

Accessing Your Information

IF YOU'RE READING THIS, YOU MIGHT BE THINKING ABOUT ACCESSING INFORMATION HELD ABOUT YOU BY HERTFORDSHIRE CHILDREN'S SERVICES.

This is your right as the information is yours. There's lots of information held for young people in care and care leavers, including all about the circumstances that brought you into care, the decisions that were made and the interactions you may have had with Children's Services.

THE PROCESS WHEN YOU ASK FOR YOUR INFORMATION

This is how requests for information are dealt with:

1. Applying

You can do this by:
Emailing data.protection@hertfordshire.gov.uk
Calling **01992 588099** or speaking to your worker.



2. Checking who you are

You'll be asked to supply two forms of id, one that says who you are (eg passport, driving licence) and one that says where you live. If you don't have these things let us know and we can discuss it.



3. Searching for your information

Once we've verified who you are we'll start looking for your information. Your information could be in a number of different places.



4. Allocating a worker to your files

Once we've got all your information, we'll allocate a worker who will make contact with you and will liaise with you throughout the process. Work will need to be done on your files before they are sent to you – for example information relating to a third party may have to be removed. The worker might need to ask you some questions whilst working on your information.



5. Providing you with your information

The Law says we have 40 days to provide you with your information. We can talk to you about the best way to get it to you.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Before you ask for your information there's a lot to think about....

“Am I ready?”

“Is this the right time for me? What else is going on in my life at the moment?”

“Will I find out things I didn't know?”

“Do I have someone to talk to?”

“Do I have somewhere safe to receive and keep the files?”
(it is possible that there will be lots of files, taking up several boxes, depending on the amount of time you were in care)

“I was shocked about how the social worker had written about me and found the records very upsetting to read but I am glad I asked for them as it has helped me to understand why I had to go into care”
Care Leaver aged 67

“Accessing my records helped me to understand the truth about what happened to me when I was living at home with my mum”
Care Leaver aged 32

“I couldn't believe how much information there was!”
Care Leaver aged 24

EXPERIENCES OF OTHER CARE LEAVERS WHO HAVE ACCESSED THEIR INFORMATION

Some people have found it useful to read their information. But many have found it upsetting. People have described feeling angry, re-living things from the past, feeling upset and finding out significant things they didn't know about their background.

Here are the experiences of 2 Hertfordshire care leavers:

'I requested my files when I was 18. I wanted to read them because I thought it would give me peace of mind and clarity on my experiences. But I was very wrong. A lot of info is someone else's interpretation of your life events – most of which was written negatively. It was very difficult and upsetting to read and I had to stop and put them away as I slipped into a depressive state. Five years on and I still don't feel ready. Great consideration needs to be given before accessing your files.'

'I requested my files when I was 19yrs old. At the time I thought it was a good idea as I didn't have any real memories as a young child, so getting my files would give me some answers. I wasn't really in the right frame of mind to be sat there reading through so much uncertain information but at the time it seemed like a good idea. I didn't have a good support network to discuss what I was reading and it put me in an even worse place than I was before. Some of the information I had wasn't even factual and referred to someone else, not me, which didn't help with confidence issues I already had'

Support for you

Before requesting your information think about who can support you as you go through the process.

You may have your own support network – for example, your worker, friends or members of your family, who you can really rely on. If you are a care leaver who is still open to the service you can get support from us through Safe Space. Safe Space have trained counsellors who can help you in a variety of ways, for example:

- A session with a counsellor before you request your files to help focus on your worries and concerns.
- A number of sessions throughout the process of reading your files to talk about your feelings:

If you'd like to know more about Safe Space please speak to your worker who can make a referral. If you are a care leaver whose case is no longer open you can get support from any of the following services.

1. Your GP

2. www.KOOTH.com online support, advice and counselling for young people in Hertfordshire on any issues that are affecting them.

3. Samaritans

www.samaritans.org national online support and advice for adults to discuss any issues that are affecting them.

4. The mix

www.themix.org.uk/mental-health

National website for group chats, discussion boards and more for young people to talk about issues that are affecting them.

For more help and support visit the Hertfordshire Care leaver's website – **www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/youngpeopleincare**

Here are some other sources of support:

NYAS

Independent advocacy to help you get your voice heard. Call **0808 808 1001**

Care Leavers Association

01616375040
info@careleavers.com
www.careleavers.com

Care advice line

Confidential help and advice for young people in care and care leavers.

Call **02070178901**
Email **advice@thewhocarestrust.org.uk**

CHICC (Children in Care Council)

For all young people in care and care leavers in Hertfordshire

CHICC@Hertfordshire.gov.uk

Phone: **01992 555180**
Mobile: **07812323854**

