

## Establishing Networks

Building and growing the young person's personal support network and family connections is key to ensuring they have support beyond their time in care.

Strong ties with family, friends, colleagues, and the community help us to feel happy, supported and a sense of purpose (Beyond Blue, 2020). 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.

### For The Caseworker - Referrals and Professional Networks

It is important you build strong professional networks. Your professional networks can really 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 colleagues in 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 that you are working with. There are lots of ways to develop and maintain a professional network. These include:

- Networking can be done in person and online. [LinkedIn](#) offers an easy way for you to keep in touch with professional contacts and learn about programs and services in your area.
- Ask your colleagues to introduce you to people in local organisations that you will have the most contact with. For example: social housing officer, the social worker at the local hospital or local coordinator (LAC) for the National Disability Access Scheme.

- 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.
- [Human Services Network \(HSNet\)](#) is a free directory of human services. It contains over 70,000 service listings in areas such as: family support, child protection, child wellbeing, health, disability, aged care, welfare, community, education, legal, justice and housing.
- [Deadly Story](#) has a free directory of Aboriginal specific services and organisations.
- See if your local area has an interagency network group like the ones in [Shellharbour](#) and [Newcastle](#).

## 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 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 is one of the most important but it's important they have a strong and growing personal network that is not just 'paid professionals' in their lives.

Leaving care plan 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 conference, 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 to support reconnection with family/kin and extended family.
- for resources to help you locate family see: [Find and Connect](#), [Link-Up](#) and [Family Connections and Networks - Overview](#).

For more information see: [Leaving Care Plans](#), [Casework Practitioners Guide to Leaving and After Care](#), [Leaving Care Referral information for PSP Service Providers](#).

### 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 about how they will build or maintain relationships or cultural connection. For example, engagement with the local Aboriginal Medical Service or attending annual National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week celebrations.

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“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.

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

## References

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<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/older-people/connections-matter>

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