

Foundations of After Care

After care is the ongoing support that 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 years. It is the final stage of support available under the Permanency Support Program (PSP).

After care aims to acknowledge that young people transitioning to adulthood from a care experience can face enormous challenges and disadvantage compared to their peers. Aftercare support, financial assistance and referrals can help 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. After care support can provide 'stepping stones' to stability and independence, such as help with housing, education costs, assistance with driving lessons or living skills mentoring. For more information, see: [Casework Practitioners Guide to Leaving and After Care](#).

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 an established strong personal support network and safe family connections that have grown during their time in care. However, the reality is that many young people leaving care feel isolated and lack trusted adults they can turn to for advice and 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 the best 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 of supports.

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. You can work with other services to respond and advocate for the young person.

Care leavers that may require additional or intensive support can be referred to the Specialist Aftercare Program. The Specialist Aftercare Program is for eligible care leavers aged 17-24 years who might need some additional support. For eligibility, Specialist Aftercare providers and referral please see the [DCJ Specialist Aftercare Program website](#).

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 DCJ Care Leavers Line on 1800 994 686 or email careleavers@dcj.nsw.gov.au for support.

Key Messages

- Before a young person leaves care, discuss and plan with them how they will be supported after care, and set this out in their leaving care plan. Early planning means more time to consider options such as stable housing, study and training and health and wellbeing needs.
- 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.
- Continue to help them to strengthen relationships with their personal support network, birth family and/or extended family.
- 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.
- 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 beyond 25 years 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 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
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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. Further information can be located on the DCJ website [How to apply for your care records](#).

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 courses, and other opportunities.

Financial Assistance Specific to OOHC

- Independent Living Allowance – is a fortnightly payment to help with the cost of accommodation and other essential needs for care leavers aged 18 to 20 years.
- Staying on Allowance – is a fortnightly payment for carers who continue to look after young people after they turn 18, up to 21. This payment will cease once a young person turns 21 or when the young person moves out.
- After Care Allowance – Can be accessed from age 21 to 24 years and is a need based fortnightly allowance 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. This is a short-term allowance based on assessment and eligibility and is 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 the DCJ Care Leavers Line.
- One-off Contingencies Payments – for items like education and training, securing accommodation, legal advice, finding employment, accessing health services, and for counselling and other support. Funded by DCJ.

Education Financial Assistance Specific to OOHC

- Scholarships – DCJ Scholarships for students to receive \$1,000 to help with school expenses and support services, DCJ university scholarships with Western Sydney University and Charles Sturt University. More information can be found on the OOHC Education Pathways page 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.
- Teenage Education Payment (TEP) – for those aged 16 to 17 years, up to \$6,000 per year (paid in \$1,500 quarterly instalments) to help foster and kinship carers to keep young people in their care at school or in training. Use it to pay for everyday school or training expenses as well as camps, excursions or additional tutoring.

Note this is not an exhaustive list. Information about other financial supports and opportunities 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 approved by DCJ.

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 should be encouraged to connect with organisations, apps and other resources that can help support them as they transition to adulthood. Talk to them about:

- [CREATE](#); [CYF - Create Your Future](#) ; and [Youth Hub](#) websites, which have comprehensive information and resources 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 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 and after care resources](#).

Legislative and Policy Framework for After Care

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

References

Campo, M., & Commerford, J. (2016). *Supporting young people leaving out-of-home care* (CFCA Paper No. 41). Melbourne: Child Family Community Australia information exchange, Australian Institute of Family Studies.