

# Understanding Leaving Care

## Introduction

Caseworkers play a positive role in helping young people prepare for the transition to adulthood through quality planning and support.

Young people need to feel heard and understood. They can also benefit from guidance and support that is hopeful and realistic.

Young people leaving care are more likely to experience poorer outcomes without early planning and tailored supports that speak to their strengths, skills and capacity.

Early planning should commence at aged 15 and look at the young person's needs across:

- health and wellbeing
- education and training
- building personal support networks
- disability (if appropriate)
- culture and connection

Planning should also focus on strengthening living skills and independence in areas such as learning to drive, using public transport and financial literacy.

## What is leaving care?

Leaving care is when a young person turns 18 and is no longer legally in the care of the Minister. While young people leave care at 18, they might stay living with their carer or they might move out. Regardless of whether the young person plans to move out they need quality leaving care planning.

## Key messages

- Planning should begin early with the young person, their carer and other significant people in their lives.
- Good leaving care planning is hopeful and realistic.
- Leaving care planning helps a young person build a successful future.

- Build rapport with the young person and find out their hopes, goals and worries. Their thoughts and feelings are vital.
- Establishing and building support networks and family connections will help the young person to have support beyond their time care and beyond paid professionals.
- A sense of safety, stability, support and permanent connections contribute to positive outcomes.
- Planning should consider key domains like health and wellbeing, education and employment, accommodation, culture and connection and living skills.
- Where the young person has a disability, an application for NDIS supports should be made early to help them build skills and have adequate supports for their transition into adulthood.

## Leaving Care Plans

The leaving care plan identifies the supports the young person needs as they transition to adulthood. The ‘final’ plan is settled as they approach 18 and includes financial supports and entitlements.

A good leaving care plan does not leave all the ‘doing’ to the young person alone and makes it clear how the young person can access further help, support and advice ‘**after care**’ (aged 18-25), including when things change.

This should include support from the agency that case managed the young person, as well as access to the Care Leavers Line (1800 994 686 or [CareleaversLine@fac.s.nsw.gov.au](mailto:CareleaversLine@fac.s.nsw.gov.au)).

## When does leaving care planning start?

Leaving care planning starts at 15. However, building skills for life should happen much earlier than this, as part of case planning and day to day care. Life skills should be built upon throughout adolescence.

Consider ways to engage the carer and young person. Talk about reaching age appropriate milestones such as

- walking home from school
- catching transport independently
- preparing a simple meal.

## A voice in leaving care

Leaving care can be a worrying and stressful time for young people. It's their life, so their views are critical. Be consistent and build rapport. This will help you to develop a relationship where young people feel okay to share their feelings, concerns, hopes and wishes for their future.

It's important to build support networks and a sense of community that will last beyond their time in care, so that primary supports are not just paid professionals. A young person's network may include; family, carers, friends, mentors, community such as sporting teams, youth clubs and other education or health professionals. When young people have a strong and familiar network, it is easier for them to seek help, support and voice their needs as they approach adulthood.

## Life skills in leaving care

For all people, life skills are essential. As part of leaving care work you need to support young people to develop the life skills they will need to work through the challenges of adulthood. Life skills are taught over time and should begin from the time a young person enters care (and before). Young people in care may require extra and ongoing support to develop their life skills.

Consider where there are gaps as well as strengths you can build on. Work with carers, family and other people in the young person's life to address the gaps.

Work on what will help them feel safe and secure. Be patient and consistent and think about how you or other people can role model life skills.

Life skill include:

- Daily living – a daily routine, safety, cooking, personal hygiene, budgeting and managing a home (laundry, cleaning, food hygiene)
- Getting around - using public transport, support to obtain a driver's licence, doing the Safer Driver's course, working towards a first car
- Health and medical - maintaining health and medical appointments, obtaining a Medicare card, understanding public and private medical services, sexual health and safety, and transition to adult health services
- Social - safe friends and peers, community, hobby or sports groups, respectful relationships and consent.
- Disability – will the young person transition into supported living, do they have an NDIS plan for adulthood.

- Education and vocational options – tertiary education, vocational colleges, apprenticeships.
- Other life skills – financial education, applying for a tax file number, knowing how to do your tax, making appointments, using a mobile, understanding phone/internet plans and online safety

A great resource for young people is <https://you.childstory.nsw.gov.au/>

## Personal support networks and family and community connections

Building a strong personal support network reduces the risk of the young person exiting care into isolation and without the skills they need to keep safe.

The relationships young people have with you and their carers' can help to reduce their stress and anxiety. For many young people in care, staff in their agency are their most important relationship. It is your job to help them find and build safe and positive relationships with others. This includes:

- birth family
- caring family
- significant people such as former carers, sports coaches, music teachers
- friends
- elders and other community members
- other professionals in their life

Building and nurturing ongoing positive and safe family relationships improves the outcomes of young people leaving care.

Family should be involved in leaving care planning. Many young people return to their family once they leave care. It is fundamental that this connection is established in a safe and nurturing way before the young person leaves care.

## Disability and leaving care

Where the young person has a disability covered by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) the caseworker needs to apply to the NDIS.

Where an application is approved and finds a functional need due to disability, an NDIS plan is created. The NDIS plan includes disability specific supports that be can used to assist with capacity building for the young person. Skill building can be developed during the leaving care period, which they will need for later adult life.

This is particularly critical as the young person prepares to leave care as they need an NDIS plan that provides adequate disability support for the young person in adulthood.

If you expect that the NDIS will be the major support, looking at accommodation options early is an essential.

Consider who will be making decisions for them after they turn 18 and whether they will need a Public Guardian and/or Financial Manager.

See the DCJ Leaving Care resource for further information:

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/providers/children-families/leaving-care-planning/resources-for-caseworkers>

## Holistic planning and care

You are responsible for developing, implementing and reviewing a young person's leaving care plan. The leaving care plan is a living document and must be guided by the young person's wishes.

The areas a leaving care plan must include are:

- Housing/accommodation - consider if the young person can remain, or expects to remain, living with their carer. In some cases, this happens naturally and in other cases you might need to help them to speak with their carer about this. Where this is not possible, scope other options such as supported accommodation, share houses, university housing, social housing or independent living.
- Culture and connection – what are the young person's networks to provide ongoing support and strengthen their identity?
- Health and wellbeing
- Life skills
- Education - how does the young person need to be supported to complete school or continue their education through TAFE or university?
- Employment and training - what are the actions needed to support the young person's work or training aspirations?

- Financial support and entitlements - what financial support is available to the young person? Have you discussed the Transition to Independent Living Allowance with the young person?

Legal matters - are there any legal matters that need to be considered and planned for? Does the young person have any fines/penalties, and could they complete the work and development order program?

Think about you own feelings when you moved out of home. Was it a scary time? Who was there to support you? Did you have anyone who you could call upon when you needed help? Who helped you with furniture and other household items?