



Access to information for adult care leavers

Introduction

This leaflet explains what happens when you ask us for information about your time in care. It also gives information about other services we provide for adults who were once in the care of Nottinghamshire County Council.

When you ask for access to your care records we will ask you to confirm your identity. From the date your identity is confirmed we must give you the information we hold about you within one month. In some circumstances we may have three months to reply to your request. Your request will usually be assigned to one Information Case Officer. Sometimes we may contact you to ask for more information to help us find records held from the time you were in our care.

How much information will I get?

The amount of information we hold can vary.

Some records are handwritten (and may be held in paper archives), some are stored on microfilm – an early way of storing copies of written material – and more recent records will be digital files.

It may be disappointing to find, especially in the case of older records, that there is very little information in your records. In some cases, records have been destroyed or damaged by fire or flood and sometimes a small number of records cannot be located.

What information is in care records?

Usually, the records will include information about what was happening to you and your family at the time you came into care and details of your family that were recorded at the time. There may be information about:

- children's homes you were placed in;
- foster families you lived with;
- school reports;
- medical information;
- other information about your welfare and development.

The records may not answer all your questions. Sometimes there are gaps or little or no detail. Also, it's not always possible to confirm the accuracy of the information. Sometimes, records written in the past contain the kind of prejudiced and judgemental comments that were often used at the time.

Will there be any photos?

It is unlikely there will be any photos of you in your records, but if there are they will be made available.

Will I receive my medical records?

Your case records may contain routine medical information which we can send to you. If there is health information that seems complex, we may need to talk to a medical professional before we can share it. If you are especially interested in your medical history it will be better to make a subject access request to the NHS; you can do this by contacting your GP or hospital specialist.

Are there any restrictions on what I can see?

Data protection law means that we cannot share other people's personal information, sometimes referred to as "third-party information". This means that personal information about people other than you may have to be removed from your records before they can be shared with you. But we will try to give as much information about other people as we are allowed.

How will I get the records?

It is likely that you have made your request electronically, by email or through an online form. It's normal in such cases for us to send your records to you by email. The email will be secured with a password so that you can only access the documents once you have phoned us to get the password by answering a security question (which is usually related to the identity documents you have provided).

If you prefer to receive paper copies of the documents, we can arrange for you to collect them from a Nottinghamshire County Council office or for copies to be sent by registered post to an address where you live. We would want to be sure that no one else at the address would interfere with the material we post to you.

How will I feel?

Receiving information about your past can raise many different emotions and stir up unwelcome memories; it may be upsetting or overwhelming. If you feel unsure or apprehensive about what you might read it may be worth having someone with you for support as you read the documents. This could be a personal adviser, counsellor or trusted friend/family member.

It is unlikely that all the questions you have about your early life and your time in care will be answered. However, most people who ask to see their care records tell us they are glad they have done so. Some say they have a better sense of who they are or feel they have

a better understanding of why they came into care.

How long will I have to wait to see the records?

We must process your application for access to records held by us within one month of checking your identity (or three months if your records are complex). We will keep you informed of the progress of your application and let you know if we are not able to keep to this timescale and the reasons why. If you wish, we may be able to provide the case records in stages.

Will I need to confirm with you who I am?

Yes. Your case records are confidential, and we must make sure we do not share them with anyone other than you. You will need to provide photographic proof of your identity, e.g., a driving licence, travel card or passport – as well as proof of your current address before we can go ahead with your request. The initial form on our website includes more information about the documents you can produce to verify your identity. If this is difficult, please phone us.

Can I keep the records?

The records we provide to you – whether on paper or by email – are yours to keep.

If you want to keep the records we send to you by email it is important that you download them and save them securely within one month of getting our email. After that the password will no longer work. But don't worry if you forget to do this – contact us and we can re-send the information.

What can I do if I think the information on the records is not accurate?

If you believe that any information we hold is inaccurate, you have the right to have this recorded on the case files. Please contact us for assistance.

Non-recent abuse and safeguarding children

Sometimes people will remember unhappy, painful times of being a child or young person in care. They may have memories of being ill-treated or of seeing others being treated badly. We take these reports very seriously and are particularly concerned about your welfare and want to prevent harm to any child today. If you have any concerns, please call us on 0300 500 8090 or the police on 101. All calls will be treated with strict confidentiality.

What help can I get if I want to search for family members and people important to me?

Some people decide that they want to try to contact family members or other significant people from their time in care. Family Connect can offer help and support and you can find out more at www.familyconnect.org.uk or by phoning (020) 7254 6251.

What information will you keep about me?

In order to provide a subject access service we will keep a record of the service we have provided, and details of your identity verification documents, contact details and any telephone, letter or email contact we have with you.

Can I share copies of my case files with other people?

It is your choice what you do with the information you receive. Some people want to share information from their records with a relative, partner or friend. Others prefer to keep it to themselves.

Feedback

We want to improve our service and welcome your comments and suggestions.

What can I do if I am not happy about the service?

If you are unhappy with any aspect of our service, we have a review procedure. The first step is to contact our office and ask for an internal review.

If you are not happy with the outcome of an internal review you can also involve the Information Commissioner's Office which is responsible for data protection practice. You can find further details at www.ico.org.uk or by phoning 0303 123 1113.

Contact information

Phone: (0115) 977 2788 - Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 5pm.

Email: accessto.records@nottsc.gov.uk

Website: www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk

Further support for adult care leavers

Care Leavers' Association – run by care leavers for care leavers aged 18 upwards, the CLA promotes and campaigns for positive changes for UK care leavers. The website contains information on accessing records, including a discussion forum and personal accounts from care leavers who have searched for records. Find out more at www.careleavers.com or by phoning (0161) 826 0214.

Nottinghamshire County Council – the leaving care service offers advice, support and guidance to young people aged 16-25 who are eligible for support when they leave care. Young people who meet the criteria will be allocated a personal adviser who can provide practical and emotional support in access your records. Please speak with your personal adviser to access support around accessing your information or, if you are over 21 years then contact the 21Plus Service at 21Plus@nottsc.gov.uk, or for more contact details and information visit www.nottshelpyourself.org.uk.