

# Your guide to the care system.



CREATED  
BY YOUNG ADULTS,  
FOR YOUNG ADULTS.

**LEADERS  
UNLOCKED**

**Blagrove.**  
investing in  
young people



**YOUNG  
JUSTICE  
ADVISORS**



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# Introduction.

## **Are you in need of support?**

## **Do you feel like you need more Information?**

## **Do you need directions on how to get the most positive outcome out of your Care experience?**

Then look no further! In this guide, you will find all the information needed to answer any questions you may have. We will provide information for different support agencies, different ways you can progress your education or employment and you will even find advice, along with experience, from other young people who, like yourself, have spent time within the care system.

A group of care experienced young advisors from Leaders Unlocked put this guide together. We created something that we believe young people would benefit from, no matter their circumstances.

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**The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of them all.**

# Know your rights.

## **Your Right to Family Contact**

Every child under the care of the Local Authority has a right to spend time safely with their parents and family, as long as there are no risks in doing so, should contact with the family be presented.

## **Your Right To Access Your Information**

You have the right to see any information Social Services holds about you. You can find answers on how to 'Access Your Information' at [www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)

If you become homeless, you may be entitled to help with money, housing, education training and support from social services.

## **Under 18s**

A child who has been placed in care by a Local Authority for more than 24 hours is known as a looked after child.

## **Care Leavers**

It's important to know the law about leaving care changed on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018. The law now states that Children's Services must offer help to all Former Relevant Children up until they are 25. This is a big change as before you had to be in education or training to continue receiving support.

Please see [www.turn2us.org.uk/Benefit-guides/Care-Leavers-and-Benefits/Who-is-a-Care-Leaver](http://www.turn2us.org.uk/Benefit-guides/Care-Leavers-and-Benefits/Who-is-a-Care-Leaver) for further information on the support available for care leavers, each local authority to consult with and see what offers they have posted for their care leavers. The local offer should provide information about all the services and support available to care leavers from the local authority including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support they choose to'.

Care leavers are also entitled to apply for bursaries from their chosen educational establishment to help with costs associated with courses.' To 'To help with costs associated with courses, Care Leavers are entitled to apply for bursaries from their chosen educational establishment. The student bursary is provided to young people in care or on low incomes.



# Matthew's story.

Hi, my name is Matthew. I am 24 years old and living in Wallingford.

My journey into the care system started a lot later than most. However, this was only because my Grandparents took me in at the age of 13 when no one else wanted me. Eventually, they followed the same trend and, at 15, I found myself in care. This was due to me not them. I was 15, being mentally, physically and emotionally abused by my 'high school sweetheart' and did anything I could to rebel. These, along with a few other things going on, led me to be horrific to have to deal with. So, they kicked me out too and I found myself wondering when my next 'family' would come from.

While in care, I found my final social worker and my second foster parents helpful. Other than that, nothing seemed to help. My social worker was always doing her best to support me where I needed it and my foster parent looked past my past, and horrific personality traits, to give me a chance to work on building a better Matthew.

My main motivation to stay on a positive path is my need to make the past, scared little version of me proud. Aside from that, my step kids, partner and sisters keep me going. I have more than just me to look out for and it wouldn't be right to give up.

My most important piece of advice for anyone leaving care would be to pursue your dream. We have all grown up living under slightly different rules and regulations. This has made us a lot stronger and more resilient than the average person. I believe that if a care leaver is to use that same strength and resilience to pursue a dream, they're almost guaranteed to succeed.

**We have all grown up living under slightly different rules and regulations.**

**This has made us a lot stronger and more resilient than the average person**

# Mental health.

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, connect to others and make choices.

Here are some of the signs and symptoms of deteriorating mental health.

## Early warning signs

Eating or sleeping too much, or too little, pulling away from people and usual activities and having low or no energy.

## If you feel one or more of the symptoms above, seek out help from

- Social worker
- Doctor
- Friends
- Family

There are organisations, such as Samaritans and Mind, that you can call and speak to without being face to face. For more information about how to contact these services, please see the final page. Accessing counselling, psychological Services, talking therapies or psychological therapies are effective and confidential treatments. They can help with common mental health problems like stress, anxiety and depression. Talking therapies can be accessed on the NHS.

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**It's better to look forward with hope than to look backward with sadness**



# Fatmata's story.

I was placed in the care system at the age of nine, I was really young I didn't really know the reason it was all of a sudden, never really had the brain capacity to understand what was happening around me or in the background, but the one thing I knew was that my life from then on would be so different I had to rapidly mature in order to adjust and survive.

My experience is what helped me the most, always learning from other people and situations I had to raise myself so becoming self-aware is what helped me especially for when I would be leaving, I left the care system at 16 and pregnant.

I now have three beautiful children it is if for them I stay positive and continue to push myself in the right direction sometimes my path changes and it can feel like everything around me is going wrong but I just have to think of how far I've come and what will be waiting for me in the future and it brings me back to a balanced safe place where I know I can keep pushing on through.

The best advice I can give anyone with experience of the care system is that it does not define you. do not lower your own expectations

just because of your circumstances. one day you will be on your own journey and that moment will be a memory. everyone can do whatever they want with determination, discipline and positivity everyone is allowed to slip just make sure you pick yourself back up .

**My experience is what helped me the most always learning from other people and situations**

# Self care.

Sometimes we live busy lives and it can be easy to forget to put yourself first. Self-care is an important part of living a healthy and happy lifestyle. Self-care works differently for everyone. It's useful to find what suits you and your situation best.

## **Here are some things you could try**

Pick up a new hobby - Something you have always been passionate about trying.

## **Keep a diary**

Keeping track of your personal developments can help build your confidence.

## **Level up your skills**

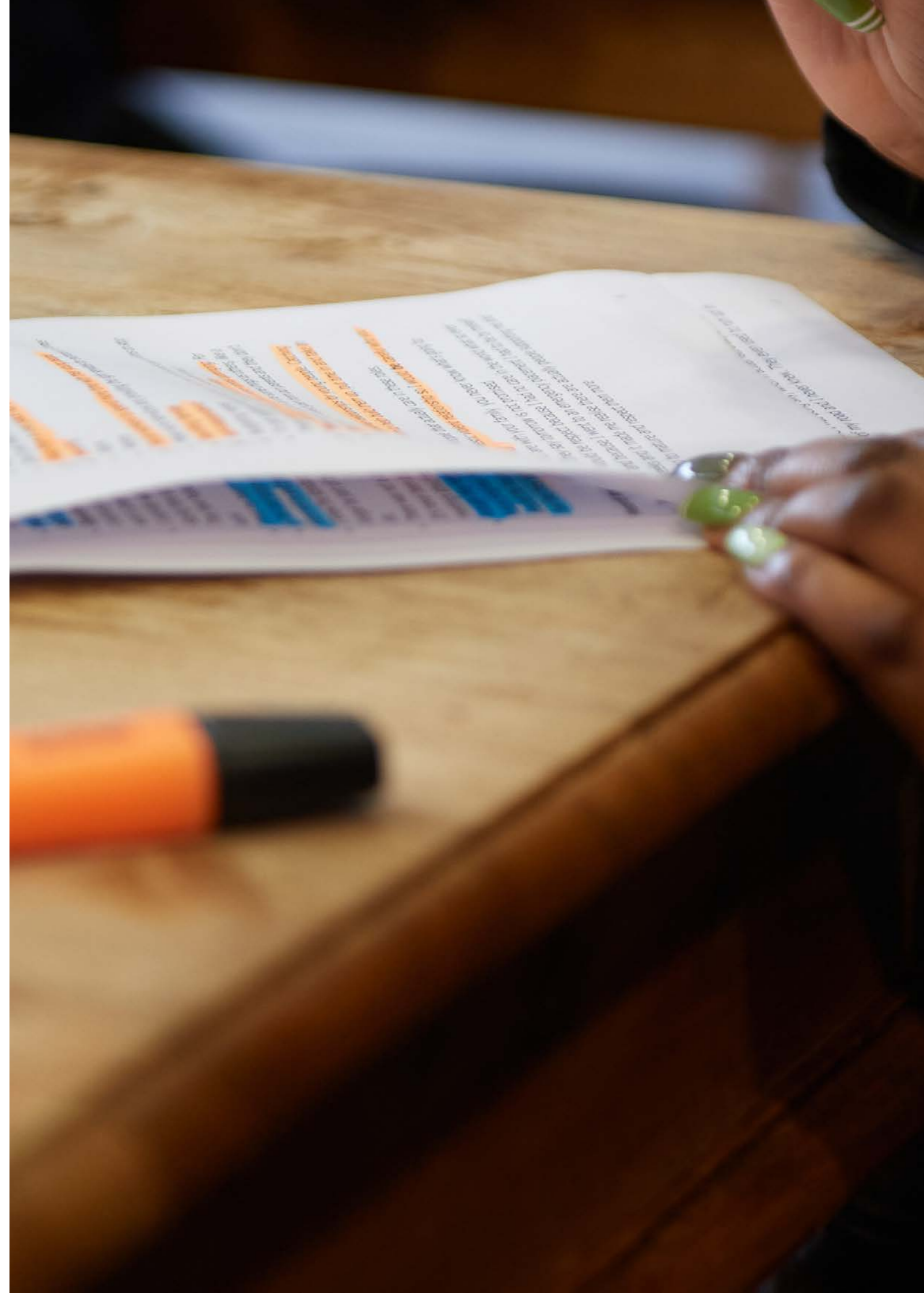
Find out what you're good at and deliberately practice it, this will help you improve your skills.

## **Ask for feedback or advice**

This could be from friends, colleagues or support workers (but this doesn't mean you always have to take it). Take notes from people who inspire you.

## **Avoid negative people**

Try and surround yourself with positivity and like-minded people, so it helps you move forward rather than dragging you down.



# Careers & Aspirations.



## Do you have goals?

Would you like to further your education or maybe working is more of an interest to you? Here are some things to think about:

- Have you thought about your career path?
- What would you like to do or where you would like to work?
- What is your dream job?
- Do you know what you will need or what to do to be successful
- Do you have a CV and cover letter?
- Have you had interview practice and preparation?

## National Career Service

The NCS can help you with many things to point you in the right direction. A couple of these things include preparing you for education and employment, by helping with your CV and gaining the qualifications you need.

## Positive Things to Remember

- You can do whatever you set your mind to
- If you fail, just try again. Practice makes perfect
- Every accomplishment starts with the decision to try
- Don't give up
- Constructive criticism isn't negative. Learn from your mistakes, it helps you grow

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**It is always the start that requires the greatest effort**

**James Penney**

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# Sadia's story.

I became involved in the care system because I lived in a dysfunctional household and there was a lot of violence. I didn't choose to be in care but I now understand it was for my own protection.

In the care system I learnt to fend for my self and to fight for what I need. I don't think there was much helpful about the system, I think of my experience there as a lodger as when I turned 18 I was asked to leave my foster family who I had already formed bonds with because I was an adult legally.

As I have children I wanted to be a positive role to them and show to them that I could still achieve even though I was labelled a teenage mother and care kid. I hoped to inspire them so this motivated me to not get into trouble.

I would say always have a dream you want to aspire to and know that through determination and hard work anything can be achieved. Also, it can be lonely and scary leaving care and the network of people that have always been around so I would remind a person in care that there are many mental health organisations like Samaritans who are available 24 hours a day if you needed reassurance or just an ear to listen.

**As I have children I wanted to be a positive role model to them and show to them that I could still achieve**

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# Education & employment.

**Are you thinking about what your future looks like?  
Are you unsure and need support with education and employment?**

**Then have a look below!**

## **Support**

St Giles Trust  
020 7708 8000  
[www.stgilestrust.org.uk](http://www.stgilestrust.org.uk)

## **Princes Trust**

0800 842 842  
[www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk)

## **College**

You have the option to further your skills and go to college. Your local area will have a college or you can look into other colleges in different areas to suit your interests. You have the chance to meet new people and gain skills, qualifications to add to your CV

## **Apprenticeships**

If you want a more hands-on approach and would like to train and earn a little bit of money, apprenticeships are a great choice for you.

## **Apprenticeship**

[www.apprenticeships.gov.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk)

## **Reach Volunteering**

020 3943 9901  
[info@reachvolunteering.org.uk](mailto:info@reachvolunteering.org.uk)  
[www.reachvolunteering.org.uk](http://www.reachvolunteering.org.uk)

## **Can Training**

0800 177 7733  
[www.can-training.co.uk](http://www.can-training.co.uk)

## **Volunteering**

Some employers offer a volunteer service so you can get the chance to gain more experience in the working environment and gain new skills.

## **Do-it.org**

Do-it is a database of UK volunteering opportunities. You can search more than a million volunteering opportunities by interest, activity or location and then apply online.

**If you are not sure which direction you want to take, there are many organisations that can support you on that journey:**

# Housing.

## **If you're 17 years or younger:**

It's unlikely you'll be able to sign a tenancy contract.

If you're 16 or 17 and homeless, you'll usually be provided with accommodation by Children's Services at your local council. This is because you'll be considered a 'child in need'. Children's Services will also consider if there's any way you can return home or go and live with another relative.

They cannot force you to go back somewhere you do not feel safe.

## **What a 'child in need' is**

### **You're a 'child in need' if you're under 18 and:**

You're living with a violent person

You do not have money for food

You do not have anywhere to live

You have problems that affect your health or education (eg you're disabled)

Your home is uninhabitable (eg there's been a fire or flood)



# Benefit information.

In July 2019, changes were made to the benefits system, replacing 6 other benefits all into one known as a universal credit

If this is your first time making a benefit claim or if there has been a break in your previous claim and you were once on the following benefits below, due to the changes you will have to make a claim for universal credit.

## Child tax credits

## Housing benefit

## Income support

## Income based job seekers (JAS)

## Working tax credits

## Income related employment and support allowance (ESA)

## What a 'child in need' is

**Important notice!!** - You will not be entitled to make a claim on universal credit if You get the severe disability premium, or you are entitled to it if you got or were entitled to the severe disability premium in the last month, and you are still eligible for it.

## How to claim Universal credit

Applications have to be made online via the .gov.UK website. As soon as you make your claim, you will be entitled to apply for advance payment as it may take 6 to 12 weeks for your claim to be up and running. You are required to pay this advanced payment back in monthly instalments.

This can be done via your journal on your universal account or phone call where you can find all information about universal credit and your claim.

If you have any other issues you can either put a note in your journal and you will receive a reply. Alternatively, you can call the universal credit line Telephone: 0800 328 5644

The Universal Credit team might phone you after you have sent your application if they need more information or if you cannot verify your identity online.



Single and under 25

**£257.33**

Single and over 25

**£324.84**

What you can get in a couple and you're both under 25

**£403.93 (for both)**

In a couple and either of you are 25 or over

**£509.91 (for both)**

Once you've started your claim if anything changes you are to report any

changes in your circumstances. If you do not, your benefits may be stopped.

## Personal Independent Payment (PIP)

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) can help you with some of the extra costs if you have long-term ill-health or disability. Personal Independence Payment is tax-free and you can get it whether you are in or out of work.

## How to claim

You can make a new Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claim by calling the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Claim by telephone PIP claim line. Telephone: 0800 917 2222

## What you can get

The weekly rate for the daily living part of PIP is either £60 or £59.60.

The weekly rate for the mobility part of PIP is either £23.70 or £62.55

# Support agencies.

## Shelter

[www.england.shelter.org.uk](http://www.england.shelter.org.uk)

0808 800 4444

Shelter believes everyone should have a home. More than one million people a year come to us for advice and support via our website, helplines and national network of services.

## Care Leavers Association

[www.mycovenant.org.uk](http://www.mycovenant.org.uk)

0800 077 3557

[info@mycovenant.org.uk](mailto:info@mycovenant.org.uk)

Care Leaver Covenant | A cross governmental support strategy which engages with all sectors to create opportunities for care leavers

## Young Minds

[www.youngminds.co.uk](http://www.youngminds.co.uk)

We're leading the fight for a future where all young minds are supported and empowered, whatever the challenges

## Healthy Minds

[www.healthyminds.org.uk](http://www.healthyminds.org.uk)  
01213012525

Healthy Minds is passionate about enriching the lives of all children and young people, teaching them well-being for life tools and techniques, to carry them through their adult lives.

## Nacro

[www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk)

0300 123 1999

[helpline@nacro.org.uk](mailto:helpline@nacro.org.uk)

Our work spans housing, education, justice, health, policy, support and advice

## Care Leavers Association

[www.careleavers.com](http://www.careleavers.com)

0161 826 0214

The Care Leavers Association is a national user led charity aimed at improving the lives of care leavers of all ages. We bring together the voices and experiences of care leavers to support care leavers of all ages, improve the current care system and change for the better society's perception of people in care.

## Samaritans

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

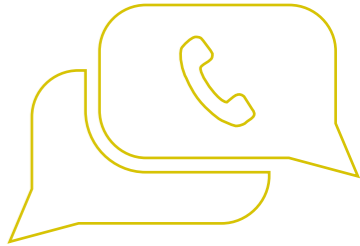
116 123

(24 hours a day, free to call)

[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland, often through their telephone helpline.





# We want to hear from you.

**Leaders Unlocked** enables young people and under-represented groups to have a stronger voice on the issues that affect their lives. In education, policing, health, justice and elsewhere, we help organisations to involve the people who matter and shape decision-making for the better.

You can see our projects here:  
[leaders-unlocked.org](https://leaders-unlocked.org)

The Young Justice Advisors are always looking to speak to and work with young adults who want to have their say and work alongside decision makers. We have a team of 'experts by experience' that are able to voice their thoughts on a wide range of areas within justice. We will build up your skills, confidence and C.V and want to hear from as many young adults who have experienced the Justice System.

You can see our projects here:  
[youngjusticeadvisors.co.uk](https://youngjusticeadvisors.co.uk)

Twitter: @YJAdvisors  
Instagram: yjadvisors

We'd also love to know your thoughts on this guide and if you would like to get involved with us.

Please contact - [nadine@leaders-unlocked.org](mailto:nadine@leaders-unlocked.org)



**When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful.**

**Malala Yousafzai**