

When I'm Ready (WIR) Policy

Swansea Council
Child & Family Services
November 2023



1. Introduction

This policy has been produced to support staff working in Child and Family Services with children, young people, families, and carers to make decisions around the 'When I'm Ready' (WIR) Scheme.

2. What does the law say?

The relevant legislation and practice guidance relating to When I'm Ready includes:

- [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)
- [Part 6 Code of Practice on Looked After and Accommodated Children 2015](#)
- [Children and Young Persons Act 2008](#)
- The Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 - [Statutory Guidance - Fostering Services](#)
- [The Care Leavers \(Wales\) Regulations 2015](#)

We have developed and deliver our WIR Scheme in line with the principles outlined in the When I'm Ready: Good Practice Guide, which was produced by Welsh government and can be found at [WIR Good Practice Guidance](#).

3. What is a When I Am Ready (WIR) Arrangement?

'When I'm Ready' is a scheme developed by the Welsh government in partnership with local government and key third-party sector partners to enable care leavers to continue to live with their former foster carers after turning eighteen. The WIR Scheme is part of a wider package of support which the local authority provides to young people leaving care, including a Pathway Plan, personal advisor and certain financial entitlements.

The WIR Scheme is aimed at care leavers who require an extended period with their former foster carers in order to prepare themselves for independent living and / or to complete their education or training. WIR arrangements are transitional, and the expectation is that the young person will eventually move on to a more independent living arrangement.

The WIR Scheme was developed to improve the outcomes for looked after children by helping them to develop independent living skills, provide them with stability and continuity, and giving them increased opportunities to exercise voice and control over their lives, i.e., a greater sense of autonomy when it comes to making decisions about their futures.

WIR arrangements can bring a lot of potential benefits to the lives of young people who are no longer in care. These benefits include:

- Development of Independent Living Skills – Young people leaving care receive on-going support from their WIR Providers to assist them in developing the necessary emotional and practical skills and confidence to prepare for their transition to independent living.

- Stability and continuity - Young people leaving care continue to have security, protection, practical and emotional support and can continue to live in a supportive family and household environment.
- Improve the life chances for looked after children - The opportunities for care leavers to access post-18 education, training and employment opportunities are maximised and the number of young people experiencing periods of homelessness or housing instability is reduced.
- Provide young people with increased opportunities to exercise voice and control over their lives. They can influence the timing of their transition from care, and are not obliged to leave their former foster family before they feel ready to move to greater independence.

Legally, a WIR arrangement is recognised as a 'post-eighteen living arrangement' between adults not a foster care placement and as such, the young person is no longer considered to be 'looked after' or 'accommodated'. The WIR arrangement can continue until the young person reaches their twenty-first birthday or completes their agreed programme of education or training after their twenty-first birthday, if they have been continuously living in the arrangement since their eighteenth birthday.

Foster carers, in taking on their new role as a 'WIR Provider' for the young person, will provide ongoing social and emotional support alongside specific support to assist the young person to develop the skills they need to successfully live independently.

4. Who is eligible for When I'm Ready?

A 'WIR' arrangement can usually be made for a young person if they are in a situation described below:

- The young person was a 'looked after child' immediately prior to their 18th birthday and was living with foster carers in a placement arranged by the Local Authority AND
- The carers were acting as approved foster carers for the young person immediately prior to their 18th birthday AND
- The young person is deemed, under current legislation, to be an eligible child within the meaning of the Children Act 1989 immediately before they reached 18 ('Category 1' young people under the 'Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 AND
- The young person and the foster carers both wish to enter into a 'When I'm Ready' arrangement, and the arrangement has been set out in the young person's pathway plan AND
- The local authority is satisfied that such an arrangement is not inconsistent with the young person's well-being AND
- A proportion of the allowance paid to the 'When I'm Ready' carer will be paid for by the local authority.

As long as the young person is in a situation outlined above a WIR arrangement can usually be made regardless of whether they are in full or part time education, training or employment or none of these activities. However, there will be an expectation that

any young person accessing WIR will commit to undertaking skills development for the future.

Eligible young people will receive support from their Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officers to support them to fully understand the scheme so that they are able to make an informed decision about whether a WIR arrangement is right for them.

5. Young People with Care and Support Needs

The 'When I'm Ready' scheme is aimed at care leavers who require an extended period with their former foster carers in order to prepare themselves for independent living and/or to complete their education or training. 'When I'm Ready' arrangements are transitional, and the expectation is that the young person will move on to more independent living arrangements.

Young people with care and support needs can access 'When I'm Ready' in the same way as any other young person who was formerly in foster care, if this meets the well-being outcomes set out in their placement and care and support plans. However, there are young people whose care and support needs are complex and ongoing, and for whom moving on to independent living will not be an appropriate longer-term option. Children and adult social services will work together, as part of the pathway assessment and planning process, to find the most appropriate longer-term arrangement for these young people. For some this will be an Adult (Shared Lives) Placement. In some cases, the young person and their foster carers may wish to enter into a longer-term arrangement, and it may be more appropriate to convert the foster placement into an Adult Placement / Shared Lives arrangement when the young person turns 18.

It is further recognised that there will be situations where the long-term plan may be to move the young person into an adult placement ('Shared Lives') scheme, but the young person does not feel ready to move into this at 18 and wishes to stay with their former foster carer in a 'When I'm Ready' arrangement until they have developed further skills and confidence to make this transition as successful as possible.

However, Swansea will, wherever possible, avoid the use of 'When I'm Ready' as an interim arrangement pending a detailed transition assessment and planned move into another more suitable type of arrangement.

6. Supporting WIR Arrangements

The BAYS+ Team have a specialist 'When I'm Ready Co-ordinator' who provides support to both young people and WIR Providers to ensure their needs are met in relation to the WIR arrangement to help promote stability and successful outcomes for the young person.

When establishing a WIR arrangement, the young person and WIR providers will agree how they will live together as adults. This plan, along with the young person's Pathway Plan, will outline the young person's specific independent living needs associated with them remaining in a WIR arrangement and the WIR Co-ordinator will

work alongside the young person and WIR Provider to monitor and review how the plan is working and whether any adaptations need to be made to the plan to respond to changing needs over the course of the arrangement. There will be clear expectations for both the young person and the WIR Provider to ensure that the young person is adequately prepared for their transition to independent living.

Once the WIR arrangement is underway, the WIR Co-ordinator is responsible for co-ordinating the provision of services and will work alongside the young person's social worker and personal advisor to keep in touch with the young person and monitor the progress of the arrangement. The young person can request advice at any time from their allocated social worker or personal advisor and will continue to have all entitlements consistent with their care leaver status.

Where other foster children remain in placement or the WIR Provider remains registered as a Foster Carer, the Supervising Social Worker from the Local Authority Fostering Service will continue to provide support to the carer in relation to the non-WIR children or young people living in the household only. The WIR Provider will receive support in relation to the young person living in the WIR arrangement from the WIR Co-ordinator. This will also be the case where the WIR Provider terminates their registration as a Foster Carer or in the case of WIR transition from Independent Foster Agency placements, the role of the Supervising Social Worker will end and the WIR Provider will receive support from the WIR Co-ordinator.

Despite the changes in legal status that come with a WIR arrangement, the over-riding principle is that the young person continues to be part of the home and that he or she remains a member of the family.

7. Ending a WIR Arrangement

The 'WIR' arrangement extends until: -

- The young person leaves the 'WIR' arrangement, or;
- The young person reaches their 21st birthday if continuously living in the arrangement or;
- The young person completes their agreed programme of education or training after their 21st birthday, if continuously living in the arrangement since their 18th birthday.
- In cases of exceptional circumstances, it is deemed by the Local Authority that the placement is no longer consistent with the young person's wellbeing or where an arrangement suddenly and irreparably breaks down the Principal Officer for Adolescent and Young People Services, will be responsible for agreeing that a placement is ended and the young person will be supported to suitable accommodation arrangements.

8. Complaints and Representations

Young People, Foster Carers or WIR Providers may wish to make complaints or representations about aspects of the WIR Scheme or decisions made about them. If the matter cannot be informally resolved following discussion with the allocated Social Worker or their Line Manager or the Principal Officer for Adolescent and Young People

Services, then complaints can be made through the Local Authority's Complaints procedure which can be found at [Make a complaint - Swansea](#).

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Principal Officer for Adolescent and Young People Services and the BAYS+ Team Manager will meet:

- Bi-annually to review the profile and uptake of the WIR Scheme
- Annually to review qualitative information collated regarding the outcomes of the WIR scheme and feedback from young people and WIR Providers
- Regular reporting of the above information to the Corporate Parenting Panel

This policy will be reviewed annually.