

Gateshead's Local Offer for Care Leavers

Gateshead has your back



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1. What is the Local Offer to Care Leavers?

Local authorities have a legal duty to support young people making the transition from care to adulthood. It is our responsibility to make sure you know what services are available to you, and what you can expect to receive when you are in care.

If you are leaving care, or have already left care, this doesn't mean that we don't care about you and don't want to continue to support you. We want to make sure that you feel safe and supported and know where to go for advice and help. This document will tell you about the support that Gateshead has in place for you as a care leaver. It will help you make the most of the services available to you so that you can make the most of your independence.

To be able to get the support set out in this document, you must have been in care for at least 13 weeks or periods totalling 13 weeks which began after you turned 14 years old, and also included some time on or after your 16th birthday. If you are not sure whether you qualify for support, you can ask your social worker or personal advisor.

This document will cover the following areas:

1. Health and wellbeing
2. Finances
3. Accommodation
4. Education, employment and training
5. Relationships
6. Participation in society

At the back of this document there is a list of useful contact numbers that you should find helpful. Below is some important information you will need to know about the support we must give you by law, the Leaving Care Team, Personal Advisors, Pathway Planning and more.

2. The support we must give you by law

Through the Children Leaving Care Act (2000) Gateshead must provide you with the following:

- A Personal Advisor (PA), who will offer you advice and support
- Suitable accommodation and financial support if you leave care before your 18th birthday
- A Pathway Plan which must be regularly reviewed with you.

Following changes introduced via the Children and Social Work ACT 2017, you can ask for support from your PA up to the age of 25, regardless of whether you are in education or training or not.

There are also times when you may need extra support and this may be due to:

- Being a young parent
- You have a disability or special educational need
- You are an unaccompanied asylum seeking child and you have an ongoing asylum claim
- You are in custody or in contact with Probation or youth offending services
- You are going through a difficult time.

3. What does the Gateshead Leaving Care Team do?

We are your 'Corporate Parents', which means that it our responsibility to be good parents to all young people in our care. A good corporate parent should have the same aspirations for a child in care, or a care leaver, that any good parent would have for their own child. This means providing you with the stability and support that you need to make progress; helping you to access new opportunities and experiences that inspire you to set ambitious goals for yourself. It means celebrating your successes, but also recognising that you will sometimes make mistakes and need our help to get back on track. It also means supporting you to gain the skills and confidence to live an independent life whilst letting you know that you have someone to call on for help if the going gets tough.

The Leaving Care Team is based in the Civic Centre, Gateshead. It is part of the Corporate Parenting Service and works with young people who are aged 18+ (care leavers). Our team is made up of PAs who will support you with your journey to independence. We have a legal duty to support and assist you until you are 25.

4. What you can expect from your Corporate Parents

A corporate parent is an organisation or person who has special responsibilities to care for looked after children and young people, including:

- those in residential care
- those in foster care
- those in kinship care, who live with a family member other than a parent
- those who are looked after at home

Our Care Pledge says that we will:

- Look after you
- Treat you right
- Find the right place for you
- Involve you
- Keep you happy and healthy
- Help you get a good education
- Help you get on in life

5. What is the role of the Personal Advisor (PA)?

Once you turn 18, you will no longer have a social worker and your PA will become your main worker and continue working with you until the age of 25, regardless of whether you are in education or training or not. A PA will be identified for you after you become 16, so you can build a relationship before they become your allocated worker.

Your PA is there to help you to prepare to live independently and be successful at this. They can offer you advice, guidance and support after you leave care. PAs will talk with you about the support that you may need and will write this support and how it will be offered to you in your Pathway Plan. The amount of support that you receive from them will depend on your needs and what you want from them.

We will try and keep the same PA allocated to you, however this can sometimes be difficult and you may wish to request a change in your worker. The relationship between you and your PA is important; make the most of them, treat them with respect and keep in touch.

6. What is a Pathway Plan?

Every young person between the ages of 16-25 in care or a care leaver has a Pathway Plan. Your Pathway Plan is a document that is written by your social worker and handed over to your PA after speaking to you and the other significant people in your life. It sets out what support and help you need, your views and what your future goals are. It will also outline exactly what support you will receive from Gateshead Council.

Your Pathway Plan will be reviewed with you every 6 months, or if there are any significant changes in your situation.

SECTION A: Health and wellbeing

Your health matters to us. Being healthy doesn't just mean eating fruit, exercising regularly and keeping your teeth clean. It also means feeling strong and well emotionally and being sexually healthy and safe. Your PA can offer you support to achieve and maintain positive health and wellbeing and we recognise that this is different for each individual. In Gateshead we will support you to recognise your own health needs and signpost you to services to meet these needs.

We also recognise that it can be very difficult leaving care and living independently and that this can often be lonely and isolating. This can have a negative impact on how you feel and cope on a day to day basis. There are lots of services and support out there. Read this section to find out some of the services available to you.

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Emotional problems Your PA can offer you emotional support to talk through any feelings and problems you have and can put in strategies with you to help you cope. If you need more specialist support your PA can refer and support you to access adult mental/emotional health services.</p> <p>Streetwise offers free and confidential information, advice, support and counselling to young people aged 11-25: counselling@streetwisenorth.co.uk /Tel: 0191 2305400</p> <p>North East Counselling Service This is a free service for all children and young people aged 9-25 years old. You can contact them at: info@necounselling.org.uk /Tel: 0191 440 8127</p> <p>ChildLine offers 24-hours support: Tel: 0800 1111</p>	<p>Remember: if you are struggling with anything, speak to someone about it – don't bottle it up!</p> <p>Evidence suggests that a small improvement in wellbeing can help to decrease some mental health problems and also help people to flourish. There are five actions to improve personal wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connect • be active • take notice • keep learning • give

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Access to free leisure facilities If you want to access free leisure care within Gateshead, speak to your PA who will arrange for you to be issued with a Leisure Pass which can be used at any leisure centre within the Gateshead area.</p>	<p>Remember: Your PA can arrange free access to leisure services for you.</p>
<p>Sexual health If you need help and support with sexual health and family planning issues you will be signposted by your PA to the right local services for you that can offer you additional support and advice.</p> <p>Free contraception, pregnancy checks and check-ups are available. Contact: www.gatesheadsexualhealth.co.uk /Tel: 0191 283 1577</p>	<p>Remember: Keep yourself safe. If you do not use a condom you will be at risk of becoming a young parent and catching infections.</p>
<p>Drug and alcohol support Platform Gateshead offers a range of specialist substance misuse services to under 18's: www.platformgateshead.org.uk /Tel: 0191 4601354</p> <p>Gateshead substance misuse service (Change, Grow, Live) is a single, integrated drug and alcohol recovery service for all adults in Gateshead. https://www.changegrowlive.org/get-help/advice-information/drugs-alcohol /Tel: 0191 5947821</p> <p>FRANK (friendly, confidential drugs advice): www.talktofrank.com /Tel: 0300 123 6600 / SMS to 82111</p>	<p>Remember: At Change, Grow, Live we believe that everyone has the right to lead the best life they can. Our accessible services empower people to improve their health and wellbeing and take control of the direction of their lives.</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Dentist and opticians If you are receiving benefits then you will have access to free dental health care and opticians.</p> <p>Opticians and dentists are free if you are under 18 years old, on benefits or in full time education.</p>	<p>Remember: You should visit the dentist twice a year for cleaning and a check-up.</p> <p>Even if you do not have any eye problems you should have your eyes tested every 2 years.</p>
<p>GP/doctor Your PA will support you to register with a GP and will help you to attend health appointments. A GP treats preventative illnesses and will be able to refer you to other services.</p> <p>Your PA can also give you information on financial assistance for prescriptions which the GP may issue.</p>	<p>Remember: If you move it will be your responsibility to inform your GP and sign up with a different, more local GP.</p>
<p>Health passports When you become a care leaver you will be given a health passport by the LAC Nurse at your last statutory health check. This will contain all your available health information, like the name of your GP and dentist and any ongoing health conditions. This will be useful for you to use when you access health services and adult services.</p> <p>You will also be offered a monthly drop-in session which the LAC Nurse will attend giving the opportunity to discuss any health issues that you may have.</p>	<p>Remember: If you lose your health passport speak to your LAC nurse.</p>

SECTION B: Finance and money

We understand that one of the biggest concerns for care leavers is money. We can offer you financial support to make living independently that little bit less difficult. The amount of money you will get depends on your age and what type of accommodation you're in. There is a lot of information available online for care leavers and you will be able to ask your PA for more information if you need it.

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Budgeting We will give you support with budgeting your money and help you learn how to budget and live independently. We can also offer you a finance education course to give you a bit more support.</p>	<p>Remember: If you don't know how to budget and spend your money wisely, you will really struggle when you live on your own.</p> <p>Not being able to budget properly may affect you in the long term.</p> <p>If you need more budgeting support, then speak to your PA.</p>
<p>Welfare benefits When you are old enough to apply for benefits, we will help you do this. Four weeks before your 18th birthday your PA will help you with this. We have an arrangement with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) that your application will be processed on the day of your birthday, and given priority. If you have applied for benefits and are waiting to be paid, we will pay you a weekly living allowance to help you live while your claim is processed.</p>	<p>Remember: You must attend your appointments.</p> <p>It is a criminal offence to lie to the benefits office. You will also need to show your PA that you have applied for benefits.</p> <p>If you don't attend appointments with the Job Centre and don't keep to your agreement to look for work without a good reason, your benefits may be stopped.</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Benefit options</p> <p>Universal Credit – this is a monthly payment to encourage you to get into paid work.</p> <p>Job Seekers Allowance – this is a twice weekly payment to help you when you look for paid work.</p> <p>Income Support – if you are in college full time or other education (Level 3 or below) you can claim Income Support (but not Universal Credit or Job Seekers Allowance). This is a right for all care leavers until you turn 21.</p> <p>Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – if you are ill or have other problems that stop you being available to work you may be able to claim ESA.</p> <p>Council Tax Exemption – all care leavers will be given 100% exemption from Council Tax until they turn 25.</p>	<p>Your PA will advise and support you with applying for benefits and attending appointments.</p>
<p>Living allowance payments</p> <p>If you are unable to claim benefits or are waiting for your application to be processed, you will be offered a weekly payment until you are in receipt of money. This payment will be the equivalent of state benefits. You will be expected to use this for all of your living costs.</p> <p>We will provide you with a financial gift on your birthday, at Christmas and other celebratory events.</p> <p>If you are in your own tenancy we will provide you with a winter fuel allowance to help with the extra costs of heating your home over winter.</p> <p>How will I be paid? You will be encouraged to set up a bank account. The best way to get paid is through BACS – which is a bank transfer. The money will be paid into your account each week.</p>	<p>Remember: You will need to spend your Weekly Living Allowance on day to day essentials. You should budget this money and pay for your essentials first (food and bills).</p> <p>Your PA will support you to open your own bank account if you haven't done this before.</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Savings If you have been in care for a while you will have a savings account which you can access when you turn 18.</p> <p>Your PA will provide you with information on how to access your Junior ISA or Child Trust Fund.</p>	<p>Remember: Depending on how long you have been in care, your savings may be quite a lot. Use this chunk of money to help you with your future and don't waste it.</p>
<p>Leaving care grant We will provide you with a leaving care grant, up to the value of £2,000, to decorate and furnish your home.</p> <p>At times you may need items of furniture before you move onto independent living. Your PA will help you decide which items you will need, such as white goods, crockery, beds, curtains etc. from a list of recommended items.</p>	<p>Remember: To choose items that you really need from the recommended items list.</p> <p>The grant is a contribution to help you buy everything you might need when moving into your first home.</p>
<p>Education incentive payment If you are in full time education we will provide you with bursaries or money for your education, employment or training.</p>	<p>See the education, employment and training section for more information.</p>
<p>Emergencies We understand that emergencies do happen. We will pay emergency payments or offer food packages to care leavers for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as part of an education package • if you are unable to claim benefits • if you are waiting for your benefits to start • in an emergency 	<p>Remember: Speak to your PA if you think you are entitled to food packages or you are facing an emergency.</p> <p>You may be asked for proof of your situation.</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Other sources of funding Some organisations help care leavers by awarding grants (which do not need to be repaid). Some grants help with university, moving into independent accommodation, financial support to help you train etc.</p> <p>Contact the Care Advice Line at: www.thecareadvice.org /Tel: 0161 413 7860</p>	<p>Remember: Speak to your PA about what other funds you may be entitled to.</p> <p>You may apply to charities and organisations for additional grant funding if you meet their criteria.</p>

SECTION C: Your Important Documents

We all need important documents to do simple things like book on a course, claim benefits or open a bank account. We will make sure that you have the important documents that you need in adulthood, such as a passport and birth certificate. We will keep copies of your important documents safely on file and you will be responsible for keeping the original documents safe. If you lose any of these documents you should inform the relevant authority or discuss this with your PA immediately. Lost documents can be used for identity theft – this is where someone may use your name and personal information in order to obtain credit, loans, etc.

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>National Insurance number At 15 years and 9 months we will apply for your national insurance number (NI Number)</p>	<p>Remember: Remind your social worker if you do not receive this.</p> <p>Your PA will support you to find this out when you turn 18.</p>

<p>Passport We will support you with an application for a passport and pay the fee for your first one. Your passport is your main source of ID.</p>	<p>Remember: Do not lose your passport or you will have to apply and pay for a new one which will cost you over £70. If you lose it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you will not be allowed to leave the country to travel • you may be at risk of identity theft
<p>Provisional Driving Licence We will support you with an application for a provisional driving licence and pay the fee for your first one.</p>	<p>Remember: You cannot drive without a provisional licence.</p> <p>If you lose your licence you will have to pay for a new one.</p>
<p>Birth Certificate If you do not already have a birth certificate, we will apply for you to get one.</p>	<p>Remember: If you lose your documents you will have to pay for new copies.</p> <p>Your birth certificate is an important document.</p>
<p>British citizenship If you are entitled to apply for British Citizenship before the age of 18 then we will support you to do this.</p>	<p>Remember: To tell us if you want to apply. We will help you with the application.</p>
<p>Access to your file You have a right to see the information we keep about you. If you apply, we will provide you with a copy of your social services records.</p> <p>If you would like to see a copy of your file, please make a request in writing and give this to your PA.</p>	<p>Remember: Think about the decision very carefully. Files can be very difficult to read.</p> <p>It can take some time to get a copy of your files, so please be patient.</p>

SECTION D: Accommodation

If you are aged over 18 your PA will help you find suitable accommodation. This might involve working with Gateshead Housing Company, supported housing and supported lodgings to support you to get the best accommodation suitable for you. We might also recommend a taster flat to you, in case you prefer to experience living independently with some support from the Leaving Care Team.

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Staying Put If your foster carer and you decide that you would like to remain living with them, then we will support you to do that under a Staying Put arrangement. This can last until you are 21.</p> <p>Staying Put allows you to stay with your foster carers so that you can get further help and support with independent living skills. You will have responsibilities such as paying board and other independent living skills. All of this is to prepare you for when you move on.</p>	<p>Remember: Staying Put will help you maintain a supportive relationship with your foster carers.</p> <p>Your social worker, foster carer and PA will be able to discuss this option with you.</p> <p>If you decide to stay, we will help you apply for independent accommodation after you are 21.</p>
<p>Taster flat This is a flat that will be your own but will give you the opportunity to experience living independently without the added pressure of a tenancy agreement as it is managed by the Leaving Care Team. If, after a period of time, you have been successful at managing this tenancy then we will sign it over to you completely.</p>	

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Independent housing</p> <p>When you are in independent accommodation you are responsible for yourself and for paying your bills. We will support you to make an application so you can access registered social landlords. You will get a tenancy of your own.</p> <p>Your PA will make a referral for floating support for you – this is so you can have more support with managing your tenancy and help you avoid arrears in your rent and bills. We know it can be very hard having your own place for the first time and we will support you the best we can to make that easier for you and ease some of the pressures.</p> <p>Your PA or Floating Support Worker will help you make a claim for housing benefit.</p> <p>You will be entitled to a setting up home allowance if you are living in your own tenancy. This will be £2,000 to furnish and decorate your home. See the Finance section of this offer for more information.</p>	<p>Remember:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To keep on top of your bills • To keep to your tenancy agreement <p>Work with your PA who will help you with all of these things.</p> <p>If you do not keep to your tenancy agreement, you may be at risk of losing it.</p> <p>Your bills (water, gas and electricity) can all be paid for monthly through your bank. This is often a much better option than running up bills.</p> <p>Make sure you know how your rent is being paid. It is your responsibility whether you are working or on benefits to ensure that your rent is paid to avoid eviction.</p>
<p>Supported Accommodation/Semi-Independent</p> <p>You may not be ready for your own tenancy when you decide to leave care and may prefer more supported options. Your PA will discuss these with you and help you identify one that will be suitable for you.</p>	<p>Remember: Make good use of your PA and Support Worker – they will help you access local services and help you connect with your local community. They are there for you.</p> <p>If you do not use your accommodation, then you may be at risk of losing it.</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>University accommodation (holiday periods) We will provide you with accommodation during university holidays (or fund this if you make your own arrangements) if you cannot stay within your term time accommodation or return to your home area.</p>	

SECTION E: Employment, Education and Training

We want to make sure that every young person leaving care is able to achieve the goals that they set in life. We want you to succeed in your education, training and employment. When we meet with you we will find out how you are doing and will celebrate achievements with you.

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Careers advice and information on training and courses We also recognise that personal circumstances can impact on a person’s ability to engage full time in a course or job. We can offer support to look at courses that can be tailored to your needs, explore with you what you want to achieve and help you make a realistic plan to get there.</p>	<p>Remember: Education, training and finding a job is your responsibility. The Leaving Care Team will support and help you but you must be willing and give your best.</p>
<p>Job search We will support you with finding employment, including help to write your CV, apply for jobs and prepare for interviews.</p> <p>We will provide you with funding for interview clothing and transport costs.</p>	<p>Remember: Interview clothing should be WORK APPROPRIATE clothing and not new trainers!</p> <p>Speak to your PA or Support Worker for help to apply for jobs and get ready for an interview.</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>The Job Centre Plus will support you to look and apply for work if you are not in education or employment.</p> <p>Your PA can refer you to Building Better Opportunities – Wise Steps, where you will receive one to one support from a job coach for up to 18 months. This will include help with a job search and will focus on removing any barriers to work through social inclusion activities, life skills, confidence building and skills development. Activities will also include ICT training and personal money management.</p> <p>You can also be referred to our in-house Learning & Skills provider who offers career information sessions, CV design, mock interview skills. You could also be offered a place on a Study Programme, Traineeship or Apprenticeship.</p>	
<p>Apprenticeships As your corporate parent we take our role seriously, we are therefore making efforts to offer opportunities for apprenticeships within Gateshead Local Authority. We have already secured apprenticeships in Business Administration and the Highways department, and we are working towards increasing the number of care leavers within the council. There will be further opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships and employment within the council.</p> <p>Year 11 guarantee We will give you access to a careers guidance and information meeting which lets you know what progression pathways are available into apprenticeships, which includes CV and interview preparation workshop.</p>	<p>Remember: You may still be get Housing Benefit and other support (talk to your PA to ensure that you are getting all the financial help available to you)</p> <p>Remember: If you didn't do as well as you had expected at school, we will still get you a job with training.</p> <p>Remember: You will have a dedicated advisor and personal tutor.</p> <p>Remember: You will be given pastoral care, to support you with personal issues.</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Apprenticeship guarantee</p> <p>We will give you an apprenticeship guarantee, you will have a guaranteed apprenticeship offer through learningSkills, this guarantee consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone interview with specialist information, advice and guidance to identify your vocational areas of interest, including access to live vacancies and for you to make an informed choice on whether apprenticeships are the right choice for you. • An invite to the weekly learningSkills Assessment Centre and an interview with our dedicated advisors who will help you to identify your skills, experience and prior attainment and support you to progress into an apprenticeship. This will give you access to the opportunities below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Programme of Study – a full time programme (16-18 years, 16hrs a week for up to a year) in a range of vocational subjects, maths and English support at an accessible venue in Gateshead, including financial support with travel and lunch. This route will give you the skills employers demand. ○ Employability programmes – intensive support for 19+ unemployed into sustainable employment. Including job search, maths and English support, help with job applications, digital skills and CV writing. ○ Traineeship – this programme provides a direct route into apprenticeships, you will have access to maths and English support if you need it, will be provided with a work placement in your chosen vocational area and will be supported to develop your employability skills to enable you to be 	<p>Remember: We expect you to have good attendance and punctuality.</p> <p>Remember: We expect you to attend all interviews.</p> <p>Remember: We expect you to sign up to our learner charter.</p> <p>Remember: We have a zero tolerance to bullying and harassment.</p> <p>Remember: We make decisions together, everyone is valued, all cultures celebrated and we share and respect the opinions of others.</p> <p>Remember: If you get an apprenticeship or traineeship we will provide you with support for transport costs. We will also provide you with support to buy any tools, equipment or essential clothing that you need as part of your apprenticeship.</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>apprenticeship ready. You will be provided with financial support for travel, lunch and interview clothes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Apprenticeship – Gateshead Council is one of the largest local authority providers of apprenticeships in the country. Last year we had over 1000 people on apprenticeship programmes. We will guarantee you an apprenticeship in the vocational areas that learningSkills deliver inside and outside of the Council. This will include specialised one to one support with job search, interview skills and drafting your CV. ○ We will work with you to progress you onto the next level apprenticeship and into sustainable employment. <p>Do you have a learning difficulty/disability? We will guarantee a priority application to our internship programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The internship offer is 4 days a week working with an employer and 1 day a week classroom based. You will be provided with financial support for travel, lunch and interview clothes. ● You will progress into employment, volunteering or further learning. <p>New this year! We would like to give you the opportunity to come and work for us! Gateshead Council has pledged to ring fence apprenticeship vacancies within the Local Authority for Looked after Children and Care Leavers.</p>	<p>Remember: For further information, advice and guidance please contact us direct on Tel: 0191 4338727/07825552087. Email apprenticeships@gateshead.gov.uk or register online at www.gateshead.gov.uk/applynow</p> <p>Alternatively, contact your PA to arrange an appointment with us or like/message us on Facebook to access all of our apprenticeship opportunities by searching “learningskillsapprenticeships”</p> <p>Or text JOBS to 80818.</p> <p>Remember: If you have a learning difficulty and/or disability and would like further information, advice and guidance contact Mary Burns on Tel: 0191 4338528/07887488305.</p> <p>Remember: For a wide range of other learning opportunities visit Gateshead.gov.uk/learningSkills to access our course directory.</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>We will offer at least one employer event which will give you the opportunity to speak to employers who have pledged to support Looked After Children and Care Leavers into employment through work placements/apprenticeship opportunities.</p> <p>We will progress people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into apprenticeships.</p>	
<p>University If you decide to go to university, we will assist you with your housing during holiday periods and provide you with extra financial support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will give you a higher education bursary of at least £6,000 • We will help you obtain tuition fees • We will assist you with the initial costs of moving to and from university • You will be eligible to apply for a student loan <p>You may also be entitled to additional support from the university who often have additional funds and grants for care leavers.</p>	<p>Remember: There is additional support available to you if you go on to attend university- this can be from a designated person within the university who your PA will help you to identify.</p>

SECTION F: Relationships

Having relationships, both personal and professional, is important for emotional health as well as support. One of the biggest issues raised by care leavers is that of isolation – without a strong and stable social network it can be extremely hard to navigate life after care.

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Peer mentoring</p>	<p>Remember: Your peer mentor has also been in care and gone through similar challenges to you.</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>We feel that it would be helpful for you to be in touch with other care leavers. We can link you with a peer mentor who can support you through the journey of preparing to leave care, and help you when you have left.</p> <p>There are also opportunities for young people to train to become a peer mentor themselves, offering support to other young people leaving care.</p>	
<p>Family and friends We will support you to reconnect with your family when this will be in your best interests.</p> <p>We will also help you to maintain contact with the significant people in your life – your family, friends and previous carers.</p>	
<p>Support networks We will support you to make contact with social support in your area which will build on the relationships within your life.</p> <p>We will also invite you along to our monthly participation meetings where you can link in with other care leavers and professionals that can support you.</p>	

SECTION 6: You as an active member of society and your local community

You have a right to be involved in all the decisions about your plans for leaving care. In Gateshead we value the participation of our care leavers within the development of services. We also want care leavers to be active members of society and the local community and to have all the chances that other young adults have.

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>Personal Advisor When you turn 18 a PA will be allocated to you. Your PA will keep in contact and arrange meetings with you, they will visit you at home but can also arrange to see you in the community. Your PA is there to give you advice, information and guidance to help you make the best decisions. If you are unhappy about the plans or support you get, you can speak to your PA about it. You also have a right to an advocacy service to help you say what you are not happy with and challenge any decisions.</p> <p>Gateshead’s Children’s Rights Officer can help you with this or you can access an independent advocate. Children’s Rights Officer: Tel: 0191 4332647 or 07795 021819/ email: rights@gateshead.gov.uk</p> <p>National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) https://www.nyas.net/ / 0808 808 1001</p>	<p>Remember: Make the most of your PA and stay in contact with them.</p> <p>If you don’t engage or speak up, decisions will be made without you. This may mean that things will happen that you do not want.</p> <p>Make sure you are clear about what you want – it’s your life after all.</p>
<p>Changing your worker In certain, exceptional circumstances you can request to change your social worker or Personal Advisor. Ask to speak to the Leaving Care Team Manager if you wish to change your worker:</p> <p>Lesley Thompson. lesleythompson@gateshead.gov.uk 0191 433 2263</p>	
<p>Participation We want to offer you the opportunity to have your say on service improvement and delivery. You can do this by speaking with your PA, completing a MOMO app or attending</p>	<p>Remember: Your views are important to us You need to speak up and tell us how we can improve the services for you now and others in the future</p>

What we offer 2 U	What U Need to Know
<p>one of the events that we hold to consult with young people. We also ask you to complete an annual survey.</p> <p>We will also provide you with information on groups and clubs that you may wish to join, along with informing you about relevant awards, schemes and activities you can engage in that are in line with your interests.</p>	
<p>Your right to vote Once you turn 18 you are entitled to vote in local and national elections. We will encourage you and help you to enrol on the electoral roll so that you can vote in these, if you wish to.</p>	<p>Remember: You can make sure that your voice is heard and your vote will play an important role in shaping the government and your future.</p>
<p>Citizens advice The Citizens Advice Bureau aims to provide free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities as a member of society.</p> <p>www.citizensadvice.org.uk / 0344 2451288</p>	
<p>How to complain You have the right to complain to Gateshead if you can't solve a problem with your social worker, Personal Advisor or their manager. You can contact the Social Care complaints team on 0191 4332692 / email: enquiries.cbs@gateshead.gov.uk / text "Complaint Call Back" to 07736 287376 (make sure you include your contact details within the text).</p>	

7. Where to get further information

As a Care Leaver there are a range of support services available to you. We have put together a list of useful contact details. If there is anything you do not understand or further information you need then please speak to your PA or social worker.

GATESHEAD LEAVING CARE TEAM CONTACT INFORMATION

Where to find the Leaving Care Team?	Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead NE8 1HH
When are we open?	Monday to Thursday from 9.00am to 5.00pm / Friday from 9.00am to 4.30pm
How to contact us?	0191 4332750 / email: lacadminteam@gateshead.gov.uk Out of Hours emergency number: 0191 4770844

Children's Rights Officer: Tel: 0191 4332647 or 07795 021819/email: rights@gateshead.gov.uk

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) <https://www.nyas.net/> /Tel: 0808 808 1001

Complaints Team: Tel: 0191 4332692 / email: enquiries.cbs@gateshead.gov.uk /
text "Complaint Call Back" to 07736 287376 (include your contact details within the text).

