



INDEPENDENCE

REPORT CARD
TRANSITIONING
FROM CARE

March 2008

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for CREATE Foundation Limited

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We wish to acknowledge the involvement of the young people who entrusted us with their valuable insights into their personal transitioning-from-care experiences. Special thanks also go to the carers and Departmental workers who facilitated access to the young people.

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Following John's departure from the organization, Dr Joseph McDowall (Griffith University and Chair of The Care Connection) undertook the task of analysing collected data and writing the final Report. He has produced a comprehensive document that should provide a platform for systemic change. Joseph has liaised with staff across the organization to ensure that the Report accurately reflects the voices of young people. His contribution is highly valued by the entire organization.

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Foreword

CREATE Foundation, now in its 15 year, was formed to provide children and young people with a vehicle for speaking to the authorities making decisions about their lives. We aim to forge connections within the cohort of young people themselves, and between them and their support networks including carers, caseworkers, and relevant others, e.g., indigenous agencies. Through strategies of empowerment, we support their voice in their efforts to change the system for the better. Our goal is to ensure that children and young people in state care are afforded the same life opportunities as all young Australians.



This Report Card, Transitioning from Care, provides heartening evidence that governments have accepted their responsibility to formulate strong legislation and policies to regulate practice in this area. It also is clear that, despite strong policy development, in many cases young people are not receiving the essential supports and services stipulated by these regulations. The challenge for us now is to find mechanisms for ensuring that relevant policies are implemented, and their effectiveness monitored.

It also is highlighted that the process of transitioning would be even less successful for many young people without the extensive support provided by foster carers. This group at present forms one of the limited range of continuing points of contact for young people striving for independence, even though their official period of responsibility has ended. Their contribution should not be underestimated.

Due to the disparity between the espoused requirements of policies and the comments from young people indicating significant lack of support, CREATE Foundation is committed to promulgating the Report's recommendations and conducting future surveys to monitor improvements within the sector to keep this issue placed firmly on the agenda at both state and federal level. In the meantime, we will continue to offer specialist programs reflecting best practice, such as Create Your Future (empowerment program and web site) and Mission:Be (see Appendices A to D), to enhance the opportunities available to young care leavers.

It gives me great pleasure to commend this Report to the sector, and to anticipate the positive developments that will follow its implementation.

Jacqui Reed
Chief Executive Officer
CREATE Foundation



“Formal partnerships would reduce the uncertainty surrounding responsibility for provision of support, [and] help clarify the type and extent of assistance available...”

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Overall, this Report Card highlights the gap that exists between the development of policies and their implementation. Most jurisdictions have given considerable attention over recent years to the formulation of legislation and policies to address the needs of children in care and care leavers. Unfortunately, it appears that, although the regulations in most cases are explicit, their requirements are not being translated into actions that will assist the relevant young people. This research indicates some of the areas where the expected support is not being provided, suggests possible reasons for these breakdowns occurring, and advocates changes that may improve the provision of necessary support. More research needs to be directed to confirm the observations presented here and to explore further solutions.

From the data collected in this study, the following recommendations are drawn. They derive from the information provided by Governments as well as the responses collected from the young participants.

1. It would seem desirable to establish in Australia minimum national standards to achieve parity across jurisdictions concerning the treatment of care leavers by reducing the variability encountered in key areas of legislation and policy. Consistency should be introduced to ensure:
 - a. early commencement of transition planning (planning to begin at 15 years);
 - b. continuity of support (support should be maintained until the young person reaches 25 years, and then be extended at Ministerial discretion); and
 - c. comparability in the content of the plans produced (plans should include an assessment of a young person's needs with reference to the seven *Looking After Children* domains: Health, Education, Identity, Family and Social Relationships, Social Presentations, Emotional and Behavioral Development and Self-Care Skills. It is important that specific reference be made, where appropriate, to accommodation, employment, and financial considerations.
2. A greater number of formal associations and partnerships need to be instigated between relevant government Departments, and between Departments and agencies to provide specific support for those transitioning from care. Although portfolios differ in focus and extent across jurisdictions, connections would seem logical between Child Protection and areas such as Disability Services, Health, Housing, Education, Employment, Communities, and Transport. Formal partnerships would reduce the uncertainty surrounding responsibility for provision of support, help clarify the type and extent of assistance available; make expectations of care leavers clearer and more realistic; and spread the cost of support across areas.
3. Since planning for leaving care must begin while young people are still in a placement, the carers concerned should be informed fully of milestones to be reached during transitioning and actively involved and supported by Departments to help make the process as positive as possible, especially for the young people. Emphasizing the collaboration between young people, carers, and the Department to ensure a smooth, gradual transition (rather than an abrupt termination) is likely to result in more positive perceptions of the system by young people and a greater willingness on their part to engage with support mechanisms in the future.
4. Given the high incidence of Indigenous young people in care (relative to their proportion of the population) and the consequent number becoming care leavers, more attention needs to be directed to forming associations between Departments and agencies that may benefit this group. Consultations should involve Indigenous stakeholders (such as the Recognised Entities in Queensland) to determine appropriate connections and priorities.
5. Governments must ensure that the plans developed for and with care leavers must address the life issues they are likely to confront. It is essential that the individual needs of young care leavers within the *Looking After Children* framework must be assessed professionally to inform any plan to be prepared. Actions recommended and processes established must relate to areas of greatest individual need. Planning must be proactive in

predicting needs that may arise (given the individual's experiences in care) rather than just addressing immediate concerns.

6. Since at present there is a lack of clarity regarding who should control the development and implementation of Leaving Care Plans, it is suggested that specific positions for individuals or groups (Transitioning From Care Officers or Sections) be established within Departments to assume responsibility for overseeing these processes. Departments must institute rigorous monitoring procedures to evaluate both the implementation of their leaving-care policies and the success of their outcomes for the young people. Departments need to set criteria for Key Performance Indicators (including long-term measures) and determine the effectiveness of policies and programs using these tools. If NGOs are involved in providing services, Departments must be responsible for accrediting agencies and training their staff in data collection and reporting to ensure consistency and accuracy of the evaluations.
7. It is clear that transitioning is a long-term process (from 18 until the young person reaches at least 25 years); therefore, there is a strong need for continuity of support, not only through specific services, but also with social networks. While family may fill this role in some situations, young people without such connections need someone (as well as carers and Departmental workers) to turn to for ongoing guidance and reassurance in their move toward independence. One way of providing this ongoing support is through mentoring programs, such as those operating in WA and VIC. To provide valued longitudinal support for care leavers and reduce the pressures on overworked Departmental officers, all jurisdictions should investigate the introduction of similar programs.
8. While it would seem advantageous to have a range of services available (specialist and non-specialist) to support care leavers, it is imperative also to ensure that young people know about the services and have the means to access them. To increase engagement of care leavers with support programs, clear and accurate information must be provided in a variety of forms to maximize the likelihood of young people realizing what their entitlements are and what assistance is available. This will require a variety of approaches being adopted, using hard copy, Web sites, Help lines, and Transitioning From Care personnel. Mechanisms must be established to enable integration of information and coordination of services. For example, Departments could provide information to CREATE for inclusion in the Club CREATE newsletters to guide young people in ways of accessing relevant services and programs. Transitioning From Care officers would take responsibility for this.
9. Another area in which Transitioning From Care officers could play a pivotal role is in monitoring the provision and integration of services to ensure there are no "cracks" for young people to fall through. When formal arrangements exist between Departments/agencies, the specific areas are held accountable for their actions and the outcomes achieved. However, when several independent programs may be employed, success of service provision must be assessed through the eyes of the young people. The Transitioning From Care officers need to develop non-threatening procedures for establishing regular contact with care leavers to obtain feedback on their transitioning to independence.
10. Acquisition of life skills seemed to be an area that some young people found difficult, perhaps through lack of opportunity, before leaving care, and didn't access post care. When designing programs involving skills training for young people, particularly those including life skills, it would be useful to consider holistic approaches that integrate a variety of abilities to ensure that the young persons' basic needs of caring for themselves (e.g., hygiene, nutrition) will be met. Examples of such programs from CREATE are documented in Appendices A through D.
11. In spite of various programs and schemes focusing on the issue of housing and accommodation, finding an appropriate place to live still appears to be area of major concern for young people leaving care. Leaving Care Plans must give this subject top priority. Special attention should be given to young people who have experienced several disrupted placements while in care to minimize instability post care. Continued monitoring of the young person's situation (e.g., by Transitioning From Care personnel) is required to eliminate homelessness in this readily identifiable group.
12. Mechanisms must be put in place to encourage greater participation in continuing education. More jurisdictions should investigate the feasibility of introducing schemes such as those developed in SA with removal or reduction in fees and quarantined places provided for care leavers entering TAFE/University. (It may be useful to explore "preventative measures" that may result in improvement in completion rates for Year 12 studies by keeping a close watch on levels of expulsions and suspensions within the care population with a view to minimizing these

occurrences).

13. Care leavers should be encouraged to become self-sustaining to reduce the dependence on social assistance from Governments and to enhance their self-esteem. This is an area where format partnerships between Departments could work well. For example, links with TAFE to provide more traineeships and apprenticeships would extend the skill base of young people; connections with Transport Departments to assist in the acquisition of a driving license could increase their employability.
14. Finally, child protection Departments must acquire an accurate picture of actual costs to government of the transition from care process. It is essential to know "who" is using "which" services. When the costs of providing services are understood, it will be possible to ensure equitable funding across jurisdictions (at least referenced against a local cost of living index if necessary). All governments should make explicit the specific budget allocation available for Departments and regions, and provide official guidelines so that decision makers understand the levels of support that can be provided. Also, it would seem advantageous to make a specific financial allocation available for each care leaver to reduce their uncertainty about entitlements, reduce reliance on the discretionary powers of decision makers, and reduce the feeling by young people of having to "beg" for basic assistance. A relatively small investment now will save a huge social and economic cost in the future.

"A relatively small investment now will save a huge social and economic cost in the future."

“In 2000, CREATE began a process of surveying children and young people in care across Australia on issues and themes relating to their care and protection.”

PART A: CONTEXT

1.0 The Concept of the Report Card

CREATE's mission includes listening to the voices of children and young people in care to help enhance their life opportunities by informing the community and governments about how well this group is being protected and supported across Australia. This involves identifying key issues impacting on the children and young people in care, collecting information about their progress and their needs, then making this information available to others.

In 2000, CREATE began a process of surveying children and young people in care across Australia on issues and themes relating to their care and protection. The data collected, combined with reviews of relevant literature, forms the basis of a document that includes evaluations of performance by responsible government departments and agencies combined with consequent recommendations likely to achieve positive future outcomes for the children and young people. This document is known as the Report Card. It has become one of the key interfaces between CREATE, state and territory governments and the broader community sector and informs members of the CREATE Foundation when pro actively advocating on behalf of children and young people in care.

Because of CREATE's primary concern with facilitating the participation of children and young people in the consultative process, one of its first endeavors involved conducting focus groups regionally across Victoria for the Leaving Care project (CREATE Foundation, 2000). The current Report Card is concerned with the same topic: Leaving or Transitioning Out of Care. Children and young people can leave the system in a number of ways, often depending on why and how they have been placed in care initially (Mann-Feder, 2007). This Report Card will focus on those young people who "age out" of care (when they reach 18 years), or those who, before reaching that milestone, are able to transition to independent living arrangements.

This Report Card provides an opportunity to review progress over the last seven years by governments and agencies in supporting the potentially vulnerable young people who have been in care through what for all teenagers is the major life transition of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2004). The document is organized in three sections:

Part A provides a review of recent literature that locates the Australian experience in an international context. Issues of concern for care leavers are identified and available best practice solutions to problems are discussed. Attention is focused on suggestions for improvements to the system that have emerged from Australian research.

Part B presents a snapshot of the current position of state and territory governments in relation to the support they provide, directly or indirectly, for care leavers. Performance of authorities will be compared against global standards in addressing six key areas: Legislation and Policy; Formalised Partnerships; Transition from Care Plan; Support / Resources Provided; Funding; and Monitoring Outcomes.

Part C documents the results of CREATE's national survey of young people who recently have left care and those preparing to do so, conducted in 2007. These data represent a consumer evaluation of the range of policies that have been drafted by the various governments and the effectiveness with which they have been implemented and the appropriateness of the outcomes for care leavers.

2.0 Children and Young People Transitioning from Care

2.1 Transition to adulthood

Anyone who has, or is experiencing the developmental shift from adolescence to adulthood will acknowledge that, even under ideal circumstances, it can be a challenging period in one's life marked by major transitions in various areas including: finishing school, leaving home, commencing employment, getting married, and having children (not necessarily in that specified order). Most observers recognise that, in the present global social and economic climate, the period of transition is greater now and the pathways more complex than in the past (Furstenberg, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2005). Parents need to realize that their children may be dependent on their emotional and financial support for many years, and that full independence may not be the expectation it was previously, with some form of interdependence preferred (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006). As Gitelson and McDermott (2006) emphasise, adulthood no longer starts when adolescence ends, and parenting does not end with adolescence.

While this period may pose problems for young people in the general community, it can be "a minefield for vulnerable populations" (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005, p. 3). The plethora of recent research in this field provides clear evidence that young people transitioning from care can be included in this category. Coupled with the negative experiences that resulted in their being placed in care initially, "care leavers are expected to undertake their journey to adulthood, from restricted to full citizenship, far younger and in far less time than their peers...their journey to adulthood is both accelerated and compressed" (Stein, 2006, p. 274). Such pressures would be expected to lead to transitioning difficulties (e.g., Freundlich & Avery, 2006; Reilly, 2003).

2.2 Transitioning from care

The problems encountered by young people leaving care, and the authorities responsible for providing state care, and hence overseeing transitions from care, are so ubiquitous that Pinkerton (2006, p. 191) among others has advocated for a global approach to "identifying how the needs of care leavers are assessed and met in different national contexts." Several authors recently have published studies reporting extensive analyses, both "snapshot" and longitudinal, of the leaving-care systems in a variety of countries including the US, Canada, Israel, UK, and Australia (e.g., Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2004; Maunders, Liddell, Liddell, & Green, 1999; Munro, Stein, & Ward, 2005; Cashmore & Paxman, 1996, 2006a; Stein & Munro, 2008). More similarities than differences emerge.

Tweddle (2007) in her extensive review of the international literature, summarises the common characteristics of youth who have left care. They are more likely to:

- be undereducated (not have completed high school);
- be unemployed or underemployed;
- be earning lower wages (if employed);
- become a parent at a younger age;
- be incarcerated or involved in the criminal justice system;
- experience homelessness;
- live in unstable housing arrangements;
- be dependent on social assistance;
- have mental health issues;
- not have medical insurance (in the US)
- be at a higher risk of substance abuse.

It must be stressed that this litany of negative outcomes does not necessarily apply to all care leavers. Stein (2005, 2006), working within a resilience and social exclusion framework, suggested that youth are likely to fall into one of three categories on leaving care: (a) the young people able to "move on" successfully (those who had more stability and continuity in their lives, had benefited from the assistance they had been offered, and often maintained contact with former carers); (b) the "survivors" (those who had more disruptions while in care and believed that the problems they faced made them more self-reliant even though evidence of extensive agency dependency contradicted this; however, these young people responded well to the personal and professional support they received after transitioning); and (c) the "victims" (those who were the most

“it still is ‘very important to these young people that somebody [is] there for them, that they [are] not abandoned’ (Stein, 2005)”

disadvantaged, with most damaging pre-care experiences, many placement moves, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and problems at school; after care, many of the negative experiences listed above apply particularly to unemployment, homelessness, and mental health issues). Each group needs support, but of differing kinds and degrees. While the “victims” may pose the greatest challenge because of their poor starting points and their tendency to alienate personal support, it still is “very important to these young people that somebody [is] there for them, that they [are] not abandoned” (Stein, 2005, p. 22).

Clearly, in an attempt to discharge their responsibilities and address these pressing issues, governments around the world exercise varying political control over care leavers within their child protection systems. For example, in the UK, the national government takes major responsibility for passing the laws to govern child protection, and even has enacted specific legislation to articulate the rights of care leavers, e.g., *Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000* which replaced Section 24 of the *Children Act 1989*. Local authorities provide required service delivery. In other countries with federal systems (e.g., Australia), individual states develop their own legislation, policies, and procedures and implement available support. Mendes and Moslehuddin argue that, because outcomes for care leavers appear similarly poor whether or not support is provided in a national or decentralised system, the legislative framework is not a major consideration. The problems generally relate to the extent of variability across jurisdictions in the provision of services.

2.3 The “Seven Pillars” of Successful Transition

The needs of young people transitioning from care consistently identified by researchers have been summarised elegantly by Reid (2007) in her reference to the seven pillars and the foundation for success of youth aging out of care. These include: Relationships, Education, Housing, Life Skills, Identity, Youth Engagement, and Emotional Healing, based on essential Financial Support as the foundation. To these could be added Employment as another discrete but inter-related factor effecting a positive transition. The following discussion reviews key aspects of each of these areas as they affect care leavers, policy makers, and service deliverers. These categories provide the measures against which performance of responsible authorities can be evaluated.

2.3.1 Relationships

Reid (2007) draws attention to the obvious importance of relationships in human development, especially with young people for whom meaningful connections with trusted adults have been difficult to achieve. As evidence supporting this observation, Cashmore and Paxman (2006b), when exploring predictors of successful after-care outcomes, found that stability in care (75% of their time with one carer) and the young person’s perceived emotional security (i.e., relationship factors) correlated significantly with the strength of social support after care and underpinned a positive transition. Networking and social support systems need to be established and maintained for care leavers to maximise their likelihood of success in all areas of their lives. This can be achieved through the formal relationships with carers and case workers, but could be enhanced through the introduction of specialist schemes such as the “Advocates to Successful Transition to Independence” program that employs trained mentors to work with older adolescent foster youth to facilitate their transition to independent adulthood. Osterling and Hines (2006) in their evaluation of this program found that it was particularly valuable in helping prevent negative post-care outcomes. The need for the establishment of relationship networks underpins the conceptual shift advocated by Propp, Ortega, and NewHeart (2003) in stressing “interdependence” rather than independence as the desired outcome for care leavers.

2.3.2 Education

“Among the risk factors facing youth in foster care, low educational achievement may have the most adverse effect on long-term adjustment... Educational achievement is a powerful determinant of future life success for all youth.” This claim, made by Pecora et al. (2003) when evaluating the effects of the foster care experience seen through the eyes of the Casey Family Programs alumni, highlights the importance of educational attainment. These workers point to national surveys in the US that reveal care leavers as generally having lower high school completion rates or scoring lower on educational attainment tests than their counterparts in the general population. While implementation of the special programs available through the Casey Family Services resulted in rates of high school completions for young people in care becoming comparable with those of the general population, Pecora et al. (2006) revealed that the performance of care leavers at college tends to be poorer; this is an area that needs particular attention. Individuals who experience a stable school attendance, a challenging high school curriculum, extensive social support, involvement in prosocial group activities, and have the necessary financial assistance are likely to be the most successful in the educational context (Manser, 2007; Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005).

2.3.3 Housing and Employment

Having a place to call home and finding a job are stabilising influences in a person’s life, particularly if the past has involved living in various locations corresponding to numerous placements. Wade and Dixon (2006) noted in their UK study that, although care leavers accessed a variety of housing options (including living with family, foster carers, friends, but mostly in private tenancy or supported accommodation), when a sample was interviewed 12-15 months after transition, housing emerged as a critical element where post-care interventions were effective and was the life area most closely associated with mental well-being. From the point of view of young people, establishing a successful home life is top priority when moving from care to independence. Through the introduction of innovative housing programs, authorities can impact positively on care leaver transitions (Choca, Minoff, Angene, Byrnes, Kenneally, Norris, et al., 2004). However, as in other areas, having family and friends to turn to and leaving-care teams to assist in accessing housing services greatly benefited care leavers (Simon, 2008).

When discussing employment and career paths followed by transitioning young people, Wade and Dixon (2006) emphasised that achievements here can relate to successful access to housing and the development of life skills. They acknowledge the generally poor employment outcomes of care leavers but stress that, while experience of a relatively stable care environment was important, events that happened post-care were vital to success here, including obtaining assistance with sound career planning. However, they found the overriding factor attributing to employment success was the delaying of a young persons transition from care; those who exited under 18 fared worse than those who were 18 or older on transition.

2.3.4 Life Skills

As Reid (2007, p. 38) indicates, when young people have stable home and educational experiences, “the life skills that are generally learned through observation and practice are just as innate to youth aging out of the foster care system as they are to almost everyone else.” Because such stability is not common in the care system, service providers need to ensure that skill development is not assumed and act to build on existing ability with specially designed training programs. However, they must be mindful of the findings of Courtney et al. (2001) who showed that although an average of 76% of their young respondents reported receiving training in a range of independent living skills from a variety of sources before leaving care, fewer than one-fifth claimed to have received concrete assistance, and only between one-quarter and one-third, after experiencing the “real world”, felt they had been well prepared for their transition.

2.3.5 Identity, Youth Engagement, Emotional Healing

If Relationship issues emphasise inter-individual factors, these areas could be considered intra-individual. They constitute critical elements in Arnett’s (2007) five ages of emerging adulthood and can profoundly influence a young person’s future. Recent reference texts that are likely to influence service providers address the importance of attention to these topics (Broad, 2005; Chase, Simon, & Jackson, 2006). Indeed, organizations such as the National Youth in Care Network (2005) provide direct instruction to their workers to increase their awareness of

these issues. Reid (2007, p. 39) summarises the underlying principles when she insists that every child should be “given an opportunity to learn and appreciate his or her history and culture” and leave care “feeling as though he or she belongs and has a strong sense of self.” Adolescents need to be in control of their own lives but to receive support rather than punishment when things don’t work out; youth learn from failure as well as success. “Sometimes parents, *even when the state acts as parents* [italics added], have to let go and allow their child to do what he or she is going to do.” It is vital that adequate time and resources such as counselling be provided to ensure that past experiences do not limit young peoples’ future development and success.

2.3.6 *Financial Support: The Foundation*

In spite of the obvious necessity for young people to have adequate financial support to achieve successful outcomes post-care, the literature is equivocal on what actual expenditure is appropriate to cover the needs of transitioning youth (Reid, 2007). Generally, poor records are kept that makes monitoring of costs of transitioning difficult, possibly because support often is discretionary and administered on a case-by-case basis and needs are highly variable. One study that did shed some light on possible per capita costs and areas of expenditure was that conducted by Kerman, Barth, and Wildfire (2004) based on data from Casey Family Services (CFS). They estimate that independent living programs in the US at the time were allocating a notional \$2000 per youth per year to the 55% of those eligible who applied for transitional support (which was not seen to be sufficient to meet the various needs of the young people). By comparison, CFS provided \$6000 in per capita costs for extended services to the 41% of its alumni surveyed who accessed them, mainly for housing, education, and independent living expenditures. Kerman et al. argue optimistically (p. 259) that “these costs are not necessarily beyond what is possible for other agencies” given the benefits that flow from facilitating successful transitions.

2.4 **The Australian Context**

2.4.1 *Background*

The previous discussion of themes underlying the process of young people transitioning from care applies equally in Australia as elsewhere. These are the issues that governments and responsible authorities here also must address. Part A of this Report will conclude with a brief overview of how state and federal agencies in Australia have handled the problems faced by care leavers.

The most recent available data reported through the Australian government (SCRGSP, 2007), show that (nationally) 6520 Indigenous and 20, 668 non-Indigenous children were on care and protection orders for the 12 months ending 30 June 2006. For the same period, a total of 2801 children and young people left care after being in the system for at least 12 months (see SCRGSP, Table 15A.15), and of these an average of 48% had experienced three or more placements (see SCRGSP, Figure 15.6). Unfortunately, ages were not available in these data. AIHW (2007, p. 50; see Table 1) does report the numbers in various age groups being discharged from out-of-home care 2005-06. While some of the totals are inconsistent with their corresponding measures in the SCRGSP data (e.g., total discharges tabled by SCRGSP / AIHW: NSW – 1628 / 2442; VIC – 2031 / 3076; WA – 351 / 558; TAS – 198 / 308), it is claimed that a total of 1817 15-17 year olds left care in the specified period.

2.4.2 *Research*

A seminal project was undertaken by Cashmore and Paxman (1996) in which they began a longitudinal study of young people leaving care in New South Wales. While they noted many differences in the circumstances of the former “wards” they interviewed, they also identified common needs for adequate preparation and ongoing support (including financial) beyond discharge. Cashmore and Paxman advocated flexibility in the age at which young people were expected to leave care and increased assistance for developing skills to facilitate independent living and gaining employment, as well as the social and emotional skills required for successful interpersonal relationships. This was in response to their finding the classic negative outcomes within the first 12 months of young people leaving care: care leavers had moved an average of three times, almost half were unemployed, nearly one-third of young women became pregnant or had a child soon after transition, just over half had completed only year 10 or less schooling, and over half had thought about or attempted suicide (findings remarkably similar to those documented by Leathers and Testa from a caseworker survey in Illinois ten years later). These workers stressed that legislation needs to be more specific about entitlements for young people leaving care.

Table 1

Number of Children Discharged from Out-Of-Home Care, by Age Group, States and Territories, 2005–06

| Age(Years) | NSW | VIC | QLD | WA | SA | TAS | ACT | NT |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| | Number | | | | | | | |
| <1 | 181 | 154 | 77 | 38 | 12 | 30 | 3 | 8 |
| 1-4 | 473 | 733 | 325 | 124 | 45 | 66 | 29 | 16 |
| 5-9 | 529 | 780 | 344 | 126 | 43 | 68 | 34 | 11 |
| 10-14 | 712 | 752 | 407 | 143 | 65 | 89 | 35 | 17 |
| 15-17 | 539 | 657 | 293 | 127 | 106 | 55 | 32 | 8 |
| Unknown | 8 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 2,442 | 3,076 | 1,446 | 558 | 271 | 308 | 133 | 60 |

Maunder, Liddell, Liddell, and Green (1999) conducted a major overview of the relevant policies and procedures of governments in Australia with a view to identifying the needs of care leavers and factors that assisted or impeded their transition to independent living. They collected responses from governments, ran focus groups, interviewed both service providers and a group of 43 young people who had left care. Similar findings were documented to what Cashmore and Paxman (1996) had found regarding unemployment, education, and pregnancy. In addition, they noted that 42% of their sample had been discharged from care before the age of 18 years and fewer than 10% were living in a family setting. Half the group had experienced a period of homelessness and almost half had committed criminal offences since leaving care. Maunder et al. (p. vii) make the strong point that “unlike their peers ‘leaving home’, young people ‘leaving care’ are deprived of the opportunity to return to their former accommodation if and when they need to.”

In their review of state and territory child protection legislation, Maunder et al. (1999) were critical that there was a lack of legal obligation to prepare young people for, and support them during life after care. Even though National Baseline Standards for Out of Home Care had been agreed to by all governments (SCCSISA, 1996), standards requiring that “each child/young person leaves the out-of-home care service in a planned and supported manner to enable a successful and sustainable transition” (Standard 3: Exit Procedures), the researchers found little evidence (apart from some initiatives by NSW) that the rhetoric was being operationalized into effective service provision. There seemed to be a lack of clarity about the role and responsibilities of governments, an increasing complexity of legislation and practice, little attention to gender and cultural issues, more focus on entry into care but little on exit, and generally poor coordination of services. Case planning, when it occurred, was often inadequate and funds available for extended support were inconsistently applied.

Factors identified as likely to inhibit a young person’s transition included multiple changes of carers and workers, unstable accommodation at discharge, inadequate income, lack of preparation for leaving and goal setting, and unresolved anger towards family, workers, or the “system”. Maunder et al. (1999) suggested a three-component model of support designed to minimize these problems: (a) *Preparation*: based on a high quality, stable system of care with quality case planning and a flexible support continuum; (b) *Transition*: provision of appropriate information to young people about their past and options for the future, effective support (including financial) for developing life skills and establishing personal and social networks including the involvement of suitable mentors; *After-care*: continuing access to support and contact with care agencies (with support continuing at least until age 25). The recommendations flowing from this report appear to have had some impact on subsequent decision makers.

The impact of this report was reinforced by the findings of other major reviews conducted by Green and Jones (1999) and Owen, Lunken, Davis, Cooper, Frederico, and Keating (2000), both impressing on the Victorian government

“the common theme in all the literature:
'To be supported until I become an adult
both emotionally and physically and am
ready to live independently' ”

the need to revise its transitioning-from-care policies and practice. Green and Jones reiterated the requirement to strengthen the planning process and the provision of ongoing support, including direct financial assistance for independent living for at least six months post-placement, and clear financial entitlements for accessing accommodation, education, and training. They also suggested formulating a strategy for assisting organizations in the application and further development of the national standards that were not being implemented, with special attention being given to the training and support of workers, educators, and caregivers.

Owen et al. (2000) based their conclusions on an extensive literature review of the leaving-care field and an analysis of data from the Victorian system for the three years to June 1998. As well as confirming the largely negative outcomes for care leavers reported generally, these workers also made a series of recommendations concerning the need to (a) extend the scope of services to young people who have been in care up until the age of 25 years, (b) factor in time in case management for workers to provide services, (c) monitor and evaluate services, and (d) encourage practice enhancement and the formation of linkages with related agencies and service providers. Most importantly, they stressed the development of effective “personal development and support plans” and gave guidelines as to the form these could take and possible content. One deficit of the study was in not supporting the outcomes with the voices of actual care leavers; the authors were rather unsuccessful in persuading young people to participate in their study. Fortunately, CREATE Foundation (2000) was able to convene focus groups around Victoria involving 78 young people who were approaching discharge, or already had left care. Their perceptions grounded Owen et al.'s observations through expressions of concern at being forced into independence without adequate consultation, feeling they were not ready to cope alone, were isolated and lacked information, or that they were not receiving adequate support (to stay at school, manage their finances etc.). Their expressed vision summarizes the common theme in all the literature: “To be supported until I become an adult both emotionally and physically and am ready to live independently” (CREATE Foundation, p. 24).

More recently, Mendes and his coworkers from Monash University (Mendes, 2005; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006) assessed the progress that had been made in the light of the various inquiries held and reports produced into transitioning from care and found that much still needed to be achieved. All Australian states were encouraged to pass specific legislation to provide for the ongoing support of care leavers with clearly articulated policy statements and planning practices developed from the legislation. Adequate funding had to be provided to indicate the importance of leaving care programs through direct support. A range of services was required to cater for young people with varying degrees of vulnerability. These must include life skills training (e.g., budgeting, cooking skills, literacy and numeracy, communication skills, sex education etc.) as well as specialist schemes that would address the provision of counselling (including help renegotiating relationships with family), resources to assist with basic financial difficulties, drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, advocacy support for accessing accommodation, education and training. Such support should be provided through a designated after-care worker, not be time limited, and be enhanced through links between support agencies. Above all, young people must be involved in determining what support is needed and given appropriate information about the services available.

Such findings were reiterated in the summary concerning support for young people leaving care produced by

CAFWAA (2007). The two broad recommendations drawn from the transitioning section were consistent with the more detailed suggestions that emerged from the review of key Australian studies conducted by Osborn and Bromfield (2007). Their summary statements that articulated the essence of changes needing to be made in the national leaving care provisions included the following:

- There is a need for minimum leaving care standards;
- Legislative changes in relation to care leavers need to be evaluated in each state and territory;
- Other states and territories should follow NSW's lead and develop specific policies, and programs to provide ongoing support for care leavers;
- A range of support services is desperately needed for care leavers;
- An integrated model of leaving-care support for young people up to 25 years of age is recommended;
- A prudent economist would spend a little now to save a lot in the future. The cost of doing nothing is detrimental to young people, society, and the economy at large.

This last point has been addressed by Forbes, Inder, and Raman (2006) in undertaking the daunting task of attempting to measure the total cost of leaving care (again in Victoria). When the life outcomes of young people who had been in state care were matched with peers from the general population (on factors such as Child Protection, GST revenue loss, General Health, Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol, Police, Justice and Correctional Services, and Housing), the total cost difference (equivalent to the potential maximum cost savings to the State of Victoria for each person leaving care) was found to be \$738,741. Based on a notional 450 young people on orders leaving care *each year* in Victoria, this translates into an estimated annual cost to Government of a staggering \$332.5 million. Since 55% of these expenses were in the areas of Police and Justice, providing programs at the time of transition to minimize the need for these later interventions would result in considerable economic savings and generate better outcomes for the young people.

2.5 Conclusion

It is clear from the previous discussion that, throughout the world, leavers from state care are vulnerable young people who need the same ongoing support effective parents would give their children. For a child in the general population, leaving home is a process of transition; it takes time, with many false starts and recoveries, but with the continuing support of family and friends, a level of "independence" can be achieved. Why would we expect it to be different for those transitioning from care, young people who, almost by definition, already have experienced disadvantage?

Given the history of the leaving-care debate in Australia, this Report Card will now attempt to give an up-to-date review (as of July 2007) of the situation concerning legislation, policies, and practices within the Australian states and territories (Part B), followed by an analysis of how children in care approaching transition, and those who already have left care view the experience (Part C).

Coincidentally, while data were being collected for this study, London, Moslehuddin, Cashmore, and Mendes (2007) also were mapping the range of legislation and policies specifically addressing care leavers in Australia, and surveying service providers to help identify similarities and differences in approach possibly to highlight examples of best practice. Because of the concurrent nature of these two studies, ongoing reference will be made to the London et al. data where relevant to the present report.

“...transitioning is a long-term process ... therefore, there is a strong need for continuity of support, not only through specific services, but also with social networks.”

PART B: GOVERNMENT SURVEY

3.0 Method

To collect information on the most current position regarding the status of legislation proclaimed and planned, the CEO of CREATE wrote to the relevant Departments of the state and territory governments asking for a response to six fundamental questions concerning their control of the leaving-care transition:

- What legislative and policy provisions exist to assist children and young people leave care?
- Does your Department have formalised arrangements and partnerships with other Departments and key stakeholders for specifically supporting the needs of children and young people transitioning from care, or for care leavers once they have left care? If so, please list and describe these arrangements.
- Does every child leaving care have a Leaving Care Plan? What role do they play in the creation and implementation of the Plan?
- What specific supports and resources are available for those transitioning from care?
- Does your State or Territory have funds set aside specifically for assisting children and young people to leave care, and for supporting them after they have left care?
- Does your State, Territory, or Department monitor the outcomes for children leaving care, including how many children leave care to independent living?

Responses were received from:

Australian Capital Territory: Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

New South Wales: Department of Community Services

Northern Territory: Department of Health and Community Services

Queensland: Department of Child Safety

South Australia: Department for Families and Communities

Tasmania: Department of Health and Human Services

Victoria: Department of Human Services

Western Australia: Department for Child Protection

The varying responses will be summarised in the following six chapters using the question focus as the major theme.

4.0 Legislation and Policy

In their national survey, London et al. (2007) presented a comparison of State and Territories' legislation and policy position (by indicating presence or absence of a response). Tables 2 and 3 document a similar comparison but with more detail regarding the actual legislation and policies. "Preparation" refers to Legislation and Policies dealing with events occurring before orders have expired (usually at 18 years), while "After-care" relates to services and support provided post orders.

It can be seen from Table 2 that the states and territories fall into two categories regarding the strength of legislation for transition-from-care planning and after-care support. New South Wales, Victoria, and Western Australia, and to a lesser extent Queensland (particularly concerning after-care assistance), provide clear stipulations as to the type and level of support young people leaving care can expect to receive from the government through responsible agencies. South Australia, Tasmania, ACT, and Northern Territory provide less detailed, more general expression of the responsibilities of authorities. Both Tasmania and the Northern Territory have foreshadowed new legislation (2009-10) specifically addressing transitioning from care.

Legislative requirements generally are translated into policies that direct support practice. Therefore, it would be expected that there would be a strong link between legislation and service provision (London, 2007). NSW, Victoria, Western Australia, and Queensland do have clear policies, and South Australia (as a result of major reviews) recently has developed a suite of new transitioning-from-care and post-care policies and guidelines. Even ACT and the Northern Territory, jurisdictions that have to deal with fewer care leavers annually than the states, also have some policies regarding support for young people transitioning from care, particularly concerning planning. Tasmania has similar policies under development.

It is somewhat reassuring to see as a result of recent developments that there is more consistency than in the past concerning the fundamental issues of when transition planning should commence and for how long support should be available. However, variability still exists. On equity grounds alone, it would seem desirable for these milestones to be the same across Australia.

All areas agree that a Leaving Care Plan must be prepared for the young person, and five of the eight jurisdictions now recommend that the planning should begin when the young person turns 15 years. The three exceptions are Western Australia (final case plan modified 12 months prior to leaving care); Victoria (transition planning to begin six months prior); and NSW (no timeframe specified).

While the age at which support will end is generally increasing, reflecting changing trends in parent-child relationships in the general population, differences still persist across jurisdictions. Four governments (NSW, South Australia, Western Australia, and Northern Territory) suggest 25 years as the notional termination point (although two of these allow support to extend beyond this time based on Ministerial discretion); Victoria and Tasmania opt for 21 years; ACT selects a base of 18 years (that can be extended for the young person to complete year 12); and Queensland sets no upper limit at all (relying totally on Ministerial discretion). It is difficult to understand why such variability (and hence confusion across boundaries) needs to exist; standard beginning and end points (with overriding discretion) would make expectations for young people regarding the timing of support clearer.

Table 2

Summary of Legislative Requirements of States and Territories for Leaving-Care Preparation and After-care Support

| Jurisdiction | Legislation: Preparation for Leaving Care | Legislation: After-Care Support |
|--------------|---|---|
| ACT | <i>Children and Young People Act 1999</i> (Chapter 4, Part 4.1, Section 33): "If the chief executive ceases to have parental responsibility for a person for any reason, the chief executive may arrange for financial or other assistance to be provided to, or in relation to, the person on the terms and conditions the chief executive considers appropriate." (Best interests of child or young person of paramount importance.) | No specific provision (see previous entry). |
| NSW | <i>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998</i> (Chapter 8, Part 6, Section 166): "(1) The designated agency having supervisory responsibility for a child or young person must prepare a plan, in consultation with the child or young person, before the child or young person leaves out-of-home care. (2) A plan is to include reasonable steps that will prepare the child or young person and, if necessary, his or her parents, the authorised carer and others who are significant to the child or young person for the child's or person's leaving out-of-home care. (3) The designated agency is to implement the plan when the child or young person leaves out-of-home care." Section 169: "On leaving, or after having left, out-of-home care, a child or young person is entitled to possession, free of charge, of the originals of documents held in a file of personal information by the designated agency that had supervisory responsibility for the child or young person, by his or her authorised carer or by the Director-General, if the child or young person was under the parental responsibility of the Minister, including his or her birth certificate, school reports, medical reports, and personal photographs." | <i>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998</i> (Chapter 8, Part 6, Section 165): "(1) The Minister is to provide or arrange such assistance for children of or above the age of 15 years and young persons who leave out-of-home care until they reach the age of 25 years as the Minister considers necessary having regard to their safety, welfare and well-being. (2) Appropriate assistance may include: (a) provision of information about available resources and services, and (b) assistance based on an assessment of need, including financial assistance and assistance for obtaining accommodation, setting up house, education and training, finding employment, legal advice and accessing health services, and (c) counselling and support. (3) The Minister has a discretion to continue to provide or arrange appropriate assistance to a person after he or she reaches the age of 25 years. Note. The assistance may be provided under section 166 by a designated agency. (4) The Minister may cause to be published guidelines specifying the circumstances in which assistance may be granted under this section." |
| NT | No specific provision. Responsibility scoped under the parameters of the <i>Community Welfare Act 1983</i> (Part III, Section 8): Assistance under certain circumstances to people in need. | No specific provision. A draft Bill for the proposed Care and Protection of Children Act is being prepared following a 2004 review; has yet to be introduced into the Legislative Assembly. The draft bill will contain the following leaving-care provisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support until age 25 years for accommodation, education and training, employment, legal services, health, counselling • financial assistance • access to personal material. |
| QLD | No specific provision. <i>Child Protection Act 1999</i> (Chapter 2, Part 3A, Sections 51A-Y): Case Planning (provide a broad framework to assist children and young people in care; if planning done according to the legislation with six monthly reviews, the final case plan should be a Leaving Care Plan). | <i>Child Protection Act 1999</i> (Chapter 2, Part 6, Section 74 refers to a Charter of Rights (Schedule 1) that legislates for children in care to receive appropriate help with transition to independence (e.g., assistance accessing accommodation, income support, training and education). Section 75: "(1) This section applies to a child or person who is or has been a child in the custody or under the guardianship of the chief executive. (2) As far as practicable, the chief executive must ensure the child or person is provided with help in the transition from being a child in care to independence. (3) Without limiting subsection (2), the help may include financial assistance provided under section 159." |

Table 2 continued

| Jurisdiction | Legislation: Preparation for Leaving Care | Legislation: After-Care Support |
|--------------|---|--|
| SA | <p><i>Children's Protection Act 1993</i> (Part 2, Section 8hii): Recent amendments have extended the Minister's duty of care " to assist persons who, as children, have been under the guardianship or in the custody of the Minister, to prepare for transition to adulthood."</p> | <p><i>Children's Protection Act 1993</i> (Part 2, Section 8h) Brief reference; no specific details.</p> |
| TAS | <p><i>Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997</i> (Part 1, Section 7[2h]) requires the Minister "to provide, or assist in the provision of, services to help persons who have been under the guardianship or in the custody of the Secretary during childhood to make a successful transition to adulthood."</p> | <p><i>Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997</i> (Part 1, Section 7[2h]). Brief reference; no specific details.</p> |
| VIC | <p><i>Children Youth and Families Act 2005</i> (Chapter 1, Part 1.2, Section 16[1]): The Secretary to the Department has the responsibility to "(g) to provide or arrange for the provision of services to assist in supporting a person under the age of 21 years to gain the capacity to make the transition to independent living where the person (i) has been in the custody or under the guardianship of the Secretary; and (ii) on leaving the custody or guardianship of the Secretary is of an age to, or intends to, live independently." Section 16[1f] introduces a Charter of Rights for children (but not articulated in the Act). Case Planning for older children is assumed to involve preparing for transition from care</p> | <p><i>Children Youth and Families Act 2005</i> (Chapter 1, Part 1.2, Section 16[4]) "The kinds of services that may be provided to support a person to make the transition to independent living include: (a) the provision of information about available resources and services; (b) depending on the Secretary's assessment of need: (i) financial assistance; (ii) assistance in obtaining accommodation or setting up a residence; (iii) assistance with education and training; (iv) assistance with finding employment; (v) assistance in obtaining legal advice; (vi) assistance in gaining access to health and community services; (c) counselling and support.</p> |
| WA | <p><i>Children and Community Services Act 2004</i> (Part 4, Section 88-95: Care Plans). Section 89(5): "Without limiting subsection (4), the CEO must, in the case of a child who is about to leave the CEO's care, modify the care plan for the child so that it (a) identifies the needs of the child in preparing to leave the CEO's care and in his or her transition to other living arrangements after leaving the CEO's care; and (b) outlines steps or measures designed to assist the child to meet those needs." Section 97(2): "When a child leaves the CEO's care, the child has a right to the possession, free of charge, of any personal material held by the Department or by any person or body who or which has provided care for the child under a placement arrangement."</p> | <p><i>Children and Community Services Act 2004</i> (Part4, Sections 96-100: Provisions about leaving the CEO's care). Section 98(1): "The CEO must ensure that a child who leaves the CEO's care is provided with any social services that the CEO considers appropriate having regard to the needs of the child as identified in the care plan for the child under section 89." Section 99: "Without limiting section 98, the CEO must ensure that a person who qualifies for assistance is provided with services to assist the person to do any one or more of the following: (a) obtain accommodation; (b) undertake education and training; (c) obtain employment; (d) obtain legal advice; (e) access health services; (f) access counselling services." Section100(1) "The CEO may provide a person who qualifies for assistance with financial assistance in the form of: (a) a contribution to expenses incurred in obtaining, furnishing and equipping accommodation; (b) a contribution to expenses incurred by the person in living near the place where the person is, or will be (i) employed or seeking employment; or (ii) undertaking education or training; or (c) a grant to enable the person to meet expenses connected with his or her education or training."</p> |

Table 3

Summary of Policies Developed by States and Territories for Leaving-Care Preparation and After-care Support

| Jurisdiction | Policy: Preparation for Leaving Care | Policy: After-Care Support |
|-------------------|---|---|
| <p>ACT</p> | <p>The Office for Children, Youth and Family Support (OCYFS) has created a designated position of Senior Compliance Officer to ensure appropriate implementation of legislation, policy, and practice in relation to young people leaving care. Young people in care 15 years and over are required to have a Leaving Care Plan.</p> | <p>OCYFC policy ensures consistency for 18 year olds, after their orders have expired, in relation to contingency payments including items such as education and training (e.g., costs to finalise a course in which they are enrolled), dental/medical/optical/ professional therapy, and obtaining official documents. Provision also is made for the continuation of subsidy payments to carers for 18 year olds while young person completes year 12 after their orders have expired.</p> <p>Upper Limit on Age for Support 18+ years (see above; continued if completing year 12)</p> |
| <p>NSW</p> | <p>Extensive policy framework e.g., through Office for Children – Children’s Guardian (OCCG) <i>Accreditation Benchmark Policy Statements</i>, Section 6: Leaving Care, Standard 6.1a (Planning for leaving care to live with family or significant others); Standard 6.1b (Planning for leaving care to live independently). Section 166 of the Act stipulates the preparation of a Leaving Care Plan for young people transitioning (no age for this to begin is specified).</p> | <p>Extensive policy framework e.g., through Office for Children – Children’s Guardian (OCCG) <i>Accreditation Benchmark Policy Statements</i>, Section 6: Leaving Care, Standard 6.2 (After care support). Following the recent amendment to Section 165 of the Act, a new Ministerial guideline is being prepared that will clarify the circumstances in which assistance will be provided by the Department and the levels of support offered to care leavers.</p> <p>Upper Limit on Age for Support 25+ years (Ministerial discretion)</p> |
| <p>NT</p> | <p>Currently, Child in Care Assessments are used to inform leaving care planning and preparation (covers health, education, identity, family and social relationships, emotional and behavioural development, self-care skills); takes into consideration continued involvement and support from young person’s carers. All young people 15 years and over must have a Leaving Care case plan.</p> | <p>Since leaving care currently is not a statutory service, under Section 8 of the present Act there is discretionary support provided post order. All young people 15 years and over must have an After Care case plan.</p> <p>Upper Limit on Age for Support The draft Bill will provide support to 25 years</p> |
| <p>QLD</p> | <p>The sections of the Act discussed above inform the Child Safety policy “Transition from Care No. 349-2” which requires that young people are supported when aging out of care according to the following principles: (a) the Department must ensure that young people receive appropriate help, including financial assistance, (b) young people are entitled to be connected to support services and social networks, (c) they have a right to be given information about their personal history and be involved in planning for their future, and (d) decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people must be made in consultation with the Recognised Entity for the young person. Relevant policies are interpreted in the Department’s <i>Child Safety Manual</i>, Chapter 7, Section 7.20: Transition from Care. Planning should begin one month before age 15 years.</p> | <p>After care support not automatic. If the relevant Child Safety Officer (CSO) determines that support is required, a specific Support Services Case must be opened.</p> <p>Upper Limit on Age for Support No set age limit (CEO discretion)</p> |

Table 3 continued

| Jurisdiction | Policy: Preparation for Leaving Care | Policy: After-Care Support |
|--------------|--|---|
| SA | <p>Following several reviews and inquiries(e.g., Layton, 2003), Families SA has developed a new (June 2007) Transitioning from Care Policy (together with the <i>Transition Planning for Young People Leaving Care Practice Guide</i>) that will determine the provision, promotion, and support of transition service responses.</p> <p>All policies have been developed with due consideration to SA <i>Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care</i>. Underlying principles include: ensuring safety, best interests, and wellbeing of the young person; early preparation for, and smooth transition to independence; supporting collaborative practices; facilitating access to information and services and equitable outcomes; promoting cultural respect; maintaining continuity of significant relationships.</p> <p>Planning for transition will begin at age 15 years.</p> | <p>Currently, Families SA District Centres use their discretion when providing ongoing case management services post order. Support may include financial assistance for educational, medical, and other expenses.</p> <p>As well as the support available under the new Transitioning from Care policy, a Post Care Policy has been developed to underpin the provision of information, advocacy, and referral services to assist adults formally in care in accessing relevant resources to enhance their emotional and physical wellbeing.</p> <p>Upper Limit on Age for Support Transition support will continue where necessary until age 25 years. No age limit for Post Care support.</p> |
| TAS | <p>Following a major recent review of Child Protection Services (Jacob & Fanning, 2006) new policies currently are under development. Draft policy (in anticipation of legislative changes possibly to be introduced in 2009) provides guidance on the initial stage of planning for leaving care.</p> <p>Draft policy suggests that planning for transition should commence at 15 years.</p> | <p>Draft policy for support after care.</p> <p>Upper Limit on Age for Support Support for 12 months after care; can be extended to 21 years of age.</p> |
| VIC | <p>Transition planning (as part of the <i>Looking After Children</i> [LAC] framework) is required for children and young people when a decision has been made that the child/young person will leave the placement to return home, go to another placement or move to live more independently. The Care and Placement Plan and the Review record and process can be used to develop and comprise the Transition Plan or Leaving Care Plan. In some cases a more detailed Leaving Care Plan may be developed as an attachment to the Care and Placement Plan.</p> <p>Transition planning with the young person must begin at least six months prior to the move to independent living.</p> | <p>Community Service Organizations are responsible for developing and implementing leaving care plans that must detail post placement support. These are prepared under the seven <i>Looking After Children</i> health and welfare domains.</p> <p>Upper Limit on Age for Support The Act stipulates support to age 21 years</p> |
| WA | <p>Policy for Children and Young People in the CEO's Care requires that a Care Plan be developed to ensure that the child or young person is prepared to leave care and provided with any social services that the CEO considers appropriate, having regard to the needs of the child or young person as identified in the Care Plan.</p> <p>Young people may qualify for assistance if they have reached 15 years of age and are under 25 years of age. The young person must have left the CEO's care, have been the subject of a protection order or a negotiated placement agreement for at least six months, or provided with placement services for a continuous period of at least six months prior to leaving care.</p> <p>The Care Plan is to be modified 12 months prior to the young person leaving the CEO's care. If the young person has a disability the Care Plan is to be modified two years prior to leaving the CEO's care.</p> | <p>The Department must ensure that the young person who qualifies for assistance is provided with services to assist with one or more of the following: obtain accommodation, undertake education and training obtain employment, obtain legal advice, access health services and access counselling services. This assistance can be provided directly by the Department or by referral to one of the four Leaving Care Services following guidelines presented in the <i>Protocols and Procedures for Preparation for Leaving and Aftercare Services</i> document.</p> <p>Upper Limit on Age for Support Support until 25 years</p> |

“One partnership that was not, in general, clearly articulated was regarding formal connections with indigenous agencies... Particular attention must be directed to the needs of indigenous care leavers.”

5.0 Formalised Arrangements and Partnerships for After-Care Support

The intent of this question was to identify any partnerships formed by governments specifically to support care leavers. It is clear from Table 4 that while many connections exist between government departments and support agencies, they generally are designed to service all children in care; few are focused uniquely on the needs of young people at the transitioning phase. Examples of such programs would include the NSW Housing and Human Services Accord to provide housing and related support to young people who have left care under 20 years without family assistance, and the agreement in South Australia for DFEEST and TAFE SA to give special consideration to care leavers enrolling in further education.

One essential partnership that appears in most regions is that between Child Protection and Disability Services, particularly to ensure that suitable accommodation is found for the young person, and that the level of support required is available. WA has given particular attention to these special care leavers and has developed a strong association between the Department for Child Protection and the Disability Services Commission to ensure comprehensive support.

One partnership that was not, in general, clearly articulated was regarding formal connections with indigenous agencies. While QLD indicated that policy requires the relevant Recognised Entities to be consulted when making decisions about indigenous children in care, Victoria was the only state that specifically mentioned (in the responses concerning partnerships) a formal link with a peak indigenous body (the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency). Given the disproportionate incidence of indigenous children in care (for children aged 0–17 years, a rate of 29.8 / 1000 compared with 4.1 / 1000 for the non-indigenous groups; see AIHW, 2007, Table 4.8), such relationships need to take higher priority and any that exist elsewhere should be championed. Particular attention must be directed to the needs of indigenous care leavers.

It is clear that, while governments may not have concentrated on specific, formal arrangements with other stakeholders to provide after-care support, many associations exist that could be accessed by care leavers. While it would be unrealistic to expect the same services to be available everywhere (different regions have different needs, and the focus of service providers tends to be on local issues), the critical factor is ensuring that those who need a service know the range of possibilities available and how relevant support can be accessed.

South Australia and Victoria appear to have addressed this concern by adopting integrative approaches designed to emphasise the coordination of services. SA has created the *Rapid Response* system to bring together all relevant Government sectors to deal with an issue such as leaving care; alternatively, Victoria (under its *Looking After Children* framework) proposes to establish a Regional Leaving Care Alliance to maximise the impact of each DHS region's leaving care response. Since both developments are recent, they will need to be in operation for at least 12 months before a meaningful evaluation can be conducted.

Table 4

Summary of Formalised Arrangements and Partnerships Developed Between the Relevant Child Protection Departments and Other Departments and Stakeholders Supporting Care Leavers

| Jurisdiction | Formalised Arrangements and Partnerships |
|--------------|---|
| ACT | No formal arrangements exist; Department undertakes whatever collaboration necessary to provide support to young person. |
| NSW | <p>NSW Housing and Human Services Accord between Department of Housing and NSW Human Services Agencies; One target group: young people who have left care under 20 years without family assistance; provision of housing and related support.</p> <p>MOU between DoCS and Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC); Provision of planned support for young person with a disability transitioning from the parental responsibility of the Minister to ongoing care and support as a client of DADHC; DoCS must notify DADHC at least two years prior to expiration of court orders to begin joint casework and planning.</p> |
| NT | No formal partnerships have been established. |
| QLD | <p>No specific formalised arrangements and partnerships. The following collaborative interdepartmental responses to the needs of children and young people in care also can apply to those transitioning from care. Department of Child Safety involved with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evolve Services (formerly known as Child Safety Interagency Behavioural Support Services) established as a collaborative interdepartmental response to the needs of children with high and complex needs; Queensland Health enhanced mental health therapeutic services comprising: Mental Health-Child Safety Therapeutic Support Teams, Therapeutic Residential Services, Multi-Systemic Therapy; Disability Services Queensland in providing two new services: Specialist disability assessments for children with a disability entering care; behaviour support services for children in care who have extreme and complex behaviour support needs; Department of Education, Training and the Arts in developing Education Support Plans to assist in providing children and young people in care with effective across-agency support to maximise their educational outcomes; Child Health Passports: begin in care and apply until all transitioning from care case plan goals have been achieved. |
| SA | <p><i>Rapid Response</i> partly focuses on the provision of transition-from-care planning, including the provision of after-care supports and services. Developments under <i>Rapid Response</i> that can apply to young people transitioning from care include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) has established Individual Education Plans (IEP) to ensure coordinated planning of support for young person's education; Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) will waive fees for young people who are or have been under guardianship up to age 26 years and TAFE SA has agreed to a 5% sub quota for competitive enrolments and automatic entry to non-competitive places; SA Dental Services and SA Ambulance provide access for young people in care; Housing SA has developed <i>Housing SA, Families SA and Disabilities SA Service Delivery Guidelines</i> for providing housing assistance for young people exiting guardianship up to 25 years Public Trustee has agreed to waive the income commission of 5.5% on the return of funds and to spread the 4.4 % initial capital commission over the life of the trust; Various agencies (education, health, housing, disability, Families SA and SAPOL) have signed a Working Together agreement in Northern Metropolitan Area indicating their commitment to working collaboratively to meet the needs of young people. |

Table 4 continued

| Jurisdiction | Formalised Arrangements and Partnerships |
|-------------------|---|
| <p>TAS</p> | <p>No formalised arrangements or partnerships exist at present to support young people leaving care because of the small number of young people leaving long-term care each year and the various pathways they follow, transitional arrangements are managed through individual plans rather than formalised partnerships.</p> <p>Some collaborations exist (e.g., the Liaison and Children's Services project involving the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services) addressing educational outcomes for all children in OOHC (not specifically young people exiting care).</p> |
| <p>VIC</p> | <p><i>Looking After Children</i> (LAC) provides a framework for effective collaboration: Requires the formation of a "Care Team" for each child in OOHC that includes a Child Protection practitioner, agency placement worker, child's case manager, child's carer, and parents (as appropriate); this team is not directly involved in statutory decisions (provides advice). Team supports children throughout their childhood and adolescence to develop skills and knowledge they need to move towards independence.</p> <p>Partnership agreement between DHS and the Department of Education and Training (particularly for development of Individual Education Plans)</p> <p>Proposal: Establish a Regional Leaving Care Alliance (RLCA) in each of the eight DHS regions to maximise the impact of each region's leaving care service response by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinating services (including those provided by Office for Children, Office of Housing and other regional support services; Ensuring compliance with mandatory planning for leaving care; Monitoring effective expenditure of regional brokerage funds; Overseeing the performance of the proposed regional mentoring services; Building and maintaining links among key care providers <p>DHS Child Protection is required, consistent with a protocol with Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, to consult the relevant Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service when making significant decisions about an indigenous child</p> |
| <p>WA</p> | <p>Arrangements exist between the Department for Child Protection and the Disability Services Commission to ensure best possible outcomes for children with disabilities who are leaving care by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing and maintaining a joint database to enable the early identification of children with disabilities who have been in the care of the CEO who will be turning 18; Beginning planning for transition 2 years prior to young person with disability's 18th birthday; DSC providing full Accommodation Support Funding continuing beyond the child turning 18. <p>An MOU with Office for the Public Advocate makes provision for a guardian or administrator for young people over 18 not capable of making reasoned decisions for themselves.</p> <p>A manual documenting <i>Protocols and Procedures for Preparation for Leaving and Aftercare Services</i> was developed in 2006 to provide guidance and practical templates for consistent referrals, assessments and delivery of leaving care services by the Department, the four Preparation for Leaving Care and Aftercare Services, and other relevant agencies.</p> |

"... five of the eight jurisdictions now recommend that the planning should begin when the young person turns 15."

"Some consistency and rigor would seem necessary when following through with plans to ensure outcomes in the best interest of care leavers."

6.0 Transition from Care Planning

As indicated in previous sections (Tables 2 & 3), all jurisdictions now require some form of transition-from-care plan to be developed in consultation with each young person (and other relevant stakeholders) in preparation for transition. Table 5 shows that while most areas factor post-care support into the general Leaving Care Plan, Queensland requires a separate Support Services case to be opened by the responsible Child Safety Officer, and Northern Territory specifies the preparation of an After Care Plan to clarify the ongoing support to be provided.

Universally, the aim of Leaving Care Plans is to prepare young people for a successful transition from care and in some cases to independent living. The structure of the care plans can differ and the emphasis placed on aspects of support can vary; however, at some level similar issues are addressed. Many of the jurisdictions are influenced, directly or indirectly, by the principles underlying the *Looking After Children* materials developed in the UK (Department of Health, 1995). Victoria and Tasmania acknowledge this framework, while South Australia and Western Australia draw heavily on it. It would appear that the seven domains identified in this program (viz. Health; Education; Identity; Family and Social Relationships; Social Presentation; Emotional and Behavioural Development; and Self Care Skills) are essential aspects of the individual young person's life that need to be functional to effect a successful transition.

Each young person leaving care should have the right to expect that their skills/needs will be assessed professionally, and any deficits that may be detected used to highlight areas where assistance should be directed. When support is provided to ensure that these areas are addressed, for example by creating a stable home base through selecting appropriate accommodation, and providing adequate financial backing to cover expected expenses, a positive experience exiting from care is likely. In addition, a continuing point of contact (e.g., carer, mentor) will ease the feelings of anxiety and isolation that may arise so that any "failure" will be only a temporary setback. Ideally, these factors could be considered as defining the minimum conditions to be met when providing support for a young care leaver.

Another issue that is not clearly articulated in the various responses from Departments is who is responsible, and what mechanisms exist for monitoring outcomes to ensure that whatever plan has been developed is followed through after the young person leaves care or reaches 18 years. As an illustration of the range of approaches, Western Australia involves caseworkers in developing leaving care plans and requires funded leaving care services to implement them and report at six-monthly intervals on outcomes. It is not clear who evaluates the outcomes. Victoria expects the accredited community service organizations to develop and implement transition plans (but no reporting framework was mentioned; the proposed Regional Leaving Care Alliances may have a role here). NSW also accredits and funds external agencies to perform this post-care function, while Queensland specifically requires the relevant CSO to prepare a Support Services Case when assistance is deemed necessary following transition from care. Presumably, the CSO then is responsible for gauging the success of the outcomes specified in this plan. South Australia places any post-care case management at the discretion of the District Centre; ACT indicates that monitoring continues only until orders expire. Tasmania's draft policy has an expectation that the After Care Program will develop mechanisms to monitor outcomes (no details provided); the Northern Territory's system (requiring specific After Care Plans) appears similar to Queensland's but no indication was given of who will oversee the plan's execution. Some consistency and rigor would seem necessary when following through with plans to ensure outcomes in the best interest of care leavers.

Table 5*Summary of Requirements by the Various Jurisdictions for Transition from Care Planning*

| Jurisdiction | Transition from Care Planning |
|--------------|---|
| ACT | <p>Young people 15 years and over are required to have a Leaving Care Plan to identify key areas that need to be addressed when they leave care.</p> <p>Young people (and carers, family, and service providers where appropriate) are to be consulted</p> <p>Key support can include: acquiring stable housing / accommodation; providing knowledge of resources and key supports available; gaining access for young person to appropriate documentation; ensuring young person has clear goals for education/work/apprenticeships.</p> <p>Case worker develops care plan in consultation with young person (and carer/family/support systems if appropriate); plan reviewed by Team Leader and Senior Compliance Officer then sent to Public Advocate</p> <p>Department monitors progress until orders expire.</p> |
| NSW | <p>Young people who have been in statutory out-of-home care are required to have a Leaving Care Plan prepared before they leave care (no specific commencing timeframe stipulated).</p> <p>Plan to be developed in consultation with young people.</p> <p>Plan is designed to include reasonable steps to enhance the young persons' life skills and prepare them and, if necessary, their parents, carers, and significant others for the young persons' exit from care. Support can include: Education; vocational training; financial management; nutrition; accommodation; health; legal rights and responsibilities; as well as the risks of alcohol, drugs and unsafe sex practices. Young persons also need to know how to access and use local services within their community. It also is necessary for designated agencies to provide young persons leaving care with relevant files and records of their time in care.</p> <p>DoCS or designated supervisory agency (accredited by the Office for Children – Children's Guardian using NSW OOHC Standards) is responsible for preparing Leaving Care Plan</p> <p>Agencies are required to retain records of children and young persons for a period of 7 years after they cease to have responsibility for the placement of the child or young person.</p> |
| NT | <p>Young people over the age of 15 years must have a Leaving Care case plan (in certain cases a Leaving Care plan can be developed with those under 15 years). Prior to the termination of their court orders, young people must have prepared an After Care case plan.</p> <p>Young persons must be involved in all planning processes.</p> <p>Child in Care Assessments are used to inform leaving care planning and preparation; these provide an holistic assessment of young persons' needs. Such Assessments cover health, education, identity, family and social relationships, emotional and behavioural development, and self care skills. Plans allow sufficient scope to tailor the goals, outcomes and strategies to the young person's phase of care.</p> <p>Copies of plans are provided to all participants involved in the development process.</p> |
| QLD | <p>Transition from care planning commences when a young person reaches 15 years (child to be notified in writing), and gains clarity and intensity until 18th birthday</p> <p>Young person must be involved in development and review of Plan (along with designated stakeholders identified by young person to CSO)</p> <p>Department uses Structured Decision Making Tools (including the Child Strength and Needs Assessment) that focuses on various domains to assist planning. Support areas explored by a Child Safety Officer can include: Payment for secondary educational study / apprenticeship / traineeship / training experiences / life skill courses; assistance in obtaining a drivers licence; support for living in semi-supported accommodation; access to counselling and support services; transport to visit / reconnect with family; assistance undertaking creative musical / artistic / sporting activities; and support in applying for Commonwealth Transition to Independent Living (TILA) funding.</p> <p>Assistance to young people does not automatically cease when they leave care or reach the age of 18 years. Because a Support Services Case has to be opened if the CSO determines continuing assistance is required, this will continue until all identified goals have been achieved.</p> |

Table 5 continued

| Jurisdiction | Transition from Care Planning |
|--------------|---|
| SA | <p>New policy and practice guidelines specify that transition planning will occur for every young person from 15 years (gaining intensity until young person reaches 18 years) who have spent a minimum of 6 months in alternative care or under Family Care Meeting Agreements from the age of 15 years</p> <p>The process will be flexible, ongoing, and will involve the young person and all significant stakeholders (including the carer, birth family, case manager, Youth Support Services, Anti-poverty services) in identifying and meeting the needs of the young person.</p> <p>Transition planning will focus on a specific range of issues, activities and goals dedicated to effecting the young person's transition to independent living including: Relationships with caregiver family and placement; connections with birth family / kin; education and employment; health; emotional and behavioural issues; identity (including cultural maintenance plan); life skills, social skills, peer relationships; and other relevant issues e.g., legal advice.</p> <p>Meeting objectives of the Plan will form part of the Annual Review process for each young person until 18 years. Post-care case management is at the discretion of the District Centre.</p> |
| TAS | <p>Current policy position is not clear in relation to after care plans. Planning for leaving care occurs within the <i>Looking After Children</i> framework.</p> <p>Draft policy proposes that planning for leaving care should commence when young person is aged 15 years (still being determined; could be 12 years)</p> <p>All young people in care during adolescence will have the option of support by their case manager for one year after leaving care (some will have the option of support up to age 21 years).</p> <p>It is expected that the After Care Program will develop mechanisms to monitor outcomes for care leavers.</p> |
| VIC | <p>Preparation and planning for leaving care should commence two years prior to a young person's transition from care; a clearly articulated transition plan must be developed at least six months prior to the time of transition.</p> <p>It is expected that the care team is responsible for ensuring that young people develop the skills and knowledge they need to move toward independent living while in placements. Assessments of a young person's readiness for independent living are undertaken regularly; adherence to Best Interests Principles demands that young people be involved in the planning process.</p> <p>The transition plan must detail the post placement support required under the seven <i>Looking After Children</i> health and welfare domains and should include: Clarifying accommodation arrangements post care; establishing financial and other resource supports; setting education, training, and employment goals including further living skills development; necessary counselling arrangements; maintaining young person's networking; mentoring of engagement as appropriate.</p> <p>Community Service Organizations (CSOs) providing the OOH care are responsible for developing and implementing transition plans for young people (Child Protection is responsible for those in kinship care).</p> |
| WA | <p>Planning for transitioning must begin at least 12 months prior to young person exiting care (2 years for young people registered with Disability Services Commission). The CEO is required to modify the Care Plan of a child about to leave care to identify and address needs for transition to independent living (following Charter of Rights Principles).</p> <p>Young person must be involved in planning wherever possible (Principle of Child Participation: Section 10 of the Act)</p> <p>Department's Assessment Planning System (APS) assists caseworkers developing Care Plans incorporating seven dimensions: Health; Education; Emotional and Behavioural Development; Family and Social Relationships; Recreation and Leisure Activities; Identity and Culture; and Care Arrangements. These would be modified where necessary to address leaving-care issues.</p> <p>Funded Leaving Care Services and Transitional Support Services report six-monthly on outcome measures including indicating to what extent young people: Have increased knowledge, skills, and confidence to support their progress toward independent living; access alternative, safe, supportive long-term independent living; improve their relationships with their families or communities (where appropriate); have links with appropriate services (e.g., employment, training, education, accommodation, counselling, and recreational); develop a network of social and personal support systems to assist in managing independent living.</p> |

“This is an area that requires well-publicised assistance systems that could include local ‘help’ phone lines, nominated Departmental personnel, and the internet.”

7.0 Areas of Support / Resources

This question was intended to reveal examples of best practice in terms of types of support and resources specifically made available to care leavers. The responses from Departments made it clear that this was a difficult area to address, either because there were no *specific* programs available, or because of the vast array of possibilities that care leavers could access. Table 6 is an attempt to summarise the information provided by the Departments. This needs to be reviewed in conjunction with data presented by London et al. (2007) in their survey of actual providers of leaving care/after care services in each state or territory. For example, although the NSW response in Table 6 is relatively brief, London et al. identified 12 specialist services in that state (their estimate of existing comparable services in other jurisdictions include: WA: 4; SA: 2; VIC: 13; TAS: 1; other areas were deemed to have only generalist programs: QLD: 1; ACT: 2; and NT: 1).

ACT and Northern Territory, because of the relatively small number of care leavers annually, to date have not invested in specific support services and rely on an analysis of need on a case-by-case basis. States such as South Australia and Western Australia, because of recent changes and developments, enthusiastically promoted their efforts to provide a higher level of support for those leaving care than has been available in the past.

Given the large range and specificity of services available, a major issue confronting care leavers is finding out what relevant support services are available and how they might be accessed. This is an area that requires well-publicised assistance systems that could include local "help" phone lines, nominated Departmental personnel, and the internet.

Most of the states indicated that they have included in their Web site a section dedicated to Leaving Care. It is beyond the scope of this Report to evaluate such Web sites, but given their importance as a point of contact for care leavers and their capacity for coordinating access to information and support services, the effectiveness of these tools needs to be explored. Future research could investigate such aspects as ease of navigation and engagement; relevance, currency, and accuracy of information; and comprehensiveness of linkages to other sites containing legislation, policy, Charter of Rights etc.

However, given that many of the leaving-care cohort will not have, or be able to gain easy access to the internet, other information systems that require contact with actual people, in addition to the production of hard copy leaving care kits such as SA's *My Stuff* and Tasmania's *Outta Here: Your Options, Your Choices*, still should be available.

Table 6

Summary of Areas of Support and Resources Available to Care Leavers in the Various Jurisdictions

| Jurisdiction | Areas of Support / Resources |
|--------------|--|
| ACT | <p>No programs specifically target care leavers, but young people are advised of relevant services during the transition period.</p> <p>These services can include: Residential care facilities (e.g., Karinya House), maternal and child health nurses, youth services (e.g., Youth in the City youth centre), housing, education (year 11 and 12 can be completed at Technical Colleges within Canberra), indigenous services (e.g., Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service).</p> <p>Access to services based on assessment of need.</p> |
| NSW | <p>As well as that prescribed under the Act, appropriate support may include: Provision of information about available resources and services (e.g., "Your Next Step" resource guide prepared in consultation with CREATE); financial assistance (including access to the Commonwealth's Transition to Independent Living Allowance); assistance obtaining accommodation, setting up house, education and training, finding employment, legal advice; accessing health services and counselling support; assistance in contacting family, significant others, and establishing and maintaining links with cultural identity.</p> <p>Ministerial Guideline being prepared to clarify the provision of assistance to care leavers.</p> |
| NT | <p>Currently, there are no specific leaving care programs or services; an After Care case can be made to obtain access to full range of services available to all young people in the community.</p> <p>Small number of young people leave care annually; delivery of tailored services is difficult.</p> <p>In NT, Centacare distributes Transition to Independent Living Allowance (Commonwealth payment).</p> |
| QLD | <p>Section of the Department of Child Safety's Web Site ("Where to from here") has been developed as a resource to support transition from care by assisting young people to connect with available services which include: Education; accommodation; employment; counselling services; advocacy services; registering for services / benefits (Centrelink, TILA, voting, tax file number, health care card); financial assistance (budgeting, bank accounts, credit cards, purchases etc.).</p> <p>Provides positive assistance and standardises information given to young people on leaving care.</p> |
| SA | <p>Comprehensive Transitioning and Post Care Services launched in 2007; services provided at the discretion of Families SA District Centres.</p> <p>Families SA Youth Support Teams have been expanded (four new staff positions) in northern and southern regions to provide a post-guardianship support service for young people up to age 25 years with assistance for transition to independence. Services include: Life skills training and development (in conjunction with Housing SA, Centrelink, JPET [Job, Placement, Employment, Training], and Second Storey [health service].; TAFE accredited tenancy training program; assistance in obtaining accommodation; brokerage applications and the acquisition of furniture and household effects; assistance with developing support networks within communities; assistance in seeking employment; educational directions and advice.</p> <p>Families SA Post Care Service is a newly formed information, advocacy, referral and support service for adults 18 years and over (no upper age limit) who have been in some form of care.</p> <p>Families SA Anti Poverty Services can help transitioning young people develop life skills required for independence by supporting: Development of personal and household financial management skills; development of consumer knowledge; access to entitlements; achievement of a sustainable financial position through financial counselling.</p> <p>The <i>My Stuff</i> Leaving Care Kit has been designed and developed (following consultation between young people, CREATE, Alternative Care Service Provider Agencies, the Guardian for Children and Young People, and Families SA) as a planning tool and resource folder provided to all young people in care from age 15 years to help them prepare for their transition and/or assist them if they already are living independently.</p> |

Table 6 continued

| Jurisdiction | Areas of Support / Resources |
|-------------------|---|
| <p>TAS</p> | <p>Department's After Care Support Program that commenced April 2007 provides: Assistance for adult care leavers to access their personal information and help locating family members; financial assistance for care leavers up to 25 years to access goods and services for transition to adulthood (to promote the best outcomes for young people).</p> <p>New policy will allow Departmental Child Protection Workers to support young care leavers through an after leaving care plan until age 21 years.</p> <p>Kennerley Children's Home (an NGO) has managed a leaving care mentoring, lead-tenant residential program ("Moving On") since 2003 providing support to four young people for up to 12 months.</p> <p>A leaving care package <i>Outta Here: Your Options, Your Choices</i> has been developed that includes information on obtaining employment, managing money, staying healthy, sharing accommodation, and other available services.</p> |
| <p>VIC</p> | <p>Newly introduced model for post care support includes the specific components of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) expansion of leaving care mentoring initiatives using volunteers to support young people in their transition to independent living and to connect them with the broader community thereby reducing the risks of social isolation; (b) post care support, information and referral to maximise regional capacity to assist care leavers by providing: Case work support when preparing for, and following transition; access to education, employment, training; assistance gaining appropriate accommodation or housing; support for re-connection with family; access to brokerage funding to support the transition plan and for young people under 21 years who have left care; (c) flexible brokerage support in addition to the Federal Government's TILA. |
| <p>WA</p> | <p>When leaving care, young person receives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) social services which include: Preventative, protective, placement, child care, information and advisory, education and training counselling, therapeutic, advocacy, mediation, crisis, family and domestic violence and support services, that have been identified in Care Plan; (b) services to assist in obtaining accommodation; employment; and legal advice; undertaking education and training; and accessing health or counselling services; (c) financial assistance for obtaining, furnishing and equipping accommodation; in seeking employment or undertaking education or training. <p>Leaving Care Services funded by Department for young people 14 to 25 years provided by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Wanslea Family Services: COOL/SCOPE camps for 15-17 year olds to show how to develop healthy routines, manage budgets, food shopping, meal preparation; <i>Roofs for Youths</i> program helps young people understand tenants rights, gives knowledge of rental market, and creates confidence to maintain a property; (b) Mission Australia programs; (c) Salvation Army Crossroads West: Youth Services database, Leaving Care Guide, Community and Peer Mentoring Program, Youth Consultation Group, cross-cultural camps, and a horticultural program. <p>Through Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, the Department funds the Transitional Support Service to provide supported accommodation for care leavers as well as pilot programs assisting in transitional accommodation in Perth and Albany.</p> <p>Ida Curtois Awards and Scholarships: for care leavers enrolled in post-secondary study (in 2007, four scholarships of \$3000 and three Achiever Awards of \$1000, and one Traineeship Award of \$500 were provided).</p> <p>Department's <i>KickRoc</i> program facilitates opportunities for young people in the Rockingham/Kwinana region to participate in social activities (sports, camps) as well as life skills programs (cooking, budgeting). The Kick Rock group currently is involved in developing Western Australia's Leaving Care Guide.</p> |

8.0 Funding

Table 7 presents the available data regarding specific budget allocations in the various states and territories for facilitating transition from care. ACT, Northern Territory, and Queensland did not provide details of specific funding dedicated to supporting care leavers; costs in these jurisdictions are met from the general Departmental budget.

Other states were able to define amounts that had been set aside to fund various leaving care services. If the amounts indicated in Table 7 (viz., NSW: \$3.9m; SA: \$500,300; TAS: \$90,000; VIC: \$3.8m; WA: \$929,922) are divided by the number of care leavers for 2005-06 (Table 1), a rough *per capita* allocation can be obtained. (Note this is likely to be an overestimate because the trend is for numbers of care leavers to increase annually. Also, it is indicative only because not all care leavers access the support available.) Based on these calculations, NSW allocated \$7235 per young person; SA: \$4719; TAS: \$1636; VIC: \$5783; and WA: \$7322.

It is not clear from these figures exactly how much funding would be available for young people to access; as Kerman et al. (2004) explained, a large proportion (perhaps up to one-third) of such funding would be expended on administration. However, the net amounts here appear more generous (except in Tasmania) than the \$2000 *per capita* that Kerman et al. calculated was available in the US.

No details were provided of how allocated amounts were determined in the stated jurisdictions, or how much of each general budget was used to support care leavers. Obviously, certain regions are more expensive than others in which to live, but costs within Australia would not be expected to vary to the extent indicated by these figures. More attention needs to be given by Departments to calculating the actual costs incurred by care leavers to ensure that an adequate amount is allocated *per capita* for support (and to determining the actual number of young people accessing services).

It would seem desirable for governments that haven't already done so to aim for a more explicit statement of budget allocation for care-leaving support to reduce the uncertainty and make expectations clearer, and minimise the need for discretionary judgements. This would lead to a more equitable distribution of support funding for transition from care across Australia.

“It would seem desirable for governments ... to aim for a more explicit statement of budget allocation for care-leaving support.”

Table 7*Summary of the Funding Allocated Within the Jurisdictions to Support Care Leavers At Transition and Post Care*

| Jurisdiction | Funding |
|--------------|---|
| ACT | No specific funding allocation for transitioning from care; costs (including those incurred in finalising current education / training, dental / medical / optical / therapy services, acquisition of documents, and ongoing carer subsidy while young person completes year 12) are met from the Departmental contingency budget |
| NSW | In 2007-08, DoCS budget partitioned to include: \$1.6 million directly to support young people who have left care (covers one-off payments to assist young person in establishing independence, contact with family, medical or education needs); \$2.2 million for specialist after care services including services for Aboriginal young people (e.g., costs of accessing documentation, accommodation, health care, financial assistance, legal advice, counselling etc.); Funding is provided for agencies assisting young people in accessing personal records (e.g., Link-Up Aboriginal Corporation received \$57,555; the Salvation Army Search Service \$124,358); DoCS also funds Relationships Australia's telephone Helpline for care leavers 25 years or over Two one-off grants of \$10,000 have been made to Care Leavers of Australia Network (national peak advocacy group for older care leavers) to facilitate the running of their telephone support. |
| NT | No specific budget allocation; cost of delivering support sourced from Child Maintenance funding allocation on a case-by-case basis. |
| QLD | Department claims a specific budget is available to develop and implement transition from care case plans; no details were provided. |
| SA | Recurrent funding is provided for Transitioning and Post Care Services. In 2006-07 the total allocation of \$500,300 included post-care services (London et al., 2007). No data are available for 2007-08. Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund provides grants of \$1000 - \$10,000 for young people (up to age 29 years) who are, or have been, under the guardianship of the Minister or in a DFC supported family placement for over 12 months For individuals post care, funding is available through an alternate cost centre in the District Centre budget (level of support determined by District Centre staff). |
| TAS | The After Care Support Program has an annual budget of \$90,000 to assist adult care leavers under the age of 25 years. Support for case plans (approved by a senior worker) relating to the period of transition and post care is funded from the case management budget for all children and young people under care and protection orders. |
| VIC | \$800,000 to establish leaving care mentoring state wide; \$880,000 to strengthen regions' capacity to provide case work support, information and referral to young care leavers and those who return seeking assistance; From July 2007, \$1.12m (rising to \$2.1m) in flexible brokerage. This expenditure will be reviewed and monitored by the Regional Leaving Care Alliances to be established in each DHS region |
| WA | The Act requires funding to be provided for leaving care costs (implemented 2006); currently costs met from central budget (controlled by the Executive Director Country Services); expenditure will be monitored to determine amount to be set aside in future. Total funding for the four Leaving Care Services in 2006-07 was \$929,922; no 2007-08 details are available. |

9.0 Monitoring Outcomes

The responses to the question on monitoring outcomes were somewhat surprising. Only Western Australia could give a clear indication of the procedures in place to gather data on transition outcomes and provide some picture of how care leavers were responding to the support system in operation. Other states and territories claimed that they had no authority or capacity to monitor young people after orders expire, or indicated that under their new systems monitoring will occur in the future but hasn't in the past.

Monitoring of outcomes is the only way the effectiveness and efficiency of the programs can be determined. It is essential to determine (a) the adequacy of the initial Leaving Care Plan, (b) whether or not the necessary support is available, (c) if the necessary services are accessible to those who require them, (d) if the services are being delivered in appropriate ways, (e) if the services are meeting the needs of care leavers, and (f) what are the realistic costs of the services.

The Departments, as the major funding bodies, must ensure that monitoring and evaluation of leaving care procedures and outcomes occur. As more and more of the support functions are out-sourced to authorised agencies, the Departments must not only perform the accreditation of these organizations, but also establish guidelines for achieving rigorous monitoring procedures and develop Key Performance Indicators to assess meaningfully the whole gamut of support performance and outcomes within their jurisdictions.

While Western Australia must be commended for already developing and implementing a reporting strategy for capturing data on transition outcomes, it is worth noting that the value of the information gained depends totally on the quality of the data collected. Departments must take responsibility for ensuring that reporting agencies can produce accurate measures of their achievements by following consistent procedures. This can be done through providing training programs for staff and assisting with data collection where possible so that the results reported are as error free as possible.

As WA also has realised, monitoring cannot focus only on the Department or agencies; the care leavers themselves must have a voice. WA achieves this with the Customer Perception Surveys. While such surveys are valuable tools, care must be taken with how these measures are administered. WA's 2006 positive service evaluation was based on a response rate of 25% (of 80 surveys). In general survey work, a relatively low response rate may be tolerated; in this situation, the non-responders are most likely to be the more dissatisfied clients. If support services are to gain a realistic picture of their achievements, every effort must be made to obtain feedback from as many care leavers as possible. This follow-up contact also would reinforce the feeling in the young person that someone cares about them.

“Monitoring of outcomes is the only way the effectiveness and efficiency of the programs can be determined.”

Table 8

Summary of Responses Regarding Monitoring of Outcomes for Young People Leaving Care Within Jurisdictions

| Jurisdiction | Monitoring Outcomes |
|--------------|---|
| ACT | <p>Department monitors preparation for transition and the exiting of care, but has no authority to monitor young person after orders have expired.</p> <p>Fifteen young people 18 years and over accessed support 2006-07.</p> <p>Young people usually opt for one of the following outcomes: Return to birth parents; access youth residential accommodation; access government housing; continue living with foster parents.</p> <p>It is hoped that the Leaving Care Plan (prepared with the young person) results in an appropriate placement being found</p> |
| NSW | <p>No formal ongoing monitoring of outcomes for the 539 young people who exited care in 2006-07 was reported.</p> <p>DoCS commissioned a longitudinal study of the 1992/93 care leavers cohort (Cashmore & Paxman, 1996); the findings from this study informed the drafting of the current Act.</p> |
| NT | <p>No capacity for Family and Children’s Services to monitor long-term outcomes of young persons who are no longer engaged with the Department (if an After Care case exists, progress can be followed)</p> <p>In 2005/06, only 8 young people aged 15-17 were discharged from care (including those who “aged out” of care)</p> <p>There is no capacity to monitor trends in type of living arrangements or expenditure through the client information system.</p> |
| QLD | <p>No formal mechanisms for monitoring outcomes are in place; review is on a case-by-case basis.</p> |
| SA | <p>Since Post Care Services are new, monitoring of outcomes for affected individuals has not occurred.</p> <p>New systems will allow more accurate information to be collected on those of the (approximately) 100 young people whose orders expire each year who choose to engage with the transition services.</p> |
| TAS | <p>No provision for monitoring outcomes has existed to date.</p> <p>More information will be available following the establishing of the After Care Support Program, but it is recognised that data collected through the program will not provide a full picture of outcomes for all care leavers.</p> <p>Care leavers who need additional support will be referred to other agencies e.g., CREATE and CLAN; these organizations also will gather a clearer picture of the needs and outcomes for care leavers.</p> |
| VIC | <p>With the implementation of the leaving care service from 2007-08, Office for Children will put in place a process for monitoring outcomes for young people leaving care.</p> <p>The four leaving care mentoring initiatives currently funded also provide the opportunity to monitor outcomes for young people who have left care. Reporting processes provide some feedback on outcomes although no formal evaluation is undertaken.</p> |
| WA | <p>Client and Community Services System (CCSS) captures data on transition outcomes based on six monthly reports from NGOs and annual Customer Perception Surveys by the Department including care leavers.</p> <p>Results from the 2006 Survey (with a 25% response rate from 80 surveys) showed that: 100% of respondents felt the service met their needs well; were satisfied with the service; and indicated that they felt confident that they would be able to manage in the future. 95% reported that the service involved them in finding a way to meet their needs, and that as a result of coming to the service they had learned new relevant skills.</p> <p>Young people leaving care go to a variety of destinations including: returning to own family; remaining with foster carer; detention; Disability Services Commission placement arrangement; independent living (over a third of the young people transitioning from care); and SAAP transitional accommodation programs.</p> |

PART C: YOUNG PEOPLE'S SURVEY

10.0 Method

10.1 Participants

Responses were received from 164 young people throughout Australia. Two groups of young people were sampled: a cohort of those who already had left care (Post Care or PC), and a comparison group of young people who were still in care but approaching the time of "aging out" (In Care or IC). Table 9 shows the distribution of participants by care leaving status, sex, and jurisdiction. The mean ages for females and males in the Post-Care group were 20.7 ($SD = 2.9$) and 20.4 ($SD = 2.7$) years respectively; those still in care obviously were a little younger: MFemales = 17.3 ($SD = 1.2$); MMales = 16.9 ($SD = 1.0$).

Of all the young people, 37 were indigenous (one Torres Strait Islander) with comparable mean ages to the total group (MFemale Indigenous PC = 21.2, $SD = 2.8$; MMale Indigenous PC = 19.7, $SD = 1.4$; MFemale Indigenous IC = 17.0, $SD = 1.2$; MMale Indigenous IC = 16.9, $SD = 1.3$). A total of 16 were from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Because of the constraints on the CREATE workers conducting the research (including the difficulties in gaining access to children in care and care leavers particularly in the smaller jurisdictions), the sample is not random or proportional. While it would have been desirable to have more responses from all areas, the low returns from Victoria and South Australia especially are disappointing. Ninety-six percent of respondents knew about CREATE, 43% for between one and four years, and 44% for longer than four years. The high incidence of females (72% of the sample) may indicate that females in care are more likely to be involved with CREATE programs. It would be desirable in future studies of this kind for support to be given by all stakeholders to obtain larger, more representative samples.

Table 9

Distribution of Participants by Care Leaving Status, Sex, and Jurisdiction

| Group | Sex | Jurisdiction | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------|--------------|-----|----|-----|----|-----|-----|----|-------|
| | | ACT | NSW | NT | QLD | SA | TAS | VIC | WA | Total |
| Post Care | Female | 4 | 17 | 2 | 10 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 8 | 57 |
| | Male | 1 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 20 |
| In Care | Female | 2 | 25 | 0 | 20 | 5 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 61 |
| | Male | 1 | 12 | 0 | 9 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 26 |

10.2 Procedure

Data were collected through the use of structured interview techniques. CREATE workers contacted respondents willing to participate in the study and asked them a series of prepared questions. This approach, while labour intensive and likely to limit the number of contacts that could be made, was chosen to maximise the number of completed surveys obtained. The interview was conducted as a conversation and the young person's identity protected by the use of a non-identifying self-chosen "nickname". Questions fell into the broad categories of demographics (information about the respondent including age, sex, place of residence, indigenous status, cultural background) and details of some of their care and post-care experiences (e.g., age on entering care, time spent in care, number of placements during care and addresses since leaving care and/or extent of homelessness). They were then asked about their involvement with education, employment, and Juvenile Justice. For those who had left care it was of interest to determine the extent to which they had

maintained contact with social networks including previous carers, workers, and their birth family.

Of major interest was the determining of which of a range of support services provided by authorities had been accessed most by the young people. They also were asked to indicate how difficult they would find completing a range of tasks for which support services are available. Finally, they were asked about their association with CREATE, and their preparation for leaving care. Opportunity was provided throughout the interview for the young person to note any comments they wished to make about any aspect of the survey.

11.0 Results

11.1 Young Persons' In-Care Experience

The young people in this sample matched the care population in terms of the distribution of ages at which they entered OOHC. Sample percentages for the various age groups (compared with values documented by AIHW, 2007 in parentheses) include: Under 1: 6.9 (13.3); 1 to 4: 23.1 (25.3); 5 to 9: 32.5 (25.9); 10 to 15: 27.5 (27.4); 15 and above: 10 (8.1).

Interestingly, there were differences among the five states, with samples large enough to compare, in the age that the young people (as children) began their journey through the care system, and consequently the time they spent in care. Victorian young people were significantly older¹ (and consequently spent less time in care on average) than those in QLD, NSW, and SA (WA, while lower, was not significantly different). The data on number of placements while in care were so variable that no significant differences were observed. Overall, young people experienced an average (mean) of nine placements in their nine years in care. Most (42%) were placed with 2 to 5 carers, while 16% lived in over 10 different households.

These data indicate that, although this sample is biased in terms of the large proportion of females (49% of the population of children in care are female; see AIHW, 2007, Table A1.10), it matches the care population in other respects.

11.2 Planning for Leaving Care

Young people in this sample left care at a mean age of 17.3 years ($SD = 1.1$). There were no significant differences across states and territories in the age of leaving care. In spite of the requirement of all jurisdictions for those transitioning to have some form of structured Leaving Care Plan prepared in advance of their exiting the system, 58.3% of this cohort reported that they did not have such a plan. This indicator is worse for those still in care and approaching the exiting phase; 66.7% of that group did not know of the existence of any leaving plan for them. A significant difference was found across the five mainland states in the incidence of leaving care plans with a maximum of 75% of Victorian respondents having a plan compared with 10% of South Australians. However, these comparisons are based on relatively small numbers of respondents (VIC = 12 and SA = 10)².

It would seem that a fundamental piece of information (introduced as a way of initiating the planning process) would be to forewarn the young person of when it would be likely that they would leave care. Policies in many jurisdictions require this to happen ideally at around 15 years, but certainly in advance of the exiting date. Of the care leavers in this study, 50.9% were informed between the ages of 15 and 18 years of when they would be leaving care; a further 13.6% had been notified before this. Sadly, 10.2% had little time to prepare, being told when they were 18 or older. However, these were in a better position than the 25.4% who were never told what was going to happen.

This trend, while changing, has not improved significantly³ with the In-Care group preparing for transition (75% informed before 18 years; 5.8% after 18 years; and 19.2% not notified).

1 QLD: $M = 7.1$, $SD = 4.7$; NSW: $M = 6.3$, $SD = 4.4$; VIC: $M = 11.2$, $SD = 3.9$; SA: $M = 5.74$, $SD = 3.6$; WA: $M = 8.0$, $SD = 5.0$; $F(4, 141) = 4.9$, $p < .01$.

2 Percent with Plan: Qld: 43.3; NSW: 35.3; VIC: 75; SA: 10; WA: 33.3; Chi-Square(4) = 10.5, $p < .05$

3 Chi-Square(2) = 1.4, $p > .05$

11.3 Young Persons' Post-Care Experience

11.3.1 *Accommodation.* There was a moderately strong correlation between the number of placements a young person experienced in care and the number of places they lived after leaving care ($r = .46, p < .01$). While 42.9% had remained in the one accommodation location, 38.6% had lived in between 2 to 5 different places, 14.3% between 6 and 10, and 4.3% in more than 10 households. The majority were living in shared accommodation (9.6% with 5 or more others), but 16.4% were living on their own.

However, of the 70 care leavers who responded to the question on homelessness, 34.3% indicated they had been homeless at some stage while transitioning. One-third of these young people had been homeless for less than one month, 23.8% between 1 and 6 months, 9.5% between 6 and 12 months, with 33.3% homeless for longer than one year. Unfortunately, 37.5% had never accessed any homeless support service.

11.3.2 *Education.* When considering the highest educational level achieved by the young care leavers, only 25% had completed high school (Year 12), with 43.4% having completed Year 10. Encouragingly, 14.5% had completed tertiary studies, all but one with TAFE. Each jurisdiction (except TAS, ACT, and NT) had 1 to 3 young people in this group.

From their own reporting, 19.2% of the care leavers sampled had been involved with Juvenile Justice. This was associated with the attainment of significantly lower educational outcome levels⁴.

The difficulties completing high school probably were related to the fact that 53.3% of care leavers reported being suspended or expelled from school at some stage. This rate was comparable across jurisdictions and matched by the experiences of those still in care (53.5%). Reasons for the suspensions were not recorded, but the high rates among children in care suggest that Riordan's (2006) "deficit" theories, leading to discrimination against particular students and disruption to their academic life, might still be being applied in the various education systems.

In spite of these difficulties, 60.5% of leavers still were involved in some educational program. Of this cohort, 22% were enrolled in University studies, 41.5% were studying a TAFE course, 29.3% were completing Year 12, and 7.3% were involved in traineeships.

11.3.3 *Financial Support.* When considering their main source of income, 56.3% of care leavers indicated that they depend on the various governments for their major financial support. However, 38% achieved most of their income from working in paid employment.

11.4 Social Contacts

In an attempt to gain some insight into the continuity of social networks that the young person had experienced in care, those transitioning were asked about the recent contact they had had with previous carers, Departmental workers, and members of their birth family. No significant differences were found across jurisdictions in the pattern of maintaining contact within these three groups. 48.6% of leavers had seen a previous carer in the last month, 38.2% a worker, and 73.3% a member of their birth family. Interestingly, the proportion contacting workers is significantly lower than would be expected by chance, while that contacting family is significantly higher⁵. Perhaps the relatively low recent contact with workers reflects the negative relationship some young persons have with the various Departments or the limited accessibility of workers to people who no longer are their responsibility. Over a longer time frame, at least half the care leavers who had not made contact in the last month had interacted with a member of each of the three groups in the last year (carers: 50%; workers 55.6%; family 63.2%).

11.5 Accessing Support

11.5.1 *Services accessed.* Care leavers were given a list of support services and asked to indicate which they had accessed in the past six months. They also were asked about obtaining a copy of their personal case file. The list of services and their associated extent of access are summarised in Table 10.

4 JVI Yes: M Highest Educational Level = 2.6, $SD = 1.0$; JVI No: $M = 3.6, SD = 1.0$; $F(1, 70) = 10.1, p < .01$
5 Workers: Chi-Square(1) = 4.26, $p < .05$; Family: Chi-Square(1) = 16.1, $p < .01$

The degree of access reported is significantly different across the types of support⁶. Clearly, Medical Services and Education were important to most young people, with cooking and legal services of less immediate relevance. The other services attracted interest from around 40% of care leavers.

Table 10

Percentage of Care Leavers Accessing Support Services

| Support Services | Care Leaver Access (%) |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Housing | 40.8 |
| Financial Support | 36.8 |
| Counselling | 38.2 |
| Medical (doctor/hospital) | 64.5 |
| Cooking (classes/support) | 14.5 |
| Employment | 38.2 |
| Education | 50.0 |
| Legal (lawyer, legal aid) | 26.3 |
| Case File | 43.1 |

11.5.2 *Areas of needed support.* Young people were presented with a list of seven tasks that could be facilitated through accessing support services and were asked to rate on a 5-point scale how difficult it would be for them to complete these (1 - Very Easy; 2 – Easy; 3 – OK; 4 – Hard; 5 – Very Hard). Analyses⁷ comparing responses across the mainland states (because of sample size) revealed significant differences in the estimated ease of completing the specified tasks, thereby indicating areas where more effective support could be provided. No differences were found for State or for the State X Task interaction. The pattern of responses is shown in Figure 1.

Clearly, care leavers found the task of finding and maintaining appropriate accommodation the most difficult across all states, while accessing medical services (doctors and chemists) was the easiest. The other tasks (housekeeping, financial management, obtaining appropriate food, seeking employment, and applying time management skills) fell between these extremes.

It might be expected that, if a leaving care plan is functioning effectively, it should aid the care leaver in completing tasks necessary for successful transition. To test this, an analysis was conducted comparing the ease of completion scores for those young people who had leaving-care plans with those who did not. Figure 2 shows these results. The only area significantly assisted by having a plan was accessing medical services⁸.

The fact that a well-publicised national health system exists that presumably would have been accessed by young people while in care might explain the confidence with which care leavers felt they could utilise medical services.

⁶ Cochran's Q (8) = 42.1, $p < .01$

⁷ Means were compared using a one-way MANOVA. Significant differences were found in the difficulty of the specified tasks (Wilks' Lambda = .52, $F(6, 55) = 8.42, p < .01$). No State differences were found ($F(4, 60) = .69, p > .05$) or a State x Task interaction (Wilks' Lambda = .57, $F(24, 193) = 1.4, p > .05$).

⁸ Overall MANOVA: Plan: $F(1, 49) = .03, p > .05$; Support: Wilks' Lambda = .44, $F(6, 44) = 9.4, p < .01$; Support X Plan: Wilks' Lambda = .75, $F(6, 44) = 2.4, p < .05$.

Medical Services: $F(1, 49) = 6.1, p < .05$

A further MANOVA analysis compared indigenous with non-indigenous groups on ease of completion of the specified tasks. No significant differences were detected apart from the major task main effect.

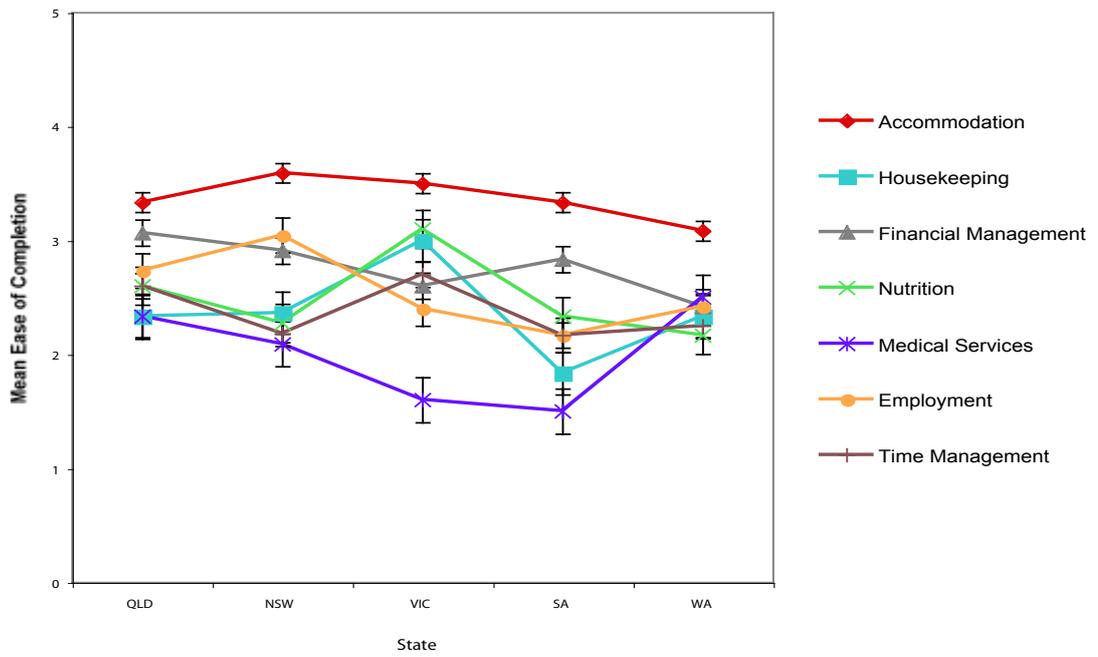


Figure 1. Mean ease-of-task-completion ratings by care leavers from the five mainland states in response to seven tasks that could be facilitated by support

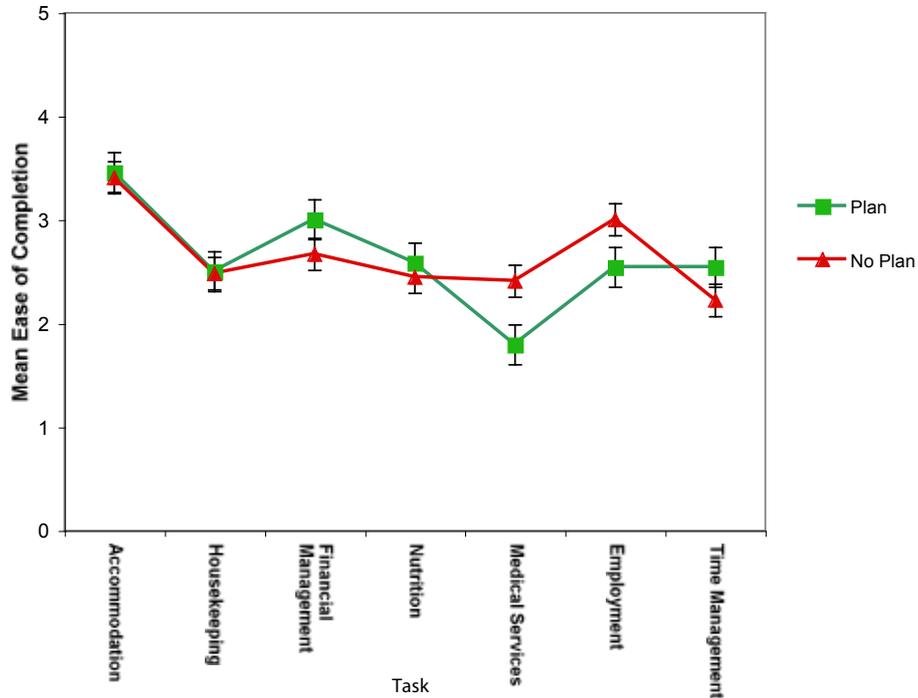


Figure 2. Mean ease-of-task-completion ratings as a function of having a leaving care plan.

11.6 Care Leavers' Comments

11.6.1 *Care leaving experience.* The interviews concluded with requests for respondents to describe their leaving experience and to give any suggestions they had for improving leaving care support and making the experience easier for others. A review of the descriptions revealed an even split between positive and negative responses. Half the leavers received the support they needed ("Set up everything on my own...I asked for it and it was paid for...I received funding to set up"; "Quite easy, gradually workers pulled back, let me do stuff myself. If I needed help, I could call and they would try to help") and saw the transition as an opportunity to escape problems of the past ("Really good...lived with chromers at residential...glad to get out"; "Happy to leave, freedom, did not have to wait for things to happen"). However, just as many felt rejected and disillusioned ("I was 'dropped' out of care...no support. Case worker left and there was no new worker. I was forgotten because I was a 'low risk' person"; "Intimidating...no family, no one to contact").

11.6.2 *Suggestions for improvements.* Many of the thoughts the young people expressed regarding improvements that could be made to the leaving care process concerned issues that are the subject of existing government policy. Examples of comments include: "Start at early age, ease out"; "Support after turning 18"; "Constant communication through process to make process clear for whole family"; "More notice and support...only received brochures and a file"; "Counselling should be more accessible"; "More support workers to help you regularly. Help with food and accommodation, feeling of belonging"; "Make actions from what [young people] say and not just listen and then do nothing". If the policies that exist were being applied, and available support services implemented effectively, such comments would not arise. The likelihood of achieving this ideal, as one young person concluded, might be enhanced by having a "Transitioning From Care worker allocated to service centres...not CSO...Transitioning From Care specific worker, only does Transitioning From Care work". It would appear, even to the care leavers, that they are not getting the specific attention they need and the detailed policies and procedures that have been documented clearly are not being converted into satisfactory outcomes.

"...the detailed policies and procedures that have been documented clearly are not being converted into satisfactory outcomes."

12.0 General Comments

12.1 Progress in Development of Transition From Care Provisions

As discussed in Part A of this Report, Osborn and Bromfield (2007) conducted a review of findings from major Australian studies concerned with transition from care. From this study, they identified six areas that they felt required attention by legislators and policy makers viz., the need for (a) minimum leaving care standards, (b) evaluation of legislative changes in relation to care leavers in each state and territory, (c) all states and territories to develop policies and programs to provide ongoing support for care leavers, (d) a range of specific support services for care leavers, (e) an integrated model of leaving-care support for young people up to the age of 25 years, and (f) appropriate financial support for the transitioning process to avoid greater problems in the future. These constitute a set of criteria that can be used to evaluate the recent progress that has been made by authorities in establishing leaving care provisions.

12.1.1 Minimum leaving care standards. From the information supplied by governments, it is clear that serious attempts are being made in all jurisdictions to address the needs of care leavers. The states and territories are moving in directions recommended by the extensive research, but there still exist what would appear to be unnecessary variations in the standards set.

For example, all jurisdictions recognise the value of planning for transition from care. Why, then, do most areas require that planning begin three years before the scheduled leaving date, but others opt for one year or even six months? Why do some Departments simply modify existing case plans to handle after-care support, while others recognise the benefits of instituting specific care-leaving procedures detailed in specialised transition plans? Why is support maintained until the young person reaches 25 years in some areas, but limited to 21 or even 18 years in others? There does not seem to be any justifiable reason for such variation. Sufficient evidence is available now to identify best practice and this should constitute the minimum standard.

12.1.2 Evaluation of legislation and policy. Since some legislative changes affecting the leaving-care system are relatively recent (e.g., Victoria and Western Australia) and some are still being drafted (Tasmania and Northern Territory), a definitive picture of the type and levels of support young people leaving care could expect is difficult to obtain. Some governments explicitly have enshrined in legislation the rights of young people, while others have produced broad-based statements that could be applied in various contexts requiring interpretation and discretion. Such differences could be anticipated, given the varying sizes of the jurisdictions and the impact of issues such as transitioning from care in their region. Furthermore, critiques of legislative inadequacies must acknowledge the exceedingly long time frame required to instigate changes.

Although it might be unrealistic to expect comparable legislative requirements across the states and territories of Australia in relation to leaving care, policies interpreting the legislation by clarifying the types of support provided, who is eligible for it, and how it can be provided or accessed should be consistent. To their credit, the major states over recent years have paid considerable attention to policy development, and even NSW which was the first state to have substantive leaving-care policies is in the process of reviewing and developing new Ministerial guidelines to help clarify issues surrounding provision of support to young people transitioning from care. Areas still developing legislation will be expected to produce comparable policy frameworks in the near future.

12.1.3 Support programs. Information provided regarding Departmental initiatives, partnerships, and the resources that are available to support those transitioning reveals that, although the smaller jurisdictions with fewer care leavers tend not to have targeted support programs in place, all areas have a variety of relevant services provided either through the Department or by non-government agencies that care leavers are eligible to access. States (such as South Australia and Western Australia) that recently have reviewed their policies and procedures, were able to articulate the extensive range of programs and services available to young people. Other documentation (e.g., London et al., 2007) indicates that NSW and Victoria also offer a wide range of services.

Herein, however, lies the essence of a potential problem. While it is desirable to have many diverse programs and services, each appropriate to address particular needs of young care leavers, it also is imperative to have a mechanism in place to document the range on offer and match the services to the specific needs expressed. It is not clear from the data presented that this level of coordination is being achieved.

12.1.4 *Integrated model of leaving-care support.* As discussed in Section 2.4.2, Maunders et al. (1999) proposed a basic tripartite model to address the three essential phases of transitioning from care: Preparation; Transition; and After-Care. State and territory governments have attempted to address the first through legislation and policy development, and through the implementation of procedures already common within existing case management. The Transition phase, where the impact of support services is maximum, requires more attention to its integration so that young people are informed appropriately of what support is available and how they might go about accessing it. After-Care has been the most neglected area largely because it can be confusing where responsibility lies for maintaining the assistance. Is after-care support a right that should be available to all eligible young people and provided to those assessed as in need, or must the young people seek out particular services and actively ask for help? This question lies at the heart of how after-care support is managed.

Governments already are aware of the difficulties in overseeing after care and some have taken steps to solve some of the problems (perhaps creating others in the process). For example, Northern Territory is proposing to prepare an After-Care Plan as well as a Leaving Care Plan for those transitioning, but it is not clear yet who will be responsible for implementing the Plan. Queensland requires that a specific Support Services Case be opened by the relevant Child Safety Officer if that officer determines that a need exists; however, a review of the CSOs' responsibilities for transitioning alone, as documented in that government's excellent *Practice Manual* (see Queensland Government, 2007) coupled with their usual demanding case load for children in care, suggests that a Support Case might not justify high-priority treatment. Also, what if a need arises after the Support Case has been initiated?

ACT has created a position designated Senior Compliance Officer to ensure appropriate implementation of legislation and policies regarding care leavers, but this Officer's responsibility officially ceases after the young person reaches 18 years. Victoria has gone further by suggesting the formation of Regional Leaving Care Alliances, groups charged with maximising the effectiveness of a region's leaving care support response. This will involve the coordination of programs and services as well as overseeing mentoring programs that presumably could provide continuity of support to all care leavers. Although the efficacy of this model has not been tested, the intention behind its development and the likely positive outcomes for care leavers makes its introduction commendable. It also would establish a vehicle for effective monitoring of the transition process.

12.1.5 *Financial support.* The provision of financial support to cover the costs incurred in effecting transition appears a delicate area for governments. In the short term, the increasing cost of funding support programs is a concern for any government, but as Forbes et al. (2006) point out, the long-term consequences (social as well as financial) might be even more catastrophic. Accurate data are required to assist in determining actual costs of transition. Until these have been collected (hopefully as a result of the introduction of sophisticated data collection systems in various jurisdictions), governments could show another level of support for care leavers by stating explicitly what minimum level of financial support could be expected by young people, rather than leaving the decision to the discretion of an official. Obviously, expenditure beyond the minimum would have to be sanctioned, but a knowledge of their entitlement could increase the confidence of young people and encourage more to access assistance to maximise the likelihood of a successful transition from care.

12.2 Young Peoples' Leaving Care Experience

In this section the implications of findings from the young persons' survey will be discussed. This provides a test of the effectiveness of the policy frameworks in place, both in terms of the type of support they advocate and how well they have been applied to support care leavers.

12.2.1 *Planning for leaving care.* All jurisdictions require that care leavers have a Leaving Care Plan and the young people in their comments reinforced the benefits of being involved in the planning process. Unfortunately, only 41.7% of the respondents here had a Leaving Care Plan. These findings are similar to those reported by Dixon and Stein (2002) in their study of the Scottish system where 77% of authorities offered a planning program but only 39% of young people transitioning received one. Such observations make it clear that, while developing appropriate policies is important, making sure they are implemented also is critical.

Similar criticism can be levelled at jurisdictions in their adherence to the Children's Charter of Rights that most embrace officially. A major feature of such Charters is that young people, taking into account their age and

capacity, must be consulted about and involved in planning regarding any issues that affect their lives. Leaving care would seem to be one of these significant life decisions, yet 25.4% were not even officially informed of what was happening to them, and 10.2% were told so late in the process they had little time to prepare. Again, this is an example of where the rhetoric is not matched by action.

12.2.2 *Post-care experience.* As indicated previously (Section 2.2), care leavers have been characterised as generally being undereducated, underemployed, more involved with the criminal justice system, homeless at some stage of transition, and dependent on social assistance (Tweddle, 2007). Some of the data collected here allowed an assessment of whether or not these claims still hold in Australia. Ongoing participation in education for care leavers (at 60.5%) appears promising, but when compared with the rate for 15 – 19 year olds in the general population (82.5%), it shows more encouragement is needed for care leavers in this area. Similarly, with the majority dependent on social assistance and only 38% sustaining themselves through paid work, improvements can be made here as well. Furthermore, the levels of homelessness and involvement with Juvenile Justice remain unacceptably high. It would appear, therefore, that the care leaver population continues to need considerable support, and greater efforts must be focused on directing the assistance to those in need or at risk, not just those who are self-assured enough to ask for it.

12.2.3 *Social contacts.* The limited data available here regarding the maintenance of selected social contacts post care highlighted two interesting observations. In spite of the difficulties they may have experienced in the past, care leavers remain bonded to their birth family and are highly likely to contact members regularly. They are far less likely to contact a Departmental support worker. In future research, it would be useful to explore this issue in greater depth to try to determine whether this was by choice (the young people wanted minimal continuing contact with the Department, perhaps because of negative experiences as some of the comments provided indicated), or because the workers were largely inaccessible because of workload constraints.

12.2.4 *Accessing support.* Rates of accessing support services in this sample are comparable to the overall figure of 41% obtained by Kerman et al. (2004) from US data. The observed participation rates raise the question of what is happening with the other 60% of leavers who do not access particular services. Is this non-involvement the result of lack of need or lack of knowledge of the support available.

More work should be directed at determining trends in treatments being sought that constitute the high demand for medical services. Are medical practitioners being approached purely for medical reasons or because their services are accessible and familiar to young people? What proportion of their access might be handled equally well through counselling? One interesting observation concerns “cooking classes”. This area of support seemed to have the lowest level of engagement (perhaps reflecting the lowest need), but several young people commented that they could benefit from more instruction on cooking and meal preparation. This might suggest that programs concerning meal preparation, nutrition, and diet could be better promoted, or become a more fundamental part of life skills training.

It is of some concern that acquiring appropriate accommodation was seen as the most difficult task confronting care leavers. This is an area that attracts considerable support within all jurisdictions, through major partnerships between individual Departments, and involving non-government organizations, and even interfaces with the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program funded by the Commonwealth. Why, if they find this task the most difficult, have only 40.8% of care leavers accessed relevant assistance? More research is needed into the effectiveness of existing programs and into determining what barriers may be inhibiting engagement with the available services. More innovative programs such as those advocated by Choca et al. (2004) and Kroner (2007) may need to be introduced.

Furthermore, the fact that having experience with a Leaving Care Plan, which would detail various forms of support for a range of problems areas relevant for the young person, made little difference to how easily care leavers thought they could handle transitioning tasks raises questions about the value of such plans. Because planning tends to be done before the real difficulties of transitioning are understood by care leavers, the relevance of the plans produced can be compromised. Research is required to evaluate the appropriateness of plans that have been prepared for particular young people and the needs assessment on which they are based. Examples of LC Plans have not been available for review from all jurisdictions so that content could be compared (perhaps this could be part of a future study). It is suggested that, as a minimum, the needs analysis should consider the relevance of each of the *Looking After Children* domains for each young person. Only when it can be demonstrated that plans address real issues for the young person would it be meaningful to

investigate their actual implementation.

12.3 Conclusion

Overall, this Report Card recognises the important advances governments have made in addressing the needs of care leavers within the Australian community. Mainland states have tightened legislation and given significant attention to policy development. Tasmania and Northern Territory also have reviewed their position and proposed new arrangements to take effect in the near future. ACT now is a little out of step and needs to move into line with other jurisdictions, particularly concerning the continuity of care leaver support. Clear requirements have been articulated regarding planning, and services are available in most areas to provide necessary assistance.

Unfortunately, in spite of these commendable efforts in establishing the ground rules and infrastructure, many young people are not achieving the successful outcomes in transition that would be desired. It appears that the implementation phase of the process is failing them. In “theory” the support system should have the capacity to resolve most issues faced by care leavers; in practice, it is falling short. Many “rules” are not being followed. Young people need to be better prepared for transition.

Determining why this might be happening is beyond the scope of this Report; with so many stakeholders and competing interests, it is a complex problem. However, the basic tenet of all child protection systems must not be forgotten: The interests of the child are of paramount importance. When it is clear that young care leavers are not achieving the transition from care they deserve, practices must be reviewed. If this means that governments have to increase resources to ensure that the policies on paper can be translated into reality, such action must be taken. The future cost of inaction, economically and socially, is far too great.

“In ‘theory’ the support system should have the capacity to resolve most issues faced by care leavers; in practice, it is falling short.”

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Appendices

*CREATE Foundation Programs
designed to facilitate Transitioning
from Care*

MISSION:BE



“ personal
discovery,
self-
development
and
leadership
training for
young people
aged
14 - 18 ...”

Appendix A

MISSION:BE (CREATE Victoria; Contact: Cathy Carnovale; CREATE South Australia; Contact: Emily Rosee)

AIMS

The Mission:Be program incorporates action learning and adventure activities to provide participants with an experience of enjoyment, fun, challenge, and new opportunities to grow and learn. (To BE!) Specifically, the Program is designed to enhance the skills of the young person to facilitate independent living, and help consolidate the relationship between the participants and some of the services in their region. In general, the Program encourages young people to believe in themselves and to become functioning members of their community by employing strategies for improving confidence, self-esteem and self-empowerment.

METHODS

Mission:be is a program emphasizing personal discovery, self-development and leadership training for young people aged 14 to 18 years who are in care. It comprises seven modules conducted part-time in 3- month blocks and can involving a series of workshops, camps and adventure activities. Depending on location, it also can incorporate external input from such Programs as the Young Renters (a short course looking at bond applications, renters rights, different accommodations available, housing applications and how to read real estate advertisements) and the Commonwealth Bank's Startsmart budget training (providing education on credit cards, mobile phone contracts, how to read pay slips and general financial management).

Relevant information is imparted through action learning. For example, an activity included in Module 2 (Be.long to your Community) of a recent mission:be required teams of participants to compete in "An Amazing Race" event to help identify services, agencies and key locations of these that the young people might need to utilise within their own community. Clue by clue, the groups completed challenges that led to the discovery of certain information on reaching specified destinations. Throughout the day, participants had to locate and engage with community agencies and learn about the services offered to young people in a fun and safe way. For example, to complete one stage of the race, teams were required to locate the police station and have a photograph taken with the community programs officer. At another stage, teams had to fill out a Centrelink job placement form, and while at "Shop Front" (a youth health and information service), teams received a tour of the centre and had to answer a series of questions using the knowledge they had gained of the services provided.

MODULES

As well as the above component, other Modules focus on planning, budgeting and cooking meals for the two camps held during the program. Participants are given resource packs on transitioning to independent living, containing information on general home hygiene, voting, photo ID, becoming a driver, buying a car, birth certificates, tax file numbers and how to apply for the Transition to Independent Living Allowance.

OUTCOMES

Through this program, young people will have:

- participated in team building where their achievements are acknowledged by receipt of a Certificate of Completion (the Young Renters Certificate able to serve as a reference on rental applications);
- formed positive relationships with the community;
- reduced feelings of anxiety and isolation;
- developed strategies to facilitate the transition to independent living;
- become aware of support services available within the community;
- an increased understanding of what services are provided;
- developed confidence in accessing services.

This knowledge and skill base is developed, not through formal instruction, but through active discovery and engagement, processes meaningful to the young people. Hopefully, these outcomes will lead to the young people involved feeling that they are well supported.

CREATE Your Future Program 2007



...where
young
people
are
guided
to create
their
future...

Appendix B

CREATE YOUR FUTURE: An empowerment program which guides young people to create their future (CREATE Foundation, New South Wales; Contact: Karyn Robinson)
The social partner for the program, who pioneered this, was ATARI Australia.

AIMS

CREATE Your Future is a balanced and broad based program that aims to enhance a young person's skill base and to encourage life-long change and is therefore focused on the individual over a sustained period of several months. This program has the broad aims of building confidence in the young participants, connecting them with each other, and shedding light on the endless possibilities of life as an adult.

METHODS

For 10 weeks, 10 participants (who are aged 15-25 and are in care or have a care background) explore many aspects associated with independent living. This takes place within the premises of a real organisation, the entire staff of which undertake to support and mentor the young people during this period with the firm. The first and last weeks of the program are conducted as full-time contact; the young people work within the company at least one day per week in between, and attend a group training day as well.

CREATE facilitators run the program at the workplace. They brief the staff of the "social partner" on what to expect and how to approach their roles, lines of reporting, and ways of handling problem issues that may arise.

When the young people arrive, they experience warm-up and team-building exercises and games. They have plenty of fun and get to know each other. The adults give them some background into their own career paths and then teach them some of the things they do in their working departments. Finance, Logistics, Sales & Marketing, Human Resources, Reception, Distribution, and other work skills are taught including administrative tasks.

CREATE Your Future takes a holistic approach in developing life skills, according to the real needs of young people. These skills include coping with stress, budgeting and managing money, cooking healthy meals and looking after your body. In a non-threatening context, they learn a range of self-presentation skills including good manners and social protocols (e.g., how to greet people), hygiene requirements, and appropriate clothing choice for different situations. They practice looking for work, preparing a resume and engage in mock interviews. They are taught communication skills and also get some career counselling which includes uncovering their potential talents and interests.

MODULES

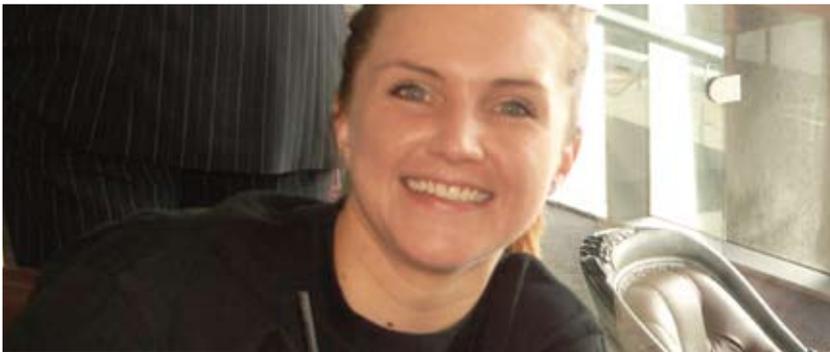
Specific formal topics covered include: Communication skills, nutrition / well being / cooking skills, budgeting, goal setting, being part of a community, interviewing techniques, time management, human rights in the workplace, career planning, relaxation techniques.

OUTCOMES

- The achievement of participating in the Program;
- Improved understanding and experience of a workplace environment;
- Improved knowledge of and adherence to workplace responsibilities;
- Improved workplace readiness;
- Increased awareness of career options;
- Development of an After Program Plan for each participant;
- Engagement of all participants in productive activity which may include work, further education, or other programs at conclusion of CREATE Your Future;
- Improvement in life skills and personal attributes which may include self-awareness of strengths and areas for development, enhanced intra- and interpersonal relationships, positive coping mechanisms, cooking skills, healthy lifestyle choices, confidence, and other areas identified by each participant.

As with many young people's programs, the improved outcomes tend to show up more, as time passes. When young people don't seem to immediately see the gains, when asked six months or twelve months later, they report that the outcomes are much more visible. They seem to 'get' that a lot more was learned than they first might have thought.

CREATE Your Future gained recognition through receipt of the Prime Ministers Award for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships 2007, along with corporate partner: ATARI Australia.



*www.
createyourfuture.
org.au
launches
across
Australia*

Appendix C

Create Your Future: The Website for Leaving Care



www.createyourfuture.org.au

This is the only national portal for young people preparing to exit care. Information is included on many aspects of independent living. Pragmatic, practical advice plus inspiration have been loaded into this system designed by young people for young people. CREATE Foundation directed the production, which was funded by ATARI Australia and the Australian Government under its Regional Partnerships Program.

Over two years in the making, this project has been imagined, developed, evaluated, designed and produced in consultation with young people in care, so that when they are ready to make their own way in the world, they have a comprehensive portal of knowledge to access.

“ I want them to know what I want, and what I think about their plans for me.”

From discussions with young people, CREATE realised that they value the internet as an information portal, and that many of them would use this sort of site. We also heard that workers and young people didn't have any “one stop shop” for information about leaving care. So, this tool was designed to facilitate information exchange.

When the site was first proposed, responses from other agencies were extremely positive:

- “Initiatives like the CREATE and Atari project provide an opportunity for alternative pathways that can make a real difference in their adult lives.” (Southern Cross University, NSW)
- “The leaving Care website is an admirable project which will enable young people who lack support networks, to gain information and form links that they otherwise would not have access to.” (Anglicare, WA)
- “This will be a valuable resource for not only young people, but will also save worker time and resources when preparing young people for post-care.” (Youth Affairs Council, SA)
- “Uniting Care Burnside wholeheartedly support the Leaving Care Website and Workplace Learning Project that Atari and CREATE are collaborating on.” (Uniting Care Burnside, NSW)

Now that it is functional the website is gaining hits from all over the world.

There was a special alignment of several major factors in this partnership. The ‘whole life skills’ presented within the CREATE Your Future Program established a great information base to transfer to the Create Your Future website. ATARI had the knowledge and confidence to help CREATE develop this website and assist in promoting it.

We are all extremely happy to have this new website. We hope you will all take some time to cruise through the content, which has been carefully written by Courtney Collins, designed by Black & Hayden, and contributed to by hundreds of young people, both in and post-care.

Appendix D

CREATE Transitioning from Care Kits

Outta Here: Your Options, Your Choices
(CREATE Tasmania; Contact: Stephen Donnet-Jones)

These Kits were an initiative of the Southern Tasmanian Face-to-Face committee (2005-2006), a partnership of stakeholders comprising the Department of Health & Human Services, FCAT, young people in care, Kennerley Children's Home and CREATE. They were developed with the intention of being given to young people 12 to 15 years of age to develop their skills and knowledge in preparation for exiting care (e.g., practicing basic shopping and cooking; collecting the 100 points of identification for banking and CentreLink purposes). Kits are issued by CREATE in response to advice provided by Departmental caseworkers. The Kits are continually being improved, most recently in 2008 with an audio CD included for young people with literacy problems.

Time To Fly Kit: Inspiration and Information for Young People Leaving Care
(CREATE Australian Capital Territory; Contact: Lisa Stockheim)

The name for these Kits was decided following periods of consultation with young people. They take the form of a backpack containing a number of ACT specific resources and are designed to be used by young people transitioning from care and those supporting them on their journey. It will be given to young people approximately 12 months before they are due to transition and it is expected that they will explore their kit with the assistance of an identified support person (carer or mentor).

In the Kit are found the following resources:

- A "Time To Fly" A5 Folder;
- The "Contact" Book (This is published by the Citizens Advice Bureau ACT and provides a comprehensive collection of Community Information);
- Two document holders;
- Stationery, including pens, a notebook and an address book;
- Leaflets and information brochures from various community organizations;
- An Enrol-to-Vote form.

This project was funded by the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services and The Office for Child, Youth and Family Support.

The information included covers such topics as: Living Skills Checklist; moving to independent living; TILA; CentreLink services; managing money; sharing accommodation; staying healthy; your Rights; obtaining legal advice, getting a job; further information, including details of education; other things to consider, including: family connection; cultural ID; more on accommodation; medical details to be completed; mental health details, i.e. appointments and important phone numbers; dental details; sexual health; disability services; youth worker support; co-dependents / children.

In the documentation, it is emphasized that the Kit is designed to complement the CREATE Web site and that the resources should be used in conjunction with the web site CREATE Your Future: A guide for young people leaving care; the web address appears as a footer on every page (<http://www.createyourfuture.org.au>).

CREATE staff rely on the Department to notify them when a young person is approaching the transition phase; then they will supply the Kits and work with the young person and their supporters (foster carers, youth workers, mentors etc.) to appreciate the value of the Kit and identify information relevant for the individual. This might involve completing the checklists, filling in sections regarding medical details, obtaining a Medicare card, opening a bank account etc.

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The Care Connection



CREATE Foundation works to connect and empower
children and young people in care,
and give them a voice to improve the care system.

For more information about CREATE and the work we carry out:
www.create.org.au www.createyourfuture.org.au
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