



YOUR GUIDE TO BEING IN CARE

MADE FOR YOU BY VOICES OF CARE



Coventry City Council

www.coventry.gov.uk/voices

This booklet will help you understand what being in care means for you.

It will give you lots of information about being in care and about the people that can help you.

If you do not understand any part of this booklet, please ask your social worker or carer to explain it to you.

This booklet belongs to:



My social worker is:

Name:

E-mail:

Telephone:



My Independent Reviewing Officer is:

Name:

e-mail:

Telephone:

My GP

My LAC Nurse/health professional



SHIANNE'S STORY

Hello my name is Shianne and I have been in care since I was 14 years old. Being labelled as a "care kid" doesn't sound great. Believe me, I've had my share of good and bad days whilst being in foster care, but mostly good days. This booklet provides information about the different places where you can get support, a group called **Voices of Care** has been great for me. At VOC you will meet other young people who are in a similar situation to you. At this group you can be yourself and talk about things that are concerning you, whilst helping to improve services that affect you. It's not all work we have lots fun and go on activities. The contact details for VOC are on the back page of this booklet.



THIS IS WHAT SOME OF MY FRIENDS FROM VOICES OF CARE THINK ABOUT COMING INTO CARE

"Coming into care felt really scary, but it all worked out great for me in the end" (Katy aged 14)

"I felt anxious and unhappy, now I feel loved and so spoilt." (Leah aged 14)

"I felt worried about what might happen; now I feel safe and secure. Make sure you talk to your social worker." (Chloe aged 15)

"I was nervous as I was moving to a new home, but all my fears have turned to happiness." (Levana aged 10)

"I feel like I've been given a fresh start in life" (Kat aged 16)

GETTING TO KNOW THE FACTS

What being fostered means

Fostering means going to live with a foster family when you cannot live with your mum and dad. Sometimes this is called “going into care” or being “looked after”.

There are many reasons why children are fostered. Your social worker will tell you why you need to be looked after away from your home.

It is important that you grow up in a family with a parent or parents where you are taken care of. Even though you might be with a foster family for a short time, your foster family will treat you as part of their family. If there are other children in their family, they will become your foster brothers and sisters. Being in foster care does not mean your parents and family do not love you.

What residential care means

Mostly you will be looked after by foster carers but for a small number of young people residential care might be more suitable.

Residential care gives you a stable and safe place to live, with 24 hour support from skilled staff that are there to help you. Living away from home in strange surroundings, with new people and new rules can be confusing, frustrating or upsetting at first. It doesn't matter how you came to be in care you will be made to feel comfortable and safe.

Social Workers

Every child in care has a social worker who they see regularly, and can contact when they need to. Your social worker's name and how to contact them is in the front of this booklet. Your social worker knows all about you and is there to help you. They will listen to your problems and try to help your family work things out. It may seem strange at first, but get to know your social worker and build up trust. Their job is to keep you safe and well looked after.

Your social worker will talk to you regularly to keep you informed of what is happening. The social workers will decide the best place for you to live. They will also think about what you need, your health, your education and who you will see from your family/friends and when. All this information is recorded on a special form so that the people looking after you know all about you. You can ask your social worker for a copy of the form.



Foster carers

Foster carers are ordinary people who have been trained and 'checked out' to make sure they can offer you a safe place to live. The sizes of foster carer's families vary just like the size of ordinary families. The important thing is that they will treat you as one of their family.

Foster Carers will:

- Make sure you are well looked after
- Respect, help and support you
- Listen to you
- Treat the information about you and your family confidentially
- Explain why they are asking certain things of you
- Support contact with your family when this is planned
- Enable you to follow your religion if you wish
- Attend meetings about you at school and with social workers
- Help you learn the skills you need when you grow older and leave care

Meeting your foster family

Before going to meet your foster family you will receive an information sheet with photographs of the family and their house. The sheet will also describe who is in the family, if they have any pets and what sort of activities the family get involved in.

Your social worker will take you to the foster carer's home to meet everyone who lives there. You will be able to take your belongings with you and your social worker will make sure you have some proper luggage to put all your things in.

When you move in your foster carer will show you around the house, show you where you will sleep and where you can put your things. The house may feel strange and different at first but your carers will help you to settle in. Every family has rules about what you can and cannot do, your foster family will explain what the rules are.



Foster carers will:

- Look after you
- Make sure you have food to eat
- Make sure you are safe and warm
- Get your breakfast in the morning and help you get ready for school
- Wash and iron your clothes
- Make sure you have your lunch or lunch money on school days
- When you are home they will be there to talk to you, watch television, and play with you.



Foster carers will expect you to:

- Show respect to everyone
- Join the family meals and activities
- Attend school regularly
- Stick to your coming home times
- Stick to the rules the family live by
- Respect the property of others
- Share your views



Residential Homes

A residential home is a place that has a number of young people living there. A residential home is very similar to foster placements however there are some differences e.g. there are more adults in a residential home that are professional staff. They do not live in the home but work there on shifts; each home has a list of what they expect from you and what you can expect from them. It makes it nicer if you try to respect the home, the rules and the workers. In turn they will treat you with respect. You will be supported to attend school. Staff will help out with things like books, uniforms and getting to school. There are set meal times and you will help the staff to make healthy meals. You will have your own bedroom which will be a safe place to put all your things. One of the staff members will be your keyworker this person will work closely with you so you get the most out of your time in residential care.

WHAT HAPPENS WHILE YOU ARE IN CARE?

A number of meetings take place while you are in care. These are to make sure everyone is clear about what is happening. This includes information about your health, education, where you live, when you can see your family and what happens when you leave care.

The plan is checked regularly at review meetings which are run by an Independent Reviewing Officer.



Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

Your IRO is very important. They check how things are going and make sure your social worker and Coventry City Council are doing what they should (this happens at review meetings). You should be told who your IRO is within 7 days of being in care. You should have the same IRO throughout your time in care, but if your IRO leaves their job they should introduce you to the new IRO before they leave. Your IRO should talk to you before every review meeting to make sure you're happy and to check how things are going. Your IRO will make sure you get a copy of everything that was talked about at the review. Two weeks after the meeting you should have a written record of all the decisions that were made. You can contact your IRO at any time not just before or after a review meeting. Your IRO's name and contact details are in the front of this booklet.

Keeping you healthy and well

Your health is just as important when you are in care. You have a GP, but when you first come into care a Doctor will see you to ensure you are as well as you can be, or help get other health professionals involved to be certain you keep as healthy as possible. After this, a Nurse will see you every 6 months if you are under 5, or once a year after that. We will see you at home, in school or in a place of your choosing and in the way that works best for you. We will work with the other health professionals (if we need to) and we will talk with you to find out what is most important to you, to keep you well. Your (GP and) Looked After Nurse's name can be found at the front of this leaflet.



YOUR QUESTIONS

Will I see my family and friends?

Each child and young person's situation is looked at individually and your social worker will be able to explain what arrangements have been made for you. Many children and young people in care are still in touch with their families and friends. Talk to your carer and social worker so they can check your care plan and help you to keep in touch.



Will I have to change school?

Your social worker will try to make sure you can stay at your own school, if this is what you want, so that you can see your friends and carry on with the activities you enjoy. Sometimes this is not possible and your carer, social worker and teachers will help you to settle into a new school and make new friends.

What happens if I am not happy where I am placed?

It can take time to settle so be patient and give it a go, however if you have lived there for a while and you are not happy please let your social worker know. It can be a very difficult time leaving your own family, moving to a new house, perhaps changing school and missing your friends. Talking to your social worker will help with your feelings.

Will I get pocket money?

You will be given pocket money and your carers will also be given money from Coventry City Council to pay for things like:

- Clothes and things you need for school
- Presents for your birthday and other special occasions
- Hobbies or interests you have



WHERE CAN I GET EXTRA HELP?

Sometimes you want someone (other than your social worker or carer) who can give you advice, speak up for you in meetings, help you with complaints and understands what's going on. This person is called an **Advocate**. You can find out how to contact them at the back of this booklet.

If you are feeling lonely, finding it hard to make friends or feel you are struggling with the situation you are in then you can also have an **Independent Visitor**.

The independent visitor will spend time with you and be a friend.

Or you could talk to your social worker about having a **mentor**. Your mentor is someone who will meet you regularly to chat about things which are on your mind – like problems with homework, schoolwork or your friends. A mentor can also help you find out more about sports, hobbies or out of school activities.

The Council's **LAC Mentoring Service** can find a mentor to help you. The service also organises events and activities for looked after children and young people. In the past, they've done things like horse riding, snow boarding, bowling and archery.

In Coventry we also have a group called **Voices of Care**. This is a group of young people in care who get together and give their views to staff at Coventry City Council about how to improve being in care. The group also get to go on some exciting trips and have lots of fun.

Contact details for all these teams are in the Useful Contacts section at the end of this booklet.



HAVING YOUR SAY

Don't forget your wishes and feelings must be taken into account when decisions are being made. This doesn't mean you will always get what you want, but your social worker must explain what decisions have been made and how your wishes and feelings were considered.



WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS?

You have the right:

- To be treated with respect
- To receive praise and recognition for your achievements
- To be protected and kept safe
- To be listened to and consulted on plans or decisions made about you
- To have help in expressing your wishes and feelings
- To access health, education, and recreational activities
- To help so that you can keep in touch with all important people in your life unless it is not safe to do so
- To make a complaint
- To speak to an Advocate for advice and support
- To celebrate your birthday and special occasions
- To practise your religion
- To your own bedroom
- To a safe place to keep your belongings
- To have help with learning
- To access health information and support to keep as well as possible



HOW DO I MAKE A COMPLAINT IF I NEED TO?

If you feel you are not being treated properly then you should talk to someone you trust and feel comfortable with.

You could:

- Talk to your carer, social worker or another adult you trust like a teacher. You can talk in private and they will be very discrete in sorting the problem out.
- You could talk about it at your next review
- You can speak to an advocate

You can also make a complaint to:

Coventry City Council
Children's complaints officer
Email: CLYPCustomerRelations@coventry.gov.uk
Website: www.coventry.gov.uk/youngpeoplesccc
Tel: 0800 269851
Civic Centre 1
Little Park Street
Coventry
CV1 5RS

Coventry believes all children and young people are important individuals in their own right. We have made a set of promises called the Coventry Pledge to make sure that you have the same opportunities in life as your friends.

OUR PLEDGE TO YOU:

Fit for life

- We will make sure you are cared for by people who can help keep you safe and healthy and can teach you to look after yourself
- As you grow older and are ready to move on, we will make sure you are prepared for life – including managing money, looking after your health, cooking healthy food and taking care of where you live

Your views count

- We will listen to you, involve you in decision making and be honest about plans being made
- We will give you the opportunity to tell us what you think makes a good social worker, foster carer and residential worker
- Where possible we will give you a choice about where you live, for example living with other children/young people

Safe and sound

- We will make sure you live in a safe and comfortable place, where you can have your own belongings and special things around you
- We will respond to your concerns about safety

Investing in your future

- We will make more work experience and apprenticeships available for young people in care through city council connections
- We will make sure you have financial support and help with managing your money

You can do it

- We will help you get a good quality education
- We will make sure you can participate in school activities and have the right equipment for school or college
- We will support you to try new leisure or cultural experiences and have a chance to follow a hobby

Coventry cares about you

- We will make sure you know why you are in care
- We will give you the opportunity to have an independent visitor
- We will support you in your contact with family and friends
- We will make sure you have a significant adult taking an interest in your education and life

If you feel that any of these promises have been broken, please let VOC know, the contact details are on the back page.

USEFUL CONTACTS

To get an Advocate or Independent Visitor:

Barnardo's Coventry & Warwickshire Children's Rights Service
Tel: 024 7637 2596
Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm
If you can't speak to someone, leave a message on the answerphone and someone will call you back.

To speak to the LAC Mentoring Team:

Tel: 024 7683 3630
Or write to:
LAC Mentoring Team
Coventry City Council,
Civic Centre 2.3, Earl Street,
Coventry CV1 5RS

To speak to a Looked After Children's Nurse:

Coventry & Warwickshire Partnership Trust
1st Floor, Paybody Building
Stoney Stanton Road, Coventry CV1 4F
Telephone: 024 7696 1442

To find out about Voices of Care:

Tel: 024 7683 2989
Mobile: 07904 395868
E-mail: Voices@coventry.gov.uk
Website: www.coventry.gov.uk/voices

To find out about Compass (Drugs & Alcohol Misuse Service)

12 Warwick Row, Coventry CV1 1ED
Freephone: 0800 121 4043
Telephone: 024 7625 1653
Email: coventry@compass-uk.org



To speak to the Coventry NHS Walk in centre:

City of Coventry NHS Healthcare Centre
Stoney Stanton Road, Coventry, CV1 4FH
Telephone: 0300 200 0060

To speak to the Coventry Central Police Station:

Little Park Street, Coventry, CV1 2JX
Telephone: 0345 113 5000

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Make sure adults in charge listen to children and young people.
Tel: 0800 528 0731 or 020 7783 8330
Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk
Web: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Or write to:
The Office of the Children's Commissioner, Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT

OFSTED

This organisation checks the work of fostering agencies in England and Wales.
Tel: 0300 123 1231
Email: enquires@ofsted.gov.uk

Or write to:
Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD

CAMHS

CAMHS provide services to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Contact Information for CAMHS Looked After Children's Team
Telephone: 024 7696 1368
Monday-Friday 8.30am-5pm