

The Big Wide World

Thurrock Council Aftercare Team's Guide to independence

Welcome to the Aftercare Team

The Aftercare Team can be contacted by:

- phone – 01375 652 456
- post – Aftercare Team, Thurrock Council, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL

You can contact us:

- Monday to Thursday, 9am to 5:30pm
- Friday, 9am to 4:30pm

Outside of these hours, you can contact our Out of Office emergency duty team:

- phone – 01375 372 468

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Foreword

This guide will give you information on the skills and abilities you need to live independently. It will provide you with activities and worksheets on areas you will need to work on to improve your skills for independent living. It will also inform you of your Leaving Care Entitlements.

As well as the above, you will be expected to attend the Independent Living Programme run by Open Door (SIP programme) where you will be able to explore these themes in more depth.

To support you further with this, we have experienced Personal Advisers within the Aftercare Team who will work with you to make your transition into adulthood as smooth as possible. We welcome you to look through this guide with your Foster Carers, Care Providers, Support Workers and Social Workers as we've taken time to prepare this important and useful information for you.

Once you reach our team we will continue to work through this guide to ensure that you have the opportunity to reach your full potential within your adult life.

This guide was developed, and is regularly revised with care leavers.

The Aftercare Team sends a monthly newsletter to all young people, covering updates on services and useful information to support you and your independence. If you do not get your copy, please speak to your Aftercare worker.

If you have any further suggestions or information you would like to be included within this guide, please contact the Aftercare Team. We welcome all feedback.

Eligibility criteria

To receive support as a care leaver you will have to fall into one of the following categories.

'Eligible' – this means you:

- are aged 16 or 17 years-old
- have been in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14
- were in care on your 16th birthday and for at least 24 hours after

'Relevant' – this means you:

- are aged 16 or 17 years-old
- have been in care for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14
- left care after your 16th birthday

'Former Relevant' – this means you:

- are aged between 18 and 25 years-old
- have previously been 'eligible' or 'relevant' or both

'Qualifying' – this means you:

- are under 25 years-old
- have been looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, such as custody, and have returned home and stayed there for 6 months or more after your 16th birthday

Extending personal adviser support to all care leavers up to the age of 25

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 says local authorities have a duty support care leavers aged between 21 and 25 years-old who may be continuing to struggle with the transition to independence and adult life. Local authorities does not necessarily need to provide the same level of support to care leavers aged 21 to 25 as it does for those aged 18 to 20.

What is independence?

To some of you this might look like a silly question. People can disagree over what independence means, but there's general agreement that it means being able to look after your own day-to-day needs without having to rely on others for constant support. This includes simple things such as cooking for yourself, maintaining your home, making appointments and engaging with your neighbours and society.

Preparing for independence can be a challenge but you do not have to do that on your own. Whether you're just starting to prepare for leaving care or have already left care, you will have lots of questions and important decisions to make. There can be a lot to find out and learn when preparing for independence and leaving care.

'The Big Wide World' will help you find information and give you an overview of the services you may need to support your independence.

The Aftercare Team will support you with your transition to independence. We start engaging with young people from the age of 16 who have been looked after by Thurrock Council. We attend Looked After Children Reviews and Pathway Plan Reviews to provide you with information and advice about Leaving Care and your Transition to Adulthood. Whether you are – or have been – in foster care or in supported accommodation, the chances are you've not had many responsibilities of running a household and paying bills.

When you are 18 years-old, our aim is to work in partnership with you to enable you to learn the skills you need to live independently and succeed in your adult life.

If you have a registered disability and you have been supported by the Children with Disability Team, you will be transferred to the Adult Transitions Team. The Aftercare Team will become a secondary team working with Adult Transitions Team to give you practical support for your independent living skills. Your Pathway Plan will be managed by both teams.

Further sections in this guide includes:

- education, employment and training
- accommodation
- money matters
- budgeting and cooking
- health and well-being

Professionals involved with you

Your personal adviser _____

Contact number _____

Social Worker _____

Contact number _____

IRO _____

Contact number _____

Advocate _____

Contact number _____

Other Relevant Professional _____

Contact number _____

Here are some of the services provided to young people by the Aftercare Team.

Personal Advisers (PAs)

All care leavers aged 18 to 25 years-old will have a Personal Adviser (PA), also known as an Aftercare Worker. Your PA will provide advice and support to help you access services you need.

They will keep in touch with you at least 6 times a year, or more if needed. You can contact your PA whenever you need advice or support and agree the easiest way to keep in touch. This can be via home visit, email, phone, letter, text messages, WhatsApp or the Mind Of My Own app.

Your PA will support you with the updating of your Pathway Plan and arrange the reviewing of the plan to help you stay on track and achieve your life goals detailed in the plan.

Pathway Plan

A Pathway Plan is your own individual plan. It is expected that, as a Care Leaver, you will be involved in updating, agreeing and reviewing your Pathway Plan.

Your Pathway Plan is important as it will look at the things that are important to you in moving to independence, such as being ready to leave care, accommodation, finances, self-care, health, employment, education and training. It makes sense that you play a big part in putting it together and can share your views and wishes.

To make your Pathway Plan more manageable for you, it can be updated one section at a time whenever you meet your worker. A copy of the plan will be given to you when it's completed.

The plan will be updated every 6 months to make sure it meets your needs. You are able to contribute each time your plan is updated. It can be updated at any time, but especially when things change – for example, when you move home, start at college or get a job.

Your Pathway Plan is an agreement of the support that the local authority will provide to you and what is expected of you. When you are over the age of 21 you may choose for your case to be closed and your Pathway Plan to stop.

Finance

At the age of 18, if you are not in education or employment you will be able to claim Universal Credit online. Your PA will help you to claim any benefits to which you are entitled. This might include helping you apply for your ID, or accompanying you to a Job Centre to process your application.

Your PA will help you make your claims in good time. They will do what is required to keep your benefits payments regular and prevent benefit sanction.

In the interim period while you wait for your Universal Credit application to be approved, the Aftercare Team will provide you with a personal allowance.

Health

Your PA will support you to ensure you are registered with a GP, dentist and optician. They will offer you advice and support on how to access health services for your specific needs.

Your PA will discuss with you how your health needs will be met as part of your Pathway Plan. They will provide support and advice on applying for a Health Credit Certificate – known as HC2, or HC3 if you are on a low income. This reduces the cost of dental treatment, eye checks and prescription charges, or may make them free for you.

You can get free emergency treatment from the Accident and Emergency (A&E) department at any general hospital. You don't have to be registered with a GP to use the A&E service at the hospitals, but it will be easier if you are.

Your PA will provide you with a 'Health Passport', on which you and your GP, dentist, optician and hospital are able to record any appointments, medication or treatments. This is so you are able to keep a personal record of your health, to which you can refer whenever you need it.

Education

We want to support you to engage in education, employment or training (EET). To do this, your PA, and the Inspire Thurrock Careers service will work with you to help you consider your EET options. They will also assist you with travel costs, where appropriate.

Young people at college can apply for the 16 to 19 Bursary Scheme. Care leavers should get a guaranteed £1,200 bursary if they stay in full time education. This depends on you having good attendance at college – usually over 95%.

Students aged 19 or over are only eligible to receive a discretionary bursary if they are either:

- continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 ('19+ continuers')
- aged 19 to 24 and have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Young people should get in touch with their education provider – their school or college – to find out how to claim the bursary.

Other support includes travel costs associated with education, apprenticeship, work interviews and training equipment. You can speak to student support services or ask your tutor for advice. To find out more, go to [GOV.UK: 16 to 19 Bursary Fund](http://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund) (www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund)

Young people at university will receive a Higher Education Bursary of £2,000 to cover the whole of their course. The money will be paid in instalments across the duration of the course, as shown in your Pathway Plan. You will also receive an allowance to support you to pay your accommodation costs during university holiday periods.

Your PA will support you to claim other grants or bursaries.

Accommodation

Many young people will leave care at the age of 18. When you leave care, a Pathway Plan should be in place to outline your housing needs and inform you of what accommodation is suitable for you. We will listen to your views about accommodation and what you feel is best for you.

If you wish to remain living with your carers, this may be possible under a 'Staying Put' agreement. You and your carer/s must agree for you to continue to live with them. For more information on Staying Put, ask your PA for a copy of Thurrock's Staying Put Policy.

If it's not possible for you to stay with your carer – or if your supported accommodation provision has ended – and you are ready to move into your own place, your PA will support you in finding somewhere to live that will meet your needs. This may include:

- Head Start Housing – private rent or hostels
- social housing – council or housing association
- friends and family

When you move into you own social housing, you will receive a Setting-up Home grant of £2,000 to help with the cost of purchasing essential household items.

Young people with disabilities will be supported by the Preparation to Adulthood (Transition) Team for suitable accommodation to meet your specific needs. Young people with mental health issues will be referred to the Adult Community Mental Health Team.

Young people who become homeless will be referred to Thurrock Council Homeless department.

Useful contacts

Advocacy

Open Door in Thurrock can be contacted via:

- 01375 390 040
- general@opendoorservices.org
- Open Door, The Beehive, West Street, Grays, RM17 6XP
- [Open Door: Advocacy and Support for Thurrock Looked After Children](https://opendoorservices.org/ypla-advocacy-and-support-for-thurrock-looked-after-children)
(opendoorservices.org/ypla-advocacy-and-support-for-thurrock-looked-after-children)

Complaints and compliments

To make a complaint or compliment, contact:

- Complaints Team, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL
- 01375 652 643
- ascfeedback@thurrock.gov.uk

Emergency services

Phone:

- Police – 101 if it's not an emergency, or 999 if it is an emergency
- Fire Service – 01376 576 000 if it's not an emergency, or 999 if it is an emergency
- Emergency Duty Team (EDT) – 01375 372 468

Childline provided by National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

Contact:

- 0800 1111 (free)
- www.childline.org.uk

Samaritans

Contact:

- 116 123 at any time, day or night
- jo@samaritans.org – response time 24 hours
- www.samaritans.org

Refugee Council

Contact:

- 0207 346 1134
- children@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Wize-Up young people's substance misuse service

Contact:

- 01375 376 111
- thurrock.wize-up@cgl.org.uk
- Unit 2, Thurrock Centre for Business, 2 George Street, Grays, RM17 6LY

Inclusion Thurrock

Inclusion Thurrock provides a free NHS psychological therapy service for adults across Thurrock who are experiencing common mental health difficulties such as depression, or anxiety disorders such as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and social phobia. Contact:

- 01375 898 680
- inclusionthurrock@sssft.nhs.uk
- inclusionthurrock.org

Thurrock and Brentwood MIND

MIND provides free services to people experiencing mental health problems. Contact:

- 01375 391 411
- reception@tbmind.org.uk

Thurrock Covid-19 Child Well-being Support Line

Contact:

- 01375 652 537 or 01375 652 558
- sws@thurrock.gov.uk