

Foundations of Leaving Care

For young people in the Permanency Support Program (PSP), leaving OOHC can be an emotional time. Although they may look forward to the independence and freedom of being an adult, the young person may feel uncertain about what the future holds for them. Through quality planning and support, you can play an important role in helping young people prepare for the transition to adulthood. Young people need to feel heard and understood and benefit greatly from guidance that is hopeful and realistic.

Remember, young people transitioning to adulthood from out of home care are more likely to experience poorer outcomes without preparation, early planning and tailored supports that address gaps and speak to their strengths, skills, and capacity.

“We want your support and genuine care - please give it to us”

- [Care leaver, Care Leavers' Charter of Rights](#)

What is Leaving Care Planning?

The process of preparing a young person to leave care is called leaving care planning. It involves working with a young person, and the adults in their lives, to plan for their future and work out their next steps. Leaving care aims to provide young people with the connections and supports they need, as they develop their independent living skills and transition into adulthood.

The plan documents the goals, tasks and actions and support identified, based on the young person's needs. Your PSP Service Provider may have a template that you can use when creating leaving care plans. The 'final' plan is settled as the young person approaches 18. Remember, circumstances can change, and the plan may be reviewed and amended post 18. For more information, see: [Casework Practitioners Guide to Leaving and After Care](#) - Developing a leaving care plan.

Eligibility for Leaving Care

PSP Service Providers develop a leaving care plan for all young people who are in statutory OOHC for over 12 months; are over 15 years of age; and are not anticipated to leave care because of restoration, or the making of an adoption or guardianship order.

When does Planning commence?

When a young person turns 15 years of age, their case plan goal changes to 'leaving care'. This is the time where you should start conversations with a young person, and the adults in their life, about what they need now and into the future to support them and the purpose of the leaving care plan. It's important to reassure the young person that 'leaving care' does not necessarily mean leaving the carer's home. Many young people stay on after turning 18 if that is what they and the carer want. This provides stability in their life and should be encouraged where it is in the young person's best interest.

While building skills for life should happen much earlier this is the time to identify any gaps or needs the young person may have to support their *readiness* for young adulthood.

To achieve this, consider ways to engage the carer and young person. Talk about reaching age-appropriate milestones such as:

- catching transport independently or preparing for learning to drive
- preparing a simple meal
- starting casual work such as babysitting or dog walking
- learning about budgeting and saving.

A young person's transition to independence is a gradual process. In-depth and early planning is key for young people to gradually develop their independent living skills, build confidence and establish their personal support network. The [Independent Living Skills checklist](#) can help identify gaps in a young person's knowledge and skills to be strengthened. It can be used to guide conversations and assess gaps and strengths. A leaving care plan is 'finalised' as the young person approaches aged 18 and must include all the financial elements.

Developing a Leaving Care Plan

A leaving care plan is developed between you and the young person, with input from their parents, carers, and other significant people in the young person's life. It must focus on what support they will need, building on their strengths and needs, their hopes and goals for the future, and detail the resources they need to achieve them. An effective leaving care plan considers all life's domains and must help the young person feel empowered about making decisions about their future.

The leaving care plan is a modification of the young person's case plan and focuses on a young person's needs while in care and the supports they will need after they have left care when their care order comes to an end.

The leaving care plan looks at the young person's needs across:

- culture and connections (including life story work)
- health and wellbeing (including counselling)
- education
- training and employment
- living skills
- legal advice
- financial support and entitlements
- living arrangements and housing.

“There was a meeting, but things were not explained properly”

- [Care leaver, Care Leavers' Charter of Rights](#)

The leaving care plan must have clear and achievable goals and detail the entitlements and supports available to the young person. It will detail who has responsibility for each goal, as well as alternatives if things do not go to plan. A good leaving care plan does not leave all the 'doing' to the young person alone. Warm referrals to tailored supports and programs and collaboration with other organisations can help strengthen the quality of leaving care supports post 18.

After Care

Young people leaving care need to know they have someone to turn to for support and advice after they have left care. The leaving care plan must also make it clear how the young person can access further help, support and advice 'after care'. After care is the ongoing assistance a young person receives from the age of 18 up to 25 years – after they have legally left OOHC. In some cases, this care can extend beyond the age of 25.

You are responsible for providing after care. Young people access after care from the PSP Service Provider they were last case managed by, prior to them leaving care.

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) can also provide after care assistance if the young person is not able or does not want to engage with their provider. Young people with complex needs may also be referred to a [Specialist Aftercare service provider](#) and you may work in partnership with this provider to support a young person.

Young people can also contact the DCJ Care Leavers Line on 1800 994 686 or email careleavers@dcj.nsw.gov.au for help. Let them know about this line!

“No one can predict the future, understand that my needs and wants will change”

- [Care leaver, Care Leavers' Charter of Rights](#)

What if a Young Person is Resistant?

Remember that sitting down to create a leaving care plan is an unnatural process that most young people do not have to do. Young people may be resistant, act out, or refuse to participate in their leaving care plan. Look behind the behaviour to see what the young person is trying to tell you. They may be scared or trying to express what they need.

Leaving care is a vulnerable and uncertain time, it is understandable that a young person would feel overwhelmed. If the young person is not participating, those best placed to understand their needs can participate in the consultation on their behalf. Whether the young person is an active participant or not, it is important that you let them know that they have a plan, explain it to them, and give them a copy.

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	Photographs and memorabilia
Medical and other health information	
Clothing	Personal items and Life Story work

Furniture, bedding and sporting items	Electrical including TV, iPad, mobile phone
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Access to their OOHC Files

Talk to the young person about their right to access files and information 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. 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. For more information, see: [How to apply for your records](#).

PSP Specialist Funding Packages to Support Leaving Care

There are two specialist packages available for PSP Service Providers that support agencies to help young people. These are the Leaving Care Package and 15+ Reconnect Package. The Leaving Care Package provides funding for time to plan and support a young person, age 15 and older to exit long term care.

The 15+ Reconnect Package supports you to help young people to reconnect with family and extended family and other significant people in their lives, where it is safe to do so. Your Agency can apply for these when a young person approaches the age of 15 years.

Financial help, payments and entitlements

Young people leaving care are entitled to a range of financial supports and entitlements.

These include:

- [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.
- [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.

- 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.
- 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 and training help:

- 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 Pathway 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.
- Smart and Skilled fee-free or low-cost training means that students can get training to get the skills they need to get the job they want, and their course fees will be covered.

As well as universal and tailored financial help:

- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – supports people with disability.

- [Centrelink](#) – offers young people payments including Youth Allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY, rent assistance etc.
- [Rent Choice Youth](#)

Teach young people financial literacy skills to help them manage and protect their money.

Youth Initiative

[Youth Initiative](#) (YI) is a support service for young people leaving OOHC who are vulnerable to experiencing homelessness when leaving care. The program is for young people aged 16 to 21 and aims to build capacity and resilience. Young people enter one of two ways: either by being identified as suitable by DCJ or through a [community referral](#).

DCJ File Audit and Victims of Crime Support

You must make an application on behalf of all young people at the age of 15, for a legal audit to be completed by DCJ. A legal audit can help identify potential eligibility for Victims Support or other legal claims. For example, a young person may be eligible for counselling, financial assistance, or a recognition payment under the NSW Victims Support Scheme

Victims of Crime recognition payments for children in care are managed as trusts by the Trustee and Guardian until they legally turn 18. During leaving care planning it is critical to prepare the young person for any money they may be due to receive, especially larger sums. For more information, see: [preparing young people to receive a large sum of money](#) for suggestions and advice.

NDIS

If the young person has a disability covered by the NDIS, you will need to make sure their plan meets their current needs, offers support as they transition to independence, and will continue to meet their needs after they leave care. If the young person's current NDIS plan does not meet these needs, you may need to request an unscheduled review. For more information about the NDIS and leaving care, see: [Leaving Care Planning and the NDIS](#).

If a young person is unable to make decisions for themselves, consider who will make decisions for them, such as the [Public Guardian](#).

Resources to Share with Young People and Carers

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

- the NSW Government's [Youth Hub](#), which has information, links and resources specifically for young people leaving care.
- [CREATE](#) and [CYF - Create Your Future](#) 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.
- You may also want to highlight resources available through [headspace](#), [Family Planning NSW](#) and [moneysmart](#).

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

Legislative and Policy Framework for Leaving Care Planning

Leaving care planning is guided by the following legislation, policy, and guidelines. It is important you familiarise yourself with the following legislation and documents to inform your work:

- [Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act](#). See Section 165.
- [Care Leavers' Charter of Rights](#)
- [Guidelines for the provision of assistance after leaving out-of-home care](#)

- [Permanency Case Management Policy and Aboriginal Case Management Policy](#)
- [The NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care \(Standard 12\)](#)
- [Transitioning from out-of-home care to Independence: A Nationally Consistent Approach to Planning \(Australian Government\)](#).
- [Leaving and after care resources](#)

For more information, see: [Legislative and Policy Framework Leaving Care and After Care](#).