

Local Offer to Care Experienced Young People

July 2024



Working
for Children
and Families
in Solihull



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Local offer for young people who have experienced being in the care of Solihull

Welcome to the Local Offer for you, our care experienced young people aged 16 and above in Solihull. We want you to have the best possible offer to support you through adulthood. We want to make sure you are aware of all the support available to you and how you access it.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 places a legal responsibility on us and all local authorities to write and publish a list of services which all care experienced young people will be able to access after they reach the age of 18 years old. This is called the '*Local Offer for Care Experienced Young People.*'

We have the pleasure of launching our new Local Offer to support you as you leave the care of Solihull Council. Our offer is ambitious and creative and, we hope, will provide you and all the other care experienced young adults in Solihull with the best possible chance of success. The ambition within this offer builds on the ambition of our Corporate Parenting Strategy.

As your corporate parents, we want only the best for you and for all our children and young people. We are actively focused on our commitments and responsibilities in that role as corporate parents. Feedback from people like you through Our Voice Our Services (OVOS), our Children in Care Council, and from a wider group of children and young people has helped us to shape this new offer around the things that matter to you.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy drives our services for children and young people of all ages who are in or have left our care. To compliment this strategy, we have supported our young adults to develop Our Promise to You, [which you can read here](#). It makes it clear what you can expect from us, like how we will make you feel cared for and make sure your voice is heard. The Promise is deeply important to us as Corporate Parents, as are the contents of this offer. We take them seriously and hope the strength behind the words is easy to see.

There is also a '*money and more*' booklet available to help you understand what you are entitled to, and we are working to produce a quick guide to services that you can keep on your phone or computer.

It is essential that we offer strong support and advocacy for you and all our young adults. This is a joint responsibility for every employee at Solihull Council. We hope you will see the commitment of our staff in the Child Asylum and Care Experienced Team and look forward to seeing positive outcomes for our young people as you take up the support contained in this offer.

Yours sincerely



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1. Our support to you

What should you expect?

As a care experienced young person, you can expect the following support:

1. You will have an allocated Personal Advisor (PA) by the time you are sixteen and they will work alongside your allocated Social Worker. Your Personal Advisor will listen to you and help you with decisions that will affect your future. You will be provided with the information and support you need to help you make decisions about where you are going to live, what you are going to do and how we are going to support you to learn look after yourself.
2. Until you are eighteen you will also have a Social Worker to support you and develop your Pathway Plan and an Independent Reviewing Officer who will review your Plan and make sure it stays right for you.

What will my Personal Advisor do?

Your Personal Advisor and Social Worker will help you to develop and work with a support network which may include family, friends, cultural or religious organisations, and other support services or professionals.

Your Personal Advisor will visit you as frequently as you need, to give you the maximum amount of support. They will aim to see you at least every eight weeks until you are 21 and every twelve weeks after that until you are 25 but will always see you more often if needed.

Your Personal Advisor will be in touch to say hello soon after you turn 16 and plan how best for you to get to know each other and meet. Your Personal Advisor will be able to keep in touch with you through text, e-mail, phone and video call as well as visiting you. You can tell us what works best for you.

What is a Pathway Plan?

Your Social Worker and Personal Advisor will work with you to develop a Pathway Plan which clearly sets out:

- your achievements so far
- what you might be worried about
- what you need when you turn 18
- your aspirations, and
- your goals.

This will be reviewed every six months for as long as we are supporting you, which we will do until you are at least 21 and until you are 25 if this is what you want.

We will then work out what practical things need to happen to make your plan work for you. We will check and review your plan at least every 6 months, but we will do this more often if there are big changes in your life and this is what you need. Remember, your Plan belongs to you. If you want us to look at it at any time and make changes, please feel you can ask us. This is your life, you are in control of it, and we are here to make it a happy and safe one.



What will be included in my pathway plan?

Your Plan will look at your needs and strengths under the following headings:

- Relationships and Support Network
- Where I Live
- Education Employment and Training
- Independent Living Skills
- Money and Budgeting
- Health and Wellbeing

The following will also be added if relevant to you:

- Young Parent / Carer
- Immigration and Legal Status
- Youth Offending and Probation

2. Care Leavers Covenant

What will be included in my pathway plan?

Solihull expect all care experienced young people to have the same opportunities with education, employment and training as those who have not been in care. In fact, Solihull have made this a specific priority in our Corporate Parenting Strategy and we are working hard with local and national businesses to provide extra opportunities that are only open to young people who are care experienced.

Have you heard about the care leaver covenant? www.mycovenant.org.uk

The covenant is a pledge made by public, private and voluntary organisations to support all care experienced young people, like you, to be successful and thrive. It details many exciting opportunities for you to apply for and get involved with.

Opportunities range from employment, work placements and internships with big businesses, government departments, museums, theatres, or Premier League football clubs, as well as training workshops and life-skills coaching. Your Personal Advisor can help you to find and apply for these opportunities via national and local initiatives.



3. Your home

Where will I live?

One of the most important decisions we must support you to make as a young person is where you are going to live when you leave care. It's very important that wherever you live is safe and feels like a home.

Your Personal Advisor is there to help you with this, working through the options available to you and helping you to decide on what will be best for you at that time. All plans for where you live will be included in your Pathway Plan and agreed at your reviews.

When you are ready, a permanent home with either a social housing or private housing tenancy will be considered. Your legal status as a 'Care Leaver' gives you the right to be accepted on to the housing list. However, it is important that this does not happen until you feel able to live completely on your own and manage the responsibilities this brings. We can plan for this when we are writing your pathway plan.

Moving to live on your own is a massive step; it's not just about paying bills and cooking your own food. It's also about staying healthy, getting on with your neighbours and knowing what to do in an emergency. Your Social Worker and/ or Personal Advisor will talk to you as part of the pathway planning process about the best ways for this to be a success that lasts.

Having somewhere warm and safe to live is very important. If you were living in a family with your parents, it is unlikely you would move away to live alone at the young age of 18 years old. That's why in Solihull, we will encourage you to stay living with the carers you know, or very close by, so you have good support around you when you need it most.

If you have been living in residential care like a children's home, we will help you to stay in touch with important adults there when you leave. We will try to help you to live locally to Solihull so you can maintain your important relationships. If you have been living away from Solihull and feel connected to the community where you have been in care, we will support you to identify accommodation that meets your needs and keeps you in the local area that you identify most closely with.

We are excited to help you to move on but will also want to make sure you are ready, and we will discuss it together a lot. Your pathway plan will make very clear what is likely to work for you and how we are going to manage this together.

Our options for where you can live once you are 18 years old include:

You will have a place of your own that is safe and homely which will match your individual needs. We will help you understand your options and make the best choice for you. You will be supported to apply to be placed on the housing register 54 days before your 18th birthday if applying for housing in Solihull and you will be given priority in line with the Care Leaver protocol between Children's Services and Solihull Community Housing. This will mean that when you are ready for a permanent home, you can begin to consider a social housing home. We will also support you to apply for social housing outside of Solihull if this is your preference and advocate for you with other Councils where you feel you have a local connection.

The different options for where you live when you turn 18 years old are:

- **Staying put:** This is an arrangement where we will help you to remain with your foster family (if you are already living with that family when you turn 18) for as long as possible, if that is what you want. Moving into semi-independence or full independence will only happen when you are practically, mentally and emotionally ready to make this happen.
- **Supported accommodation:** This is a self-contained house or flat, where you have your own room but share some facilities with other young people and receive support from a Housing Support Officer.
- **Supported lodgings:** This is where you would share a safe space and home with an adult who will be there to help if you need it, but who will also be able to support you to live independently in their home.
- **Independent accommodation:** This is a where you would live in a home from a housing association (either in Solihull or an area of your choice) or a home that has a private landlord. We will support you to secure this accommodation and ensure you have the right skills to manage living on your own.
- **Returning to live with your family:** Where it is safe to do so, we will support you to leave care and return to your family if this is what you want.

Moving in Day

We will be there to make sure everything goes smoothly on your moving in day. If you are moving around the time of your 18th birthday, we won't expect this to happen on the day and will make sure you have time to celebrate your birthday before taking the step into your new place.

We realise this can be an exciting but also scary time. Your Personal Advisor will be there with you every step of the way for emotional and practical support. We will help you to move your belongings, settle in and make sure all practical things are in place such as water, gas and electricity.

Immigration Support

You may be a young adult leaving our care who was an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child and have an application with the Home Office which is under consideration for asylum and refugee status.

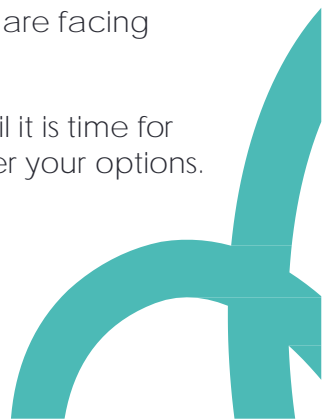
Sometimes, these applications can take a very long time to process during which time you will not have permanent status in the UK nor be able to work or receive regular benefits or apply for Local Authority housing. However, you will be entitled to support from our Child Asylum and Care Experienced team including funding for housing and living costs, and we will make sure you have a place to live that meets your needs until you know the outcome of your Asylum claim.

As part of your Pathway Plan, it will be important to talk about what happens if application to remain in the UK is denied.

The Personal Advisor will explore the appeals routes as well as what happens if you are facing removal from the UK and how this may need to be planned.

If your appeal rights are exhausted, we can continue to financially support you until it is time for you to leave the UK and we will support you emotionally and practically to consider your options.

The important to thing to remember is that we will not abandon you!



4. Education, Employment and Training

In Solihull, we believe every single young person can and should be able to work or study. Therefore, your Personal Advisor will stick by you when you are deciding what you want to do; and will be there to give you a helping push when you are unsure or not confident in what you can do so that you can go on to make decisions that you are in control of and give you the best chances in life.

Your PA will support you to access a specialist education and employment advisor via the Virtual School and/ or our Employment and Skills team, helping you into education, employment or training. We will also help you to access some of the opportunities provided to care experienced young people by the Council, its partners and the wider business community to help kick start your career.

As your corporate parent, we have high ambitions for you and make it our priority to support you into a job that is good for you, an academic option such as a university course, an apprenticeship or a training course. We will help you get the funding you need in order to do well. Your Personal Advisor will support you with any practical things like equipment that you may need.

It does not matter if you have a gap in your education because of other things going on in your life. We will help you to start again as soon as is reasonably possible. Your Personal Advisor will help you to make applications that may financially support your education and training placements.

Financial support is also in place for young people who have left our care and attend higher education at a university or equivalent. In this case, you will be entitled to a grant and non-term time rent to the end of your first degree, ask your Personal Advisor for the current amounts. You are entitled to apply for student loans and grants and usually you will not be able to claim benefits. Student loans and maintenance loans are administered by Student Finance. Both will need to be repaid when your earnings reach a certain amount after you have completed your course of further study. See the student finance website ([link](#)) for further information.

You may also be entitled to a Higher Education Bursary to meet the costs of your 'out of term' accommodation. Please visit the government funded website on supporting university finances for further information at www.gov.uk/extra-money-pay-university. Your PA will talk this through with you as well as any support available to you from the place where you choose to study.

There are many opportunities available in Solihull Council, which would look great on your CV too, including:

1. Getting involved in recruiting and interviewing new Solihull Children's Services professionals.
2. Meeting elected Members known as Councillors, to share your experience and help them consider whether the services for children, young people and young adults are reaching and supporting the right people in the right way.
3. Getting involved in one of our focus groups. At different times throughout the year we may need to have a specific group to help us look at certain areas we would like to change or need advice on.
4. Taking up a shadowing or work experience opportunity offered via our corporate parenting partners.

5. Health and Wellbeing

We will help you prepare to leave care by supporting you to develop practical self-care and life skills, health, budgeting, domestic skills and personal and professional relationships.

You will receive a **'health summary'** which details your confidential health history. We will help you understand the health and medical information within it. Keep this safe with you for when you may need it. You can also add to and update it at any time.

You can add information about your doctor, dentist, optician or any other medical professional, detailing everything from medical conditions you may have to when you last visited your orthodontist. Give a copy of your health summary to your doctor when you register with one. It will help them to understand your medical history and needs.

A useful way to find out about services available if you are living in Solihull or Birmingham is by accessing The Waiting Room:

[The Waiting Room - Health and Wellbeing services at your fingertips – Birmingham & Solihull \(the-waitingroom.org\)](https://the-waitingroom.org)

Registering at your local practices: It's important that you register with your local GP, Optician and Dental practices. We can support you to do this.

Healthy living: It's really important you look after your physical and emotional health. Sometimes if you are busy or feeling stressed it is easy to stop taking care of yourself. We can offer advice and support around healthy living and emotional well-being. You also get free access to leisure centres in Solihull and we will also help you with access to exercise opportunities if you are living elsewhere.

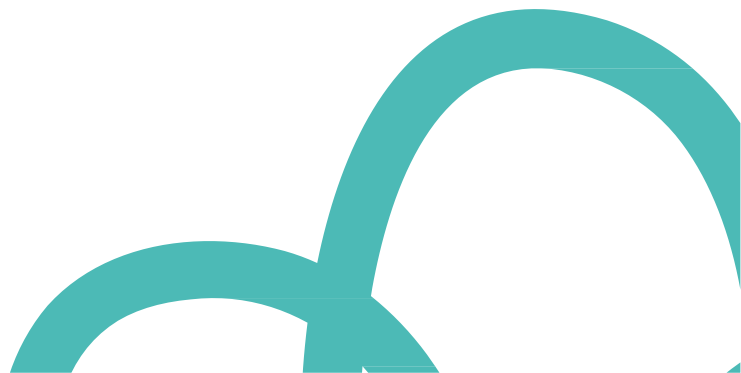
If you are concerned about drugs or alcohol, we can discuss this with you and put you in touch with people and services that can help.

Mental Health Support: Your Personal Advisor or Social Worker can support you with making a referral to Solar (an emotional wellbeing and mental health service for children and young people in Solihull, also known as Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS)) and / or other mental health services in your area. Support from Solar is available for all of our young people up to their 19th birthday and we can support you to access adult mental health services beyond then.

We know that your emotional well-being is critical and so advice is available for you. We will support you to find out about other community resources that may be able to help you deal with any challenges you may have. We will also make sure you have access to specialist support in relation to your experience if you are an asylum-seeking young person.

Kooth: Kooth is an anonymous online support and counselling service for any emotional wellbeing/ mental health issues if you are aged 11 to 25. You don't need a referral and it's open 365 days a year: <https://www.kooth.com/>

The Living Well Consortium: This service for people aged 16 and over is delivered by Psychological Wellbeing Workers who support people through talking and motivational therapy and activities quickly and easily: <https://livingwellconsortium.com/>



Relationships: Your relationship with your Personal Advisor and/or Social Worker is important as they are the main go-to person for any support you may need. Your Personal Advisor will support you to understand about healthy relationships. We will support you to understand good sexual health and healthy relationships. We can link you with community organisations such as the Umbrella service (who offer free sexual health services for Birmingham and Solihull) to offer advice, guidance and practical support.

We will also help you to build up a good network of people who you can have fun with and turn to for support so that you are less likely to feel lonely or isolated.

SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities): If you have additional needs or disabilities, we will help as much as we can to ensure you get the right help as you become an adult. We know this can be a worrying time for young people who have additional needs and want to make this time of change as smooth as possible and so will start thinking about this transition once you are fourteen years old or as soon as it is clear that this will be needed.

Young Parents: If you are going to become a parent, we will support you to get ready for this big and exciting change in your life and to adapt to be the best parent you can be. We will help you to get the most out of services that can help you and your family, like your midwife and health visitor and the Family Hubs (local centres where children, young people, and parents can access support and take part in fun activities) where you live. We will also support you with any challenges that come up for you in your role as a parent.

If you are living in Solihull or Birmingham, information about how health services will support you can be found here: [Support for Care Experienced Parents :: Birmingham and Solihull ICS \(icb.nhs.uk\)](#). If you live elsewhere, we will help you to find out what's available in your area.

6. Money

As your corporate parent, we want you to learn how to manage your money with confidence so that you can live comfortably and without having to worry too much about your finances. We know that's really hard when you're working with a small income.

Budgeting is hard, but it will help to make sure you can stay where you live, pay the bills and have money for food, clothes and activities. Your PA will help you to manage your money and understand any benefits you may be entitled to. They will also make sure that there is someone to support you in the event of a crisis or when things do not go according to plan.

We will support you financially if you are living independently and not eligible to claim benefits – such as if you are still under 18 or if your immigration status has not been sorted out. Payment amounts will be in line with benefits levels. Although you may still receive some financial support once you are 18, you will no longer receive a weekly personal allowance. You will be expected to find your income from work, education grants and, if eligible, benefits. In most instances, we will not be responsible for your daily living costs, but your Personal Advisor will talk you through what happens if you are at university or waiting for a decision on your asylum application.

If you are not working or in higher education or a training programme, you will need to make a claim for benefits. Your Personal Advisor will be able to help you with this. You will need identification documents and a bank account (if you **don't** already have one) for the benefits to be paid. Your PA will help you to get these in place before your 18th birthday.

We will ensure you have a birth certificate and both a provisional driving license and passport, whether or not you are planning to claim benefits. We will support you to apply for your benefits before your birthday so that everything is set up in time and reduce any delays in payments.

If you are receiving benefits and find yourself in a 'sanction' from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), which usually means your benefit payments are reduced or stopped for a period of time, if you **don't** meet certain conditions; you should contact your Personal Advisor **urgently** and we will do all we can to help. We work with a DWP Champion for care experienced young people who can help you to plan ahead and manage your appointments and processes to avoid sanctions where possible, and if not, will show you how to challenge a sanction.

Debt and money worries can have a serious impact on your well-being. In Solihull, we want to know as soon as you start to worry about having enough money. At that moment, we will help you. **We won't necessarily be able to give you more money than you are entitled to, but we will find ways for your life and living arrangements to be manageable.** Please **don't** keep these worries to yourself – get in touch!



a. Emergency Payments

There may be unexpected situations that arise that may leave you in a financial crisis or at risk of not being able to eat, travel to work or college or heat your home.

In these times, a one-off emergency payment can sometimes be made. This is limited to no more than £150 in any twelve month period in situations where there is really no other solution. Please get in touch so we can help.

b. Help with Your Rent

If you are over 18 years old, living away from your family and are studying full-time in further education (up to and including A Level or equivalent), you can claim Housing Benefit. You can enroll in your course of study at any time up to your 21st birthday and can continue to receive these benefits up to the end of your studies or the end of the academic year in which you become 21 years old, whichever is earlier.

This help is also available to you if you have stayed on with your former foster carers (Staying Put).

Housing Benefit can pay for all or part of your rent. If you are likely to have difficulty paying your full rent, you can approach the council and ask for Discretionary Housing Payments. These are not guaranteed, but the council may be able to help you financially for a period until you find other accommodation or earn enough to pay your rent yourself.

c. Help with Your Council Tax

Council Tax is a payment made to your local authority for local services such as collecting your rubbish, clearing streets, running services (including providing social workers) and the local parks.

Solihull Council decided to exempt all care leavers living in the Solihull area from payment of Council Tax up to the age of 25 years.

This means as a young adult leaving the council's care, you will not have to pay Council Tax until after your 25th birthday if you are living in Solihull. Speak to your Personal Advisor about Council Tax if you are living outside Solihull or living with a partner.

d. TV Licence

Everyone who watches TV, even if it is only via a catch-up service or online on your laptop must have and pay for a TV Licence. You are at risk of a fine or worse if you do not have a licence. Payments can be divided into weekly or monthly payments, and your PA will support you to apply or to register your address for a license.

e. Setting up Home Allowance

It is an exciting time being able to choose your own furniture and how your home will look. We will provide you with a **maximum of £3,000** worth of goods to set up your home and will also help to source other support via our partners so that you have as much as possible to spend. This will not be given to you in one lump sum and will be spent with your Personal Advisor according to your needs. The grant is not intended to meet the costs of personal support or accommodation costs. This payment is an important mark of your independence, so we want you to spend it wisely and on things that will help you to make this important step towards independence.

We will also support you to ensure you are able to access the internet in your home in whatever way works best for you.

f. Additional Payments

In addition to any benefit or subsistence payments received, please speak to your Personal Advisor about support we may be able to provide you with. For example:

- We can support with Winter fuel costs of £25 per month between October and February if all other options have been considered.
- Help if you become a parent for the first time - £500 to support with equipment costs (Cot, Highchair, pushchair, Car Seat), £70 towards baby clothes, £50 towards hospital bag essentials and £20 for a gift for your little one when they arrive.
- Legal costs – support in some circumstances for amounts under £1,500 if you cannot access legal aid.
- Up to 10 driving lessons and a contribution to the cost of theory and practical tests up to the total value of £425.
- A discretionary bus pass to help with travel if needed to help you to maintain work, training or keeping in contact with important people.
- The cost of an eye test and up to £100 towards glasses if you would otherwise have to pay.
- A smart outfit up to the value of £50 if you have an interview and help with special clothes if needed when you start a job.
- One off removal cost payment of up to £60 towards van hire to assist with the house moving process.
- Non term time rent will be covered for care leavers completing their first Masters degree or equivalent up to your 25th birthday.

Birthday and Festival Allowances:

- You will receive a birthday and festival allowance each year until your 21st birthday and this will continue up until your 25th birthday if you are still working with a Personal Advisor.
- If you are 16 or 17 and still in foster care or residential care, your birthday and festival allowance will be made through your carers.

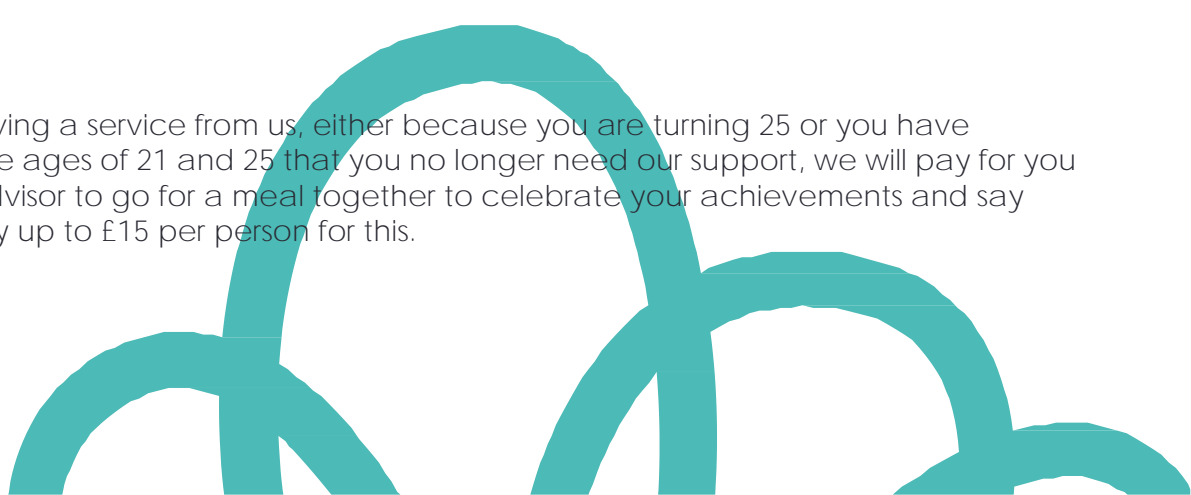
What you will get:

Birthday Allowance: You will receive a £50 gift for your birthday from 17 to 25 but this will increase to £100 for your special 18th and 21st birthdays.

Festival Allowance: You will receive a £50 gift once a year for the religious or cultural festival that you most identify with. Please let your Personal Advisor know your wishes.

Goodbye Meal:

When you stop receiving a service from us, either because you are turning 25 or you have decided between the ages of 21 and 25 that you no longer need our support, we will pay for you and your Personal Advisor to go for a meal together to celebrate your achievements and say goodbye. We will pay up to £15 per person for this.



7. Being Part of Your Community

As your corporate parents, we will be there to offer you advice and support. A big part of staying mentally and physically healthy is enjoying hobbies and interests. At Solihull, this includes access to free gym membership and swimming within the borough. If you live outside Solihull, please speak to your PA for details of what's available for you locally.

Your PA will help to find details of clubs, community groups, faith groups and activities which may interest you so that you can feel involved in your community and like you belong there. If needed, we can help you to enroll on the electoral register.

We want to hear your views so we can improve the experience for other young people leaving care.

You will be encouraged to get involved in activities and opportunities to meet other care experienced young people. You may also like to get involved with Our Voice Our Services (OVOS) to join activities and share your views about what works well and what more is needed for care experienced young people so you can influence what is offered to all children and young people. Find out more here: [Ovos Solihull](#) | [CiCC](#) | [Care Experienced](#).

Help to Understand Your History – Accessing Your Information

Children's Services have to keep written case records of your care history. These records must be kept until you are 75 years old. You can request information from your records any time and we can support you with the best way to do this so that any specific questions you have can be answered. Speak to your Personal Advisor if this is something you would like to do.

Staying in Touch

We want to be your lifelong champion and keep in touch with you if this is something you would like. Just before our involvement with you is due to come to an end, we will make sure you know how to contact us and access information that you might need. You are also always welcome to get in touch in the future no matter how old you are, especially if you are in difficulty and need support and a friendly person to talk to, or if you'd just like to say hello and let us know how you're doing!

Key contacts:

Police/Ambulance/Fire: 999

Solihull Care Leavers Team: 0121 717 1473 (option 1)

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS): 0808 808 1001

SOLAR: 0121 301 2750

Solihull Mind – 0121 742 4941 or 0121 743 4237

Solihull Employment and Skills Team: 0121 704 8076

Solihull Housing Support: 0121 717 1515

Solihull Children's Emergency Duty Team: 0121 605 6060



**Working
for Children
and Families**
in Solihull



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