

Foundations of After Care

What is After Care?

After care is the ongoing support, a young person receives from the age of 18 up to 25 years, after they have legally left out-of-home care (OOHC). In some cases, this care can extend beyond the age of 25. It is the final stage of support available under the Permanency Support Program (PSP).

After care aims to acknowledge that young people leaving OOHC can face enormous challenges and disadvantages compared to their peers and to lessen those challenges by continuing to provide support and guidance into young adulthood.

After care support is included in a young person's leaving care plan prior to them turning 18. It can also be added later by reviewing and amending the plan and connecting young adults to tailored supports or services they may need at a later point.

Why is After Care Important?

Young people leaving care need to know they have someone to turn to for support and advice after they have left care.

Ideally, the young person has a strong support network and safe family connections that have grown during their time in care. However, many young people can leave care feeling isolated and with not many people to turn to for support.

As a result, young care leavers may be at increased risk of a range of poor social, educational and health outcomes including homelessness, mental illness, unemployment, substance misuse, contact with the justice system and early parenthood (Campo & Commerford 2016).

Who Provides After Care?

PSP Service Providers

The PSP Service Provider that manages the young person's last placement, prior to them leaving care, is responsible for providing or arranging after care support. There is no additional payment to PSP Service Providers to provide after care support. This is because the provision of 'light touch' after care support is accounted for throughout a young person's time in OOHC.

You and your organisation are in a really good position to provide guidance, advice, and connection because of the relationship you already have with the young person. This will also help provide the young person with some continuity.

It is critical that we don't turn young people away when they seek help and advice. That may include a referral to a more tailored service or program or specialist. Work with other services to respond and advocate for the young person.

Young people with complex needs who require intensive assistance can receive the help they need from a [Specialist Aftercare Service](#). You can also work in partnership with these services to support a young person.

For more information see: [Establishing Networks](#) and [Casework Practitioners Guide to Leaving and After Care, Leaving Care Plans](#).

Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)

DCJ can provide after care services if the young person is not able or does not want to contact their last PSP Service Provider.

Young people can also contact the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) Care Leavers Line on 1800 994 686 or email careleaversline@facs.nsw.gov.au for support.

For more information see: [Roles and Responsibilities in Leaving Care and After Care](#).

Key Messages

- Before a young person leaves care, discuss and plan with them and how they will be supported after care, and set this out in their leaving care plan.
- After a young person has left care, you continue to play an important role in their life depending on their level of need, capacity and what kind of supports and connections they have in place.
- Be prepared for when things change and respond positively to young people. They count on you! Remember leaving care plans are not static documents and need to reflect a young person's changing circumstances. Expect to amend the plan as things change.
- Actively follow-up with the young person. This might be a phone call or visiting their new apartment or meeting them for a coffee. Ask the young person how things are going when following up. You can use this conversation to identify any

concerns. This can help divert a situation from escalating into crisis or a young person from becoming homeless.

- Connect the young person through warm referrals, information, resources and supporting early appointments and connections. Continue to help them with establishing appropriate peer and community networks. See [Leaving care referrals, collaboration and connections](#).
- Continue to help them to strengthen relationships with their personal support network, birth family and/or extended family.
- Always being there for the young person when they reach out, even if you did not have direct involvement with them when they were in care.
- For young people with complex needs, collaborate and partner with other services to ensure the young person is being supported.

Assistance beyond 25 years

Assistance beyond 25 years of age may be provided where special circumstances apply. For example, where a person has been unable to advance aspects of their leaving care plan due to health problems or parental responsibilities or if leaving care planning did not occur.

Considerations for providing aftercare assistance to care leavers 25 or older:

- age
- reasons for the delay in seeking assistance
- the goals of the leaving care plan, if applicable
- assistance provided between the ages of 15 and 24 years and
- likelihood that the assistance will significantly enhance the person's life skills and opportunities.

It's critical young people who need support, have a caseworker checking how they are going. They need to know who to contact and how if things change for them, or if there is a problem.

Releasing Information to Care Leavers

Specific information that DCJ or former carers have, as well as other items, need to be provided to the young person on leaving care. It is your role to help ensure this happens. Some of these items may include:

Birth certificate and key documents	Proof or Confirmation of Aboriginality
Medicare card Medical and other health information	Photographs and memorabilia
Clothing	Personal items and Life Story work
Furniture, bedding, and sporting items	Electrical including TV, iPad, mobile phone

Access to Their OOHC Files

Talk to the young person about their right to access files about their time in care. Let them know they can do this, only if they want to and when they feel ready.

When they are ready, help the young person to access their files and ensure they are supported when reading them - this can also be called 'therapeutic file reading'.

If a young person is over 25 years, you will need to refer them to DCJ to access their files, and for support with reading them.

Financial Assistance

There is financial assistance available to eligible young people preparing to leave care or who have left care. It is important you support eligible young people to access the below entitlements, and with applications for Centrelink, study scholarships, Smart and Skilled government funded courses, and other opportunities.

Financial Assistance Specific to OOHC

- **After Care Allowance** - a needs based fortnightly allowance up to a maximum \$240 to help secure stable, affordable accommodation where the young person is undertaking full time training or education and would be at risk of homelessness if financial assistance was not provided. Funded by DCJ.

- **One-off Contingencies Payments** - help with things like education and training, securing accommodation, legal advice, finding employment, accessing health services, and for counselling and other support. Funded by DCJ.
- **Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)** - one-off payment of up to \$1,500 to help eligible young people cover some basic costs as they leave out-of-home care. Young people aged between 15 to 25 years may be eligible. Funded by the Department of Social Services. In NSW, [TILA applications](#) are administered by Southern Youth and Family Services (SYFS).

Note this is not an exhaustive list. Information about other financial supports also available to young people in OOHC, such as help with driving, work and development orders and victims of crime recognition payments can be found under [financial assistance and entitlements](#) on the DCJ website.

Any financial assistance must be included in the leaving care plan and first approved by DCJ.

Education Financial Assistance Specific to OOHC

- **Scholarships** – including DCJ Scholarships for students to receive \$1,000 to help with school expenses and support services, DCJ OOHC Pathways scholarships with Western Sydney University and Smart and Skilled fee free Scholarships. More information can be found under [Education](#) on the DCJ website.
- **Post Care Education Financial Support (PCEFS)** – payment for carers to maintain their current living and support arrangements for young people in their care (aged 18-24) so they can complete their HSC.

Universal Services

- **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** – supports people with disability.
- **Centrelink** – offers young people payments including Youth Allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY, rent assistance etc.

Resources to Share With Young People and Carers

Young people who are leaving care should be encouraged to connect with organisations, apps and other resources that can help support them after care. Talk to them about the:

- [CREATE](#); [CYF - Create Your Own Future](#); and [YOU](#) websites, which have comprehensive information, resources and programs for young people leaving care or who have left care
- [Your Next Step](#) booklet that lists a range of services that can help young people prepare to leave care and transition to independent living
- [Go Your Own Way Info Kit](#), a CREATE Foundation resource for young people aged 15 and above who are starting to plan for their transition to adulthood and independence.
- [Leading the Way](#) is a guide for foster, relative and kinship carers to help them support their young people to transition out of care and into independent living.

For more information see: [Leaving care planning – referrals, collaboration and connections](#).

Legislative and Policy Framework For After Care

After care support is guided by the following legislation, policy, and guidelines. It is important you familiarise yourself with the following legislation and documents to inform the aftercare you provide young people:

- [Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act. See Section 165.](#)
- [Permanency Case Management Policy](#)
- [Care Leavers' Charter of Rights](#)
- [The NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care \(Standard 12\)](#)
- [Guidelines for the provision of assistance after leaving out-of-home care](#)
- [Transitioning from out-of-home care to Independence: A Nationally Consistent Approach to Planning \(Australian Government\).](#)
- See [Legislative and Policy Framework Leaving Care and After Care](#) for more information.

References

(Campo & Commerford 2016).