



OUR OFFER TO CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

March 2024



**BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST**

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OUR SUPPORT TO YOU



When you live in our care the Trust and other key agencies are what is known as your 'corporate parent'.

Corporate parenting is our collective responsibility to make sure that children and young people are provided with every opportunity to lead fulfilling lives, in the same way that any good parent would do for their child. We are also responsible for helping and supporting you after you have left our care. You can find out more about corporate parenting using the link below.

[GO TO CORPORATE PARENTING PAGE ON THE TRUST WEBSITE](#)

We understand leaving our care is a time of big changes in your life. You will have lots of questions about the support you can get and what services are available to help you.

We want you to leave our care at a time that is right for you.

We will start to discuss this with you and other people who are important to you around your 16th birthday. That doesn't mean you're ready to leave our care, just that we want to really understand your views. You may be really settled where you live and want to stay on beyond your 18th birthday. You may already be thinking about what help and support you are entitled to and want to talk about that.

Just because you are leaving our care, we don't stop caring about you. We want to make sure you feel safe and supported and know where to go for advice and help.

This is called our 'offer' to you and sometimes also known as 'the local offer'.

Put simply we will help you with:

- your money.
- where you live.
- your education, employment, training, and activities.
- living healthily.
- and lots of other practical support too.

All the information you need is in this document and on the Trust's website in the Care Leavers zone via the link below.

[GO TO OUR OFFER TO YOU PAGE ON THE TRUST WEBSITE](#)

There are lots of national organisations campaigning for better services for young people who have been in care. They run national consultation events, to hear your views. General advice regarding care leavers' entitlements can be found below.

[GO TO BECOME CHARITY WEBSITE](#)

Birmingham care leavers helped us to design our offer and we will continue to listen to your views to make sure that the services we offer are what you need.

THE LEGAL BIT



The law sets out four categories of care leaver. The table below explains what the terms mean for you.

Your rights and entitlements will depend on your legal status, so it is important to understand this.

Your social worker or personal advisor can explain all this to you and will help you to understand what help and support you can get.

<p>You are an ELIGIBLE care leaver if</p>	<p>You are aged 16 or 17, and</p> <p>You are currently a young person in care, and</p> <p>You have been a cared for young person for a period of 13 weeks which began after you reached 14 and must include at least 1 day after you were 16 or 17.</p>
<p>You are a RELEVANT care leaver if</p>	<p>You are no longer being cared for by the Local Authority (Birmingham Children’s Trust) but you have been ELIGIBLE, and</p> <p>You are currently aged 16 or 17.</p>
<p>You are a FORMER RELEVANT care leaver if</p>	<p>You are between 18 and 21, and before reaching 18 you were a RELEVANT young person, or</p> <p>Immediately before you stopped being cared for you were an ELIGIBLE young person</p> <p>If at the age of 21 or before reaching 25 you continue to be in education or training, or</p> <p>If at the age of 21 or before you are 25 you wish to start a course of education or training, or</p> <p>If at the age of 21 or before reaching 25 you wish to have continued support.</p>
<p>You are a QUALIFYING care leaver if</p>	<p>You are at least 16 but under 21 and</p>

	<p>You were a cared for young person prior to the making of a Special Guardianship Order which was in force when you reached 18 or</p> <p>If at any time (but less than 13 weeks in all) after you reached 16 you were still a cared for young person but are no longer in care or</p> <p>You were privately fostered and assessed to be in need</p> <p>As a QUALIFYING young person, you are able to access advice and assistance based on a discussion with your social worker if you are under 18 or a Personal Advisor with the 18+ Care Leavers Service.</p>
Continued support up to the Age of 25	<p>The law has also placed a duty on all Local Authorities to extend support in relation to former relevant young people who inform the Local Authority of their wish to receive a service after the age of 21 and under the age of 25.</p>

YOUR PA AND PATHWAY PLAN



Your personal advisor

Around your 16th birthday we will start to talk to you about whether you will benefit from the support of a personal advisor (PA) as well as your social worker. For some young people it will be the right decision, based on your views and needs, that a PA starts to work alongside your social worker from your 16th birthday. For other young people this may not be right, and you may not want a PA supporting you until later.

All young people will have a dedicated PA to support them from the age of 17yrs. We will review your needs nearing your 21st birthday and offer support up to your 25th birthday in a way that is right for you. We will also continue to support through a dedicated PA beyond 21 years if you are in full-time education or training.

Some of the things your PA can help you with include:

- help to find somewhere suitable to live that will help you manage in independence as well as to be safe.
- help you to get the education, training, work experience or a job, that will help you have a successful adult life.
- help you get the financial support you need and get you advice about managing your money (see Section 10 on Financial Support for full details).
- help with advice to keep healthy and get access to good health advice.
- offering advice and guidance on the issues that you are not sure about.

The relationship between you and your PA is important. The better the relationship, the more you will benefit from having a PA. To make the most of your PA it's important to keep in touch and agree how much contact you'd like. As a minimum your PA will visit you at least every 8 weeks. These visits will be arranged and agreed with you. We can keep in touch in other ways too – all PAs have an email address and mobile phone. You will also get a monthly email newsletter with useful information.

If you need help and your PA is not available, you can always contact our duty team.

Our duty team details (updated March 2024)

- Our duty telephone number for the 18+ Care Leavers Service is: 0121 464 1229.
- We are available 8.45 a.m. to 5.15 p.m. Monday to Thursday and 8.45am to 4.15pm on Friday.
- You can call in at our office: **One Avenue Road, Aston, Birmingham, B6 4DU** between these hours.
- Ask the friendly reception staff as you go in, to let the 18+ duty team know you would like to see a Personal Adviser.
- Reception will call us and a team member will come to reception to see you. We have access to a quiet space where you can speak in confidence.
- Buses to use: The main bus route is the Number 65 and 67, both go from the city centre. These buses will drop you right outside One Avenue Road, and the Number 8 route crosses nearby. The 65 and 67 buses go from outside the large B&M store in the city centre.
- Walking here From Birmingham New Street Station: There are a number of pedestrian routes you can take from New Street Station to get to One Avenue Road. This is the most direct route that follows a designated pedestrian path from the station, all the way through to the office and is well lit.
- Outside of these office hours, if you have an urgent problem or need advice and support, please contact the Emergency Duty Team on 0121 675 4806.

Pathway plan

All children and young people aged between 16 and 21 years of age in our care or who have left our care should have a pathway plan.

A pathway plan is a written document that helps everyone to understand what you need and what help and support you will get.

You will work with your social worker or PA to develop your pathway plan.

Your plan will be reviewed with you and updated at least twice a year.

YOUR IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS



We all need important documents because without them we are unable to do simple things such as applying for a course, claim benefits or open a bank account. We will make sure that you have all the important documents you need. We will give you the original copies and keep a copy in our records.

- We will apply for your birth certificate if you do not already have a copy.
- We will apply for your National Insurance (NI) number for you. Ask if you do not receive it. Always keep this safe.
- We will support you to apply for your passport. This is an essential item of photo ID. Please do not lose it.
- For asylum-seeking young people, we will fund and support with an application for a travel document. We will also contribute £75 towards travel documents for former asylum-seeking young people with refugee status or with humanitarian protection status.
- If you are entitled to apply for British citizenship, we will support you in how to complete the application.
- We will discuss with you applying for your provisional driving licence. A provisional licence is an option in terms of photo ID as an alternative to a passport.
- We will also consider paying for a course of 10 driving lessons if your chosen career path requires you to drive.

YOUR VOICE BEING HEARD



We want to make sure, in the same way that any good parent would do for their child, that children and young people are provided with every opportunity to lead fulfilling lives. We need to know what we do well and what we need to do better. You are best placed to help us to do this as you have experienced our care and ongoing help and support. We have developed a number of ways that you can share your views with us.

We need to make sure that you know your rights and entitlements as a young person leaving our care. This, our 'offer' to you, tells you what you are entitled to and what else we can do to help and support you.

Comments, compliments, and complaints

You have a right to raise concerns, complaints, and compliments about your experience of our care and the services we offer you.

[GO TO COMMENTS PAGE ON THE TRUST WEBSITE](#)

Advocacy

We have our own Advocacy Service with advocates who can help you if you want to raise a concern or a complaint. You can talk to your PA who can refer you or you can email the Advocacy Service directly.

advocacy@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

[DOWNLOAD OUR ADVOCACY POSTCARD ON THE TRUST WEBSITE](#)

Accessing your records

You have a right to access your records. We fully understand that, as an adult, you may have questions as to why you were in our care and about your time in our care. This is natural. We will support you if you want to see your records. Ask your social worker or PA and they will support you or go to the link below.

[GO TO SUBJECT ACCESS RECORD REQUEST PAGE ON THE TRUST WEBSITE](#)

Your newsletters

We have a dedicated webpage for you that has lots of useful information. We also send out a monthly newsletter that is co-produced and co-edited by our young people. This keeps you up-to-date with the latest news and things such as enhancements to our 'offer to' you. You can access previous issues below.

[GO TO NEWSLETTERS PAGE ON THE TRUST WEBSITE](#)

Rights and participation - groups and forums

We have our own Rights and Participation Service that hosts several groups and forums for young people to join.

You can meet other young people who have been in our care and get to shape services that you receive. We have a dedicated Care Leavers Forum and other groups like our LGBTQ+, SEN and Young People with Disabilities and our Young Parents Project. Most groups meet every six weeks, and you also get to do some fun activities through the year. You can help deliver training, lead workshops and support interviewing senior people and social workers applying for jobs in the Trust. You can also attend meetings like our 'Takeover' Corporate Parenting Board to share your experiences of our care. Young people who attend our groups tell us they feel listened to and don't feel judged. They feel they make a difference to other children and young people in, or those that have left, our care.

We have six Corporate Parenting Boards a year that have senior people and partners including the Chief Executive of Birmingham Children's Trust, the Director of Children and Families from the council and council elected members. Two of these boards are Takeover Boards run and led by young people. If you are interested in getting involved email us.

advocacy@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

[DOWNLOAD AN INFORMATION POSTCARD ON THE TRUST WEBSITE](#)

Young Parents Project

We have a Young Parents Project. A place for our care experienced parents to meet, make friendships and shape services around them. There are people and services that the group invite that can help being a young parent. There are also fun days out and freebies that are sometimes given out too! Lunch and taxis are provided to support young parents to attend.

Conferences for you

We hold three conferences for young people who have left our care, one each term. The conference is themed around careers, housing, health, and other topics. The conferences are also supported by many partners, giving advice and guidance. The last few conferences have seen more than 70 young people attend and 25+ partners supporting. We also offer home cooked food and many 'freebies'. If you need support to attend, please speak to your PA.

There is usually something going on that you can join in with. Look out for these via this website and our newsletters.

Events

Events and activities that usually take place include:

- Birmingham Xmas Dinner for any care experienced young adult 16-25 who may be alone at Christmas. The event is free, and you have a Christmas dinner, presents, a nice atmosphere with good company to enjoy this special day.
- Eid Meal for anyone celebrating Eid who may be alone but wants to be with others during this special time of the year.
- Eid Family event – we go big with an Eid celebration, free food, activities, music and more!

Our apprentices design and support a range of activities around the Holiday and Food Programme. Some of these are specifically for young people who have left our care and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. Events have included fun days, sports activities, safari park visits and cooking workshops

CorporateParentingEvents@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

YOUR SAFETY



As your corporate parent your safety is very important to us. We will do everything that we can to support you to feel safe and secure where you live and in your local community. If where you live feels unsafe tell us as soon as possible. We can then work with you and others to address the issues or help you to move. Our advice would be never to let strangers into your home and if you feel in danger, contact the police straightaway.

We understand that at times it may be difficult for you to share your worries and concerns with us. We will provide you with guidance and practical advice on how to keep yourself practically and emotionally safe. We may, with your consent, refer you to a counsellor or mentor to support you. At times you may not 'see' the harm and a conversation may be able to support you to see this.

Safe Families

We work with [Safe Families UK](#). This is a service that helps you to build a network of positive people around you. All help is provided by compassionate volunteers from the area that you live in (not just Birmingham). The volunteers themselves have been through difficult times and this is what motivates them to support others. What does support look like?

Support with Safe Families is flexible and designed with and for you. It might be:

- someone who meets up for a coffee to chat about you and your life, to give advice and encouragement.
- someone who remembers your birthday, invites you to things - maybe inviting you for Sunday lunch!
- someone who drops you a text or is on the phone if you need some help or advice.
- someone who helps fill in forms, or helps you get to appointments or interviews.

It can last for different amounts of time. But our hope is always to build supportive friendships that work for you.

Police and custody

If you are under 25 years of age and find yourself in a police station in the West Midlands, the police should ask you if you are a care leaver. If they don't, please tell them so they can contact us. We will then contact you to offer you support.

If you are a former relevant care leaver and in custody, we will continue to offer you support up to the age of 25yrs. If, however, you do not want to be supported after you are 21yrs, then please let your PA know. We have close working relationships with local prisons and resettlement officers.

There is also financial support available for positive activities and to help you once you are released. **See Section 10 - Your Money** for more information.

As you near release from custody we will explore with you your housing options. You will have a release plan that will be incorporated into your pathway plan so that everyone is clear what needs to happen to help you to make sure you can do well on your release.

Lifelong links

- We will help you keep in contact or resume contact with relatives, friends and others who are important to you.
- This is supported by the Lifelong Links service. **See Section 8 - (emotional) health** for more information.

WHERE YOU LIVE



When you reach 18 years old you may want to stay living with your foster carer.

This is known as 'staying put'. You can stay with your foster carer until you are 21yrs old or longer if you are in full-time education or training.

You will have a large say on where you live when you leave our care. It is really important that you talk about your options with your social worker or PA.

Housing

You are entitled to the highest priority status if you apply for Birmingham City Council housing. You can apply for Birmingham City Council housing, called Birmingham Choice. through the link below.

[GO TO BIRMINGHAM CHOICE WEBSITE](#)

If you meet certain criteria (care leavers – persons aged 18-21 or up to 25 if they are pursuing a programme of education agreed in their pathway plan, who are owed a duty by the Local Authority under Children Act 1989, section 23C, and so deemed to have a local connection to the Local Authority area) you also meet the 'local connection requirement' as well. This means you will be offered a 'pre-tenancy workshop' that gives you all the information you need to manage your own tenancy and six months of 'housing support' from a named housing officer.

In addition to any housing maintenance provided through the council we also have several companies that can support in decorating and renovating areas of your home and garden/outdoor space.

Equans offer a 'Helping Hands' Scheme and GMI are also developing a similar programme for young people who have left care. Our Rights and Participation Service can tell you more. Your PA can put you in touch with them. Your PA can also apply to the Council for support with the installation of a cooker/washing machine.

Private rented accommodation

You are likely to have more choice about where you live if you opt for private rented accommodation. We can offer a discretionary rent deposit and rent guarantee. Talk to your social worker or PA to find out more about this.

We have also set up a Housing and Accommodation Protocol between the Trust, the Council and St. Basils. This is a joint agreement to make sure that between

us we can meet your housing needs. It also means that you should not have an 'intentionally homeless decision' made against you if you are under the age of 25yrs.

Council Tax

You are entitled to council tax exemption. We will support you to claim all eligible council tax benefits and reductions. This is called an exemption, or we will fund council tax payments for all former relevant young people aged 18yrs to their 25th birthday. This only applies to young people who are named as legally responsible for the payment of Council Tax.

We offer the same exemption support for young people living outside of Birmingham.

TV licence

If you have your own tenancy, you will need a TV licence (required by law and if caught without one you will be fined). We also strongly recommend that you take out contents insurance to cover any unexpected damage to your things through theft or fire. Your Independent Living Grant will be used to meet the first year's costs. After that, we can help you to include these in your budgeting.

[GO TO GOV.UK TV LICENCE WEBSITE](https://www.gov.uk/tv-licence)

Broadband internet access

Having broadband is essential for everyone but can be costly. We are therefore offering you two years free hard-wired home broadband where you live. Please speak to your PA about this offer who will then arrange for this to be installed into your home. If there are any issues after the installation, please raise this with your PA. The free broadband will be 'gifted' to you. This means that you will be responsible for its use and not the Trust. If you move home in the two-year period, please let your PA know so that the Broadband can be transferred to your new home. This can take some time as notice has to be given. It is important for you to understand that the offer is for broadband only. If you choose to subscribe to any TV channels or phone services, you will need to meet the cost of these.

Having a laptop computer

It is also important for you to have a laptop. You should already have one but, if not, we will support you to purchase one when you leave our care. We can also provide support to secure necessary IT equipment for you up to the age of 21yrs or 25yrs if you are in full-time further or higher education.

Supported accommodation and shared lives arrangements

There is a range of supported accommodation for young people who feel ready for living independently but would benefit from or like some extra help or

support. There are varying levels of support available depending on the type of accommodation. Talk to your social worker or PA about options available.

If you are disabled and need more supportive living, then a shared lives arrangement might be a possible option for you. You will live with your current carers or other carers. This should be considered as an option before your 18th birthday, with Birmingham City Council's Adults Services, who will undertake an assessment to decide if this is the best option for you. Your social worker and Personal Advisor will support you with this.

Risk of homelessness

If you are worried that you may be at risk of becoming homeless, speak to your social worker or PA straightaway. You can also contact St Basils straightaway if you prefer. They have a Youth Hub that can help you. If you are over 25yrs please gain support from the city council's Homelessness services. More information is available on the city council website.

[GO TO BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL HOMELESS SERVICE PAGE](#)

University accommodation costs

If you are at university the Trust will pay your university accommodation costs including, where agreed, over holiday periods, up to a maximum figure of £130 per week. Please discuss your accommodation options and plans in good time with your PA so that arrangements can be made. If you are living in a 'staying put' arrangement, we will also continue to financially support these while you are at university.

YOUR HEALTH



Your health matters to us. Being healthy does not mean just being physically healthy. It also means taking care of your mental, emotional and sexual health. There are plenty of resources available to support you with all aspects of being healthy.

There is a lot of information on this page so please take your time to read all the information below.

Your health team

You should already have a relationship with the health team that supports our children in care (do your health assessments). You will no longer have health assessments once you turn 18yrs. The health team should meet with you around your 18th birthday and give you your health summary record, sometimes referred to as your 'health passport'. If you do not receive this contact the children in care health team on **0121 466 3648** or email: bchnt.dutynurse@nhs.net

The health team strives to ensure that appropriate information is shared, with your consent, across health and social care services, so that you experience a smooth transition to services that support adults. They should also provide any relevant updates to your GP. The health team will provide ongoing advice and guidance to support you to access the support you need.

Registering with a doctor

Your PA will support you to register with a GP (doctor). We advise that you find a GP service that suits you and is near to where you live. You can look up GP surgeries to see what they offer and how they compare - use the link below. It is always a good idea to tell your PA who your GP is.

[GO TO NHS 'FIND A DOCTOR' WEBSITE](#)

Registering with a dentist and an optician

You should also register with a dentist and an optician. Your PA will help you with this and attend appointments if this is what you want. If you are getting welfare benefits you should be able to access free dental and optical care. They are also free if you are under 18yrs and/or in full-time education.

[GO TO NHS 'FIND A DENTIST' WEBSITE](#)

If you are awaiting asylum or appeal rights exhausted, you will be supported to complete what is known as an HC2 certificate for help with health costs.

[GO TO NHS 'HELP WITH HEALTH COSTS' WEBSITE](#)

If you apply to the NHS Low Income Scheme and receive an HC2 certificate for help with health costs, you are entitled to:

- free NHS prescriptions
- free NHS dental treatment
- free NHS sight tests
- help with the cost of glasses or contact lenses
- help with the cost of travelling to receive NHS treatment
- free NHS wigs and fabric supports

Free prescriptions

Everyone is entitled to free prescriptions in the circumstances listed below.

- You're under 16 or over 60.
- You're in full-time education and 16-18 years old.
- You're pregnant or gave birth in the last 12 months and have a valid maternity exemption certificate (known as a 'MatEx'). It's valid for 12 months after your due date, though can be extended if your baby is born later than expected.
- You have a valid medical exemption certificate (known as a 'MedEx') – given for a range of illnesses, such as epilepsy or cancer, or severe disability.
- You or your partner receive income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, income-related employment & support allowance, or pension credit guarantee credit.
- You're receiving universal credit and your earnings for the most recent assessment period were £435 or less.
- You're under 20 and are the dependant of someone who receives income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, income-related employment & support allowance, pension credit guarantee credit. In some instances, you may also qualify if you claim universal credit.
- You have a war pension exemption certificate.
- You're an NHS inpatient.

Or if you're entitled to or named on:

- a valid NHS tax credit exemption certificate – if you don't have a certificate, you can show your award notice.
- an NHS certificate for partial help with health costs (HC3) which may also provide access to some assistance towards prescription costs. Find out more about the NHS Low Income Scheme (LIS) online.

If none of these apply to you and you are aged between 18-25yrs you will still receive free prescriptions. This will be supported by you first getting a three-month pre-payment certificate. Your PA will support you to ensure you get your free prescriptions.

If you're not eligible for free prescriptions NHS BSOL ICB have agreed a 12-month pilot to ensure all care leavers (18-25) receive free prescriptions, to be supported by providing a 3-month pre-payment prescription. This will be arranged via the designated nursing team.

Free prescriptions from Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board (added February 2024)

Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board will provide care leavers aged 16-25 years, who were supported by Birmingham and Solihull local authorities (including Birmingham Children's Trust) and are not eligible for free prescriptions, with a 12-month pre-payment prescription certificate.

You can download an application form for the pre-payment prescription certificate [here](#).

For support with completing the form, please contact nhsbsolicb.childrenincare@nhs.net.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing support

We care about your emotional wellbeing. If you need someone to talk to about how you are feeling and your emotional help, we can help to access help and support.

Forward Thinking Birmingham (FTB) will offer you specialist mental health services up to the age of 25yrs if you need those. There are lots of different specialist services, such as multi-disciplinary crisis and home treatment teams, in-patient service for those really poorly, eating disorder service, infant mental health and perinatal (pre and post giving birth) service. FTB work with the Shaw Trust who can help young people being supported by FTB and keen to access employment. To access some of these services you will need to speak with your social worker or PA. You may also need your GP to refer you.

FTB offer a drop-in service provided by Pause. There are drop-in hubs in Digbeth and Sparkbrook. All the information you need is below.

[GO TO PAUSE DROP-IN PAGE](#)

TESS (Therapeutic and Emotional Support Service)

The Trust has its own Therapeutic and Emotional Support Service known as TESS that will offer you emotional wellbeing support until you are 25yrs of age. You can self-refer via phone or use the link below.

[GO TO TESS PAGE ON THE TRUST WEBSITE](#)

You can contact TESS directly if you wish to talk with them. You can text, WhatsApp, or phone them and they will call you back. WhatsApp them a message on 07867 358565 or 07864 927111. Their landline is 0121 303 7884.

If you need help and feel ready to access support, they will look to match you with a TESS practitioner to offer the support you need. They offer different types of support like counselling or CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), and resilience building.

TESS offers a regular drop-in service that takes a relaxed and informal approach. They meet on the first Wednesday of every month at 67 Bournbrook Road, Selly Oak, and you can talk with them at the Lighthouse in Lozells on the third Wednesday of the month. Their team are ready to receive you and offer you support. If you're struggling to take those initial first steps to receive help, TESS offers a consultation service to your PA to help them think about how they can support you in the first instance.

Breaking the Cycle

The Trust has a service called Breaking the Cycle, which is a therapeutic service for people who have experienced the loss of a child through adoption. You can access this service if you have been in our care and need a safe space to talk about your loss and make sense of what has happened to you in the past. There are three different support offers (adult, pregnancy and parenting) so that individual's needs are met. We will work with you at your pace. Therapeutic life story work is on offer if you wish to understand your past in a safe space. Support groups, coffee mornings, therapeutic parenting courses, stay and play groups are also available to you. Breaking the Cycle Service also offers dedicated help and support if you have been in our care and are pregnant/expecting a child. We will support you if you are aged 16-30yrs. We will support you throughout your pregnancy as we know this can be an anxious time, especially for new parents. You will have your own therapeutic worker who will help you to 'navigate' your pregnancy, offering both emotional and practical support.

You can email: Breakingthecycle@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

Lifelong Links

The Trust has a service called Lifelong Links that, if you want help, will support you to keep in contact or re-connect with relatives, friends and those that are important to you. You can access this service up until you are 25yrs. They will support you regardless of your circumstances, such as, if you are in custody. They understand that spending time in care can often lead to losing touch with important people, including friends, family, carers, neighbours, teachers or even pets! An independent Lifelong Links facilitator will work directly with you. They will ask you who you'd like to get in touch with and who from your past was important to you. The facilitator will then use a variety of search techniques to try and find them for you. Sometimes, everyone will come together at a Lifelong

Links Family Group Conference to discuss how they can support you to get what you want and need. Talk to your PA and they will support you to access this service.

Rees Foundation - 'Ask Jan'

Ask Jan membership from the Rees Foundation can offer a whole range of support services if you meet their criteria. Talk to your PA and they will help you.

If you have completed our (the Trust's) Next Steps Independent Programme you will be automatically signed up for free and can access:

- a 24-hour counselling helpline with access to a BACP accredited counsellor.
- up to 8 face-to-face counselling sessions where assessed and agreed by the counsellor.
- personal finance advice – mortgages, pensions, insurance, debt, and savings.
- nutrition, exercise, stress, and wellbeing advice.
- specialist advice helplines including housing, legal and citizens advice 8am to 8pm.
- access to an enhanced wellbeing App My Possible Self.
- cognitive behavioural therapy – available online or via the App.
- discounts and special offers on days out and activities with The Max Card.
- access to all other Rees Foundation projects.

[GO TO 'ASK JAN' WEBSITE](#)

Other useful emotional wellbeing services

Mind

0300 123 3393 or text 86463

[GO TO MIND WEBSITE](#)

Samaritans

Email: jo@samaritans.org or call 116 123

[GO TO SAMARITANS WEBSITE](#)

Every Mind Matters

[GO TO EVERY MIND MATTERS WEBSITE](#)

Papyrus

Call 0800 068 41 41 or text 07786 209 697

[GO TO PAPYRUS WEBSITE](#)

Sane

Call 0300 304 7000

[GO TO SANE WEBSITE](#)

Kooth - an on-line wellbeing community

[GO TO KOOTH WEBSITE](#)

Sexual health

If you need any support with your sexual health talk to your PA and they will help you to access the services that you need. You can also talk to your GP. If you don't feel comfortable asking for help you can get more information from [Umbrella Health](#).

If you are having sex or thinking about it, please protect yourself against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Substance misuse

We can support you to access substance misuse (drug and alcohol) support if you need it. Talk to your PA and they can help you to access advice, information, drop-in services, structured treatment, counselling and/or harm reduction techniques.

Passport to Leisure and Be Active

It is good to keep fit and active. You are entitled to a [Passport to Leisure \(PTL\) card](#), which gives you up to 20% off most activities in council-run leisure centres, wellbeing centres and swimming pools. [The card](#) also gives you discounts at some museums, theatres, and other attractions in Birmingham. You can apply for your card online, and when you do you will be emailed a temporary membership number.

[GO TO PASSPORT TO LEISURE APPLICATION](#)

Please make an appointment at your local centre to collect your card.

If you live in Birmingham, you can also access the Be-Active scheme that provides free activities for anyone who lives in the city.

View below the list of council leisure centres where the Be-Active scheme runs.

[GO TO LIST OF BE-ACTIVE SITES](#)

[GO TO FREE SESSIONS AT CITY COUNCIL LEISURE CENTRES](#)

You may be eligible for free gym membership. You can only access this via your GP. It may be available through the Be-Active Plus Scheme, which is based on certain physical and mental health conditions

YOUR EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING



Being engaged in education, employment or training will help you with your chosen career path and move towards independence. Further education is essential for you to gain qualifications that you will need when searching for employment later. However, college and university are not the only options. There are training and apprenticeship schemes that are very popular and can be a good way to learn whilst you earn an income.

There is a lot of information in this section so please take your time to read all the information below.

In the Trust we have a specialist manager who co-ordinates employment, education and training options for young people who have been in our care. They work closely with a wide range of employers and organisations to make sure you have the best advice possible. Birmingham Children's Trust is proud to be offering paid apprenticeships for young people who have been in our care and these cover many Trust service areas.

When you are in education pre-18yrs you will be supported by your social worker and a staff member from the virtual school. Your aspirations and educational needs will be assessed and captured in both your pathway plan and your personal education plan (PeP). As soon as you are introduced to your PA they will also support you, both practically and to make decisions about what is best for you.

Next Steps programme

In Birmingham Children's Trust we also have the Next Steps Independence Programme. As part of this programme, we will find out what areas you may need support in and what things you do well. We will build a tailored programme for you to help you gain new skills and learn ways to manage the challenges of living independently. If you want to email Next steps for more information, their email address is NextSteps@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk . You can self-refer using the link below.

[GO TO NEXT STEPS REFERRAL FORM](#)

You can also request a paper copy of the referral form by emailing:
Annalise.Morgan@birmnghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

Develop Me

Develop Me is a mentoring programme with Birmingham Children's Trust that supports young people in care and young adults with care experience aged 16-25. A mentor for Birmingham Children's Trust can be life changing for someone with care experience. By having a consistent and supportive person in your life this can help to build trust and help you to reach your potential. Mentors are from all walks of life, businesses and organisations and there will be someone who will be a good match with you. The programme is designed to last a minimum of 6 months and at the end you will have a graduation event to celebrate your achievements.

[GO TO 'DEVELOP ME' PAGE ON THE TRUST WEBSITE](#)

[GO TO MENTEE REFERRAL FORM](#)

mentoring@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

Staying in education

If you want to stay in education and you are in education (college and university), we will liaise with your education provider's 'Designated Member of Staff' (a key contact specifically for young people who have been in care) to access additional support where necessary including financial support.

If you want to attend further education (college or similar) your PA will help with your application and will help to choose the right course for you. You will also be entitled to apply for various funds to support you. However, these can change each new academic year.

The sorts of things available are:

- 16-19yrs bursary

You will need to apply for this bursary from your student services advisor at school or college before you start your course. The money is to support with education-related costs and is administered by the education provider. You will need to be clear about the education provider's requirements for you to be eligible, such as, for example, 95% attendance, good behaviour etc.

- Discretionary learner support fund

This comes from the education provider. Tell your PA if you are having difficulty accessing this and they will help you.

- Care to learn

This is a grant for young parents aged 20yrs and under to help with nursery and childminder costs. Again, if you are struggling to access this tell your PA and they will help you.

Applying for university

If you are thinking about applying for university, please speak to your social worker or your PA as they will be able to assist with the course application and your application for your Student Finance Loan to cover tuition fees. We will cover travel costs to open days and pay your UCAS fee. We will also provide you with a supporting letter that confirms you have been in our care as this will open additional support for you from the university.

If you decide to go to university, we will support you to do your first degree, assist you with your student accommodation including, where agreed, during holiday periods and provide you with additional financial support. You can use some of your independent living grant to cover some costs such as duvets, pots, pans etc. We will support you with a weekly allowance. See the 'your money' section for our financial support offer and other support you can get with money.

Our support offer extends to young people over 21yrs and up to 25yrs. We will also support you to undertake a postgraduate course for one further year if that starts before you reach 25yrs.

We will ask you to sign our higher education consent form that gives us permission to talk to your university to make sure you are getting on okay.

You should also be able to access additional support from the university who often have additional funds and grants for care leavers.

You can find more information from the UCAS website.

UCAS

[GO TO UCAS WEBSITE](#)

Propel UK

This is a website for young people that have been in care and sets out all the support available to you from universities and colleges.

[GO TO PROPEL WEBSITE](#)

The Eve Brook Scholarship Fund

This is a local charity that works in partnership with the 18+ Care Leavers Service to provide financial bursaries and support to care leavers at university and recently has, for example, been supporting care leavers taking postgraduate degrees.

[GO TO EVE BROOK WEBSITE](#)

Universities and higher education colleges must make provision for students with disabilities, including some long-term conditions and specific learning difficulties.

They will have a disability advisor or learning coordinator who should help you. If you are struggling to find out who this is or you do not feel you are getting the support you need, tell us and we can intervene.

If you are not eligible for a loan from Student Finance England due to a restriction on immigration or nationality grounds, we will support you with the same offer and towards tuition fees so that you are not disadvantaged.

You will be entitled to:

- a weekly allowance in line with benefits rates.
- payment towards your accommodation costs of up to £130 per week.
- the care leavers HE Bursary, a total of £2000 which is paid in yearly instalments at the end of Autumn Term each year.
- regular visits and contacts with your 18+ Personal Advisor.
- regular contact with your academic tutor/head of department, and with the care leavers champion at the university so as to ensure you are supported.

If you have an education, health, and care plan (EHCP) this may continue until you are 25yrs old if you are in school or further education. Your PA will support you up to 25yrs if you need them to. When your EHCP is due to come to an end we will work with relevant services such as SENAR and adult social care so that you know where to go if you need advice and support. If you go to university or other education, there will be support available to you such as disabled student allowances (DSAs).

All the information you will need about [disabled student allowances is here](#). If you prefer to work, there is a lot of support available for you. A good source of advice and information is this [step-by-step guide](#), written by the Department for Work and Pensions. When you begin work, you can get support from Access To Work, which is a grant that provides support to make work accessible for those with disabilities. You can get more information about [Access to Work here](#). There is additional information also available via [Midland Mencap](#).

Trust Apprenticeship programme

If you prefer on-the-job training, we have our own Apprentice Programme in the Trust for young people who have been in our care who are aged 18-25yrs. There are a range of opportunities that range from business support, youth work, rights and participation, advocacy, social media, and marketing and more. Courses run from 12-24 months.

You will get a full range of support including:

- all courses are accredited Level 3 and 4 awards.
- salaries are over 20k.
- we work in partnership with a range of college providers to ensure the right programmes and support.

- dedicated Manager to support all apprentices.
- full 2-week induction programme before moving into your team. This allows you to be employer-ready and confident before moving into your role.
- all care experienced young adults who apply are guaranteed an interview.
- there is a range of professional and service-specific training.
- support and sign up for all apprentices with the REES foundations 'Ask Jan' scheme (which has a number of free benefits including financial and legal advice, a MAX discount card and access to counselling and therapeutic support).
- emotional wellbeing support is provided on a group and 1:1 basis.

Apprenticeships with other employers

You may want to explore an apprenticeship with other employers. An apprenticeship can be a great way to learn a new skill, achieve a qualification and get paid at the same time. Apprenticeships can also be another way of achieving higher education without accruing the university debt as they are available at several levels, from level 2 (GCSE) to level 7 (Master's degree). You could receive a government bursary of £1000 to help you to transition into work. It is your employer's responsibility to apply for this and so you will need to tell them you have been in our care for them to make the application.

For more information email: appreniceships@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

Support with jobs - including interview clothes

If you prefer to work, we will provide you with a one-off payment of £50 to purchase interview clothes (for those 18-25yrs). We will also help you with interview practice, assist you to apply for jobs and to create your CV. Discuss your needs with your PA.

Job Centre Plus will also support you. Your PA can attend with you if you want them to.

Becoming an independent visitor

If you need additional experience, we can support you to volunteer. Ask your PA. You may also qualify to become an independent visitor (a befriending service) for our children in care. Ask your PA to put you in touch with our Rights and Participation (RAP) service or email:

IndependentVisitors@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

[GO TO INDEPENDENT VISITOR PAGE ON THE TRUST WEBSITE](#)

YOUR MONEY



This section will provide you with information on what financial assistance is available to you. The amount of money you get depends on your age and where you live. Being able to manage your money is important when moving to independence.

If you don't know how to budget and spend your money wisely, then you may struggle when you live on your own. Your PA will help you with this.

If you do not have capacity to manage your money, we will support you to identify who should look after it for you and support you to make the decisions you can. We will only do this once we have done a specialist assessment called a mental capacity assessment.

Welfare benefits and other additional benefits

We will help you to apply for welfare benefits that you are entitled to. This is constantly changing and so the best place to look for the latest information is www.gov.uk. We will need your help to help us to support you to make your claim for benefits. You really need to attend all your appointments at the Jobcentre and engage with your Work Coach. If you don't, it is likely to lead to problems with your claim and benefits not being paid. If this happens, we will support you to do what you need to get your benefits and consider practical assistance, such as shopping vouchers, to assist you.

As of January 2023, Claims for Universal Credit can be started one month before your 18th birthday. Universal credit is a single monthly payment for those in or out of work. There are two parts to it – a payment to you for your living expenses and a payment to help you pay your rent. The rent part must be paid to your landlord.

If you are entitled to additional benefits because you have a disability, the [Birmingham Disability Resource Centre](#) is a really helpful source of advice about claiming disability benefits and can support you with the process.

If you are unable to claim benefits (not legally entitled to claim benefits) then we will offer you a weekly living allowance. This payment will be the equivalent to state benefits. You will be expected to use this for your living costs in the same way you would your benefits. Ideally, these payments will be made directly into your bank account. If needed, we can pay cash or in vouchers while we help you to get your bank account sorted.

Your savings account

If you have been in care for a long period of time you will have a savings account. You can access this once you turn 18yrs. You can find out more about the savings scheme on the ShareFound website.

[GO TO THE SHAREFOUND WEBSITE](#)

Leaving Care Grant (updated March 2024)

You are entitled to a Leaving Care Grant (also called Independent Living Grant). This is a grant to help you to set up your first home.

You will have a discussion with your Social Worker or Personal Adviser so as to plan and ensure you spend the grant wisely.

It is used to buy essential items, in line with your needs, including the following (these are examples):

- White goods (Fridge, Cooker, Washing Machine) – all these need to be new items
- Carpets/floor covering
- Kitchen equipment and appliances, pots and pans/crockery
- Microwave oven
- Cleaning equipment and vacuum
- Bed/mattress, wardrobe, storage furniture
- Sofa, chair and table, storage furniture
- Towels and bedding
- TV and your first TV licence.

It's important we check items are of good quality and come with guarantees; we can go shopping with you or order online.

As of February 2023 we put up the grant to £3,000 for young people turning 18 from that date.

The grant was £2000 in previous years and if you left care / turned 18 before 2023, you will only have the lower amount of £2,000.

Council Tax exemption

You are entitled to council tax exemption. Please see Section 7 'Where you live' for more information.

18th birthday allowance

You are entitled to a birthday allowance of £100 on your 18th birthday.

Bursaries when in higher education

If you are in higher education, you are entitled to bursaries. You are entitled to a maximum of £2000 paid over three years of study, paid in three instalments, one for each academic year. We would expect most students in higher education to pay for their own travel between home and their place of study.

There is lots of additional financial support for your education, training or employment. Please see Section 9 'Education, training and employment' for more information.

Financial incentive if in custody/released from custody

If you are a former relevant care leaver in custody who is engaging in positive activities whilst in prison (eg. training/education) we will offer a financial incentive of £10 per week for those 18yrs up to 25 yrs.

If you are a former relevant care leaver released from custody before your 25th birthday, then on release you will receive:

- one month's bus pass to help you attend all appointments and see friends.
- £100 clothing allowance.
- a smartphone with a pay as you go sim card with the first two months being paid for.
- a wide range of other financial support available.

MYBnk

We can also offer support through our partnership with 'MYBnk' – This is a service provided independently of the Trust.

[GO TO MYBNK WEBSITE](#)

Based in Birmingham, MyBnk have Money Works and The Money House programmes for young people across the Midlands.

For more information, please contact sally.mclachlan@mybnk.org or use the following email address to refer yourself for support tmhmidlands@mybnk.org

MyBnk are based in Digbeth and so you can also pop in.

Address: The Money House, 201-206 Alcester Street (Warwick Street entrance), Digbeth, Birmingham, B12 0NQ.

Ask Jan from the Rees Foundation

Some young people will be entitled for help from 'Ask Jan' Membership – Rees Foundation – 'Helping Care Experienced People Thrive'. Anyone completing the Next Steps Independent Programme through Birmingham Children's Trust will automatically get signed up for free.

The 'Ask Jan' membership will offer the following services:

- a 24-hour counselling helpline with access to a BACP accredited counsellor.
- up to eight face-to-face counselling sessions where assessed and agreed by the counsellor.

- personal finance advice – mortgages, pensions, insurance, debt, and savings.
- nutrition, exercise, stress and wellbeing advice.
- specialist advice helplines including housing, legal and citizens advice 8am to 8pm.
- access to an enhanced wellbeing App My Possible Self.
- cognitive behavioural therapy – available online or via the App.
- discounts and special offers on days out and activities with The Max Card.
- access to all other Rees Foundation projects.

[GO TO ASK JAN MEMBERSHIP WEBSITE](#)

The Eve Brook Scholarship Fund

This is a local charity that works in partnership with the 18+ Care Leavers Service to provide financial bursaries and support to care leavers at university and recently has, for example, been supporting care leavers taking postgraduate degrees.

[GO TO EVE BROOK WEBSITE](#)

Capstone Trust

They provide individual grants for care experienced young people and adults. Individual grants are most likely to be for amounts between £300 and £2,000, but they will consider awards of up to £3000, specifically in relation to higher education fees or training courses that are not funded by Student Finance England, the Local Authority or Trust, or where all other educational grant, bursary or subsidy entitlements have been exhausted and dependent upon your individual circumstances. This could also include tools or equipment that are essential for the course. They may also be able to help with the costs of starting a new job or paying for uniforms or work clothes that are not paid for by the employer but essential to the job. Capstone offer driving grants too. Please see guidelines on their website.

[GO TO CAPSTONE WEBSITE](#)

Bfriends Charity

The Trust also has its own charity [Bfriends](#) that may be able to offer you help and support.

Exceptional circumstances

We understand that everyone has their own individual and exceptional circumstances. We will always consider financial support for the these.

ENDS