

Reconnecting To Care

Policy and Guidance On Working With Care Leavers

1. Introduction

1.1 The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 placed a duty on Local Authorities to assist young people who have been looked after to transition into early adulthood and become economically active citizens within a community of their choice. The responsible local authority must assess and meet the needs of young people who were looked after in particular in respect of their employment, education, training and general welfare. Young people who qualify for support are:

1.1.1 *Eligible children*

aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for 13 weeks since they were 14 and are still looked after.

1.1.2 *Relevant children*

aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for 13 weeks since they were 14 and were looked after while 16 or 17 but have now left care.

1.1.3 *Former relevant children*

aged 18 to 21 who were either eligible or relevant before they left care.

1.2 In October 2012, additional statutory guidance was issued by Welsh Government, which set out Local Authority responsibilities in Wales towards former relevant children to reconnect with care services from 21 up to the 25th birthday. The guidance was issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Services Act 1970 and Section 60 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 and the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 has amended the Children Act 1989 allowing certain young people who were formerly looked after by a local authority to reconnect to care for the purpose of pursuing education or training. Essentially it places a duty on the Local Authority to (if appropriate) assess a young person in relation to education and training and to consider the reinstatement of one or all of the following:

- Pathway Plan
- Service of a Personal adviser
- Financial support in relation to education or training

1.3 Both Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Councils would like to enable young people to reach their full potential and encourage young people to be pro active in managing their needs in relation to education, employment and training. While remaining compliant with the policy, the guidance aims to provide time limited focused support that will enable young people to take active steps to economic independence.

1.4 Adult Services

1.4.1 Some young people who are former relevant children will have disabilities. Most with complex and significant disabilities receiving services from the Children With Disabilities Team will have a transition into Adult Services when they reach 18 although the planning for this will start from 16 onwards depending on the level of

need. These young people will receive support from Adult Services with daily living, education and employment, as their needs will be long term and interventions likely to take place over an extended period of time.

- 1.4.2 Other young people who have received a Leaving Care Service and have been referred to Adult Services because they are vulnerable and have moderate disabilities may receive Reconnecting To Care support provided they meet the eligibility criteria set out in this guidance. However agreement may be reached between Children's and Adult Services on how best to provide support to these young people particularly in relation to education and training and the provision of a Personal Advisor. (See 6.1 of the Guidance)

2. Who Is The Guidance Intended For?

- 2.1 This policy/guidance is intended primarily for team managers, social workers and other professionals working directly with former care leavers. It is also intended to provide a policy framework for:
- Director(s) of Social Service
 - Heads of Children's and Adult Services
 - Local Authority Members
 - Service Managers in Children's and Adult Services
 - Statutory Agencies
 - Partner and Third Sector agencies
- 2.2 The Policy and Guidance, is a joint approach by Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent Children's Services on how, Reconnecting To Care will be implemented consistently across the 2 Local Authorities and be reviewed.
- 2.3 The guidance may also be used by young people but user friendly guidance will also be available on the Caerphilly County Borough and Blaenau Gwent websites and as a booklet/flyer.

3. Eligibility

- 3.1 Local Authorities currently have a duty to provide support to care leavers up to the age of 21 or the 25th birthday if they are engaged in education or training. Under Reconnecting To Care young people aged 21 and over will be able to ask for the reinstatement of **some** Leaving Care Services if they commence education or a training course prior to their 25th birthday provided the young person is able to demonstrate that it will benefit their career prospects.
- 3.2 To be eligible for support the young person must be entering one of the following:
- A vocational course that will lead to a qualification,
 - Work based training leading to a qualification
 - Education

- 3.3 It will be the responsibility of the young person to identify and secure a placement on one of the above courses prior to contacting the Leaving Care Service that supported them prior to becoming 21. In order to assess the level of support needed the young person will be required to produce evidence that they have been offered a placement and provide the following information:
- College or university
 - Employer (if work based course/qualification)
 - Name of course
 - Duration of course
 - Full or Part Time
 - Costs
 - Contact person within the college, university or work place
- 3.4 The young person will also be required to provide information on any financial assistance that they will be receiving such as grants, bursaries, sponsorship by an employer, charitable payments or similar. If applicable, the young person will also be expected to apply for welfare benefits and/or other financial support like a student loan that they may be entitled to.
- 3.5 Leaving Care Services will also have the discretion to consider other payments to young people if they do not meet the above criteria and may include:
- Fares to college
 - Protective clothing or footwear
 - Tools and equipment (if the responsibility of the young person to supply)
 - Stationery
 - Short courses related expenses
- 3.6 The list above is not exclusive and those working with young people will need to consult the Leaving Care Team Manager who will be responsible for making decisions on one off or longer term expenses.
- 3.7 Once support has been agreed for a young person and a Pathway Plan reinstated, this may continue beyond the 25th birthday but only until the end of the course. However this will be subject to 6 monthly reviews. See Pathway Plan, Section 5.

4. Assessment

- 4.1 Assessments will be carried out by Social Workers within the Leaving Care Team. The assessment will focus on 2 areas: education and or training and will be completed in the statutory time scale of 7 working days. No services will be considered or reinstated until this is completed.
- 4.2 A young person must be willing to co-operate and make all the necessary information available indicated at 3.3. The Social Worker will also need to consider if the young person is committed to embarking on the course based on their track record of attendance in the past and if it will be a stepping-stone to work eventually.

- 4.3 If the young person has a social worker in Adult Services or other professionals supporting them with daily living, then with the permission of the young person information may be sought from these workers provided it is relevant to the assessment.
- 4.4 Assessments will only be carried out on young people who at the point of contacting the Leaving Care Team has:
- Place at college/university that will last more than 3 months
 - Vocational training that will last more than 3 months
 - Work based training likely to last more than 3 months
- 4.5 Support will also be available for other young people not meeting the requirements for an assessment but will be at the discretion of the Leaving Care Team Manager and will be in the form of discreet and or one off payments provided that sufficient information is available to establish if this is the best way to meet needs.

5. Pathway Plan

- 5.1 Following assessment young people will have an employment and or training focused Pathway Plan which will be developed in partnership with the young person which will set out:
- Needs
 - Outcomes
 - Timescales
 - Financial support
 - Review milestones
 - Responsibilities of all stakeholders including the young person
- 5.2 The Pathway Plan may also include information from a previous plan provided that it is relevant to the young person's needs currently and is related to their attendance at education or training. The Plan will aim to achieve one or all of the following outcomes for the young person:
- Achieve a qualification
 - Acquire work based skills
 - Be work prepared/ready
 - Secure a job

5.3 Reviewing the Plan

- 5.3.1 The Pathway Plan will be reviewed every 6 months provided the plan's duration is at least a year. The plan will be reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to ensure that there is a level of independence and scrutiny in relation to decisions made and that appropriate outcome are being achieved.

6. Support To Young People

6.1 Personal Adviser

- 6.1.1 Young people reconnecting to care may be provided with a Personal Adviser for a limited time provided that their needs indicate that this will assist them with education, training or employment. The Leaving Care Team have a duty to ensure that a young person has choice when selecting a Personal Adviser and will consider other professionals who will be working with the young person to see if they are suitable. For example an Adult Services Social Worker or support worker could be a Personal Adviser.

See The Children Act 1989. Guidance and Regulations Volume 3, Planning Transition To Adulthood For Care Leavers.

The Personal Adviser will help the young person to implement these elements of their Pathway Plan and to signpost to community based organisations that can also provide support and guidance. If there is a clear indication that the young person needs the service for longer than six months, the Leaving Care Team Manager will have the discretion to extend this service.

6.2 Financial Support

- 6.2.1 Consideration will be given for financial support only if all other avenues of financial support have been explored and the young person has been turned down. This will include:

- Welfare benefits while studying or working
- Maintenance and subsistence grants
- Student loans
- Financial support from employers
- Sponsorship, bursaries and other employer related schemes
- Charitable support

- 6.2.2 Young people will be able to ask for help from a Personal Adviser to assist them in securing financial support but only if they get into difficulty trying to do this themselves and they need further guidance and assistance.

- 6.2.3 Following an Initial Assessment and based on information provided by a young person, the Leaving Care Team Manager will have the discretion to make financial support available for one or more of the following:

- College or university fees
- Fees for work based training
- Maintenance allowance
- Accommodation costs
- Miscellaneous items related to study
- Miscellaneous items related to work based study

6.3 Agreement

- 6.3.1 In order that the young person is clear on what is being offered in the form of support and/or financial help they will be asked to sign an agreement which will include permission for the representative from the Leaving Care Team to check if they are attending their college or course. It will also set out the duration of any support and or financial assistance and any other conditions that it has been decided are necessary during the assessment and identified in the Pathway Plan.

7. Appeals By Young People

- 7.1 Young people who have been refused support or have been allocated insufficient support to meet their needs will have the right to appeal. In the first instance they will write to the Service Manager for Leaving Care Services stating why they believe they should receive services under Reconnecting To Care. If the Service Manager is unclear on any of the facts presented by the young person, he/she will speak to the young person over the phone or set up a face to face meeting. This will enable the young person to put their case to someone who has **not been** involved in the decision making process. At this stage the Service Manager will also request to see assessments carried out and other information relevant to the young person.
- 7.2 In the first instance local resolution will be sought with the Leaving Care Team Manager particularly if the Service Manager believes some of the facts have not been considered sufficiently. The Leaving Care Team Manager will have another 7 working days to reconsider the young person's case and make a decision whether to grant a service or not. If necessary further information will be requested from the young person and all or some of the Initial Assessment repeated.
- 7.3 Following reconsideration by the Leaving Care Team Manager, if the original decision cannot be changed in favour of the young person, a Service Manager will be asked to look at all the facts again and to verify or replace the decision with a different one if they believe that the facts justify this.

8. Legislation and Guidance

- 8.1 The legislation relevant to care leavers is:

The Children Act 1989

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

The Local Authority Services Act 2070

Government of Wales Act 2006

and can be found on the following website:

www.legislation.gov.uk

- 8.2 The Children Act 1989 – Guidance and Regulations Volume 3, Planning Transition To Adulthood For Care Leavers is particularly useful and can be found at:

www.dh.gov.uk

9. How Will This Policy/Guidance be Reviewed

- 9.1 The Policy will be reviewed after 9 months of being operational so that any amendments can be made and the policy reissued annually. Any comments on the policy/Guidance should be sent to:

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