



# Local offer for care leavers

Advice and support for young people leaving care



2019–2020

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# Introduction

Moving out of care and living on your own, or with friends, is a big step. This booklet tells you about the support you can still get from Lewisham Council.

We want to make sure you feel safe and supported and know where, and who, to go to for advice and help.

Lewisham 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 Children in Care Council and care leavers' forum, and we will continue to review it together to make sure it meets your needs.

## Who can get support

If you are a Lewisham care leaver, you can get the support set out in this leaflet. A care leaver is someone who has been looked after by their local council for either:

- at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 (including your 16th birthday)
- at least 13 weeks after your 16th birthday.

If you claimed asylum as an unaccompanied child and have been supported by us, you can get the same support as a care leaver if you meet the criteria (below left).

If you're not sure if you qualify for support, ask your personal adviser.

You can also read this information online at [www.lewisham.gov.uk/careleaver](http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/careleaver)

Your personal adviser will discuss the information in this leaflet with you.

# Your personal adviser

After you leave care, you can get support from your personal adviser. This is to try and make sure you get similar support to young adults who live with their families. You can get support from your personal adviser whether or not you are in education or training.

Your personal adviser is there to help you prepare to live independently. Personal advisers get involved in discussions about your needs and your pathway plan. The amount of support you get from your personal adviser depends on what you want and your circumstances.

If you are over 21, you can still get help from us. Speak to your personal adviser on 020 8314 8864 to discuss how we can best give you support.

## Your pathway plan

We write your pathway plan after speaking to you and the important people in your life. It sets out:

- your needs
- your views
- your future goals
- what support you will get from us.

We review your pathway plan with you regularly to make sure it's up to date.

## Extra support

We will talk to you about any extra support you might need. For example, you might need extra support because:

- you have special educational needs or a disability
- you are an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child and your immigration status is unclear (see our section on Unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers)
- you are in, or leaving, custody; or you have had contact with the criminal justice system
- you are a young parent
- you are going through a difficult time in your personal life.



# Your rights

You have a right to be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care. We respect your right to individuality and we will not discriminate against you. You have a right to support from an independent advocate if you are thinking about challenging decisions about the care we provide for you.

Independent advocates can tell you about your rights and help you to be heard in meetings. They are separate from the Council, social workers and your personal adviser.

## Find an advocate

Coram Voice is a charity which can offer you independent support and advocacy. For information, visit [www.coramvoice.org.uk](http://www.coramvoice.org.uk) or contact:

- Freephone 0808 800 5792, to find out about your rights, to get support or be listened to.
- WhatsApp 07758 670369 (add them to your contacts and send a message free with WiFi).
- Text 07758 670369 (send a text to this number and ask for someone to call you back – texts to this

number cost 12p each; calls to this number cannot be answered).

- Email [help@coramvoice.org.uk](mailto:help@coramvoice.org.uk)
- Fill in the online form.
- Coram Voice is open Monday to Friday, 9.30am–6pm, and Saturday, 10am–4pm.
- If English is not your first language, you can ask the helpline to get an interpreter on the line.
- Coram Voice will always try to help you straight away. If they can't, they'll get back to you as soon as they can and always within 24 hours.

## Your data

You have a right to see the information Lewisham Council keeps about you, including the files and records written about you when you were in care. If you want to see your files, speak with your personal adviser.



# Finding somewhere to live

Your social worker and personal adviser will discuss your housing needs with you, ready for when you turn 18. We can offer you various housing options and support:

## Staying with your foster carer

You can live with your foster carer until you are 21, if this is what you and your foster carer want. This is called a staying put arrangement. Read our staying put policy.

## Supported housing pathway

We will help come up with suitable housing options for you, including something called the supported housing pathway. Supported housing for young people is a unique pathway that helps you gain the skills you need to live independently, and make your life a success. Within the supported housing pathway, there are a number of different schemes where you will get a keyworker who will:

- work with you to help you get the most out of your life

- support you with education, training and employment
- move you on into independent housing.

There are also special services for vulnerable adults and people with mental health difficulties. The supported housing pathway gives you the skills and support to be successful, which greatly reduces the chances of you losing your accommodation in the future.

## Stay in a training flat

You may be able to stay in one of our 'training' flats for up to six months. This will give you the chance to:

- try out independent living
- see what you are good at
- find out what you might need more help with.

The flat is a space you furnish yourself, so when you are ready to move into your permanent property, you can move everything in at once.

## Supported lodgings

As a young person aged 16–25, this service provides you with a room of your own in a private home, where you're a member of the household, but are not expected to become a member of the family.

## Managing your tenancy

We know it can be hard having your own place for the first time. We will do whatever we can to ease the pressures on you. We will give you advice about holding down a tenancy, including:

- avoiding rent or council tax arrears
- paying bills
- budgeting.

## Tenancy issues

If you are a care leaver, aged 18–20, it is our priority to prevent you becoming homeless. We can give you guidance and support if something goes wrong, including if you are at risk of losing your tenancy and threatened with eviction. If you need help, speak with your social worker or personal adviser, and share any letters you have received. Together, we can help you find a solution.

## Moving on and moving in

We can offer practical support with moving into, and furnishing, your new home.



# What financial support you can get

There are a number of ways we can offer you financial support:

## Claiming benefits

We will support you to claim the benefits you are eligible for, such as Universal Credit. We will also put you in touch with a care leaver adviser at your local Jobcentre Plus.

- Your social worker can help you apply for an Advanced Claim for Universal Credits, up to 28 days before you turn 18.
- Once you turn 18, your personal adviser can help you claim housing benefit and universal credit, if it has not happened yet.

## Setting up a home grant

When you leave care, we will give you a grant to help buy essential things when you move into your own home. Currently, the grant is £2,000, which is what the government recommends.

## Council tax exemption

Until you turn 25, you will not have to pay council tax in Lewisham. If you live in a different area, check with your local council if it offers the same exemption.

## Banking

We can offer you:

- information on how to access your Junior ISA, if you have one (a fund of money set aside by the government and the Council)
- help opening a bank account
- access to Lewisham's credit union
- support to gain important identification documents, such as a passport or provisional driving licence, before your 18th birthday.

## Other support

We can also help you:

- get your National Insurance number
- with financial support in emergencies
- access the [Money House workshops](#) at [www.mybnk.org](http://www.mybnk.org) in preparation for independent living, and pay for your travel expenses.



# Help with education, training and employment

We want you to succeed in your education, training and employment when you leave care. We will ask you how you are doing and be ready to celebrate your achievements with you.

If you are starting education or training, we can give you the following support:

## College and training

- If you go to a further education college, you can apply for the 16–19 bursary fund, which pays up to £1,200 a year to support vulnerable young people to participate in education.
- You can get careers information and advice, including evening study support sessions at Young Lewisham on Tuesday evenings during term time. Tutors are on hand to help with studies, ESOL and signposting to courses (ask your personal adviser for more details).

## University

- We will give you a higher education (HE) bursary of at least £2,000 if you go to university. We will help

you choose the right course and university that matches your talents and interests.

- We will help you obtain a student loan to cover tuition and living costs.
- If you are in HE or residential further education, we will provide you with somewhere to live during university holidays.

## Other financial support

We can also:

- make a contribution towards the cost of your course, e.g. for registration or examination fees
- help you apply for extra funding for education and training from charities and trusts
- give you a financial assessment, where we look at how much money you have coming in and how much you spend, as well as budgeting advice
- make arrangements with your education or training provider to pay the initial costs for course equipment, books and essential materials, if you can't afford them. You will need to pay this back to us when you get either the

16–19 bursary, a discretionary learner support fund, or start earning from an apprenticeship.

## Find work and other opportunities

We can help you find work and build your CV by giving you:

- opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships and employment at the Council

- the chance to attend, and help organise, our yearly Celebrate Success Awards, which celebrate young people's achievements in education, employment, arts, personal development and participation
- access to employment support from the Drive Forward Foundation which helps care leavers with career opportunities. Visit [www.driveforwardfoundation.com](http://www.driveforwardfoundation.com)

# Support with health and wellbeing

Below are some of the ways we can support you to stay healthy, and look after your physical and mental health.

## Physical health

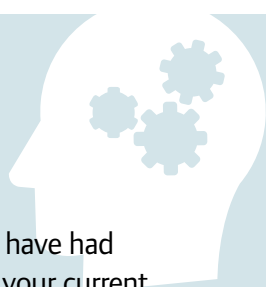
We can:

- give you information about healthy living
- tell you how to get financial help to pay for prescriptions
- help you register with a GP
- offer free or subsidised access to leisure centres in the borough through the Be Active scheme
- tell you about health drop-in centres (see opposite).

## Mental health, relationships and wellbeing

We can:

- support you to move from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to adult services
- tell you about counselling services that are available locally
- refer you to mentoring schemes
- continue to support contact with the independent visitor you had while you were in care, if appropriate
- help you maintain or regain contact with people who are special to you, or who cared for you in the past, such as former foster carers or social workers



- help you access the drop-in support service twice a week – where you can go for a chat, have a cup of tea, wash your clothes, make calls or use the internet.

## Other support

We can also:

- give you help with transport costs to get to health appointments
- support you to look after your child, if you are a young parent, and help you arrange childcare
- make sure you have a leaving care health letter from the LAC health team – it contains key information from your childhood (for example,

when and if you have had immunisations), your current health needs, as well as information about what you need to do to address current health issues and who to contact for further support

- consider whether to refer you to the Youth First service – which provides personalised support to adults with multiple and complex needs, to help them start living more stable lives and support their journey to independence. Visit [www.youthfirst.org.uk](http://www.youthfirst.org.uk)

# Getting involved and getting heard

We want our care leavers to be active members of society, and to have all the chances in life that other young adults have. To help you participate in society, we can:

- give you information about groups and clubs you can join, including our care leavers' forum
- invite you on trips to the theatre, sporting events and other activities
- give you opportunities to work for us as an interview panel member or staff trainer
- tell you about awards, schemes and competitions you can enter that reflect your talents and interests
- help you enrol on the electoral register, so you can vote in elections
- offer work experience with our councillors
- tell you about voluntary work opportunities
- tell you about leisure activities and possibly help finance them
- help you challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver.



# Unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers

If you are waiting for a decision on your asylum claim to stay in the UK, we can support you to plan for three possible outcomes after reaching 18 years. We will:

- prepare you if you receive a form of leave to stay in the UK
- prepare you to return to your country of origin if you are refused leave to remain in the

UK at the end of the immigration consideration process, or decide to return yourself

- prepare you for a period of uncertainty if you remain in the UK without permanent immigration status.



# Useful contacts

If you need any help and support, you can directly contact:

- your personal adviser (make sure you have their number saved)
- a social worker on 020 8314 9312 or 020 8314 6623
- a looked-after young people's nurse on 07771 794004 or 07557 542163
- the care leavers' forum participation manager on 07725 785672.

## Support for care leavers

- **Become:** freephone advice line for care leavers. Call 0800 023 2033, Monday to Friday, 10.30am–5pm, or visit [www.becomecharity.org.uk](http://www.becomecharity.org.uk)
- **Capstone Care Leavers Trust:** provides grants for care leavers aged 17–25. Visit [www.capstonecareleavertrust.org](http://www.capstonecareleavertrust.org)
- **Rees: The Care Leavers' Foundation:** gives advice, and financial and community support. Visit [www.reesfoundation.org](http://www.reesfoundation.org)
- **Sir William Boreman's Foundation:** provides grants to help people under 25, who live in Greenwich and Lewisham, access education. Visit [www.thedrapers.co.uk](http://www.thedrapers.co.uk)

- **The Skinner's Company:** provides grants and helps to access training. Visit [www.skinner.org.uk](http://www.skinner.org.uk)
- **The Spark Foundation:** provides grants up to £600 for young people in care and care leavers. Visit [www.sparkfoundation.org.uk](http://www.sparkfoundation.org.uk)
- **Turn2us:** helps people see what grants and benefits they can get. Visit [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk)

## Employment and education

- **Drive Forward Foundation:** helps care leavers to get into work. Visit [www.driveforwardfoundation.com](http://www.driveforwardfoundation.com)
- **Lewisham Virtual School:** monitors and supports education. Visit [lewishamvirtualschool.org.uk](http://lewishamvirtualschool.org.uk)
- **Princes Trust:** provides support for jobs, training and education. Visit [www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk)

## Finances

- **Lewisham Credit Union:** not-for-profit financial cooperative which offers loans and savings. Visit [www.lewishampluscu.co.uk](http://www.lewishampluscu.co.uk)
- **The Money House:** helps young people learn budgeting skills. Visit [www.mybnk.org](http://www.mybnk.org)

## Health

- **My Health London:** Visit [www.myhealth.london.nhs.uk](http://www.myhealth.london.nhs.uk) for information about NHS services.
- **NHS 111:** 24-hour urgent care phone line on 111 (in emergency call 999). Visit [www.england.nhs.uk/urgent-emergency-care](http://www.england.nhs.uk/urgent-emergency-care)
- **Mind:** mental health charity which offers advice and support. Visit [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- **Samaritans:** call the free 24-hour helpline on 116 123. Visit [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
- **Compass:** help and advice on emotional wellbeing, sexual health or substance misuse. Visit [www.compass-uk.org/lewisham](http://www.compass-uk.org/lewisham)
- **Mind Kit:** wellbeing and resilience sessions for young people. Visit [www.mindkit.org.uk/lewisham](http://www.mindkit.org.uk/lewisham)

## Parenting

- Visit [www.lewishamcfc.org.uk](http://www.lewishamcfc.org.uk) to find children and family centres in the borough.
- Find local events for families and children at [www.lewisham.gov.uk](http://www.lewisham.gov.uk)

## LGBTQ

- **METRO:** services to support young LGBT people. Visit [www.metrocentreonline.org](http://www.metrocentreonline.org)

## Immigration

- **Refugee Council:** support for refugees. Call 020 7346 1134, email [mytime@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:mytime@refugeecouncil.org.uk), or visit [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)
- **Migrant Children's Project:** call 0207 636 8505, Tuesday to Thursday, 10am–12 noon, email [mcpadvice@coramclc.org.uk](mailto:mcpadvice@coramclc.org.uk) or visit [www.coram.org.uk](http://www.coram.org.uk)
- **Red Cross:** support, advocacy and family-finding service. Visit [www.redcross.org.uk](http://www.redcross.org.uk)
- **Afghanistan and Central Asian Association:** 24 Deptford Broadway, Deptford SE8 4PA. Email [info@acaa.org.uk](mailto:info@acaa.org.uk), or visit [www.acaa.org.uk](http://www.acaa.org.uk)

