

Your plan, your voice

Thrive



REAL LIFE

Jake's on the road to the army

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The Fostering Network



Get the lowdown...

Hello!

Welcome to another Thrive, and this time we're bringing you expert advice and real-life experiences about your pathway plan. This is the document that replaces your care and support plan. It sets out how the local authority and children's services will help you consider the options of preparing for leaving care and provide the support you need, so that you can achieve your hopes and dreams as you become an adult. What could be more important than that?

Despite the world seeming to stand still over the last year, your lives have kept moving and this issue of Thrive is about making sure your ideas, worries, hopes, views and opinions about what you want as you leave care are listened to. It's your life, right?

For some of you, leaving care might seem a LONG time away, but it's never too early to start thinking about the future and a pathway plan can help you do that.

Thanks for reading - until next time!

Thrive xxx

PS: There's loads of issues of Thrive online with advice about all sorts of things. Find them at bit.ly/TFNThrive.

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A big up to...

The Fostering Network in Wales Young People's Care Forum, Daniel Sinclair, Stuart Khokhar and Alun Richards. Without your contributions, we just couldn't create this mag. Thank you!

By the way, if you'd like to influence what we do here at The Fostering Network in Wales and what goes into Thrive, you could join the forum too. Email charlotte.wooders@fostering.net to find out more.

The Fostering Network



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Real life:

Jake's marching to success

Jake, 17, is a member of The Fostering Network in Wales Young People's Care Forum and is about to serve his country by joining the army. There have been some bumps in the road but Jake tells us how his pathway plan - along with a load of hard work and support - has put him on the road to success.



Hi Jake! Tell us a bit about yourself.

I'm Jake, I'm 17 and I'm currently at Military Preparation College waiting to join the Welsh Guards. My plan is to stay in the army for at least four years and then maybe transfer to the paras or do an officer course. I'd also like to do an engineering course so that I have a job role when I leave the army.

I've turned my life around in the last four years since I've lived with my foster carers. To start off I was rebellious and started acting out and being with the wrong people. My foster carers and social worker and I put a plan together to stay in, put my head down and try to make a better version of me.

Joining the army seems like a big step. What gave you the idea? And aren't you a bit nervous?

I only started attending school properly when I moved in with my foster carers. Unfortunately, I didn't have enough time to catch up my grades and, when my foster carer told me the truth about my predicted grades, I started thinking about my future and concentrating on what I wanted to do next. That's why I chose the army.

My foster carers support me joining the army 100 per cent, but also said I should tell them if I don't want to do it so we can have a back up plan. My back up plan is to go into independent living, which would mean I was living on my own and doing what I want to do, when I want to, but I don't think that's what's best for me right now. In the army they have structure 24/7, they give you a roof and food and you get to travel the world which is a dream of mine.

I'm quite nervous about failing my training. I will miss being here at my foster carers' but I've already been through leaving home before and I know that I'll get through it again.

How has your experience of pathway planning been?

I just turned 16 when Covid hit so there was a backlog so I didn't start my pathway plan until six months after my 16th birthday. I do worry about the future so I like to have a plan written down on paper so that I know what I need to do.

I spoke with my foster carers about what I wanted. They spoke to my social worker who came round to my house when they could (because of Covid). Then we had a meeting and set up my pathway plan.

My plan has helped me do online training courses - a hygiene course, communication skills, safeguarding - which will help me be more ready for independence in case I don't go into the army.

What advice would you give to other young people about to start on their pathway plan?

Try to include courses in your pathway plan and they will fund gym membership and driving lessons.

It's a good idea to have some ideas of what you want to do before you start your pathway planning otherwise you won't know what to put in your plan.

I'd also say to be open and honest. The plan is there to help you not push you down.

Getting on track

Thinking about becoming an independent adult and all the skills and finances you need to do that can be really exciting but it can also be pretty scary...

...and you are definitely going to need to access all the help and support that's available, along the way.

So, what is a pathway plan?

If you are a young person in care, the pathway plan is a very important document which says how your local authority and children's services will help you on your journey to independence. It sets out what options are available, what you want to do, what support you need and how children's services will provide that help until you turn 21. You can also ask for advice and support after you turn 21, up until your 25th birthday, if you are still in education or training.

The last year of your pathway plan should focus on the range of support you can get in preparing for and then living independently. This should include: your rights, lists of who's there to help you, what they can do and how you can get in touch.



+ Did you know?

A pathway plan is a plan about your future from leaving care. It's all about you and what you want to do and how your team can support you in making that happen for you.

Whose pathway plan is it anyway?

Pretty much every young person in care **MUST*** have a pathway plan, usually from around the time you turn 16. And, most importantly, the plan must say what **YOU** want, not just what others around you think should happen.

If you:

- are over 16
- have been in care for at least 13 weeks since you turned 14 (these don't have to be in one go, but they can't include respite care)
- have been in care for at least one day after you turned 16

then the independent reviewing officer (IRO) should get the ball rolling at the first looked after child review after you turn 16 and confirm who will be supporting you in drafting your plan, which will be discussed at all your reviews.

* This word **MUST** is really important. When a government document uses the word 'must' it means it **MUST** happen – it's not an option. So, for example, when the Care Leavers (Wales) Regulations 2015 say that the local authority **MUST** 'seek and have regard to your views' that means they have no choice, they have to do it. And if they don't, you should remind them that they have to!

+ Top tip

Always speak to your foster carers before speaking to your social workers or PA about what you want in your pathway plan. I did that and it meant my pathway plan was done really quickly because my foster carers were able to make sure we were all working towards the same goals.

What should be in my pathway plan?

Your local authority will want to convert your care and support plan into what you will need to work toward independent living. They will complete an assessment and then your pathway plan is drafted using the outcome of that assessment. It should include all of these things:



Education, training and employment

What are your career goals and how will you be supported to achieve them? Do you need to go on a course or need specialist tools. What about other practical skills like menu planning or cooking?

Your family and social network

How are children's services going to help you build and keep good relationships with people who are important to you? Your friends, family and foster carers?



Money

Your pathway plan should say what you're entitled to, how much it will be and when you will get it. There should also be a plan for budgeting and how you might save some money for the future.

Identity

Do you need any extra support around language, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation? Do you have all the ID documents you need (e.g. your passport)? And do you know how to access the files about you?



Where you will live

This is a big one (see page 8). Your children's services should regularly assess your current and future accommodation to see if it's suitable for you - that means location, safety, rent and bills. If you're not happy with where you live, say so.

Health

This is about how children's services will support you to be physically and mentally healthy. For example, do you need a gym membership or help with a health issue?



It's your plan - own it!

A pathway plan is about YOUR future, so you need to make sure that your opinions and ideas are listened to... your PA (personal adviser) will be supporting you in writing the plan so you need to make sure that they put your views at the heart of all the options and decisions.

But, it's not just your voice that needs to be heard. Lots of other people know you well and will have a good idea of the support you will need to be able to transition into independent living.

Here's who your local authority could speak to when drafting your plan (but not without you agreeing first!):

- Your parents.
- Anyone else who has parental responsibility for you.
- The people who care for you on a day-to-day basis (probably your foster carers).
- Your youth club, school or college.
- Anyone who is providing health care for you.
- Your personal adviser (PA), who will be supporting you in reaching the goals in your pathway plan.
- Your independent reviewing officer (IRO), who chairs all your reviews while you are still in care

Time to review

Your pathway plan should be reviewed at least every six months, but you can ask for it to be reviewed any time, especially if there's been a big change in your life. And don't forget to make sure you get a copy of the updated plan so that you can check everyone is sticking to it.

+ Need more support?

If you are not happy with the support you are getting, or think you are not being listened to, then an advocate might be able to help you. If you need an advocate contact:

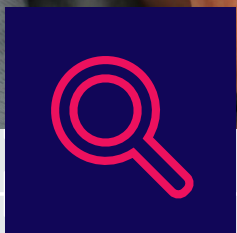
NYAS Cymru **0808 808 1001** or help@nyas.net

Or

Tros Gynnal Plant **0800 111 6880** or admin@tgpcymru.org.uk

If it's easier, your foster carer can contact them first, but they will want to speak with you to make sure that your views and opinions are being heard.





Q It won't be long until I turn 16 and I keep hearing from my friends in care that they have a personal adviser. Will I get one, and what will happen when I turn 18 and leave care? Who will help me if I have a problem, and who will take over making sure my pathway plan is met?

Matt says: **Congratulations on turning 16!** You're right that you should be given a personal adviser (PA) when you are 16 who will work alongside your social worker until you reach 18. When you turn 18 you will be leaving care (if you haven't done so already) so you won't have a social worker any more.

Don't worry though. At that point your PA will become your worker and be the person who reviews your pathway plan and supports you to get the help and support you need to transition to adulthood and meet your goals. Talk to your PA about how often you meet to discuss your pathway plan and the best way for them to contact you to make keeping in touch easy.

Turning 16

YOU ASKED, WE ANSWERED

Matt's back to help with your problems



Leaving school

Q I've recently left school and am about to start on a car mechanics course. My foster carers are really supportive and it's something I've always wanted to do and I'm really excited about it, but I'm really worried about whether I'll be able to afford all the tools I'll need to buy. Is there any help out there for me?

Matt says: **When you are in care, the local authority is your 'corporate parent'.** This means that the Welsh Government says that as a care leaver you should expect the same level of care and support that other young people would expect from a reasonable parent. They also expect that the local authority should make sure that you are given all the opportunities you need to take on the responsibilities of adulthood.

So, you should make a list of all the tools (and anything else) you need, including how much they cost. Then you should give the list to your social worker or PA and ask them to arrange payment for all those things. Ideally this would have been in your pathway plan, but don't forget your plan can be revised and reviewed as often as needed. Starting a new course would be a good time to do that.

Q I keep hearing from my mates who are also in foster care that they have a pathway plan already. I'm almost 17 and think I should have one. Does it matter that I don't and how am I supposed to get one?

Matt says: Yes, it really does matter, as it will set out what you want to see happen as you move into adulthood and what resources children's services and your local authority need to put in place, to support you in achieving your aspirations.

Don't worry though - it's not too late to start on your pathway plan. Ask your social worker or PA to start work on your needs assessment which will then be used to draft your plan.

You might find that your pathway plan has been put together without you even knowing. That's not OK! You need to make it clear to your social worker or PA that it is not your plan and you want it re-written to make it YOUR plan. If you are really getting nowhere, you could get an advocate who can support you in taking this further (see page 5).



My pathway plan

**Got a problem?
Get an answer
you can trust,
right here**

My own place



Q I'm about to work on my pathway plan and have decided that as soon as I turn 18 I want to live in my own place. I can't wait to be able to do my own thing when I want to. But I'm worried about telling my foster carers because I really like them. Please help.

Matt says: It's good that you want to be independent, but many young people find living independently at 18 pretty tough going so it's definitely worth considering options that are stepping stones to independent living. If you get on well with your foster carers and they are happy for you to stay, why not think about When I am Ready as that will give you the time and space to develop the skills and experience you need. Other options to discuss with your social worker are supported lodgings or Shared Lives.

If you do decide to move out, your foster carers will, I'm sure, be sad to see you go, but they will want to offer you as much support and advice as they can, to help you make the move a successful one. So, don't be afraid to talk to them and tell them what you need and seriously consider the advice they have to offer.

Home truths



Not many young people are ready to live independently when they turn 18, so thinking about where you are going to live after you turn 18 is probably one of the biggest decisions you have to make as you leave care. But don't worry, there's lots of help and support available for you.

There are loads of options, ranging from staying living with your foster carers under a When I Am Ready arrangement (something that's definitely worth thinking about, even if you fancy the idea of living on your own) or supported lodgings, to getting your own place or returning to your birth family. Not all of the options are available in every area, so you should ask your social worker or personal adviser to give you information and explain all your choices to you.



When I am Ready

For many young people, staying living with their foster carers after they turn 18 is a really great choice. If you and your foster carers both want this, then your local authority has to make it happen. You can stay with your foster carers under a When I am Ready arrangement until you're 21, or up to age 25 if completing an agreed programme of education or training. This means that you won't have to worry about moving while you're sorting out other important things, such as going to college or starting a job.

If you do decide to go for When I am Ready, your social worker, foster carer and you will complete a Living Together arrangement which is an agreement about the goals you want to achieve, the boundaries and rules of living together in a When I am Ready placement.

Real life experience

I was lucky enough to stay living with my foster carers. This was in my pathway plan. If not for my pathway plan and me sitting down with my foster carers and social worker, I would have been put into independent living on my 18th birthday. I was not ready to deal with that yet.

+ Top tip

If you do move out from your foster carers' place then, before you move in to somewhere new, children's services need to:

- take into account your needs and your views about where you want to live
- look at how the location meets your needs and the safety issues of the new accommodation, as well as whether you can afford the running costs
- arrange for you to visit the new accommodation.

Children's services need to be reasonable when deciding with you where you are going to live - but this doesn't mean that they will always agree with you!



+ Top tip

All local authorities have housing department workers who are experts in sorting out housing for young people. Find out the name of the person responsible for helping you with your housing. If you have trouble doing that, ask your social worker or personal advisor to find out.

For additional advice and support call the Housing Advice Helpline on **08000 495 495** or visit the sheltercymru.org.uk

It's all about rights

Darren Mutter is Head of Children's Services for Pembrokeshire County Council. We had a chat with him about pathway planning and why having a plan is so important.



Hi Darren. Good to speak with you. Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I've been a social worker for more than 20 years and have always worked with children, young people and their families. I've had a number of roles involving pathway planning, including managing a care leavers team, and I am now Head of Children's Services. It's a job with huge responsibility, but it's a real privilege and I love it!.

How would you describe what a pathway plan is to a young person?

It's a plan for your future. You have a right to contribute to your plan, so you should be telling social workers and personal advisers what you want for the future and we should be supporting you to achieve that as far as possible. Your plan is your document – it should say 'This is my plan. I want this...'. It is also a contract because we have to put our name to what we will do to support you, and if we don't do it you can hold the plan up and remind us what we promised to do.

You should also remember that if you change your mind about your future, then your plan should change and how we will support you will also change.

We have heard from some young people that they don't have a pathway plan. Does that matter, do you think?

It really does matter. If you don't have a plan, it means you haven't had your rights explained to you. You should know what you are entitled to, and you have a right to say what you want for your future. If you don't have a plan then your voice is being silenced.

A pathway plan can make a big difference to you. For example, it can set out how you will be supported through university or to live independently; or it might make sure you are helped to learn to drive so that it's easier to find a job.

How do you think pathway planning could be improved across Wales?

I don't particularly like the phrase 'corporate parenting', but I do like the idea of it – if you're care experienced, your local authority must act like your parent and accept all the things that go with that, such as support, money advice, guidance, being there and listening to you. What local authorities must do as corporate parents is set out very clearly in the law, we have no excuse not to do it. It's about making sure every part of a local authority, not just children's services, knows what rights young people have and what they have to do to meet the needs of young people. And people like me, in senior roles, need to be ambassadors for this awareness raising.

What advice would you give to a young person who is about to start on their pathway plan?

Be honest and don't be afraid to say what you want. Challenge and ask questions. It's your plan and it needs to say what you want it to say.

Want to know more about children's rights?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an important agreement by countries who have promised to protect children's rights. It explains who children are, all their rights, and the responsibilities of governments. Visit www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/ for more information.

Your pathway planning checklist

Here's **10 questions** to ask yourself to make sure the plan isn't just happening, but that it's just the right plan for you and your future.

1. Should I have started my pathway planning?

If you are 16 or older you should have a pathway plan (see page 5).

2. Am I being listened to?

Have I had lots of opportunity to tell my PA or social worker what my plans for the future are and what help I think I might need to make those plans come true?

3. Do I know where I can go to get support if I think I'm not being listened to?

See page 5.

4. Have I got all the information I need to feel informed and make decisions about my future?

If not, ask your social worker or PA.

5. Have I got my foster carers involved in my plan so they can speak up for me?

If not your foster carers, who else could you ask to speak up for you?

+ Top tip

Your pathway plan is a legal document. The local authority must give you copies of:

- the results of the assessment of your needs
- the pathway plan
- any review of your pathway plan.

And they must ensure that all these documents have been explained to you in a way that you understand.

+ Top tip

As you're revising your plan make sure you email you social worker or PA (as well as speak to them) about anything to do with your pathway plan, then the email will be evidence if you need it.

6. Have all the right people been asked about what support I will need as I move to independence?

They should have been.

7. Does my plan cover health, education, training, skills, employment, money, identity, relationships and accommodation?

It should!

8. Is my plan saying what I actually want it to say? If not, do I know what to do?

You should only sign your plan when you are happy with what it says.

9. Do I have a copy of my plan?

You should have – and don't forget to ask for a printed copy if you'd like one.

10. Do I know when the plan will be reviewed?

This should happen at least every six months.



REMEMBER: This is YOUR pathway plan so it must say what you want and how you want to be supported.