



London Borough of Hackney Leaving Care Service

Local offer for care leavers



Care Leavers information booklet

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1. Our policy

This leaflet tells you, as a young person who has been Looked After by Hackney, about the support available to you. This may change annually so please ensure you get an up to date copy of this leaflet from your social work unit.

Once a young person becomes 18 years of age they are no longer legally Looked After. Although many young people leave care at 18, some young people may leave care before that.

The definition of a care leaver is a young person aged 16 or over who has been looked after by the local authority for a relevant period of time since their 14th birthday and with a period of care taking place on or after their 16th birthday.

Other young people who were Looked After immediately before a Special Guardianship Order was granted qualify for advice and assistance from us between the ages of 16 and 21.

For more information ask someone from your social work unit.





Remember

Keep this leaflet somewhere safe so you can look at it when you need to.

If you are unsure about anything in this leaflet or want some more information, please speak to your social work unit.

In Hackney we want to ensure the support that we provide for you when you leave care:

- Recognises you as an individual with individual needs.
- Supports you in taking responsibility for yourself as a young adult. We will offer you a 'second chance' if things do not work out first time round. Most people make mistakes during their move to independence whether they have been in care or not.
- Helps you access and maximise all the support available to you through a range of services, including accessing benefits, practical and financial support.
- Ensures all young people who have left our care are treated equitably.

The amount of financial and other support you will get as a care leaver will be dependent on your age and individual circumstances.

Getting advice from your social worker

In Hackney, the role of a personal advisor is fulfilled by the Looked After Children Service social workers and from the post 16 learning advisors in the Virtual School. This support continues through to the Leaving Care Service up until your 21st birthday and 25th birthday if you want support to continue.

Your social worker will be in touch with you at least 6 times a year, but more if this is needed. You can always contact your social worker in between these contacts if you need advice and support.

Once you are 21 years of age you will only have a social worker if you want ongoing support with an area of assessed need for as long as required up until your 25th birthday. This means that your case could close, but if you need support later on you can ask for support again, up until your 25th birthday.

Your Pathway Plan

It is expected that as you are preparing to leave care, and after leaving care, you will be involved in 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, where you live, money management, looking after yourself, health, employment, education and training issues. Your Pathway Plan is also your record of the support that we have agreed to provide to you.

2. What financial support can I expect to receive?

Subsistence (16 and 17 year olds)

If you are living semi-independently you are not entitled to claim benefits, so we will provide you with a subsistence payment to cover your day to day living costs. If you are struggling to budget your money, this may be issued in a part cash and food voucher payment to ensure you have enough money for food.

This applies to young people not living with foster carers or in a residential placement and some young people who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). The current rate from 1 April 2017 is £57.90 (equivalent to the current rate for income support). Young people who are in paid training will receive the equivalent or higher allowance from their training provider.

Initial benefits claim

Once you turn 18, you need to claim Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance or Universal Credit. The Leaving Care Service will provide you with up to 4 weeks subsistence payments to assist you while you are waiting for your initial benefits claim to be processed. Your social worker will be able to provide you with further information about this. You will also need to claim Housing Benefit to cover your rent.





Fares

If you are in education or training you will be given financial assistance with travel costs during term-time only to cover up to zone 1-6 or the equivalent based on an assessment of need. You will need to have a current education contract signed by the Virtual School and apply for a student Oyster Card if eligible. If you have to attend university or college during the holidays, any additional support for fares will be based on an assessment of need and outlined in your Pathway Plan.

Additionally we will assist with some fares for family contact, leisure and cultural needs. This will also be based on an assessment of need and outlined in your Pathway Plan.

Clothing allowance

If you are aged 16 or 17 and in semi-independence you will be given a clothing allowance payable in 2 instalments at the beginning of summer and winter. The current allowance is £300 per year.

Birthday payments

Money for gifts and a contribution towards the cost of celebrations will be paid to you each year until your 21st birthday. You will only receive this allowance if you remain in contact with us. If you are in foster care, your carer will buy you a birthday present for your 17th and 18th birthdays.

- £75 for your 17th birthday (semi-independence)
- £100 for your 18th (semi-independence)
- £100 for 19th and 20th birthdays
- £150 for your 21st birthday

Holidays (16 & 17 year olds)

We will support you to have a holiday by paying a contribution towards your holiday costs. The amount we pay will be dependent on an assessment by your social worker and will not exceed £350 in any year.





Social and leisure activities

You will be encouraged and assisted to take part in social and leisure activities. If you are aged 16 or 17 you will be eligible to apply for a local leisure card. If you live outside Hackney, your social worker will assist in obtaining one from the resident authority. Depending on an assessment of need, we may pay for a hobby or fee for a club, if the leisure card is not available, provided you can demonstrate commitment to keeping it up.

Cost of key documents

It is important that all young people have a photographic form of identification (e.g. passport or driving licence) and their birth certificate when they leave care.

You will usually need formal identification of some kind, often a passport or driving licence, as well as your National Insurance Number, to start work with an employer, to claim benefits, to set up a bank account, to prove you are who you say you are and to get into a pub, club, etc.

When you leave care to become independent, you should already have a birth certificate as well as a renewed passport or a provisional driving licence. If you did not have a formal type of photographic identification when you left care, we will pay for the cost of the purchase of 1 passport and 1 birth certificate up to the age of 21. Based on an assessment, payment for a driving licence will be considered if it is necessary for your employment.

If you are an unaccompanied young person and there are immigration issues to be resolved, your social worker will help you get the right documentation required to prove you are who you say you are.

If you have lived here for more than 7 years but are not British or a European National, we will pay for you to be naturalised providing this is applied for in good time prior to your 18th birthday. You will need to discuss this with your social worker. In some cases, if you are a European National, we will assist you with purchasing a residence card.

Remember

You must keep all your documents safe as you will be responsible for paying for any replacements.



Vacation accommodation

If you are a student in full time residential education or in higher education, we will ensure that you have suitable accommodation, if you need it, during a vacation. For young people in higher education, the financial support we provide covers the academic year but we can provide advice and support with sourcing accommodation and contribute to any additional rent costs.

Support in pregnancy

If you are pregnant and aged 16 or 17 years old we will pay a one-off maternity grant 11 weeks before the birth of the baby. The current amount is £150 per baby.

Your social worker or midwife will support you to claim a grant of £500 from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) if you are eligible for one. This is to buy essential items you need for when your baby is born.

Your social worker may also be able to offer support to access funding from other organisations for you and your baby.

Council tax exemption scheme

Any care leaver, who has previously been in Hackney's care, aged 18-25, who lives in the borough and is liable to pay Council Tax, will be able to apply for a council tax exemption. Hackney Care Leavers should first apply for a 'discretionary reduction', which will leave an outstanding council tax amount, which the Council will then reduce to nil (which means the care leaver will not owe the Council any council tax money).

Financial support for transition between benefits and employment

If you are worried about the gap in receiving money when you are moving from benefits to employment, let your social worker know and they will help you contact the Drive Forward Foundation, who work closely with Hackney Council to support care leavers. They may be able to offer financial support until you receive your first salary.

Setting up Home Allowance

When you leave care and are assessed as being ready to live independently, you will be eligible for a Setting Up Home Allowance. If you need it, you could receive up to £2,000. The allowance is accessed when you are assessed as needing it. This allowance is to provide you with sufficient furniture or equipment when moving into independent permanent housing and will be written into your Pathway Plan. Payments will be made directly to the supplier or provider.

The Setting Up Home Allowance will only be used to buy essential items for permanent accommodation.

In some cases you may also be able to use the money as a deposit to rent private accommodation. You will need to discuss this with your social worker.

Please consider the following when spending your allowance:

- Buying second-hand or used goods (but not second-hand electrical items). Furniture and soft furnishings can be cheaper and of better quality than many new items when bought second-hand.
- Looking at buying items on special offer or waiting for sales to get bigger discounts.
- Planning ahead, for example, by buying some items such as towels, bedding, crockery etc. while you are still in care. You could use your short-term savings for this.
- Using some of your savings, and any other grants available to you, to help towards some of these costs.



Remember

- When most young people leave home to live independently they cannot always afford everything they need straight away and cannot always afford everything new.
- Your savings are there for you to use in your transition to independence and into later adulthood.

3. What support will I get with accommodation?

We are committed to making sure that once you leave our care we help you find suitable accommodation that meets your needs. We know not all young people will be ready to live unsupported in their own tenancy straight away. Your social worker will have worked with you to agree plans for when you are no longer in care. This will include plans for your accommodation and will be written into your Pathway Plan.

Support for 18 year olds

Most young people will leave care at 18 years of age, but we have a statutory duty to support you until the age of 21 and 25 if you want support. Your last LAC Review prior to your 18th birthday should ensure that there is a clear plan, your Review Pathway Plan, covering where you will live and the support you will need to meet your needs.



As a care leaver you will be expected to claim housing benefit to cover the Local Housing Allowance element of your rent, with the Local Authority covering the shortfall and any support costs for commissioned semi-independent accommodation.

If you later move into private rented accommodation as you are assessed as being ready for a tenancy, your landlord or agency, should agree for your Housing Benefit to be paid directly to them. It is essential that you maintain a Housing Benefit claim to not incur arrears and risk eviction.

‘Staying Put’

We know that if you have been in a settled foster home, the best plan may be for you to remain living there until you have finished education or achieved other goals that will help you move smoothly to adult independence.

All fostered young people have the right to remain with their foster carers until the age of 21.

If you and your foster carers express a wish to enter into a Staying Put arrangement, and we think it is appropriate, we will provide advice, assistance and support to draw up a Living Together Agreement.

Your social worker will support you to access all the benefits you are eligible for while in your Staying Put arrangement, including claiming Housing Benefit.





Supported lodgings

If it is not possible for you to stay with your carer, but it is felt you are not ready to move into semi-independent accommodation, your social worker may consider supported lodgings for you.

Supported lodgings are similar to 'Staying Put' with your carers but it means you move somewhere new to live. You will still be living in a family home and having the additional support that comes with being part of a family.

You will need to pay a portion of money from your personal allowance, Job Seekers Allowance or wages as a contribution towards your 'rent' and pay all of your Housing Benefit to your carer.

Renting private accommodation

If you want to rent a private property, it is likely your landlord will require a deposit and rent in advance before they will agree to a tenancy.

If you are over 18 and assessed as being ready for a tenancy, we will support you to access rent deposit schemes, or if appropriate, you could speak to your social worker about accessing your Setting Up Home Allowance to pay for this.

Other options

You may feel that 'Staying Put' with your carers, or moving to semi-independent accommodation, supported lodgings or your own tenancy unsupported, will not be right for you post 18 and up to your 21st birthday. Being involved with reviewing your Pathway Plan will give you the opportunity to talk with your social worker about this. They will be able to explain the options you have and provide support in finding somewhere to live that will meet your needs.

4. What support will I get with education, training or employment?

We want you to be able to continue your education or training or find work when you leave care.

If you are starting education or training courses and need support, you will be eligible for the support detailed below and as provided by the Virtual School.

Travel expenses for 18+ care leavers

If you are in education and/or training the Council will pay for an Oyster Card (up to zone 6), if this is not covered by your training provider.

Education Bursary for 16 to 19 year olds

If you are still in education or training, the Virtual school or your college will be able to advise whether you are eligible for a 16–19 Bursary. Careers Advisors (the new name for Connexions workers) will have more information about this. Your social worker or Virtual School worker can help you complete the application form.

18 to 21 year olds wanting to go to college

You will have the following support available to you:

- Your social worker will keep in touch with you and review your Pathway Plan to ensure you are getting the support you need.
 - Assistance with some expenses for education, training and employment if needed.
 - Income Support or Housing Benefit should be available if you have been in care and remain separated from your family and are in:
 - Full time further/non-advanced education (This is up to A-level standard or equivalent)
- OR**
- In direct training for 12 hours a week or more

Income Support or Housing Benefit should continue to be paid until the end of the academic year that you turn 21.

In exceptional circumstances and based on an assessment of need, we may be able to make a contribution towards course workbooks, field trips, special equipment or materials, clothing for work experience or job interviews.





21 to 24 year olds wanting to go into education or training

We have a responsibility to assess your circumstances and offer support to you if this is needed, once you have left care until you are 25, in respect of education or training for the duration of the course.

If you are over 21 and want to go back into education or training, you will be given advice and support to consider your options through the Leaving Care Service and the Virtual School. This will include:

- Suitability of the course.
- Using any savings you have to support you during this time.
- Combining work and study.
- Applying for financial support from charities and trusts.
- Considering if you are eligible for funding from your employer.

If we do provide you with support after 21, we will also provide you with a social worker who will update your Pathway Plan with you and keep in touch.

Support for young people wanting to go to university

Eligibility

- You must have completed BTEC level 3 or A levels and be enrolled on a course of higher education, which includes first degree and higher education qualifications that are over 12 hours per week of study, including some distance learning courses. The course must last for at least 2 academic years.
- You must commence the course of higher education prior to your 25th birthday and have confirmation of your student loan and immigration status for the duration, if you are originally an asylum seeker.
- Your social worker will formally authorise any higher education course you have chosen.

If you are starting university you are eligible for the support detailed below:

- A social worker to review and update your Pathway Plan and keep in touch with you.
- We will pay you an education grant of £1000 a term. This is inclusive of a £2000 bursary which covers the duration of the whole course.
- The financial support is generally available for a maximum of 3 years. If your first designated course is 4 years in duration (e.g. teacher training), additional financial support will be agreed in your Pathway Plan for year 4 to a maximum of £3,000.
- In some cases you will be given a grant to purchase a laptop in your first year of study to the maximum value of £400, including software, based on an assessment of need.

If you decide at the end of the first year you are on the wrong course, we will provide an additional year's funding for you to change to another designated course. You will only receive 4 years funding in total, on confirmation of your student loan.

Payment of the bursary will be assessed as part of your Pathway Plan, including agreement from your social worker that the course of higher education is a reasonable career pathway that will lead to employment.

If you are unsuccessful in a year of your education, financial support will be re-assessed in your Pathway Plan. A maximum of one year's additional financial support may be provided.

Attendance

If there is any dispute about attendance, your social worker will ask you to provide a letter of attendance from your Higher Education Institution (e.g. University). If you are not attending your course in accordance with your Pathway Plan, we may withhold payment of any bursary and other financial support provided by Hackney, following discussion with the Head of Corporate Parenting. Where you have been paid but decide not to attend, this is grounds for us to request for monies to be repaid.

Additional funding

There are sources of additional funding that you should make use of for financial support, including seeking part-time employment, student loans and grants and hardship grants. Some universities offer a Care Leavers Bursary or financial support through the Access to Learning fund. Your social worker can discuss these with you.

Support after university

We can continue to offer you advice and support, if you need it, up until you are 25, for employment, education or training.

However, when you have completed your university course, if you do not have paid work, you will be expected to claim benefits, unless you are considering going on to a post graduate course.

If you want to go on to complete a post graduate course, we will offer you support and assistance to help identify financial support for you to continue your education and will advise you how to access this. We are not able to pay your fees or living expenses.

Support for parents with child care costs

If you want to access training or education you should find out what child care support is on offer from your employer, training provider, college or university.

Remember

All 3 year olds are entitled to free nursery hours from Early Years Services. In some areas they also offer free provision for 2 year olds.



Hackney 100

Hackney 100 is a paid work placement programme for young people aged 16–19 who live or study in Hackney. Placements are available in high-profile local companies across a number of sectors, including tech, design, media, fashion, hospitality, catering, engineering and finance.

To find out more speak to your social work unit or the Virtual School, or go to <https://hackneyworks.hackney.gov.uk/hackney100>

Hackney's Apprenticeship Programme

An apprenticeship is a full time job which combines training and study - you'll learn as you earn. You can study for a number of different qualifications across Levels 2, 3 or 4. Apprenticeship training takes place for a minimum of a year, but can last for up to four years depending on the qualification you take. You usually spend around 20% of your time studying, which is only one day a week, with the rest of the time spent working to get a heap of experience to help start your future career.

As a Hackney care leaver, to be eligible for our apprenticeships you need to be aged 16-24, and not hold a qualification at Level 4 or above (this does not apply to our higher level apprenticeships).

To find out more speak to your social work unit or the Virtual School, or go to <https://hackneyworks.hackney.gov.uk/apprenticeships>

5. What help will I get with health matters?

You will continue to have health assessments annually until your 18th birthday. These will be carried out by the LAC health nurse.

If you have specific health needs, your social worker will discuss with you how these can be met as part of your Pathway Plan and offer you advice and support on how to access health services.

From the age of 14 you can ask for a copy of your health assessment from the LAC Health Team. You can either request this from your LAC health nurse at the time of your health assessment or contact the team: Tel **07989 852921** or email **whh-tr.HC-LACHealthTeam@nhs.net**

After your final health assessment before you turn 18 you will be sent a health summary which will include your immunisation record, a copy of your last health assessment, how to access a GP, dentist or optician and where to go for health advice and information.

Your social worker will support you to ensure you are registered with a GP and dentist when you leave care.



Dental care

You may be eligible for some financial support towards dental checks/treatment if you are:

- Aged 16 to 18 years in full time education.
- Pregnant or have had a baby in the last 12 months.
- Having treatment as an in-patient or out-patient at an NHS hospital.
- Receiving Income Support, Income Based Employment and Support, or Job Seekers Allowance.
- On a low income and have a Health Credit Certificate (known as HC2 or HC3 certificate).

Eye care

You may also be eligible for free eye tests and vouchers towards glasses/contact lenses if you are:

- Aged 16 to 18 and in full time education.
- Receiving Income Support, Income Based Employment and Support, or Job Seekers Allowance.
- On a low income and have a Health Credit Certificate (known as HC2 or HC3 certificate).

Prescriptions

We can give you advice and support about paying for prescriptions but we are not able to pay for the costs of prescriptions for you to get medication.

You are eligible for free prescriptions if you are:

- Aged 16 to 18 and in full time education.
- Receiving Income Support, Income Based Employment and Support, or Job Seekers Allowance.
- Pregnant or have had a baby in the last 12 months (you will need an exemption certificate from your GP).
- Receiving treatment in hospital.

Support for people on a low income

If you are on a low income you can apply for a Health Credit Certificate known as HC2 or HC3. This will give you reduced cost, or free dental and eye checks/treatment as well as prescription charges. This is dependent on your income and needs at the time you apply for support. A certificate can last from 6 months to 5 years depending on your circumstances.

To find out more, ask your GP, dentist or optician, or ask your social worker to help you apply.



6. Savings

My savings

When you leave care you should have a short-term savings account, with savings you and your carer have made while you were in care. Some of this may have been used to buy things before you moved to semi-independence.

It is important when you have left care to try and continue to save in case of emergencies or for special treats.

If you do not have a bank account, your social worker can advise and support you to get one set up. A bank account is not only important to have for savings, but also to pay your wages or benefits into and potentially any financial support you receive from us.

If you were in care for more than 12 months you should also have a Junior ISA or a Child Trust Fund, which was set up with £200 initially. When you become 18 years of age these accounts will become Adult ISAs or Adult Trust Funds and you will be able to access this money. Your social worker will be able to give you information about the money in your account and advise on how to access this money.

Remember

Your savings are there to support you in your move to independence and adulthood. This may include buying items for your own place, driving lessons and supplementing the financial support available to you if you continue in education or training.

It is important that you think before you spend your savings, as once the money has been spent, it may be a long time before you are able to add to them again.



Savings over £16,000

Some young people may have a lot of savings. This includes money in bank accounts, ISAs or Trust Funds but can also include inheritance or compensation given by the courts.

If you have savings of £16,000 or more you will not be eligible for Housing Benefit, Income Support or Income Related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), or Job Seekers Allowance (JSA).

You can put up to £15,000 of these savings into a tax free savings account such as an ISA or Trust Fund.

If you have a lot of savings, it is important to get appropriate financial advice. Your social worker will be able to advise you about ensuring you get appropriate advice for your savings.

7. Hackney Gets Heard

Hackney Get Heard is the Council for Looked After Children in Hackney. It is a group of young people aged 14–25 who are in care or have experienced care, who aim to represent the voice of young people in the care system, in order to raise concerns or ideas about how to improve services. The group meet regularly, participate in consultations, and research and deliver events to young people in care to gather their views and raise their voice. The group also attends Pan London Children in Care Council meetings and contributes to ongoing dialogue around corporate parenting both locally and nationally.

In the past this group has produced new guidelines for Hackney staff, describing the level of service young people can expect from Hackney's Children and Young People Service in the Hackney Promise, and making it more accessible to young children so they can understand their rights more easily.

The group have monthly meetings on the first Thursday of every month, 5.00 – 7.00 pm at Hackney Town Hall (just come to reception). All young people in care or who are care leavers are invited to attend. As a young person who has experienced care, you are welcome to come along and get involved. There are opportunities for training, work, and to make positive change that will help other young people.



To find out more, please go to:

<https://www.younghackney.org/get-involved/hackney-get-heard/>

8. What if I do not get the support I need?

Sometimes we may not be able to provide you with the support you feel you need, or we may not agree to provide you with a particular piece of funding or service you have requested.

There may be a number of reasons for this so it is important you understand the reasons for you not getting the support you feel you need.

Your child practitioner or social worker should:

- Record any decision not to provide you with a service or funding and the reasons why.
- Tell you about the reasons for this decision (and give you details of the complaints and appeals process if you would like this).

If you are unhappy about a decision, you need to firstly try to talk to your social worker before making a complaint as they may be able to help you understand more about why this decision has been made or why the support is not available.

If you decide you want to make a complaint, you may want to have an advocate to support you in making the complaint. If you want advice on how to get an advocate involved to support you, speak to your social worker.



The CFS complaints team can be contacted on:

Tel: **020 8356 5800**

Email: **children.complaints@hackney.gov.uk**

Or write to:

Safeguarding & Learning

3rd Floor

Hackney Service Centre

1 Hillman Street

Hackney

London E8 1DY

Children and Families Service will be reviewing the financial support available to care leavers every year. Please let us know your views on the policy and any suggestions you may have. We will consider these when reviewing the policy.

If you want to tell us your views on the policy you can speak to your social worker who will pass on the information.

9. Useful information and contacts

Hackney Children and Families Service

General Enquiries: **020 8356 3000**

(9am - 5pm, Monday to Friday - except Bank Holidays)

Hackney Service Centre

1 Hillman Street

Hackney

London, E8 1DY

National Care Advisory Service (NCAS)

Web: **www.leavingcare.org**

The latest news and information on all issues relating to transitions from care and care leavers are available on the NCAS website.

Benefits information

Web: **www.gov.uk**

The latest news and information on benefits will be available on this national website. You can search for individual benefits and use the 'benefits calculator' interactive tool that can help you find out what benefits you may be entitled to.

Turn2us

Web: **www.turn2us.org.uk**

Freephone: **0808 802 2000** (9am to 8pm Monday to Friday)

Helps people access the money available to them through welfare benefits, grants and other help.





