

WHEN I AM READY:

What does it mean for you?



.....*"I hope that 'WIR' will nurture a new generation of care leavers, who have a place to belong and someone to belong to, until the time is right for them to leave care"*

(A Care Leaver 2014).

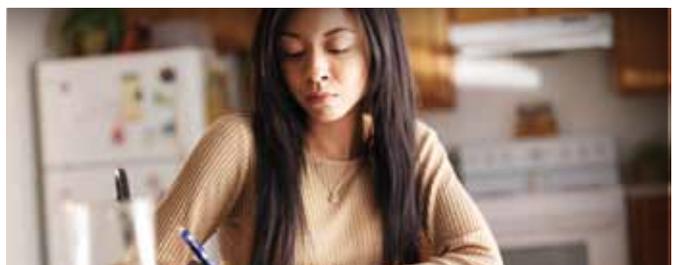
Introduction

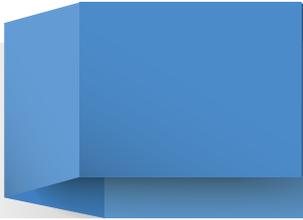
This guide is for young people who are in care or have left care. It tells you about staying with your foster carers after your 18th birthday. In Wales this is called a 'When I am Ready' or 'WIR' arrangement.

In this guide we will tell you about changes that are being made to the law and what you are entitled to.

The original version of this guide was written for looked after children and care leavers in England. It has been adapted for use by young people in Wales. The guide was written by the Young People's Benchmarking Forum and the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum. Both of these Forums are organised by a social business called Catch 22, National Care Advisory Service (NCAS). NCAS kindly said that we could use their guide to help us to write a guide for young care leavers in Wales. You can find more information about Catch 22 at www.catch-22.org.uk

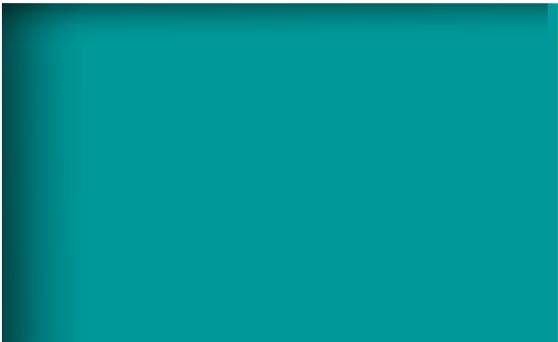
This guide has been put together for young people but the information will be useful to all those who work with young people.





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What is 'When I am Ready ('WIR')?

WIR is where a care leaver continues to live with their foster care after they have reached 18.

Some young people have done this in the past but we called it a Supported Lodgings arrangement.

From April 2016 there will be a new law in Wales which means that your Local Authority will have to find out if you and your foster carers want to enter into a WIR arrangement. If you and your foster carers agree, and the Local Authority thinks it is in your best interests, then the Local Authority will have to make this happen. But you don't have to wait until 2016 – the Welsh Government has told Local Authorities in Wales that they should be setting up WIR arrangements from 2015, ready for the new law. This means that if you and your foster carer think you might be interested in a WIR arrangement, you can ask your Local Authority about it now.

This is brilliant news for young people who can now stay with people who might have known you many years while you have been growing up and you don't have to leave until you are 21. This means that you won't have to worry about moving while you're sorting out other important things like going to college or starting a job or something else that you are concentrating on. You can become an adult in your own time.



Definitions of WIR

'WIR' is available to young people who have been in care for more than 13 weeks and are still in care up to their 18th birthday.

The young person has to be living with a foster carer who has been approved and is registered either with the Local Authority or by a Fostering Agency.

It must be in your best interests to remain living with your foster carer and your foster carer must agree to the plan.

What kind of placement is not covered by WIR?

You can only go into a WIR arrangement if you are living with a foster carer. If you are living in a children's home, you cannot stay there after you turn 18. But if you are living in a children's home and you would like a WIR arrangement, you need to tell your social worker and ask them to include this in your Pathway Plan. They will then need to find a foster placement for you, which can be turned into a WIR arrangement when you turn 18.

Is WIR right for you and your carer?

A WIR arrangement needs to have the agreement of the foster carer and the young person. This is really important and wouldn't work without this.

When you are getting close to 16, your social worker will carry out what is called a 'needs assessment', this will think about all the things you need and the outcomes that you want to achieve as you start to think about leaving care. This assessment will consider what should go into your 'Pathway Plan'. The social worker and you will be talking about where you see yourself living once you are 18. This is because at 18 you will no longer be a 'looked after' child, or in other words you will no longer be 'in care'. If you want to remain living with your foster carers, the social worker needs to put this into your 'Pathway Plan'. This is a lot to think about particularly if you are busy doing exams. Your social worker is aware of this and will be careful to make sure that your studying is not disrupted in any way.

WIR needs to be discussed at your LAC Review after your 16th birthday and should be recorded by your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

It also needs to be talked about at all other reviews in case your situation changes or you change your mind. You, your foster carer and your social worker will need to agree to WIR and work out the details of how it will work.

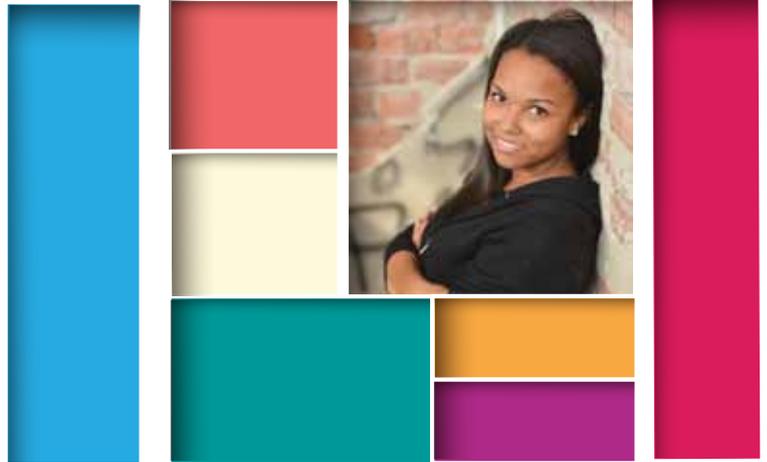
Sometimes, WIR may not be possible: for example, your foster carer may not agree to the arrangement because perhaps they want to foster young children or they may wish to stop fostering.

You may not wish to remain with your foster carer after you reach 18 – you may want to live on your own or with a friend or you might want to live with your birth family.

Your social worker needs to tell you what alternatives are available and also to talk about what practical support you will get and the financial arrangements, so that you can decide if WIR is right for you.

How long can WIR last?

'WIR' can last until you are 21. During this time you will be having discussions about your future and at some time you may decide that you want to think about other types of accommodation. All of these things should be discussed in your 'Pathway Plan' review.



What does the Local Authority need to do to make WIR happen?

1. Provide advice and support to you so that you know what WIR is and how it can help you.
2. Provide advice and support to your carer, this includes financial support.
3. Provide training to your former foster carer.
4. Monitor the arrangement.



What is the difference between fostering and a 'When I am ready' arrangement?

Fostering

You are under 18 and looked after and in care

.....
As you are in care, it is a placement

.....
A placement plan sets out the expectations on you and the carer – ie: coming in times, spending time away from the carers

'When I am Ready'

You are over 18 and are an adult and a care leaver

.....
As you are over 18, it is an arrangement

.....
A living together agreement which the carer and you write with the help of the personal advisor and the fostering supervising social worker. The format of the agreement may be different but we have put some advice in this guide to help you

You will be starting to learn the practical skills you need to live independently

The local authority will make a payment to the carer to cover the cost of your food and clothing for you

You cannot claim benefits and the local authority will provide money to the carer for your food, pocket money, clothing etc

Fostering Regulations apply to the placement

There is no requirements for you to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check

If you have committed an offence(s), there may be an assessment done to consider if the risks can be managed in the placement

As you are looked after, your foster carers receive money so you can celebrate your birthday, Christmas or other festivals and get a holiday allowance

It is expected that you are learning and practicing skills that you need to live independently

It is likely that you will be expected to contribute towards your keep – either directly or to the carer or to the local authority. You will be expected to pay for your own clothes, travel costs and spending money

You should be able to claim benefits including Housing Benefit which will contribute towards meeting the costs of the arrangement. This will mean that you will have to spend a number of nights in the home to qualify

Although this is not a foster placement you will be expected to abide by certain requirements

You will have to have a DBS check done if there are other children living there, as you are an adult living with a foster carer who looks after children

The DBS check may show you have committed offences which because of the foster carers registration may mean that you cannot live in a house with foster carers /looked after children. This issue should be discussed with your personal advisor and the manager of the Leaving Care Service so that it can be considered and resolved wherever possible

The local authority may decide not to continue to pay these allowances to the carer



WIR Living Together Agreements

Your social worker, your foster carer and you will complete your Living Together agreement. This will set out the rules and expectations of the WIR arrangement. This is different to your Placement Plan as it is an agreement between adults, but can make both you and your carers clear on the boundaries and rules of living together.

The Living Together Agreement should be based on a respect for each other and your needs and those of your carer.

In some cases, when you and your carer have been living together for a long time, and you have sorted out issues like coming in on time, having friends over, staying away over night – the agreement does not need much detail.

In other cases, there might be real concerns about your safety if you do not come back at night. There needs to be agreement about the number of nights you spend away from home and whether the police are notified if you don't return etc.

WIR Living Together Agreement: Questions to consider

Can you smoke in the home?

Can you have friends over during the day, and can they stay overnight?

What are the rules about the carer going into your room?

Do you need to let your carer know where you are and who you are with?

If you are not coming back in the night is there a time you should phone or text your carer?

Do you have a key to the house? If not, why not? What needs to happen for this to be agreed?

What happens if your carer goes away for a few days – can you stay there?

What are the expectations about doing household tasks?

Until what time can you use the washing machine or make something to eat?

What if you have been working late and have an early start and need clothes washing or need to make something to eat?



What makes a good WIR arrangement?

We understand and respect that everybody has different experiences within the household.



Top tips written by the Young People Benchmarking Forum and enforced by the Merthyr Tydfil 'Rainbows' Looked after Children/Care Leavers participation group

For Carers

Keep lines of communication open. Let your thoughts and feelings be known.

.....
Ask for help when needed, don't let things build up

.....
Keep mutual respect for each other, including everyone's belongings, space and privacy

.....
Know and understand what options for alternative accommodation and what happens next

.....
Be prepared to support the young person in developing new independent living skills

.....
Make the WIR arrangement individual to you and your household

.....
If a problem arises ask for help from a worker (supervising social worker or young person's Personal Advisor), before it gets too serious

For Young People

Keep lines of communication open. Let your thoughts and feelings be known.

.....
Ask for help when needed, don't let things build up

.....
Keep mutual respect for each other, including everyone's belongings, space and privacy

.....
Know and understand what options for alternative accommodation and what happens next

.....
Be prepared to develop and take part in learning independent living skills within the household to help prepare you for when you live on your own

.....
Make the WIR arrangement individual to you and your household

.....
If a problem arises ask for help from a worker (Personal Advisor or someone else), before it gets too serious



For Carers

Allow the young person to take responsibilities and risks – we learn from mistakes

Support the young person in simple everyday tasks

Be flexible about rules and make compromises even if rules and boundaries have been set

For Young People

Use this time to use and practice your independent living skills

Think about why you want to stay, embrace the opportunity and be clear about the outcomes you want to achieve

Being 18 years old makes you an adult in the Law, but you don't become an adult overnight. Choices and responsibilities are all part of the journey!



Moving on

The Local Authority will support your WIR arrangement until your 21st birthday.

It may be that you feel that you are ready to move on before this and moving on should be discussed at each Pathway Plan review. However, just because it is discussed does not mean you have to move on, but there should be a backup plan in case the arrangement ends suddenly.

What to do if you are not happy with the plans for you?

All Looked after Children should have an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). If you are unhappy about your Pathway Plan or the decision that has been made about WIR then you should speak to your IRO. You could also ask for an independent advocate (contact details at the end of the guide) to be appointed or you could ask for a member of your family or friend to support you.

You can request an urgent review of your Pathway Plan, so your concerns can be considered. If you feel you are not able to put your views forward you can ask for an independent advocate or to bring a friend or family member to support you.

If it is not possible to resolve your concerns you should ask for details of how to make a complaint. You will find details of this at the end of the guide on 'useful contacts' or on the Council website.

Use this space to write useful contact details including e-mail addresses



Name	Telephone number	e-mail address
Independent Advocacy NYAS	0808 808 1001 0151 649 8700	help@nyas.net website: www.nyas.net
Local Authority Complaints Officer	01685 725498	MTCBC.Complaints@merthyr.gov.uk
Your Personal Advisor		
LAC Manager		
Leaving Care Manager		



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