

# **Promoting Independence and moves to Adulthood and Leaving Care**

## **Guidance for Foster Carers**

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Essex County Council

# Promoting Independence and moves to Adulthood and Leaving Care

## About this document

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Updated by	<b>Rosemarie Cronin, CWDC Co-ordinator (Fostering)</b>
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## Version Control

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January 2017	4	Updated training courses available	Rosemarie Cronin
January 2017	4	Update of legislation regarding Staying Put	Rosemarie Cronin
January 2017	4	Inserted the Care Leaver' Charter	Rosemarie Cronin
February 2017	4	Added links to relevant resources	Rosemarie Cronin
March 2017	4	Added information regarding fostering Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	Fleur Nichols

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## Introduction and Legal Framework

Young people who are leaving care often do less well than their peers who have not experienced the care system. Young people who have been in care are over-represented in prisons and in the homeless population. Young people who are in the care system are a vulnerable group of young people who need additional help to ensure that they are prepared for leaving care and adulthood. Foster carers play a crucial role in this and must have the training and support that they require to help them work with this vulnerable group of young people.

The **National Minimum Standards** for Fostering Services (2011) standard 12 states:

12.1) Children are supported to:

- a. establish positive and appropriate social and sexual relationships;
- b. develop positive self-esteem and emotional resilience;
- c. prepare for the world of work and or further or higher education;
- d. prepare for moving into their own accommodation;
- e. develop practical skills, including shopping, buying, cooking and keeping food, washing clothes, personal self-care, and understanding and taking responsibility for personal healthcare;
- f. develop financial capability, knowledge and skills;
- g. know about entitlements to financial and other support after leaving care, including benefits and support from social care services.

12.2) Foster carers contribute to the development of each child's care plan, in collaboration with the child, including the pathway plan for an "eligible" child, and work collaboratively with the young person's social worker or personal adviser in implementing the plan.

12.3) The fostering service ensures there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. This includes appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood. Arrangements are consistent with the young person's care plan, including their placement plan, pathway plan and transition plan for children with disabilities and special educational needs.

12.4) The fostering service has a policy and practical arrangements which enable children to remain with their foster carer(s) into legal adulthood, for example so that s/he may develop appropriate life skills before being required to move to more independent accommodation. Any such decisions are agreed with foster carers at a placement meeting and are detailed in a child's placement plan.

This guidance should also be read in conjunction with the following guidance from the Department for Education:

Fostering Guidance 2011 paragraphs 3.118 – 3.125

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers

In addition to the above Essex County Council have other documents relating to Leaving Care and Staying Put which may be relevant. These include:

- The Leaving and After Care Service Transition to Adulthood Policy
- Staying Put Policy
- Staying Put Policy Finance

Copies of these can be provided by your SSW

## **Essex Corporate Parenting Pledge**

The Essex Pledge to children and young people in our care was written and agreed alongside the children and young people we look after.

In this children and young people said they wanted to “to stay in one place when you feel settled and not to be moved around”. In response to this Essex corporate parenting pledges to “Help you stay in a placement until you are ready to move on”.

The fostering service aims to support foster carers to work with young people in preparing them to be more independent in a way that is focused on the individual young person’s needs. In doing this we hope that young people will be able to learn and gain skills in a way, and at a time when they are ready, and they will be enabled to remain in their placement until they are ready to move on.

## **Care Leavers’ Charter**

The Charter for Care Leavers was written and developed by a group of care leavers and published by the Department for Education. The Charter is a statement of the values and principles that should underpin the actions and decisions of all professionals who have a remit to work with care leavers. The Charter gives us a set of principles that are designed to improve the experiences of care leavers throughout preparation, transition and on their journeys into adult life. If you are working with care leavers it is good to familiarise yourself with these principles and see how well we are all matching up to it.

The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents.

### **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. 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 it 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 dealing with other agencies. We will work together with the services you need, including housing, benefits, colleges & 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.

## **Training for Foster Carers**

There are a number of training courses available to foster carers that would contribute towards their understanding and practice of working with young people leaving care. Some of the key ones are:

1. Preparation for Adult Life (classroom)
2. Supporting Asylum Seeking Families and Young People (classroom)
3. Fostering Asylum and Refugee Children (e-learning)
4. Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults (e-learning)
5. Supporting Young People Leaving Care (e-learning)

In addition to this, the topic is included within the Training, Support and Development (TSD) Induction Standards for Foster Care.

## **Transfer process in Essex**

- 1) 0 – 18 service for children and young people who have been looked after before the age of 16. These young people remain in the Children in Care service until the age of 18, with a Personal Advisor allocated alongside the Social Worker from the age of 17, who will then remain the allocated Personal Advisor until the young person reaches 21 or older.
- 2) Exceptions to the above will be made when a young person is aged 16 or over and their allocated Children in Care SW leaves or there is a mutual agreement between the young person, IRO and Social Work team that a transfer to a different worker is in that young person's interests. In these cases young people will be transferred to a Leaving Care Social Worker.
- 3) If a young person comes into care post 16 they will immediately go to the leaving and after care service.

## **Additional Resources**

In November 2016 The Who Cares? Trust changed its name to Become. This is a charity for children in care and young care leavers. Their website has lots of useful information on for young people and professionals.

The website is: [www.becomecharity.org.uk/](http://www.becomecharity.org.uk/)

Within the site are 3 useful factsheets that can be downloaded

[www.becomecharity.org.uk/for-professionals/resources/care-advice-line-factsheets/](http://www.becomecharity.org.uk/for-professionals/resources/care-advice-line-factsheets/)

The factsheets are on the following topics:

- All About Money – a guide to financial support for care leavers aged 18 and over
- The Name Game – A guide to people you'll probably meet in children's services if you are in care or a care leaver
- Pathway to Success – Information about the Pathway Plan

### **Other useful websites**

NRPF Network (A network of local authorities and partner organisations focusing on the statutory duties to migrants with care needs who have no recourse to public funds

[www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk](http://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk)

[www.gov.uk/leaving-foster-or-local-authority-care](http://www.gov.uk/leaving-foster-or-local-authority-care)

[www.anationalvoice.org/info/rights/children-leaving-care-act](http://www.anationalvoice.org/info/rights/children-leaving-care-act)

## **Assessment and planning of young people working towards independence and leaving care**

All young people will have an allocated worker whether they are in the Leaving and After Care Service or in the Children in Care teams. The allocated worker should work with the young person, the carer and any other relevant people to complete an assessment of need regarding the young person's ability to be able to manage independently. This includes emotional as well as practical abilities. If the young person is in foster care, the foster carer will be a key contributor to this as they will see how well the young person manages on a day to day basis.

As a result of the Needs Assessment a Pathway Plan is drawn up, this is a legal requirement as part of the Leaving Care Act. This again should include all relevant people including the foster carer. The aim of the Pathway Plan is to look at areas where the young person may need additional support and input to help them towards independent living so it is crucial that foster carers are involved with this and are aware of areas where they can help and work with the young person.

The Pathway Plan supersedes the care plan at 16 and becomes the main Plan for the young person. This is then reviewed as part of the Statutory Reviewing Service.

### **Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

Children who arrive in the UK without parents or carers and are accommodated into the care of the local council often live with foster carers or supported lodgings carers.

These children and young people may have faced persecution for their beliefs or their ethnic or social group. Very often they have experienced trauma and may often have particular emotional, practical, language and cultural needs that foster carers will need to consider.

Alongside the usual fostering expectations of caring for these children, carers will also need to support them through the asylum process to stay in the UK and possibly to prepare to return to their countries of origin. This information will be shared by the child's allocated worker and become part of their planning. Information can be provided such as flow charts to help to understand what can be a complex asylum process.

## **Post 18 years and Staying Put**

Young people legally leave care at the age of 18 years. All young people are different and it is the responsibility of all those involved with the young person to prepare them for this time. The options available to young people at the age of 18 years will vary. Some will go to university, some will live independently, some will live with family or their foster carers and some will move to semi-independent accommodation. While it is important to work towards what is best for the individual young person there are financial constraints that will impact on this and all young people will be supported to claim any benefits and grants that they are entitled to.