

## Guidance for the Care Leavers Independence Booklets for Professionals

***The ability to vote, live independently and travel freely when reaching 18 can give us a sense of empowerment and control. These transitional experiences can shape who we are and our outcomes later in life.***

'Many [care leavers] feel ill-equipped to deal with the responsibility of managing accommodation, maintaining education or finding work and the challenges of accessing services and systems that are complex and often inflexible. Their experience contrasts with that of most young people, a fifth of whom remain living with parents until at least age 26 (Osborne, 2015) and most of whom receive practical and emotional support, retaining the option to return home for short or long periods of time long after they move out.' (Research in Practice, 2017)

Evidence suggests that gradual transitions to independent living can support care leavers. Manchester Local Authority are working closely with Strategic housing to look at accommodation types and this work is ongoing, however, in order to prepare Looked After Children and Care leavers to prepare for independence there is a need for a clear robust systematic approach to be used by all professionals involved in the life of a looked after child and care leavers.

In addition to practical support, the emotional wellbeing of young people leaving care is fundamental. Moving away from home, possibly leaving behind friends, family and acquaintances, and becoming financially responsible for yourself can be isolating and lonely. Promoting opportunities to develop, maintain and strengthen healthy relationships can help to build an individual's emotional resilience in order to be able to adapt to these changes.

In order to support successful care leaver transitions, professionals need to recognise the importance of preparing young people for leaving care. Enabling young people to actively participate and involve themselves in decision-making can help them in managing their future. Practical and emotional support throughout the process should begin early and include the young person, their foster carers and/or residential staff/Supported Lodgings/Supported Accommodation. And most importantly, professionals need to work in strengths-based ways to support the aspirations of young people during this transitional period of their lives.

As well as the professionals that young people may be living with, Social Workers and Personal Advisors (16 years + ) should also be discussing transitions with young person, the social worker's role is pivotal in ensuring all professionals are using the same approach when discussing transitions and planning for the future.

Manchester has developed three booklets for Looked after Children and care leavers there are three levels to ***the Toolkit (Skills) for Life*** for our Young People; from basic skills to a more advanced level.

The purpose of these booklets is so that we can prepare our looked after children's population for a successful transition to adulthood and beyond with day-to-day life, practical and social skills. **Level 1** is to be started with Looked after Children at the age of 14 Years\*. (Unless a looked after child has the capacity to work with carer/social worker before the age of 14 on Level 1).

The booklet is **not** designed as a checklist but it is expected that carers and professionals will discuss the questions in a non-directive manner and in their day-to-day life and in a natural way, such as whilst having dinner etc, then it is expected the professionals will reference the conversation they have had with the young person and highlight completion in the booklet and ensure the young person fully grasps the discussion and how it relates to the booklet. This will be evidenced by both the young person and professional signing each section together. The young person engages and signs of on each question and the carer/professionals will complete the summary at the end of each booklet. The summary will be completed alongside the young person so they both have a shared understanding on what level.

**Level 2 & 3** are both for young people from 16- 25 years. Young people vary with their level of comprehension of social situations; the booklets should be checked and carers should assess what level their young person would be able to manage, and start with the appropriate level. There is no time limit for completion of the booklet, however, it will be **expected that every six months the IRO will expect** to see the booklet completed and discussed at the Looked after Children's Review. In a Looked After Child's/young person's life there would be various professionals, it will be expected that all professionals update the IRO at the LAC review on what stage they are at within the booklet and the expectation is that each professional involved in the young person's life, would engage the young people in a meaningful discussion and jointly complete the booklet, This will be discussed by the IRO at the Looked After Children's Review. This will enable a network of professionals all involved in modelling and coaching supporting a young person's transition to successful adulthood.

**Personal Advisors** are also expected to work with young people on the booklets from 16 years old. This should be evidenced by the social worker in the first pathway plan, setting out which professionals are completing the booklet with the young person and in what timescale. The social worker will be the lead professional pre-18 years, and will compare the booklets jointly completed with the young person and by foster carers/other carers and Personal Advisors to see how/or whether the young person is fully grasping the questions and purpose behind them.

Following 18 Years, it is expected that Personal Advisors work through the Level 2 and 3, they will also be ensuring the support workers in supported accommodation and/or supported Lodgings complete the booklets with the young person. The Personal Advisor will request the copy of the completed booklet so this can be saved to the young person's case file. The summary completed by the professionals will be included in the pathway plan to evidence completion and the young person's level of understanding on the importance of transitions.