

Foundations of Leaving Care

In NSW, all young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) legally exit the care system at 18 years old. This means that payments to foster carers, kinship carers and guardians will end, and court orders regarding parental responsibility no longer apply. The term ‘leaving care’ refers to this legal change.

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 a really 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 leaving care are more likely to experience poorer outcomes without 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

What is Leaving Care?

Leaving care is when a young person turns 18 and is no longer legally in the care of the Minister. Remember young people may stay living with their carer or they might move out. Regardless of whether they plan to move out or not, all young people need quality leaving care planning.

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 document used to detail the goals, tasks, and actions to achieve the above is called the leaving care plan. Your PSP Service Provider may have a template that you can use when creating leaving care plans. The ‘final’ plan is settled as they approach 18.

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 child 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.

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 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
- or starting casual work such as babysitting or dog walking.

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 and supports. The [Independent Living Skills checklist](#) can help identify gaps in a young person’s knowledge and skills to be strengthened.

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 the young person’s strengths, hopes, and dreams 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 care plan and focuses on a young person's needs while in care and the supports they will need after they have left care.

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
- accommodation.

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

Care Leaver

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.

Remember warm referrals to tailored supports and programs and collaboration with other organisations can help strengthen the quality of leaving care supports post 18.

See: [Leaving Care Plans, Roles and Responsibilities in Leaving Care and After Care](#), and [Establishing Networks](#) for more information on how to specifically develop a plan, what needs to happen when and who is responsible for what.

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 out-of-home care (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 be referred to an 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 careleaversline@facs.nsw.gov.au for help. Let them know about this line!

See: [Foundations of After Care](#).

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

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.

You may feel frustrated by a young person's behaviour. 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 to let them know that they have a plan, to explain it to them, and to give them a copy.

For more information see: [Casework Skills for Trauma Informed Care](#), and [Talking to Young People about Leaving Care](#).

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

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.

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.

Payments and Entitlements for Young People Leaving Care

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

These include:

- Aftercare 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.
- One off contingency payment to help with things like securing accommodation, education and training, legal advice, finding employment, accessing health services, and for counselling and other support.
- Support to learn to drive and set up a house.
- Transition to Independent Living Allowance - a 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.

Education and training help:

- Teenage Education Payment is made to carers for young people aged between 16 and 17 years of age. Payments of up to \$6,000 per year (paid in \$1,500 quarterly instalments) are paid to help foster and kinship carers to keep young people in their care at school or in training.
- Post Care Education Financial Support Many young people in care turn 18 while completing Year 12 and would find it hard to study if they had to look for somewhere to live at the same time. PCEFS aims to avoid this by paying an allowance to carers to continue to provide a home and support for young people aged 18 to 24 while they complete their Higher School Certificate (HSC).
- DCJ Scholarships and Equity Access Scholarships
- Smart and Skilled free or low-cost training

As well as universal and tailored financial help:

- Youth Allowance
- National Disability Insurance Services
- Housing Pathways and youth housing pathways
- Rent Choice Youth

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

Premier's Youth Initiative

The Premier's Youth Initiative (PYI) 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 years and 9 months to 17 years and 6 months and aims to build capacity and resilience. It is currently only available to young people DCJ identify as being suitable for the program.

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. See [preparing young people to receive a large sum of money](#) for suggestions and advice.

For more information see factsheet: [Victims of Crime](#).

Resources To Share With Young People And Carers

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

- DCJ web page [Planning for your future and support after care](#) which is full of information and resources for young people leaving care

- DCJ web page [By You](#) has messages written for young people in care by others who are or were in care
- [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 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 \(Australian Government\).](#)

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