

## Help and housing for care leavers

If you are a care leaver you may be able to get housing and other help from Cumbria County Council. The help you get mainly depends on your age.

### Key advice

- Cumbria County Council's Children's Services team are responsible for finding you somewhere to live until you turn 18
- If you are an 18, 19 or 20 year old homeless care leaver, Eden Housing Association's Housing Options Service (Eden Housing Association are contracted by Eden District Council to carry out their homeless and housing advice service) must offer assistance.

### Housing help for 16 and 17 year old care leavers

If:

- you have already left care, and
- you have spent a total of at least 13 weeks in care since the age of 14, and
- part of that time in care was while you were 16 or 17

You will be able to get help including somewhere to live from Eden Housing Association's Housing Options Service. It doesn't matter if those 13 weeks were not all at the same time.

You have different rights if you have spent less than a total of 13 weeks in care, or you want to leave care before your 16th birthday.

Get advice if the Housing Options Service is not helping you.

Use Shelter's directory located at [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk) to find your local Shelter advice centre or Citizens Advice. This service is free and confidential.

### Financial support for 16 or 17 year old care leavers

Most 16 or 17 year old care leavers are not eligible for benefits. The Children's Services department of Cumbria County Council must help you by:

- providing housing or helping you find and keep your own place
- supporting you financially by paying you enough for your rent, food, bills, travel costs for education and training, clothing, pocket money and childcare if you need it
- giving you any other support you need, such as help with continuing your education, finding work or dealing with personal problems

You can usually only claim benefits if you are a 16 or 17 year old care leaver and you are also a single parent or unable to work because of a disability or illness.

Find out more from Turn2Us about benefit rules for care leavers. Turn2Us can be located at [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk)

### **Housing help for 18 to 21 year old care leavers**

If you are aged 18 to 21, you can get help from both Cumbria County Council's Children's services and the Housing Options Service. You are automatically classed as being in 'priority need' until your 21st birthday, which means that the Housing Options Service should help you find a place to live.

If you are aged 18 to 21 and spent at least one night in care when you were 16 or 17, you are automatically classed as being in priority need until your 21st birthday.

Children's services can also help you by providing support and help with training and education.

If you are in full-time further or higher education, Children's Services must find you somewhere to live during holiday periods if you need it.

### **Benefits for care leavers over 18**

When you turn 18 you are entitled to claim benefits.

You should be able to claim Universal Credit if you need to.

### **Housing help for 21 years old and above care leavers**

Some older care leavers can get accommodation from the Housing Options Service if they are in priority need. For example, this may be the case if you:

- are vulnerable as a result of having been in care
- haven't had a stable home since you left care
- have slept on the streets in the past

If you are in full-time further or higher education and you have nowhere to stay outside term time Children's Services must also find you somewhere to live.

### **Other support for care leavers aged 18 to 24**

As a care leaver you should continue to receive help and advice from Cumbria County Council until your 21st birthday, or 25th if you are still in education or training.

Children's services can help you by providing assistance with education and training until your 25th birthday.

Your personal adviser should still keep in touch and should go over your pathway plan with you to see how you are getting on (there is more information about personal advisers further down).

Ask Social Services to help you if you need support to continue with your education or find training or employment. They may be able to help with the cost of living near your college, training centre or workplace.

## **Help for all care leavers**

### **The council's role**

The council that last looked after you remains responsible for you even if you move to a different area. The council must continue to give you any help you need, even if you move to another area.

### **Personal adviser**

Before you leave care you're given a pathway plan setting out what support you might need to live independently.

Find out more from **www.Gov.uk** about pathway plans.

You're given a personal adviser whose job it is to make sure that you claim everything you are entitled to. They can help you with application forms for housing, benefits, and education and/or training courses. They should also help you with learning life skills, like how to budget.

Your personal adviser should stay in contact with you and provide ongoing support and help until you turn 21 or until your 25th birthday if you are still studying full time.

Get advice if you don't have a personal adviser. You may be able to get one even if you didn't get one while you were still in care.

### **Suitable accommodation for young care leavers**

Any accommodation provided should be suitable for you. You may get a place in a hostel or a self-contained flat.

It is unlikely, but in some cases you could be offered a place in a children's home or foster care.

Ask your personal adviser to help you if you have problems in your accommodation.

Get advice immediately if you're placed in bed and breakfast accommodation or any other unsuitable accommodation.

Use Shelter's directory at **www.shelter.org.uk** to find your local Shelter advice centre.

### **Single room rate**

Usually if you are aged under 35 and you rent from a private landlord, the maximum Universal Credit you can get is the same rate you would get for renting a single room in a shared house.

But if you've been in care, this doesn't apply until you turn 22. You should be entitled to Universal Credit even if you have just spent one night in care.

There is a maximum amount that you can be paid, which depends on the area you live in.

### **Priority need**

If you are aged 18 to 21 and spent at least one night in care when you were 16 or 17, you are automatically classed as being in priority need until your 21st birthday.

You may be entitled to emergency housing from Eden Housing Association if you are in priority need.

### **Extra help for moving into a new place**

If you are a care leaver moving to a new place, you may be entitled to a budgeting loan to help pay for any rent in advance, moving expenses or household items. Most people who have been on income support or jobseekers allowance for at least 26 weeks can apply.

These loans are paid back through deductions from your benefits.

### **Help for homeless care leavers**

Most young people who have been in care are entitled to help if they become homeless. The help you are entitled to usually depends on your age and personal circumstances.

### **Care leavers under the age of 18**

If you are under the age of 18, Cumbria County Council's Children's services department is responsible for finding you somewhere to live.

### **21 years old and above care leavers**

Some older care leavers can get accommodation from the Housing Options Service if we can show that you are in priority need. For example, this may be the case if you:

- are vulnerable as a result of having been in care
- haven't had a stable home since you left care
- have slept on the streets in the past

Children's services can help you by providing assistance with education and training until your 25th birthday.

If you are in full-time further or higher education and you have nowhere to stay outside term time Children's services must also find you somewhere to live.

## **What is a local connection?**

If you have been provided with accommodation by a local authority and you are normally living in an area for a continuous period of two years or more and some or all of this period falls before you are 16 years of age, then you have a local connection with that area.

You will also have a local connection to the area of the Local Authority that owes you the leaving care duty.

## **Help and advice for homeless care leavers**

Get advice if you become homeless.

An adviser can help you to:

- check whether Children's services and/or the Housing Options Service should help you
- tell you what sort of accommodation and support Children's services normally provide in Eden – this will give you an idea of what you can expect
- tell you what longer term housing options are available in your area and give you an idea of how much it might cost
- put you in contact with specialist support organisations or local schemes that can help you raise a deposit or find a suitable place to live

Use Shelter's directory to find an adviser in your local area, or call Shelter's helpline on **0808 800 4444**.