

# Care Leaver Local Offer

Support for Care Leavers in Milton Keynes

## 1. Forward

We have high hopes for all our children and young people in care and a belief that with the right support, you can achieve incredible things. We want to give you the stability and support you need to make progress. We will help you to access new resources and experiences that will inspire you to set ambitious goals.

We will celebrate your successes, but also support you when things are not going so well or when you need that additional help to reach a given goal. You may need support to gain the skills and confidence to live an independent life, or you may want someone to talk to when the going gets tough or to sound your thoughts and views out.

It is our responsibility to protect you and promote your welfare as children and young people in our care and as Care Leavers. Working closely with groups across Milton Keynes, we have a clear plan to achieve this but will never feel that our job is 'done'.

We must continue to listen to you, our children and young people, involving you in the decisions we take and ensuring you understand how the choices we make will affect you personally. Whether you are in care, on the edge of care or leaving care, we want the very best for you just as we do for our own children. We hope you'll be able to look back at your time in care as a positive experience, full of good memories and new opportunities.

## 2. Who is a Care Leaver

There are different types of Care Leavers depending on when and how long you have been in care; the following describes the 4 different categories.

### 1. Eligible child:

Eligible child is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is still being looked after. As an eligible child you will be allocated a Social Worker who will complete an assessment of your needs and a Pathway Plan with you, providing support with accommodation, education, contact with your family and help to prepare you for independence as an adult.

### 2. Relevant Care Leaver:

Relevant child is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care. This also includes young people who were detained (e.g. in a youth offending institution or hospital) when they turned 16, but who were looked after immediately before being detained. If you have been in care as an eligible child you will continue to be supported in the same way but have an allocated Personal Advisor, instead of a Social Worker. If you have not been in care for a period of 6 months as you returned to live with your parents, you will qualify for advice and assistance.

### 3. Former Relevant Care:

Former relevant child is a young person over 18 who was previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'. You will be supported until aged 21, or longer if you are in education or training. As a former relevant care leaver, you will be allocated a PA who will give you advice and support, and regularly update your Pathway Plan.

### 4. Qualifying for advice and assistance:

Qualifying child is any young person under 21 (or 24 if in education or training) who stops being looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, or being privately fostered, after the age of 16. This also includes young people who are under a special guardianship order. As a qualifying care leaver, you will be able to access advice and guidance.

## 3. Introduction

This leaflet tells you about all the support that we have in **Milton Keynes** for you as a care leaver. We know that it is a big step when you move out of care and start living on your own or with friends. Just because you are leaving care, or have already left care, we haven't stopped caring about you. We want to make sure that you feel safe and supported and know where and who to go to for advice and help.

Local care leavers have helped make this leaflet. We will continue to listen to your views to make sure the services we offer are what you need. We have written this leaflet with the care leavers' forum.

To be able to get the support set out in this leaflet, you must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 (including your 16th birthday) or for 13 weeks after your 16th birthday.

If you are not sure whether you qualify for support, ask your personal adviser or social worker. This leaflet is available online at: <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/children-young-people-families/care-leavers-hub>

You can email: [corporateparenting@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:corporateparenting@milton-keynes.gov.uk) to request more copies.

## 4. The Support we must give you

### **A Personal Adviser:**

Following changes introduced through the Children & Social Work Act 2017, you will be able to ask to have support from your personal adviser up to the age of 25, whether you are in education or training or not. This is to make sure care leavers receive similar support to young adults who live with their families. Your personal adviser is there to help you to prepare to live independently and to offer advice and support after you leave care.

Our Personal Advisors are experienced, enthusiastic and committed team. They are trained in Motivational Interviewing, understanding your benefits, mental health and supporting you with accessing the right accommodation. Your personal adviser will be happy to talk with you about the information in this leaflet.

**Pathway Planning for your future:**

Just before you turn 16, your social worker will complete an assessment of your needs with you. This will help to form your first Pathway Plan which will be in place on your 16th birthday. The Pathway Plan through discussion with you will highlight what your needs are and set out what your goals and aspirations you have for your future and what support you will need in achieving them.

Your Pathway Plan is written by the local authority after consultation with you and important people in your life. We review your Pathway Plan with you every 6 months so that it is kept up-to-date.

**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 also have a right to support from an independent advocate if you are thinking about challenging decisions about the care 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 Social Care.

You can request support from an advocate using any of the following links:

Email: [yourvoice@reconstruct.co.uk](mailto:yourvoice@reconstruct.co.uk)

Phone: 0800 389 1571

Web: <https://www.reconstruct.co.uk/children-and-young-peoples-pages/>

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. You can access your files email to: [data.protection@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:data.protection@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

**Leaving care before turning 18:**

If you choose to leave care, this decision will be considered by all significant people in your life and at your Child in Care Statutory Review, which is a meeting that reviews your Pathway Plan. You may already be living at home on a Care Order (an order where the Children's Social Care hold Parental Responsibility with you Parent(s) and also means you are under the care of the Local Authority. Where appropriate, we will work with you and assess whether the Care Order should be ended so that you are no longer in care.

If you choose to leave care before age 18, the law says we must provide you with suitable accommodation and also consider whether you meet the criteria for support following care.

**16+ services available to you:**

Your Social Worker and Personal Advisor will work with you to ensure you are prepared for the transition to adulthood at 18. Your social worker will visit you as agreed in your Pathway Plan and if you need more support, they can visit you more often. You can contact your social worker and Personal Advisor at any time to talk about plans for the future, ask any questions or seek advice and support.

**18+ services available to you:**

When you turn 18, your Personal Advisor will take over full responsibility for you. They will continue to meet with you regularly, offering support advice and guidance. You and your PA will review your Pathway Plan every 6 months, identifying targets for your future and support needed to achieve these.

You can contact your Personal Advisor at any time or pop into the office for advice and support. You may be signposted to other agencies who can offer you support and advice.

### **21+ services available to you:**

Before you turn 21 you will need to talk to your Personal Advisor to discuss what support you continue to need after your 21st birthday. Your Personal Advisor will complete an assessment of your needs and update your Pathway Plan. If you require ongoing support, advice and guidance we can assist you up to the age of 25 years. We will keep in touch with you annually.

### **Support to engage in education, employment or training (EET):**

We want to make sure every young person leaving care has the support to achieve their goals in life. The law says we must provide you with assistance with expenses linked with employment, education and training. You can find out what financial support you are entitled to in our Finance Policy. Please see the 'Education, training and employment' section on pages 9,10 and 11 for more information.

## **5. Other support we offer**

### **Accommodation:**

We want to ensure that you have the right support with accommodation. Setting up your home is an important step for you. We want to ensure you are prepared for this to enable you to have every success. We will ensure you can learn and develop your independent living skills to prepare you for adulthood. We will begin discussions with you around your 16th birthday about where you would like to live at 18 and what options are available to you.

If you are living with a foster family, you may decide you want to remain living with your foster family after you turn 18. This is called a '**Staying Put**' arrangement. We will arrange a meeting with you and your foster family to discuss these arrangements with you to ensure it runs smoothly.

**Shared lives scheme is arranged through Adult Social Care.** It is a scheme for more vulnerable adults who require that additional support and meet the eligibility criteria for an adult's service. Your PA will discuss with you whether this would be a suitable option for you.

You may decide at 16 that you want more independence. **Semi-independent provision** may be a suitable option for you. This is for young people who have the skills to manage on their own. You have your own room with shared kitchen and living facilities. Look Ahead Care in Milton Keynes offers semi-independent accommodation to young people. If you are living at Look Ahead Care then you will be able to remain with Look Ahead Care until your 18th birthday and we will be working jointly with you and Housing to help you access independent accommodation.

Just before you are 18 you can register with Milton Keynes Housing.

If you are aged over 18, your personal adviser will help you to find suitable accommodation.

Your Personal Advisor will give you advice and support with the following:

- Advice about holding a tenancy, including avoiding rent or Council Tax arrears, paying bills and budgeting. We know it can be very hard having your own place for the first time. We will do whatever we can to ease the pressures on you. As a Milton Keynes Care Leaver you are exempt from paying Council Tax until your 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Helping you to claim universal credit. We will support you with appointments at the Job Centre if you need to make a benefits claim.
- Practical support with moving into and furnishing your new home. We will provide you with a setting up home allowance (details can be found in Finance Policy).

- Supporting you if you have a housing crisis, this includes helping if you are threatened with or losing a tenancy
- It is difficult for all young people to fund a deposit for a mortgage or rent and whilst some will be financially supported by their parents to purchase a property, for care leavers, this is not often an option. In 2021 a new deposit scheme for care leavers is being tested, with the aim to support some care leavers on the road to property ownership or private rental. This scheme is part of our Council Plan and Priorities. The Council has granted £50K to fund 2 mortgage deposits and there is a £20,000 Deposit fund available to support at least 20 care leavers with deposits on private rental homes. Care Leavers will be selected by March 2022. This is a pilot scheme and will be reviewed in April 2022 and should this be successful we will consider continuing this offer to our Care Leavers.

### **Education, training and employment**

We want you to achieve the best in life and have put in place support to help you do this. We will ensure that you can access up to date and impartial Careers Information, Advice and Guidance to help you make informed choices for your future. We want you to succeed in your education, training and employment. We will ask you how you are doing and be ready to celebrate your achievements with you.

Services we provide for you include careers advice (for 16-25yr olds) where you can access the following:

Careers support available for you:

1. One to one support from a qualified IAG Personal Advisor
2. Help writing your CV and interview techniques
3. Applications to EET including apprenticeships
4. Resources including printer and laptop
5. Signposting to support organisations
6. Advice of welfare benefits
7. Online tools to explore career paths

Careers Information, Advices and Guidance can help you to:

1. Understand your needs, raise your aspirations
2. Understand your options and choices
3. Increase your skills and qualifications
4. Make informed, realistic choices for your future
5. Which career might interest you
6. Be part of the community when you have been out of education or training for a while

If you attend University, they will help with the cost of books and materials, in the form a bursary. Each University has a different agreement as to how much they will pay, so please speak to them directly about this.

- Initially we will support you to meet your transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews.
- Support to buy tools, equipment, essential clothing, and books.
- Support if you choose to go to university, such as helping you obtain tuition fees and maintenance loans and contributing towards the cost of your accommodation fees to a maximum of £5000.00. We will help you choose the right course and university that matches your talents and interests.

- Opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships and employment within the council.
- The chance to attend and help organise celebration events when young people achieve education, training and employment milestones.

We will regularly review this service with you to ensure that it continues to meet your needs.

\* EET refers to Education, Employment and Training

### **Health and wellbeing**

Below are some of the ways our care leaving team and your personal adviser can support you to stay healthy and look after your physical and mental health. We can:

- Give information on healthy living.
- Give information on getting help to pay for prescriptions.
- Support you to register with a GP.
- Support you to move from CAMHS to adult services.
- Give information about counselling services that are available locally.
- Give you help with transport costs when attending health appointments.
- If you are a young parent, take an interest in your child/children and support you to do the best for them. We will help you arrange childcare, if this is what you want.
- Leisure allowance of £5.00 per week until your 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Give you information about health drop-in centres.
- Work with you to make a 'health passport' containing key information from your childhood (for example, when and if you have had immunisations) and your current health needs.
- Sexual Health – accessing sexual health support.
- Substance misuse – accessing services to address substance misuse.
- Other health appointments including, dentists, optician, etc

### **Finances**

We will help you financially, in a similar way to how parents would support their own children.

Our aim is to support you to learn how to be financially independent. This includes being able to manage your money, understanding how to budget well, borrowing money, student loans and identity fraud.

Finance policy can be found on our website <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/children-young-people-families/care-leavers-hub>

Having a good financial understanding will hopefully ensure you have the skills to manage your money independently.

'*Young Money Matters*' is a helpful guide to assisting young people manage and understand their money. Click on the link to access: <https://www.young-money.org.uk/sites/default/files/Your%20Money%20Matters.pdf>

Our help includes:

- Providing a leaving care grant to help you buy essential things when moving into your own home, which government recommends should be a minimum of £2,000.
- Giving you exemptions on paying Council Tax.
- Providing or telling you about relevant money management courses.
- Information on how to access your Junior ISA, if you have one (a fund of money set aside by the government and the council).
- Support to open a bank account.

- Support to gain important identification documents, such as a passport, birth certificate and provisional driving license, before your 18th birthday.
- Support to get your National Insurance number.
- Exceptional financial support in emergencies.
- Providing a financial gift at birthdays and Christmas or other celebrations.
- -If you have received Criminal Injuries Compensation whilst in care, we will ensure we offer you independent financial advice to ensure you know how to invest this money for your future.

### **Relationships**

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

- Providing you with a mentor/peer mentor; The Grandmentors' scheme is run by Volunteer Matters. The scheme is set up to empower you to helping you achieve your potential. (Ask your Personal Advisor for further details on how to access a Grandmentor).
- Where appropriate, continuing to support contact with the 'Independent Visitor' you had while you were in care.
- Help to maintain or regain contact with people special to you or who cared for you in the past, like former foster carers or social workers.
- Before you leave care, we will look at the support networks you have and how we can help you to maintain and sustain these positive important relationships in your life.
- We also have a friendship, support and mentoring service delivered by Attain project. They will support you to consider your aspirations and goals for the future (ask your Personal Advisor for further details).

### **Participation in Society**

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 enroll on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections.
- Informing you about voluntary work that we think you may be interested in.
- Informing and possibly helping with the cost of leisure activities.
- Advice and help to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver.
- Being involved with the Children in Care Council and Care Leaver Forum

Richard Lee is our Participation Team Leader; you can contact him at: [Richard.Lee@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.Lee@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

## **4. Who can help?**

Key contact details for:

- Care leaving team: 01908 253434 (Duty PA)
- Housing advice – Civic Office - a Housing Support Officer will be able to assist 01908 253481 (Housing Options Team)

Other places you can go for help:

- Princes Trust - <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/>
- The Rees Foundation - <http://www.reesfoundation.org/>
- Care Leavers' Foundation - <http://www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/>

Relevant universal services:

- iCASH Sexual Health Services: <https://www.icash.nhs.uk/where-to-go/icash-milton-keynes>
- Drug/alcohol support - – [ypdaservice@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:ypdaservice@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

Information regarding Higher education:

- <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/universities/applying-to-university-as-a-care-leaver/>
- Parenting support groups – [www.MiltonKeynes.gov.uk/family-centres](http://www.MiltonKeynes.gov.uk/family-centres)
- Citizenship Advice Bureau - <https://www.miltonkeynescab.org.uk/>

Available in audio, large print, braille and other languages