

Thrive

Preparing for adulthood and moving on

Staying
put or
moving
on?

Your
problems
solved

with Matt

CHEEKY CHEF
EXCLUSIVE!

STAY
SASSY!

We give you the
lowdown
on life
after care

OLI TALKS

beans, spag bol
and budgets

The
Fostering
Network



Incoming message...

IN THIS ISSUE OF *Thrive* ...



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First up, on page 3 we've got **tips from some folks** who've been there and done it already.

On page 4 we've got some uber-useful info about **money, plans for your future and accommodation.**

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Cheeky chef Oli spills the beans about **cooking for yourself** on page 8.

Stressed out about moving out? Our problem solver Matt gets you sorted on page 6.

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And Ethan tells us about **the ups and downs of living in your own place** on page 10.

Hey guys!

Leaving care is exciting – it's your chance to be independent and follow your dreams. But it can also be scary. At Thrive, we think it's really important that you get all the help and support you need to make sure you know what happens next, who can help you and what you are entitled to.

We hope that this edition helps you with any worries you may have – about where you're going to live, education, training, jobs, money, health and life skills.

We're also pointing you in the right direction for advice and support – we want to make sure you're listened to and that you have all you need to make the big decisions about your future.

This magazine has been written for you! Enjoy!

Thrive

A big up to...

...all the care-experienced young people at NYAS and Whitchurch High School, Cardiff who shared their ideas and experiences with us.

When it comes to writing Thrive we try to share our readers' smart ideas for solving problems. Who better to ask? You all live with the realities of being in care day in, day out. There's no doubt that without you we just couldn't do it. Thank you.

And, finally, a big thank you to Brandon – you're a legend!

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'Moving on to uni is about looking forward! Work on the practical skills you learnt in care – you're going to be looking after yourself now.

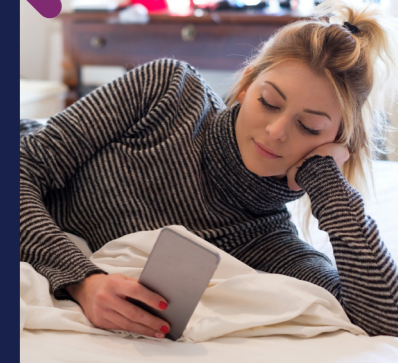
Find out what you're entitled to in terms of grants and ask for help in understanding money matters. Each college or uni has a key contact for care leavers who can help you before you start your course and after. They will have a named person who can help you. Once you've worked those things out, life is much easier. You can do this!

Liam



'I used to think that I'd get to 18 and that there wouldn't be any more rules. Er...no! I'm getting to understand that some rules are important to remember, like turning the lights off to save money, having a spare key for your flat, paying bills on time or – if you can't – explaining you need more time to sort things out. These are all basic things but they save hassle and worry in the long run.'

Jesse



Let's

Talk

If you're getting close to 16 and thinking about moving on, don't worry! We chatted with some people who've been there and done that already – here's their advice...



'For me, supported lodgings has given me confidence, and it's helped me to learn to budget. Supported lodgings gave structure to my life.'

Josh

'I'm 17 now and I'm so not ready for living on my own when I reach 18 – I'm worried that I won't be able to cope. But I've found out that I can stay on with my foster carers – they call it a 'When I am Ready' arrangement. It's about making sure you're living in the right place to give you the best chance to make it in education, training or employment, along with giving you confidence to be independent when you are ready.'

Stella

'At first, I found supported lodgings really hard and I didn't try to make it work. I didn't see why I had to be in by a certain time or live by someone else's rules as I was 17. I've got my own place now, but wish that I had taken advantage of all the support that was on offer back then.'

Tilly



The Fostering Network



Ariennir gan Lywodraeth Cymru
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Get in touch

The Fostering Network
1 Caspian Point, Pierhead Street
Cardiff Bay, CF10 4DQ
029 2044 0940

Editor: Maria Boffey
maria.boffey@fostering.net

Whether you're staying put or moving on, here's the Thrive guide to all you need to know about what happens next.

Stop the 16+ stress

NOW!

If you have ticked any of these, then it's time to get the lowdown about what happens when you're 16, and kick your stresses to the kerb.

I worry about:

- my rights
- who will help me
- where I will live
- money
- education
- having a voice

Leaving care

You usually leave care when you're between 16 and 18 years old – this means that you are no longer legally 'looked after' by your local authority. This is what's important to know about leaving care:

- You don't have to leave care when you're 16, you can stay until you're 18 if you're not ready.
- If you are fostered, you can ask for a When I am Ready arrangement so you can stay with your foster carer until you are 21.
- Your local authority has to support you until you are 21, or until you are 25 if you are in full-time education or have a disability.

Pathway plan

When you reach 16 your local council must write a pathway plan, which helps you prepare for leaving care and says what advice and support you should get. Your social worker should start talking to you about this before you turn 16.

Personal adviser

You'll have a personal adviser who stays in touch with you once you've left care until you are 21 or until you are 25 if you are in education or training. This might be somebody from the leaving care team or your current social worker. They should keep in touch with you, make sure that you are alright and help you to get what you need. To do this they must make sure that your pathway plan is reviewed and kept up to date.

Your personal adviser will give advice and try to support you in every aspect of your pathway plan. So if you have a problem or want to discuss issues about your pathway plan, tell your personal adviser.

Where to live

Your local authority must ensure that you have somewhere suitable to live – this means that it has to be right for you and safe. It might be with your former foster carer if it's a When I am Ready arrangement, or you can decide to return home if this is what you and your family want. If there are problems with where you live, such as paying the rent, the local authority must give you advice about how to sort this out.

Worried about money?

The local authority children's service department must support you financially until you are 18 years old.

If you are over 18 and not in employment or education, you can claim benefits.

When you are moving into your own place you can ask your local authority for a Setting Up Home Allowance (sometimes called a Leaving Care Grant) to help with essentials for your new home, such as furniture, a cooker or a washing machine.



It's your life!

You have a right to be involved in all the big decisions about your life – when you leave care, where you live, what training you do. If you are not happy with the support you are getting, you can make a complaint with the help of an advocate.

If you need an advocate, you should contact:
NYAS Cymru 0808 808 1001
help@nyas.net

Tros Gynnal Plant 0800 111 6880
northwalesadvocacy@trosgynnalplant.org.uk

They will be able to tell you which advocacy services are available in your area. Wherever possible, you contact them yourself (but your foster carer can make the first contact with them for you if that's easier). The advocacy services will always want to speak with you to make sure that your views and opinions are being heard.





I'm scared of moving out

Q I'm moving from foster care into supported lodgings very soon. I'm scared about how I'll cope, but I don't want to let anyone know. I don't want to look stupid and so I just pretend that I know it all. What should I do?

Matt says: It's natural to feel nervous with any change - everyone gets this, especially when moving home.

Have you visited your new supported lodgings and met the people there? Your personal adviser or social worker can help you to make a list of all the questions and worries that you have - working through this can be part of your pathway plan. And as soon as you've met the people in your new home, it'll be much easier to talk things through.

People don't know what's bothering you unless you tell them how you really feel. Maybe they're concerned that you will push them away again or be irritated or snappy? Have you tried explaining to your foster carer how you're feeling?

Changes are difficult, but people are there to help you!



A PROBLEM SHARED

Ask Matt...



Broken connections

Q I've been told that I won't be allowed to go back and spend time with my foster family when I leave them in a few weeks' time. How will I cope without seeing them?

Matt says: Who says you can't keep in touch with your former foster family? They have been very important to you and you to them - you should be able to keep in touch. That's what friends and family do when people move to different places.

Your care plan or pathway plan should set out:

- Who needs to do what to make sure the transition from your current foster home to your new setting goes well.
- How your current foster family will support you and keep in touch with you in your new home.

Tell your social worker that you want to continue to keep in touch with your foster carers as they are important to you. And ask your foster carers to tell your social worker how they would like to keep in touch with you.

If there's still a problem, your advocate can make a complaint. If that doesn't help, ring the Wales Children's Commissioner on 0808 801 1000 and ask her to investigate on your behalf.

Get an answer you can trust, right here.

Easy money

Q I'm hopeless with money and always find myself short at the end of the week, with nothing left to go out with my mates. Where's the best place to go for a loan? My friend she says she knows somebody who lends money but I'm not sure how much I would have to pay back.

Matt says: It's not easy to pay your bills and live the life you want when you haven't got much money.

But everyone has to learn to budget. Start by writing down all the essential things that you have to pay for in a week. If you're spending more money than you've got, then you need to think about cutting back, or maybe getting a weekend job to earn some more money. Your personal advisor will help you to work out your budget priorities.

A loan might seem like an easy answer, but some lenders charge huge amounts of interest and the small amount that you borrow can quickly spiral into a big debt. And getting money from an unlicensed lender - aka a loan shark - could lead you into big trouble, you might even be threatened with violence if you can't pay back what you borrowed.

If you're worried about money, please have a chat with someone you trust as soon as you can.

Q I'm finding it difficult to get my head around all the new stuff I will need to do when I'm living on my own. My health is important, but how do I register with a doctor and how do I get to see a dentist? Please help!

Matt says: You're so right, getting the A to Z of life set up is a real challenge. Talk about some of these things now with your foster carers or social worker. Your personal adviser is there to help you get set up on your own, and they can tell you about registering with a doctor and a dentist.

After 18, you may still be able to receive free prescriptions, glasses and dental treatment if you're in full-time education or claiming benefits. Ask your local Citizen's Advice for a 'benefits check' to find out.

There are other organisations that can help too, like:

- MEIC meiccymru.org
- LawStuff lawstuff.org.uk
- Voices from Care 029 2045 1431

You matter - and there is lots of support out there, so make use of it!

Doctor, doctor!





Wait till you read this! We hung out with Oli, the cheeky chef, to chat about how to eat well and eat wisely. Oli, 20, was in care from the age of 10. He's now a student living in a shared house.



So you think you can't cook?



'I began experimenting with different dishes and my mates really liked the food I made.'

Can you eat well on a student budget?

Yes! I love eating, but I haven't got the cash to eat out every day, so I needed to learn how to make great food for myself for when I started at uni - without busting the budget. I want things to be quick and easy but still tasty.

What do you always have in your kitchen cupboard?

My foster mum, Mel, gave me some great tips to set me up. I make sure that I always have a few essential things like baked beans, tinned tomatoes, some bread, a bag of rice or potatoes, a few onions and some eggs. These are my basics and I can do so many different meals with them.

You don't need ready meals or take-aways. They're expensive and you can't beat your own efforts, trust me!

How did you learn to cook?

From the age of 14, I dreamt about going to uni and my foster mum helped to get me prepared so that I could cope on my own. Cheers, Mel!

I began experimenting with different dishes and my mates really liked the food I made. It's a great way to make friends - you'll never be lonely if you can cook.

Some things were a disaster, but I kept trying until I got it right. There's no magic to it. Mel was so patient and I started to get the hang of it, trying out new ideas. She's even taken a few of my recipes for herself!

How do you decide what you're going to cook for the week?

I look to see what's cheap in the shops and then I challenge myself to see what I can produce from my budget, like they do on those cookery programmes. And it really pays to think how many different meals you can cook from one main thing.

What do you mean about cooking meals from just one thing?

OK, here's an example. A friend showed me how to cook up some mince with an onion, a carrot and a can of tomatoes. Add a few dried herbs (which cost pennies and last for ages) and you're in heaven!

If I put some home-made mash on top, it's cottage pie, or have it with pasta for spag bol. Or I can make lasagne - which looks impressive and tastes great!

What about keeping food fresh and using stuff that's past its sell-by date?

Good question: if you've ever had food poisoning, you never ever want it again!

It's important to know the basics like storing raw and cooked food separately. Keep fresh food in the fridge if you can, or in a cool, dark place to keep it safe for longer. Always check that you have reheated food so it's properly hot. Check that the use-by dates haven't passed.

Don't forget to always wash your hands before and after you cook.

They're all basic rules to keep you safe and healthy.

What's your favourite food?

Roast chicken is the best! It's cheaper to buy a whole chicken, not expensive chicken joints. From that, I can make a proper roast dinner with potatoes, vegetables and gravy.

The next day, I'll strip the meat from the bones and fry it up with some peppers and onions, and have fajitas with a bit of salad. Or I might heat up the leftover chicken with a jar of curry sauce - and I'll always keep some back for a sandwich.

I can also make soup, and that's great to come home to and just reheat. Brilliant. I hate wasting food!

Spill the beans - can anyone learn to cook?

Yes! Once you get started, you'll wonder why you were ever scared to try.

And a random question: Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter?

Instagram deffo. I love how you can post mega cool shots - especially ones of food!



Oli's jacket potato

Jacket potato with beans and cheese is the business! Get a big potato, wash it with cold water and prick a few holes in the skin with a fork. Pop it in a hot oven (200°C or gas mark 6) and leave it for an hour or so, until it's soft. Scoop out the middle and mix it in a bowl with some butter and some grated cheese. Put the mixture back in the potato skin and heat under the grill. Warm some baked beans up in a pan and pour over the top - boom!

A place of my own

21-year-old Ethan grew up in foster care. He moved into his own flat when he was 19. He shares all he's learned about budgeting, finding a job and why it's so important to get out of bed in the morning!

I wasn't grown up enough to move out of foster care when I was 16, so I stayed with my foster family until I was 19 with the When I am Ready scheme. Then I moved into my own flat.

That was tough at first. **I missed my foster family** – the dog waking me up in the morning, all the drama of a big family. On my own the quiet got me down at first and I felt lonely.

I learnt fast that it's really important to have a reason to get up in the morning, otherwise you can fall into bad habits. I had to get myself together to stop sitting around doing nothing like some of my mates.

My foster dad helped me to **get a few things to make my flat feel a bit more like my own place** – it's great what some paint and a few posters can do! We bought some recycled chairs for next to nothing and he showed me how to paint them up.

Now I choose what I want to cook, put some music on and feel proud that I can do this! It is my time and it's for me.

Money matters

It's tough to live on a budget because you want everything to be perfect straight away. There are all these ads offering cheap loans – friends of mine have been caught out this way but I promised my foster dad that I wouldn't get conned and he always reminds me about it.



'I learnt fast that it's really important to have a reason to get up in the morning, otherwise you can fall into bad habits.'

At first, I spent my money as soon as I got it, on junk food and beers. I tried online gambling too, but you never win! It's just throwing your money away. Now **I've learnt to make my money stretch** to last the whole week. I'm proud of myself.

It's not always easy, but I've got really good at finding bargains. I love going to the charity shops and I've picked up a lot of good retro stuff very cheaply. Vintage is cool.

Some of the t-shirts I've found are classics. It's not what it costs, it's how you wear it, I say!

Working works

I've filled in a lot of application forms for jobs but, as I don't have many qualifications, I haven't had many replies. I've asked people I trust for advice, like one of my old school teachers. And **I helped out my mate's dad in his shop** at the weekends – he gave me a job three days a week after that!

I feel much happier now I've got some money of my own and the security of my own place. It's up to me now. I know I can do something with my life and I would really love to learn more – maybe in my next job? I know I can do this!

It's my life and I'm living it!