



A Guide to Leaving Care in Somerset





Introduction

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More Information

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If you are 16, and have been in the care of Somerset County Council for 3 months, you are entitled to a range of services and financial support, usually until the age of at least 21, but sometimes up to 25.

You are entitled to;

- A 'personal advisor' who will be your main contact and who will make sure that you have all the support you need. This is usually your social worker until you are 18 and after that your leaving care worker.
- A detailed assessment of your needs.
- A 'Pathway Plan' which is a written record of what Somerset County Council will do for you in the future.
- Be involved in making decisions about your life, in the assessment and in writing your Pathway Plan.
- Make suggestions, comments, or complaints about the services you receive.
- An advocate to support you if you want help when decisions are being made at meetings or in making a complaint.
- Know what records are being kept about you and have access to your files.
- Money to live on until you are 18 and help and advice about finances after that.
- Accommodation provision until you are 18 and advice and help to find accommodation after that.
- Help with education, training and employment.
- Advice about your general health and wellbeing
- Opportunities for social activities, hobbies and cultural activities/outings.

There are lots of places you can get more information, such as the websites detailed below:

http://www.lookedaftersomerset.org.uk/	Care leavers' website address within Looked After Somerset including the Finance Policy
http://www.somerset.gov.uk/irj/public	Somerset County Council website
www.star@somerset-star.org.uk Tel: 01749 822802	Somerset Trust for Arts and Recreation
http://www.promisevolunteers.org.uk/ Tel: 01749 822801	PROMISE a charity providing mentors and advocates
http://www.talktofrank.com/ Tel: 0300 123 6600	Confidential Drugs information and advice.
http://www.2bu-somerset.co.uk/	If you're a young person living in Somerset you may find that being gay or questioning your sexuality can be difficult. If this is the case, there are a number of '2BU' youth groups where you can meet others in similar situations as yourself.
www.leavingcare.org OR http://www.catch-22.org.uk/NCAS Tel: 020 7336 4824	Leavingcare.org has been developed and is maintained by the National Care Advisory Service. Please go to NCAS for more information about who they are and what they do.
http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/ Tel: 020 7251 3117	The Who Cares? Trust is a national charity working to improve public care for around 60,000 children and young people who are separated from their families and living in residential or foster care.
http://www.ru-ok.org.uk/http://	RU ok? – This is a self help website for teenagers and is about coping with common, but serious problems, as well as urging you to access your strengths.
http://www.homefindersomerset.co.uk/Data/ASPPages/1/30.aspx	Somerset Housing Authorities' website
www.somersetcsh.co.uk/ Tel: 0800 282 930	Sex directory – sexual health services in Somerset.



Information Sharing

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You should always know what is being said about you. Therefore you will be asked if it is okay if we give information about you to certain professionals. Your leaving care worker will explain why that is sometimes necessary, will make sure that it is legal and fair, and ask you to sign a form.

Examples are telling supported accommodation providers about you when you want to move on, and letting the Department for Work and Pensions know who all our care leavers are at 16 so you get the right support from them.

The only reason something would normally be shared without your consent is if it affected the safety of you or someone else.



What happens when?

Talk about what needs to happen

When you are 15 your social worker will start to talk to the leaving care team, who work with young people leaving care until they are 21 or sometimes 25.

A meeting will be arranged between you, your social worker, your carer/key worker and a member of the leaving care team to talk about what needs to happen to make your move into independence a smooth one that happens when you are ready.

If you have a disability, you are entitled to the all the same advice and support as any other care leaver.

However, you may have additional needs due to your disability. You may have, in addition to everyone else, a Transitions social worker or an Adult Social Care social worker working with you.

If so, you may want one person to be your personal adviser as you may not want too many people involved in your life.

Personal adviser

You can have additional support from a volunteer for such things as; company when moving into a new area or place of your own building confidence in starting a new project, trying activities such as sports, theatre, cinema; or going shopping. This can be on a short term basis or there are 'Mentors' who offer something more long term and make a commitment to meet up at least once each week for a minimum period of two years.

You will have a named leaving care worker from when you are 16. Their role is to:

- Take over from your social worker as your personal advisor when you are 18.
- Work with you in planning for your future and update your Pathway Plan with you.
- Advise you of your rights and responsibilities and all the services available.
- Help you to get the financial support you are entitled to.
- Help you access suitable accommodation where you will feel safe.
- Encourage and help you to fulfil your potential in education, training and employment.
- Encourage and help you to be fit and healthy.
- Help you to have positive relationships with people, such as family and friends.
- Offer help in case of a crisis.
- Make sure you know how to make comments or suggestions, if you want to change something, or make a complaint if you are not happy with the services you receive.



Pathways Plans

Working Well

As you approach 16, your social worker will start to complete your first Pathway Plan. It is based on an assessment of what is working well for you, what you and we are worried about, and what needs to happen so that everything is working well. It is a record of what people are going to do with and for you in the immediate and longer-term future, who is going to do it and when. It will also include 'contingency plans' in case things don't go according to the plan, or you change your mind.

Making realistic plans

It is really important that you are actively involved in making realistic plans and decisions that are right for you. Therefore your social worker and leaving care worker will want to write your plan with you. You will be asked what you think of the final draft and will be asked to sign it. You will have a copy of it and there will be a copy on your file. It will be updated at least every six months or if there is a major change in your circumstances or plans.

Your assessment and Pathway Plan should include information on your:

- Health and general wellbeing
- Accommodation
- Education, training and employment
- Emotional issues and behaviour
- Family and social relationships, and support networks
- Practical skills and other skills needed for independent living
- Identity, such as ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation
- Financial arrangements

The Leaving Care Council

This is a group of care leavers who meet approximately every 4 weeks to discuss how best to improve the experience of being a care leaver. The group is consulted about changes that are being made that will affect care leavers, takes part in meetings with managers, and attends the 'Corporate Parent Board' with County Councillors. They also meet up occasionally with care leavers around the country.

How best to improve

Exit Interviews

After you leave care you will be asked to complete an exit interview. Information given is confidential and your anonymous answers will be looked at alongside everyone else's. The messages and themes coming through are used to help improve our services for children in and leaving care. You will also be asked to complete one when you are approaching 21, which will specifically look at your experiences after you left care.

Feedback about your accommodation

You can say, at any time, what you think about your accommodation to your provider and, if you aren't happy with the response, your leaving care worker. If you are in Stepping Stones or Leaving Care accommodation you will also be asked for your views in writing so we can plan our accommodation better in the future.



Family Contact

Have your say

Family Contact

We will need to make an agreement with you individually about how your leaving care worker can help you maintain contact with your family after you have left care. This will depend on where you and your family are and how important different members of your family are to you.

Having Your Say

There are a range of ways that you can have your voice heard about the services you receive.

Making comments or suggestions

We want to encourage you to talk to us about what you think of the services you receive. You can do that at any time by talking to, texting, writing, emailing etc your leaving care worker or their team leader. We will try to make the changes you want and, if we can't, we will explain why.

Complaints

If you feel that you have been treated unfairly or not had something you are entitled to, you may want to make a complaint. You can do that to your worker or, if your complaint is about your worker and talking to them hasn't helped, you can ask to talk to their manager. If that doesn't resolve things, you can contact the Leaving Care Manager. The alternative is to make a formal complaint and a manager or someone independent will look into things for you. You will be given or could ask for a 'Tell us what you think' Leaflet which outlines the processes for giving feedback be that comments, compliment or complaints.

Advocacy

You may want someone separate from your social worker or leaving care worker who can help you plan what you want to say at meetings when decisions are being made or to make a complaint. If you do, please ask your Social Worker or Leaving Care worker how you can contact the Advocacy Service.



Preparation for Adult Life



Before you begin to live independently, you should be well prepared and have done some work on how to take care of yourself.

Before a young person moves on from foster or residential care they should have a number of possessions that will be a starting point for living more independently. These should include;

- A wardrobe of clothing to cover all seasons and sufficient quantity for at least 1 week
- Coats / jackets / footwear to cover all seasons
- At least 1 smart outfit (interviews / special occasions)
- Clothing & equipment appropriate to work, college, sporting activities, hobbies / interests including of a laptop if going into further / higher education
- Suitcase, day bag, school college work bag.
- Towels and enough toiletries to cover at least 2 weeks after moving
- A 'bottom drawer' of small useful household items
- Mobile phone
- Some means of accessing TV / radio stations / music

'Preparation for Independence'

This involves setting up a bank account and ensuring you have essential forms of identification.

There is a 'Preparation for Independence' toolkit that might help in discussing some of the things you need to know about, or think about in more depth. In addition you could attend a 'Preparation for Independence' course.



Accommodation

We want to encourage you to remain in a care setting until you are really ready to live more independently. You may want to move on when you are approaching or become 18; you might want to stay longer or you may want to leave as soon as you can, i.e. from 16, and are legally able to leave school.

For all types of accommodation, you will need to evidence that you are able to manage, pay the rent or contributions regularly and abide by the rules or conditions that are attached. You will need to attend an interview to discuss that before being offered a place and you may need to wait for a place to be available.

Options available to you are:

Supported accommodation

Most care leavers start off with supported provision before they move into their own independent accommodation.

- **With former Foster Carers**

You are entitled to remain with your foster carer over the age of 18, if your foster carer is in agreement and your social worker thinks it is in your best interests. You can do so for a short period of time or until you are 21. When you are 18, you are not legally 'looked after' anymore, so, if you remain beyond that age, it is referred to as a 'Staying Put Arrangement'.

- **'Stepping Stones'**

Somerset has a small supported lodgings scheme where you would have a room of your own in the home of a family or person, and share the kitchen and bathroom facilities. The Stepping Stones provider will offer some support but they are not 'looking after' you in the way a foster carer would.

- **Leaving Care shared houses**

Leaving care staff manage 3 houses for care leavers, one in Taunton with 6 rooms,

another in Taunton with 2 rooms, and one in Bridgwater with 5 rooms. You would share some kitchen and bathroom facilities. The staff visit the building regularly to offer support and check everything is going well.

- **Other shared provision**

You could also access shared accommodation which caters for young people aged 16-25 more generally, some of whom are care leavers but many are not. This type of accommodation is organised in 4 area 'Pathway to Independence (P2i) Hubs'. This provision can vary in size from small (5 rooms) to large (33). Support is offered by housing support workers linked to the building.

In all supported accommodation you would pay rent when over 18 and a contribution for utilities. For some you would also pay for some food.

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Higher Education

£30
PER WEEK

If you are planning to go to university you will be able to apply for the grants and loans that are available to all students. We pay the incentive of up to £30.00 per week, as above, and a bursary of £2,000 which is paid over the duration of your course.

During the holidays within the course, if it is possible, you may wish to return to a former foster carer or lodgings provider; but if it's not possible we will provide holiday accommodation, or the money for it.

help

We can help with travel and moving your belongings to and from university, deposits on accommodation and other associated costs. An advance will be considered until student loans are available, if they are delayed. We can provide additional funds, e.g. for travel or equipment essential for your course.

We will also assist you in applying to charitable organisations for any additional funding that is available.

Employment, including Apprenticeships

You will be supported through at least one move into employment of your choice.

As agreed in your Pathway Plan, costs may be met in full for:

- Suitable clothes for interview purposes.
- Transport costs to interviews.
- Specific clothing or uniform you may need to do your job, or training such as steel-toed boots or hairdressing kit.
- Start up equipment, including health and safety equipment.
- Public transport from accommodation to employment until receipt of first earnings.
- Top up payments if you are 16 or 17, in full time work or an apprenticeship and your income is less than £110 per week.



Education, training and employment (ETE)

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Education, training and employment (ETE)

When you leave care you will be encouraged and supported to continue or engage in education or training and to gain qualifications. Specialist ETE advisors, (Targeted Youth Support workers), are available to make sure you have full and up to date advice about such things as courses, work experience and apprenticeships. They can also help you to prepare for being in further or higher education, training or in the workplace.

Further Education and training

As a care leaver you will be entitled to the 16 to 19 Learning Support Bursary of £1,200 per year.

Some colleges also have support funds that can help you with costs specifically associated with courses. In addition, we will give you an 'incentive' payment of up to £30.00 per week, paid at the end of each half term, provided that your attendance was at least 80%.

We can meet other costs not covered in these ways such as:

- Registration and examination fees.
- Text books specified as essential.
- Activities essential to meet course requirements.
- Public transport between accommodation and course centre if the distance is over 3 miles and it is the nearest college to your home offering the course you want to do.
- Transport costs to open days or college interviews.
- Specific clothing, including clothes for interviews, and essential equipment related to the course.

Independent housing

Home Allowance

When you are 18 you can access accommodation of your own and are legally able to hold a tenancy. You are then responsible for the rent and paying all the bills. You would still be offered support from your leaving care worker, and specialist housing support if required. This is sometimes referred to as 'floating support'.

You are entitled to a Setting Up Home Allowance i.e. money for such things as furniture, cooker, fridge and other essential household items. This is £1,461 if you stopped being 'looked after' between April and August 2014 and £2000 from Sept 2014. The leaving care worker will discuss the sort of things the money can be spent on and will make the purchases with you.

There are two types of rented independent housing;

Social Housing

Social Housing is accessed by registering on the District Council Housing Register 'Homefinders Somerset'. Care leavers are a priority group for this sort of housing but more people want it than there are places, so it can take some time to find what you want where you want it.

Private Housing

Private Housing where you rent from a landlord either through a Lettings Agency or directly. There can sometimes be problems with landlords not accepting people who are on benefits or in college, and also wanting someone to be a Guarantor for the rent (in case it isn't paid) and for any damage that may be caused.

Emergency Accommodation

Hopefully it won't happen but, if for any reason you were to find yourself homeless, there are a small number of emergency beds in each area of the county that can be used while a solution to the problem is found.



Money to live on

When you are living in a foster placement or in residential care the foster carer or staff will give you some money to spend on some of the things you need and they will buy you or provide other things.

If you leave foster or residential care before you are 18, unless you are working full time, we will pay you a 'personal allowance' to cover food bills, clothes, phone money, going out etc. This allowance matches the benefits rate for other young people aged 16 or 17 years and is organised by your leaving care worker.

Initially, payments may be in cash and could be once per week, on the same day every week, or split into two payments over the week. When we know you can manage your money, you will be paid once a week and work towards your allowance being paid direct into your bank account once per fortnight.

You can also receive money to help with other things that are agreed in your Pathway Plan. This might be for a passport, birth certificate or provisional driving licence; for contact with family, emergency or crisis support, or connected to your health or emotional wellbeing. You will also receive a voucher for your birthdays and, once a year, for a festivity such as Christmas.

When you are 18 you are entitled to claim all welfare benefits. Your Personal advisor will help you with this.



Health and Wellbeing

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The leaving care staff aim to help you to develop a healthy life style and become part of the community in which you live. Your leaving care worker will help you register with a new doctor, dentist, optician etc., encourage you to eat a healthy diet, take regular exercise and help you with budgeting to shop for healthy foods.

C-Cards

Additional advice and support is available on a wide range of health related issues, such as sexual health, pregnancy and parenting, substance misuse, emotional and mental health including accessing sexual health advice. Your leaving care worker can issue you with a C-Card to get free condoms.

FREE

You should receive free treatment for glasses, prescriptions and dental treatment from the NHS while you are under 18. In some circumstances you may be able to get some assistance with other health costs.

STAR

Your leaving care worker will help you continue with or develop a range of leisure interests such as art, music, sport and other activities. Money to help with this can be obtained from STAR (Somerset Trust for Arts and Recreation) for lessons, instruments, equipment etc.