



# One minute guide

## Care Leaver

No. 74, April 2015

### What is a care leaver?

A care leaver is someone between the ages of 16 and 21, (and up to the age of 24 if still in full time education), who has spent time in care of the local authority as a child or young person but has now left that care. They may have left care before or after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. For more information see the [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#).

The care may have lasted for a number of months or years and indeed, may have lasted throughout their whole childhood. To be a care leaver, they must have spent at least 13 weeks (continuously or in total since the age of 14) and at least one day following their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday being cared for by the local authority.

They may have lived in foster care, residential care or in a kinship (family and friends) arrangement. The care may have come about through a legal order such as a Care Order or through a voluntary arrangement under s20 Children Act 1989.

Mel, who was a care leaver, defines a care leaver as: 'someone who has left the care system and is now moving into independent living. They are developing life skills and are starting to make decisions for themselves, sometimes for the first time. They often don't have a biological family to fall back on for support whilst this is happening. Care leavers often find these changes difficult and don't always get it right.'

### What support are care leavers entitled to?

Local authorities must plan for looked after children so that they have the support they need as they make the transition into adulthood. The local authority's responsibility to Care Leavers extends until they reach the age of 21 (or 24, where the Local Authority is involved in supporting them in higher education or training.)

[Care leavers entitlements](#) (to support and services) depends on their leaving care status. This status depends on how long they were in care and at what point in their lives they left care. The categories of status are: eligible; relevant; formerly relevant; and qualifying. More information about these categories is available from the National Care Advisory Service [website](#).

The support that they may be able to access includes: provision of a social worker or a personal assistant; financial assistance; help with accommodation; benefits and budgeting advice; help to develop independence skills; support with education (including further education), employment and training; and support to access health services.

The support that they need is set out in a pathway plan developed with the young person, the social worker or personal advisor and others involved in the support. The plan is reviewed at least every six months but can be reviewed earlier if there is a significant change in circumstances or the young person requests a review.

## What do we have in Leeds for care leavers?

In Leeds, we have a range of services for care leavers provided by the local authority, health and third sector agencies. These include:

**Pathway Planning and coordination of support** - within the Looked after Children Service we have teams who work with young people from the age of 13. When the young person is 16, social workers in the team support them to develop the pathway plan; and from age 18, personal advisors are allocated to support the young person into adulthood and to ensure that the pathway plan is taken forward. Key aspects of the role is to ensure care leavers: are living in suitable accommodation; are engaged in education, employment or training; and regular contact is kept with them.

**Accommodation** - Care leavers who have been living in fostering placements now have increased access to 'Staying Put' arrangements where they stay living with their foster carer following their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. There is also an accommodation hub to ensure that the range of accommodation available is used effectively to meet the care leaver's needs. This includes trainer flats with floating support on short tenancies, other tenancies with floating support or non-supported tenancies.

**Education, Employment and Training** – care leavers have targeted advice, information and guidance to support them to access an offer that is right for them. As a city, we are aiming to achieve the [Care2Work](#) quality mark for Leeds which recognises best practice and is awarded to local authorities and employers who demonstrate their commitment to building the employability skills of children in care and care leavers. It covers areas such as traineeships, apprenticeships, jobs within the council, access to Further Education and Higher Education and volunteering.

**Health** – health providers work in partnership with care leavers and with their social workers, personal advisors and other practitioners working with them, to ensure they access the right health services to meet their needs.

**Financial advice** – A dedicated welfare rights worker supports care leavers to identify and access their entitlements for 18-25 year olds and work with other practitioners to support their knowledge and understanding.

## Key contacts and for more information

Head of Service Looked after Children Service  
Rob Murray - [robert.murray@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:robert.murray@leeds.gov.uk)

[National Care Advisory Service \(NCAS\)](#)

[Care leavers Association](#)

The [Care Leavers' Charter](#) outlines principles and promises for care leavers.