you can make a complaint. You can do this by contacting:

Complaints and Compliments Team

**One Angel Square
Angel Street
Northampton
NN1 1ED**

Or email:
customerfeedback@northamptonshire.gov.uk

All young people should be able to have an advocate to help them make a complaint. An advocate is a person who listens to your point of view and speaks to the council for you. The Complaints Manager can help you access this service.

Northamptonshire County Council will try to sort the problem out within ten days, but it may take longer. You will be told why and how long it will take if this happens. If you are still unhappy after this time, then your complaint can go to the next stage (stage 2).

A stage 2 complaint means that an independent person becomes involved. This person is independent and is not working on behalf of the council. Their role is to look into the details of your complaint with an investigating officer.

Following the investigation, the council must respond to you in writing and tell you if things are going to change. This should happen within 25 days of them receiving the complaint.

If the stage 2 response is still not satisfactory, then stage 3 can be pursued. This involves a panel of 3 independent people who will review the stage 2 investigation.

The Local Government Ombudsman has a fast track procedure for dealing with complaints made by or on behalf of children and young people up to the age of 19 (or 25 if they have a disability).

Contact details:

Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Call: **0845 602 1983**

email: advice@lgo.org.uk



Getting into touch with us

Your Social Worker and Personal Adviser will provide you with their direct dial extension and a mobile number.

If your Social Worker and/or Personal Adviser is unavailable, you can contact the duty worker who will be able to assist:

Leaving Care Duty Worker:
01604 364778/9
LeavingCareTeamDuty@
northamptonshire.gov.uk

UASC Duty Worker:
01604 361555
UASCDuty@northamptonshire.gov.uk

If you need to make contact urgently during the evening, at night or at the weekend, phone our out of hours team on **01604 626938**. An operator will answer the phone and take details of the problem and your contact details. They will then pass this information over to the Duty Social Worker.

Other organisations that can help

Children's Rights

Tel: 01604 368051
childrensrights@northamptonshire.gov.uk

Action for Children

Tel: 0300 123 2112
ask.us@actionforchildren.org.uk
www.actionforchildren.org.uk

CAN

Confidential drug and alcohol service.
 Tel: 08450 556 246
www.can.org.uk

Child Line

24-hour confidential advice and support service.
 Tel: 0800 1111 (calls are free)
www.childline.org.uk

Coram Children's Legal

Free legal information, advice and representation for children, young people, their families, carers and professionals.
www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Child Law Advice Line

Tel: 0808 802 0008

Migrant Children's Advice Line

Tel: 0207 636 8505

Kettering Youth Information

Tel: 07846 797836 or 01536 510089
kyikettering@hotmail.co.uk
kyicorby@hotmail.co.uk

The Lowdown

Counselling information and sexual health service.
 Tel: 01604 622223
www.thelowdown.info

Service Six

Counselling and sexual health service.
 Tel: 03332 400716
www.servicesix.co.uk

Talk Out Loud Mental Health

www.talkoutloud.info

Talk to Frank

Drug and alcohol service
 Tel: 0800 77 66 00
www.talktofrank.com

Time2Talk

Information, counselling and sexual health service.
 Tel: 01327 706706
www.time2talk.org.uk

Benefits

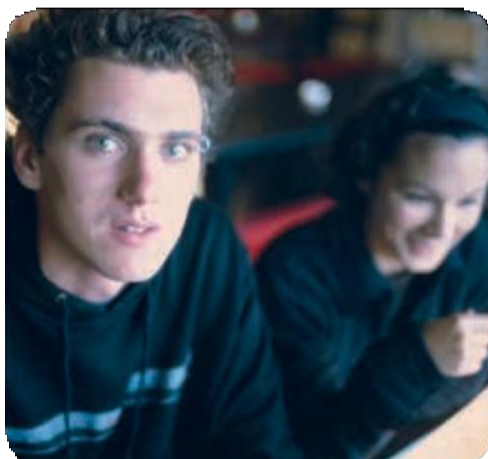
www.gov.uk

Benefit Entitlement Guide

Debt Advice Foundation
www.debtadvicefoundation.org

Benefit Helpline Numbers

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) | 0800 055 6688 |
| Income Support | 0800 055 6688 |
| Personal Independence Payment (PIP) | 0800 917 2222 |
| Child Benefit | 0300 200 3100 |
| Working Tax Credit | 0345 300 3900 |
| Child Tax Credit | 0345 300 3900 |
| Council Tax Benefit | www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council |
| Housing Benefit | www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council |
| Attendance Allowance | 0345 605 6055 |
| Carer's Allowance | 0345 608 4321 |



Access to Records and Data Protection

The Data Protection Act 1998 gives you the right to apply for a copy of information about yourself. You can ask to see any information held by the council about you. Please ask your Social Worker or Personal Adviser for further information or follow the link below:

www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/dataprotection

Northamptonshire County Council's Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers

There is an expectation that councils will develop a Pledge for their looked after children and care leavers setting out their commitments to them. In Northamptonshire the Pledge was developed in consultation with the Children in Care Forum. The Pledge is set out below:

- Always keep children/young people informed and updated.
- Inform children/young people on who they can contact, for example when they don't have a social worker or it is out of hours.
- Support children/young people with their next steps – particularly with independent living skills and getting ready to be an adult.
- Listen to children/young people's views.
- Provide children/young people with a sense of stability, belonging and safety.
- Help children/young people with their health needs.
- All professionals working with looked after children/young people will be professional upbeat, organised and truthful.
- Guide children/young people through their education.
- Review the Pledge every year with looked after children and a residential activity considered.

- Support children/young people with their hobbies, new experiences and leisure opportunities.
- Provide support for children/young people to stay in touch with their family and friends.



The Care Leavers' Charter

The Care Leavers' Charter was drawn up by the Department for Education in October 2012. It sets out a list of promises for central and local government to make to young people moving out of care and into adulthood.

The Care Leavers' Charter is set out below:

We Promise:

To respect and honour your identity

We will support you to discover and to be who you are and honour your unique identity. We will help you develop your own personal beliefs and values and accept your culture and heritage. We will celebrate your identity as an individual, as a member of identity groups and as a valued member of your community. We will value and support important relationships, and help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events. We will support you to express your identity positively to others.

To believe in you

We will value your strengths, gifts and talents and encourage your aspirations. We will hold a belief in your potential and a vision for your future even if you

have lost sight of these yourself. We will help you push aside limiting barriers and encourage and support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can. We will believe in you, celebrate you and affirm you.

To listen to you

We will take time to listen to you, respect, and strive to understand your point of view. We will place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you, negotiate with you, and show how we have taken these into account. If we don't agree with you we will fully explain why. We will provide easy access to complaint and appeals processes and promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it*.

To inform you

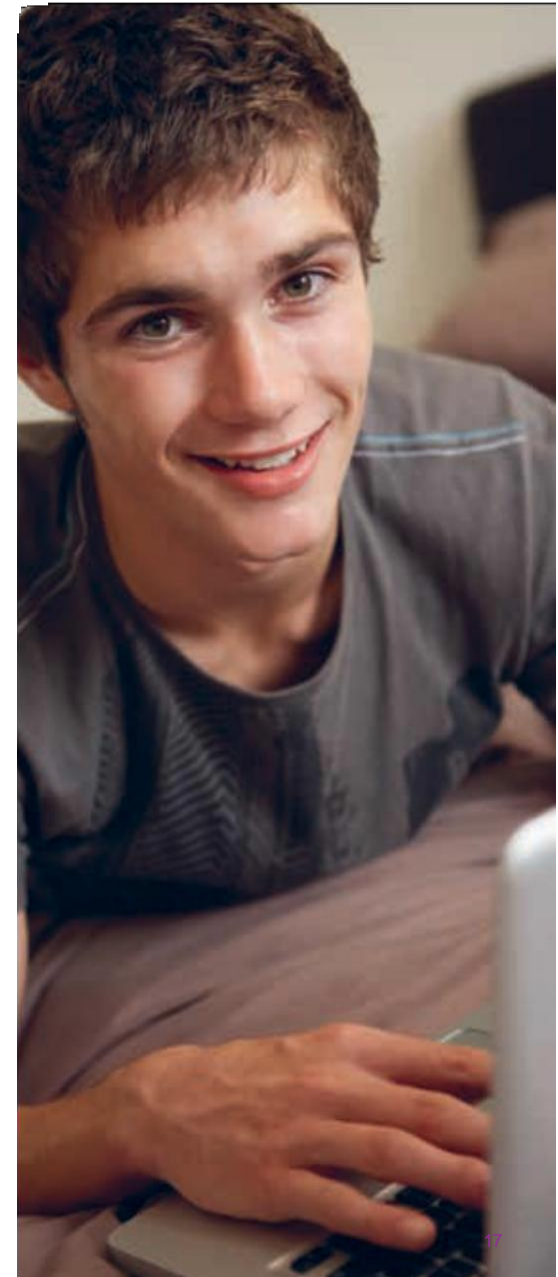
We will give you information that you need at every point in your journey, from care to adulthood, presented in a way that you want including information on legal entitlements and the service you can expect to receive from us at different stages in the journey. We will keep information up to date and accurate.

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We will ensure you know where to get current information once you are no longer in regular touch with leaving care services. We will make clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see. We will support you to access this when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information, and to put on record any disagreement with factual content.

To support you

We will provide any support set out in current Regulations and Guidance and will not unreasonably withhold advice when you are no longer legally entitled to this service. As well as information, advice, practical and financial help we will provide emotional support. We will make sure you do not have to fight for support you are entitled to and we will fight for you if other agencies let you down. We will not punish you if you change your mind about what you want to do. We will continue to care about you even when we are no longer caring for you. We will make it our responsibility to understand your needs. If we can't meet those needs we will try and help you find a service that can. We will help you learn from your mistakes; we will not judge you and we will be here for you no matter how many times you come back for support.



To find you a home

We will work alongside you to prepare you for your move into independent living only when you are ready. We will help you think about the choices available and to find accommodation that is right for you. We will do everything we can to ensure you are happy and feel safe when you move to independent living. We recognise that at different times you may need to take a step back and start over again. We will do our best to support you until you are settled in your independent life; we will not judge you for your mistakes or refuse to advise you because you did not listen to us before. We will work proactively with other agencies to help you sustain your home.

To be a lifelong champion

We will do our best to help you break down barriers encountered when dealing with other agencies. We will work together with the services you need, including housing, benefits, colleges and universities, employment providers and health services to help you establish yourself as an independent individual. We will treat you with courtesy and humanity whatever your age when you return to us for advice or support. We will help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger. We will point you in a positive direction and journey alongside you at your pace. We will trust and respect you. We will not forget about you. We will remain your supporters in whatever way we can, even when our formal relationship with you has ended.



