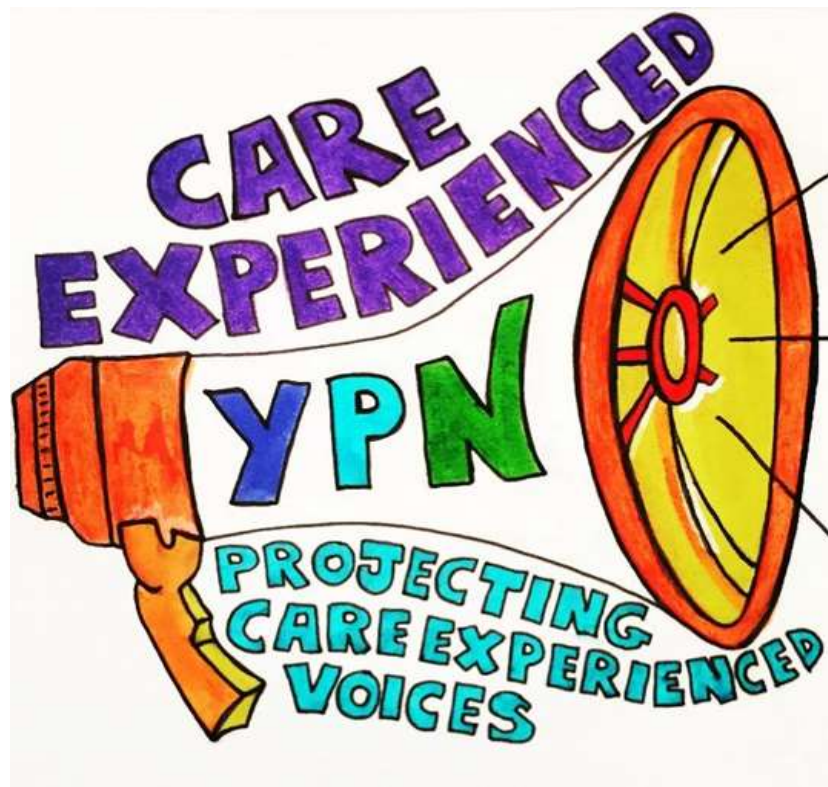


A quick guide to housing for care leavers finding and setting up their first home

Prepared by

The Care Experienced Young People's Network



The Care Experienced Young People's Network (YPN) is a small group of care experienced people (CEP). The YPN worked together throughout 2020 and 2021, creating a series of podcasts and research projects. The project was run by a project lead with care experience and allowed us to realise our own ideas. The project ends in November 2021, but you can still reach us on twitter: @careexp-ypn

One of our research projects focused on housing and home. We realised that lots of care leavers don't know much about what's available to them or what to think about when looking for their first home, so we thought we'd try and help. In Care Leavers Week 2021, we asked care experienced people and others around us to pool their knowledge together and create this little booklet. The guide is for care leavers looking for their first home after leaving care and can be read with or without support from social workers, professionals, or other people in their support network. Please pass this onto care leavers and professionals who support them. Thank you 😊

Private vs. social housing

Social housing is what you might be offered from the council. Private housing is when you rent from a private landlord. We think the pros and cons of these are:

	Social housing	Private renting
Pros	<p>Less upfront cost e.g. deposits, fees</p> <p>Longer-term security (tenancies often for longer periods than private)</p> <p>Usually, you won't have to prove your income</p> <p>Sometimes cheaper than private</p>	<p>More choice (area, bedrooms, outdoor space)</p> <p>Faster process, no waiting lists</p> <p>Can be higher standards with pre-fitted carpets</p> <p>Boosts your credit score by paying rent each month</p> <p>Option to have pre-furnished</p>
Cons	<p>Less choice in the area you live, and you might not be able to choose a safe area</p> <p>Long waiting lists</p> <p>Difficult to move again – can be reliant on someone willing to swap with you</p>	<p>The landlord might decide to sell the house – so there's less long-term security</p> <p>There are fewer chances or support available if you don't pay your rent</p> <p>Lots of competition for properties</p>

We'd be super surprised if you're ready for buying your first home (we're assuming people reading this are around 18-21 and looking for their first flat), but don't think that it isn't in your future – we believe in you! As you get older and more settled, remember to look into mortgages and ask the more adult-y adults in your life about buying your own home.

Where to start

Social housing

Your social worker or personal advisor will be able to help you with social housing. You can say no to an offer of social housing, so don't feel pressured to say yes to a home you don't think is suitable – you should feel safe. However, this could mean a long wait for another offer or not being offered another one. It's important to know what you're entitled to as a care leaver. Depending on when you came into care and your individual circumstances, the support you will be offered can vary. It's tricky stuff, so you might want to get some independent support and learn about your rights from an advocate. **You can find an advocate for support as a care leaver up until age 25, from NYAS, by contacting 0808 808 10001 or emailing help@nyas.net**

Learn about your rights on Coram Voice's website here:

<https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/1870-CV-SortedSupported-Guide-new2.pdf>

You can ask for support understanding your rights and entitlements by speaking to Become: [Free help & advice for children in care & care leavers|Become \(becomecharity.org.uk\)](https://www.becomecharity.org.uk)

There are advocacy services available in some local areas too so have a look around. For example:

- [Care Leavers' Advocacy | Advocacy Focus](#)
- [Advocacy and Independent Visiting - Children In Care and Care Leavers - Children In Care and Care Leavers \(standupspakeup.org.uk\)](#)

If you find an advocate who doesn't have much as much experience or just needs some support, they can go to Coram Voice here: <https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/specialist-advocacy-service/leaving-care/>

Private rental

When it comes to renting a private house, it's good to start by looking on websites like Rightmove and Zoopla then reaching out to the estate agents who look after the properties you like, to arrange a viewing. You can also talk to a local letting agent in an area you like about your preferences and budget, and they'll help you find some properties to have a look at.

Once you've selected a property, you'll need to prove you can afford it. When starting out, most people need a guarantor as they can't prove they can afford to pay the rent each month. Ask your council about guarantor services, as some local

authorities (like Devon and Kent) are piloting or already have in place guarantor schemes for care leavers. People are working on making this available everywhere in the UK.

You'll also need to pay fees and a deposit, so think about this a few months in advance so you can save up or, if possible, ask people around you for support. Again, ask your council about what support they offer to help with private rental as some offer this (like Derby).

Questions to ask yourself

There are some important questions to ask yourself before you commit to moving into your first home. Here are some of ones we think are most important:

- Do you like the area? Would you feel safe and secure in your new home?
 - Is it easy to get to college/work, the shops and your friends/those you care about?
 - Can you reasonably afford the rent and bills?
 - Do you know how to reach out for support?
 - What are the landlords' rules about how you can decorate and make it your own?
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Other support

There are lots of services around that can help you, often based in local areas. Different things are available in different areas so do have a look at who's around offering services near you. For example:

Make it your own: interior design project for CEP (Scotland)

Are you a care leaver aged 16-26 preparing to enter into your own tenancy – or perhaps you have done so within the last year? If so, this programme is for you! Recruitment is all year round so you don't need to worry about missing any application deadlines.

Impact Arts are offering 1-1 face to face and virtual sessions at their venues in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Ayrshire & Renfrewshire as well group taster sessions at a location convenient to you. They will work with you to explore how you can turn your space into a home.

Find out more: [Impact Arts | Make It Your Own](#)

“What I know now”

We asked lots of care experienced people, and non-care experienced people, what they'd tell their younger selves about moving into their first home if they could. Here's what the care experienced community and our supporters want to say to you.

Your home is a place where you should feel safe and learn to take care of yourself, not a place to offer out to others as a party pad in the hope of being liked. Your real friends will help you make it a home x

Your home is where you feel safe but know you have a support network nearby that you don't have to travel too far to see.

Pick somewhere in a safe location and with a community feel (if you can) feeling safe in your neighbourhood does wonders for your mental health.

Your comfort and quality of life is too valuable to settle for anything less than. Don't allow yourself to feel picky or ungrateful if you don't find somewhere that feels like home right away – you deserve all the time and energy possible invested into your future.

If you ask an estate agent where the closest shop or train/bus station is they will always say 5–10-minute walk. Check for yourself! 😊

Before you make an offer on a property, check what council tax band it falls into and the heating efficiency certificate – it affects your bills!

Check the shower pressure when you're viewing a property!

When you're renting, take photos BEFORE/AS SOON AS you move in so that you have a record of the property's condition for when you move out.

You might feel like you are alone and on your own – you will find people who love and care for you. You are important and you do matter x