

Establishing Networks

Building and growing a young person's personal support network and family connections is key to ensuring they have support beyond their time in out-of-home care (OOHC). Strong ties with family, friends, colleagues, and the community help us to feel happy and supported and can provide a sense of purpose. For the young person, a strong social network can be a protective factor against depression and anxiety (Beyond Blue, 2020). Positive relationships and expansive networks will support a young person to have a smooth transition to adulthood.

Supporting Young People to Build Networks

Begin early to identify and strengthen the young person's personal support network. Remember that leaving care is a big change for a young person. The relationships young people have with you, their family, kin and carers and their personal connections through sport, community and their culture can really help to make them feel supported and reduce their stress or anxiety about leaving care. For some young people, the relationship they have with you as their caseworker is one of the most important in their life. However, it's important they have a strong and growing personal network that is not just 'paid professionals' in their lives.

Leaving care planning should consider how to establish, grow, or strengthen the young person's network so they can feel safe and supported, and reduce the risk of isolation post care. This may include the use of [Family Group Conferencing](#) (FGC), time with family, or visits to former carers or significant people in their life.

Consider the following connections and assess the potential for safe and warm relationships for the young person:

- family/kin and/or extended family
- caring family
- significant people such as former carers, sports coaches, teachers, music teachers, mentors from the community they have a rapport with
- friends and community e.g. netball team, volunteering group
- elders and other community members
- other professionals in their life.

You must support the young person to find and reconnect with these important people as part of their leaving care plan. Access the [15+ Reconnect funding package](#) (page 26) to support reconnection with family/kin and extended family. For more resources to help you and the young person locate family see: [Find and Connect](#), [Link-Up](#) and [Family Connections and Networks – Overview](#). For more information, see: [Leaving Care Plans](#), [Casework Practitioner’s Guide to Leaving Care and Aftercare](#), and [Leaving and After Care guidelines](#).

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Young People

It is especially important that you support these young people to find and reconnect with family and community. Family and community not only offer connection and belonging; they may also offer important insights into their culture and play various roles in young people’s lives. This may mean helping a young person to plan how they will build or maintain relationships or cultural connection. For example, engagement with the local Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) or attending annual National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week celebrations.

“I would like to know who my family is and where I come from which is hard because both of my grandparents were members of the Stolen Generation. (Female, 16 years)”

– McDowall, (2018).

For more information, see: [Relationship Based Practice](#) and [Working with Young People](#).

For the Caseworker – Referrals and Professional Networks

It is important you build strong professional networks. Your professional networks can considerably expand what options are available to a young person. You must be able to provide tailored supports, referrals, and accurate information to the young

people you are working with. It is important that you know people and organisations in areas like mental health, youth housing, mentoring and other youth organisations.

Building Your Professional Networks

As a caseworker, having a strong and diverse professional network will help you to provide up-to-date and tailored referrals to support the young people you are working with. There are lots of ways to develop and maintain a professional network. These include:

- Networking in person and/or online. Reach out for a coffee with local service provider colleagues or use [LinkedIn](#) as an easy way to keep in touch with professional contacts and learn about programs and services in your area (McKay, 2019).
- Ask your colleagues to introduce you to people in local organisations you will have the most contact with (Kaada, 2023). For example: social housing officer, mental health services, the social worker at the local hospital or local coordinator (LAC) for the [National Disability Insurance Scheme](#) (NDIS).
- When you attend training or information sessions take the lunch break as an opportunity to introduce yourself to people from different organisations or different areas of your own organisation.
- [Service Seeker](#) is a national directory of human services and includes listings from other directories such as [AskIzzy](#) and the [Lifeline Service Finder](#).
- [Deadly Story](#) has a free directory of Aboriginal specific services and organisations.
- See what interagency network groups are available in your area. Peak bodies or local DCJ may offer interagency meetings or forums to participate in.

References

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McDowall, J. J. (2018). *Out-of-Home Care in Australia: Children and Young People's View After Five Years of National Standards*. Retrieved from <https://create.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CREATE-OOHC-In-Care-2018-Report.pdf>

McKay, D. R. (2019, May 30). How to Build and Maintain a Professional Network [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/building-growing-and-maintaining-a-professional-network-525834>