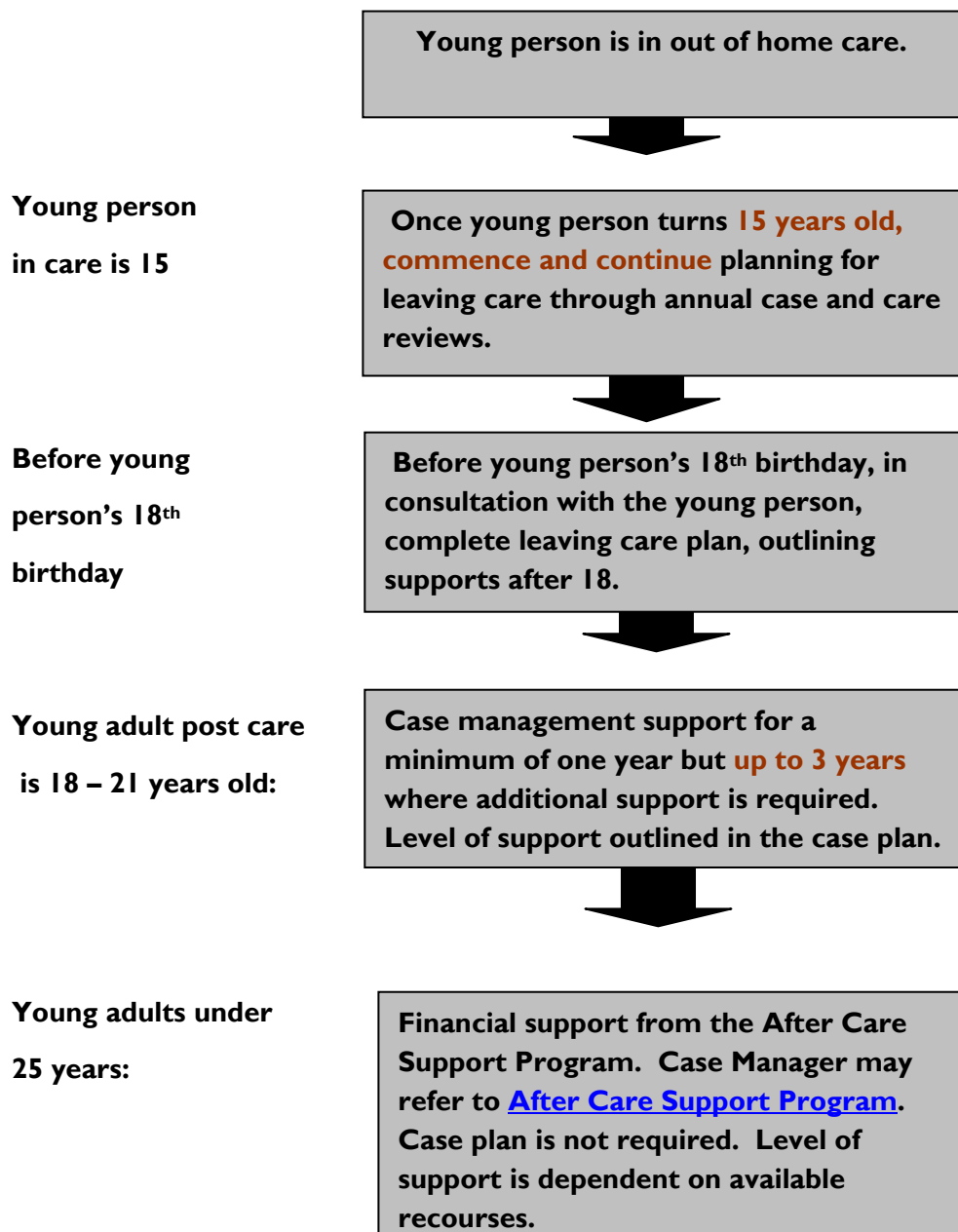


# Planning for Leaving Care and After Care Support

## Key Points:

### Leaving Care Support Flowchart



File No.:

## Planning for Leaving Care and After Care Support

<b>Description:</b>	Policy and guidelines regarding planning for young people to leave care and receive after care support.
<b>Audience:</b>	Child Protection Workers and all other employees of Children and Family Services Teams within Service Delivery Areas
<b>Approved by:</b>	DCYFS Executive
<b>Custodian:</b>	Director, DCYFS
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### Background

Children and young people who remain in out of home care for extended periods of time require additional support to assist their successful transition to independence. Additional support is required during preparation for leaving care, the transition from care and immediately after care.

Research indicates that young people leaving care are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, young parenthood, social isolation and mental health issues. Upon leaving care, young people may become depressed, lonely and overwhelmed by the demands of being independent without adequate financial income and supportive networks. The pathways to independence are influenced by experiences before coming into care as well as experiences in care. Factors that assist the successful transition from out of home care to independence have been identified as: a stable, positive out of home care experience, resilience and belief in self, the availability of mentors and advocates, ongoing support by carers, primary workers and/or after care support workers, and family contact while in care. The findings of Cashmore and Paxman (1996) show that:

- contact with family while in care is the best predictor of contact after leaving care;
- stability of placement while in care improves the outcomes for people who have left care;
- children and young people need to be aware of the reasons why they entered care; and
- closely monitoring placements is important, as is listening to children and young people in care and helping them develop a trusting relationship with a worker.

### Policy statement

This policy establishes guidelines for child protection workers who are working with young people during the transition from care and immediately after care. The policy position recognises that young people require additional support during these times.

The document is an extension to the [Case and Care Plan Guidelines](#) and the [Case and Care Planning – information sheet](#). This document should be referred to when undertaking *Case and Care Planning* for young people aged 15 years and older.

## Scope

This policy position is limited to young people who are or have been:

- under a Section 42 Care and Protection Order; or
- under a guardianship order;
- are aged 15 and older (although there can be exceptions if the young person's circumstances indicate that earlier planning for leaving care is required; or if the young person is eligible for ABSTUDY which commences at the age of 14);
- transitioning to independence from State care; and
- young adults aged 18 to 21 years who have left care and are receiving support from Child Protection Services.

[Case and care planning](#) for young people aged 15 and older should include a focus on preparing the young person to make a successful transition from care. This includes the development of the Case and Care Plan that will support young adults aged 18 years and older. Ideally the Case and Care Plan that outlines the level of support after the young person turns 18 years should be ready for sign off three months before the young person turns 18 or the date of planned discharge (whichever is earlier). See Attachment 1 for a Recommended Schedule of Tasks Relating to Leaving Care.

The standard period for a Case and Care Plan following discharge from custody/guardianship is for one year. Young people who require additional support beyond their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday should be referred to the [After Care Support Program](#). In situations where young adults require ongoing support from Child Protection Services, a Case and Care Plan may be approved for up to three years from the time of leaving care. Young adults will receive priority for extended after care support when they:

- need support to continue with their education;
- need support with their health needs including mental health;
- are not receiving support from their immediate family or former carers; and/or
- are living in rural areas where community support services are difficult to access.

Young people over the age of 19 years are supported through the [After Care Support Program](#) through:

- guided access to information contained on their file during the period that they were in care;
- assistance in finding members of their family;
- referral to government and community services; and
- financial assistance for care leavers under 25 years of age.

The intention is that young people will be supported (including the provision of financial support) during their transition from care. Support should commence when the person turns 15 years but may commence earlier if required and continues through to the care leavers 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. However, the level of support, including financial support, decreases as the young adult matures.

## Objectives

To provide, or assist in the provision of, services to help young people in care make a successful transition to adulthood in accordance with Section 7 of the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997*.

## **Case and Care Plans for young people preparing to leave care**

The development of [Case and Care Plans](#) for young people who are preparing to leave care is based on the same considerations and format that apply for all children in care. However, there are additional considerations. These are outlined in Attachment 2.

Case and care planning for young people with disabilities and young people who are clients of Youth Justice Services must involve close liaison with Disability Services and Youth Justice Services.

### **Young people under 18 years of age who are living independently**

Young people who are living independently are likely to have a variety of needs that should be addressed through their Case and Care Plans. Their needs are likely to be influenced by their:

- level of physical and emotional care before entering care, especially during their early years;
- stability of placement while in care;
- relationships with family members;
- relationships with primary workers and carers;
- educational experience;
- level and duration of challenging behaviours;
- level of participation in care planning;
- age at which planned out of home care placement ceased; and
- experiences since leaving out of home care.

### **Child Protection Services must continue to provide support**

Disrupted developmental pathways and the lack of consistent and supportive relationships may result in young people leaving out of home care placements before they are 16 years of age or shortly after turning 16 years. These young people are likely to be vulnerable and require a significant level of ongoing support.

### **Rejection of support**

Many young people in this situation reject the attempts of child protection workers to support the transition to adulthood. Thus the case planning for some young people who are living independently can be extremely difficult and the primary goal may be to minimise the potential for further harm and to meet basic physical needs. Although the young person may be rejecting of support, it is important that there are opportunities for ongoing support and that the young person is aware that Child Protection Services has a responsibility to provide support. For example:

- the young person should be invited to participate in planning meetings and such meetings should be structured in ways that promote their attendance and participation;
- the child protection worker should continue to engage with the young person's family and significant others and promote their involvement in planning arrangements for young person; and
- young people should be provided with a copy of the leaving care package *Outta Here! Your Options Your Choices* [[LINK TO BE AVAILABLE IN NEAR FUTURE IN NEW Child Protection online manual](#)] and be supported to explore information about community services that are able to provide support.

## **Working with other services**

Young people who are living independently may be more responsive to services provided by non-government agencies. However, this does not mean that there is no ongoing role for the child protection worker. Rather, the child protection should work closely with the non-government services that are supporting the young person and continue to provide appropriate levels of support either through the service or directly to the young person.

As outlined in the background of this document, young people leaving state care are at risk of experiencing homelessness. Under the *National Partnership on Homelessness* state and territory governments have agreed that young people leaving child protection and juvenile justice systems will receive prioritised support. Under the policy of 'no exits into homelessness' from statutory, custodial care and hospital, mental health and drug and alcohol services, the Australian government will work with state and territory governments to map current pathways out of these services and to identify locally based initiatives that prevent homelessness (Commonwealth of Australia 2008).

## **Case and Care Plans for young adults who have left care**

The [Case and Care Plan](#) to support the young person over 18 years of age is a voluntary agreement and must be developed in agreement with the young person. The Plan should outline the agreed strategies to meet identified needs in the four areas relating to the young person's life including:

- health and wellbeing including emotional and behavioural development;
- education including training and job placement;
- identity and social needs including family and social relationships, social presentation and self care skills; and
- contact arrangements.

Although the same case and care planning format is used, child protection workers will need to adapt the information recorded to reflect the developmental stage of young adults. For instance under the area of education, training for employment and job placement may need to be considered. Only relevant sections of the Case and Care Plan template need to be completed.

Child protection workers should refer to the more comprehensive Attachment 2, "Detailed Guide for developing Case and Care Plans for young people who are preparing to leave care and for young adults who have left care. The following is an overview of what strategies may be incorporated into the Case and Care Plan for young adults who have left care.

### **Overarching considerations**

The development of the Case and Care Plan should occur before the young person turns 18 years (or the guardianship order is discharged if earlier). The process should promote opportunities for the young people to participate in the development of the Plan. The young people are more likely to participate if they:

- feel valued and respected;
- believe that their views are heard and will make a difference;
- know that confidentiality is maintained;
- trust the adults in their lives;
- receive encouragement to address issues at their own pace; and
- understand and influence the decision-making process.

In accordance with the Tasmanian Child Protection Services Practice Framework, child protection workers must promote and support the participation of other significant people who are involved in the transition planning for the young person, including the young person's carers, family members, advocates and other services.

### **Case and Care Plans**

Case and Care Plans for young adults who have left care should:

- be sustainable;
- reflect normative expectations; and
- promote the young adult's capacity to be independent and resilient. Opportunities for building resilience are increased if young adults are able to develop meaningful and supportive relationships in a variety of settings.

### **Health and Wellbeing**

This section should clarify:

- any plans for Disability Services to assume primary responsibility for ongoing case management; and
- the involvement of preventative, sexual or other health services that will support the young adult.

This section must be completed if it is proposed that Child Protection Services will cover any medical costs on behalf of the young adult.

### **Emotional and behavioural development (Wellbeing)**

This section should be completed if there is a need for Child Protection Services to continue to support the young adult's emotional and behavioural development. Potential anxieties and worries will need to be explored. This section should contain agreed strategies to link the young adult with available services within the community.

### **Education, Training and Job Placement**

This section should outline any planned involvement by Child Protection Services to support the young adult's further education including employment related skills development and training programs. The plan should provide directions for the young adult to access employment programs, including job network organisations and Job Placement, Employment and Training Programs (JPET).

Assistance with costs associated with further education, training and job placement is a priority area for the continuation of after care support until the young person is 21 years of age. The [After Care Support Program](#) prioritises the provision of financial assistance to adult care leavers under the age of 25 years to continue with their education.

### **Identity and social needs**

This section may outline the support and assistance that the young adult will require to develop and/or maintain contact with family members. Details can also be recorded in the section on Contact. Strategies could include assistance with:

- the cost of maintaining contact with family members;
- locating family members;
- linking the young person to mentor schemes and other support services;
- developing relationships with family members; and
- reunifying with extended family.

If the plan proposes assistance with the costs of maintaining contact with family members, the level of contact should be a planned process with the young adult and the family members taking an increasing responsibility for supporting and maintaining contact. The [After Care Support Program](#) assists care leavers to locate family members and may provide financial assistance to care leavers less than 25 years of age to support opportunities for care leavers to develop relationships with family members.

Financial assistance towards social and leisure activities may be approved through the [After Care Support Program](#) and the Case and Care Plan for young adults over the age of 18 years may include a referral to the After Care Support Program after the young adult turns 19 years.

### **Identity**

Ideally there will have been a focus on identity issues as part of the process of planning for leaving care including the process of exploring information in the young person's personal file. However, some young adults may require additional support to explore their personal file and gather relevant information to promote their personal identity. There may be a need for counselling in relation to identity and self-esteem issues. It may be necessary to refer the young adult to the [After Care Support Program](#) and/or the CREATE Foundation. After care support strategies in relation to identity should be specific, action-oriented and measurable.

### **Social presentation and self care skills**

Self care skills are critical to the successful transition to independence. Young adults need to master specific behaviours such as shopping for food and washing clothes as well as the establishment of routines that support further education and employment.

Young adults should have been provided with a copy of the leaving care package *Outta Here! Your Options Your Choices* and have been supported to explore information about community support services.

If the young adult continues to live with his or her carer, the Case and Care Plan should detail the amount of board that will be paid and the roles and responsibilities within the home. Young adults paying board may be eligible for Rent Assistance from Centrelink.

The Plan may detail specific strategies and expenditure to establish independent living arrangements for the young person. If there is a plan to support a young person to live independently, the plan should also outline what community resources the young person will access including Transition to Independent living Allowance (TILA), assistance with bond and rent, assistance with furniture etc.

### **Approval of Case and Care Plans for young people who have left care**

A Team Leader Case Management must approve a Case and Care Plan that commits expenditure of up to \$2 000 for a period of 12 months after leaving care.

A Manager Child Protection must approve a Case and Care Plan that commits expenditure up to \$10,000 for a period of 12 months after leaving care.

An Area Director must approve a Case and Care Plan (including the level of expenditure) that exceeds 12 months from discharge.

### **Recording Plans on the Child Welfare Information System (CWIS)**

Young adults who are supported through a Case and Care Plan after they have left care should be listed as leaving care (Status type 43) on the CWIS Notification Slip.

### **Related legislation**

- *Children, Young Persons and Their Families 1997*

### **Roles and responsibilities**

- Area Managers will ensure the dissemination of this policy; and
- Child Protection Managers and Senior Practice Consultants will ensure the policy is implemented.
- The Program Development and Policy Unit for Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services will review the policy position in consultation with CREATE and young people who are leaving care or have left care.

### **Related documents**

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Educational outcomes of children on guardianship or custody orders, a pilot study*, Child Welfare Series Number 42, June 2007
- [After Care Support Program](#) Guidelines
- [Case and Care planning documents](#)
- Cashmore, J & Paxman, M *Longitudinal Study of Wards Leaving Care* Social Policy Research Centre New South Wales 1996
- Commonwealth of Australia, *The Road Home A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* 2008
- CREATE Foundation, *Report Card on Education* 2006
- Maunders, D Liddel, M & Green, S *Young People Leaving Care and Protection* Australian Clearinghouse for Youth studies 1999
- Outta Here! Your Options Your Choices Leaving Care Package
- Children and Family Services *Case and Care Planning* – information sheet

### **Attachments**

Attachment 1 “Recommended Schedule of Tasks Relating to Leaving Care”

Attachment 2 “Detailed guide for developing Case and Care Plans for young people who are preparing to leave care and for young adults young adults who have left care”

## Attachment I Recommended Schedule of Tasks Relating to Leaving Care

Age	Task
14 years	Lodge ABSTUDY application for Aboriginal children in care
15 years	Case and Care Plan to include a focus on planning for leaving care Referral to Disability Services (if appropriate) Provide young person with leaving care package <i>Outta Here! Your Options, Your Choices</i> Commence the process of assisting the young person read his/her personal file
Prior to 16 <sup>th</sup> birthday	Assist the young person to apply for Youth Allowance or Disability Support Pension
16 – 17 years	Continued involvement as outlined in the Case and Care Plan
17 years and 9 months	Prepare the Case and Care Plan for the period post 18 years and up to 21 years Apply for TILA (if appropriate)
18 years	Discharge from custody/guardianship Complete notification slip – transfer to leaving care status (43) Letters to young person, carer and parent as appropriate
18 – 19 years	Involvement as outlined in the Case and Care Plan Apply for TILA (if appropriate) Referral to <a href="#">After Care Support Program</a> (if appropriate)
19 years – 21 years	Involvement as outlined in the Case and Care Plan that has been approved beyond 19 years of age Review the Case and Care Plan annually until the young adult turns 21

Please note that this is a guide only and it is recognised that the actual transition to independence will reflect individual circumstances.

# Attachment 2

## Detailed guide for developing Case and Care Plans for young people who are preparing to leave care and for young adults who have left care

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## Introduction

The planning process for young people<sup>1</sup> transitioning from care, as an extension of the *Case and Care Plan*, builds upon major life areas for children and young people in care, namely health and wellbeing, education, identity and social needs and contact. This guide explores these areas in detail. The case manager, the young person and the carer should be involved in developing the Case and Care Plan. Family members and other professionals involved in the young person's life should be encouraged to participate in the development of the plans to support the transition from care. The *Outta Here: your options, your choices* leaving care package has information and web links to assist the young person gather information and develop skills in relation to the key areas that are reviewed through the *Case and Care Plan*. The planning for leaving care process should encourage and support the young person to actively use the leaving care package.

## Health and Wellbeing

The health component of the Case and Care Plan will build on the health issues that have been identified during the young person's period in care. By the age of 15 years, there is likely to be a significant amount of health information on the young person's file.

The planning should focus on the required steps for the young person to take increasing responsibility for managing his or her health needs. For instance, the plan may identify a person who will work with the young person to obtain information about specific health conditions as well as support groups, such as the Asthma Foundation.

### ***Day to day health care needs***

Developing increasing responsibility includes the opportunity for young people to take an active role in decisions about health needs and solutions. Planning during this stage should explore the following aspect of day to day health care with the young person:

- whether the young person has a Medicare card, if not what will be the arrangements for obtaining a card;
- are health checks (including dental checks) up to date;
- is the young person happy with his or her doctor (consider gender issues and location);
- does the young person know how to make an appointment to see a doctor;
- does the young person understand that some doctors are willing to bulk bill and how to find a doctor that will bulk bill;
- if the young person is taking medication, can the young person manage his or her medication, and if assistance is required, who will provide assistance;
- discussions around sex education and gender identification (see separate section below);
- for young females, are they participating in the national human papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination Program to prevent cervical cancer; and
- any other day to day health needs about which the young person is concerned.

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<sup>1</sup> The term young person includes young adults.

## **Preventative health**

Developing increasing responsibility includes an understanding of preventative health measures and taking action to address lifestyle issues that act as health determinants. Therefore the planning should address the following matters:

- the young person's understanding of the need for a healthy/balanced diet;
- the young person's understanding of the relationship between hygiene and health;
- the young person's understanding of the affects of alcohol and substance abuse on health, and identifying specific concerns in relation to alcohol and drug consumption where necessary;
- the young person's understanding of the importance of keeping fit; and
- whether or not the young person wishes to set specific goals to address lifestyle factors to improve his or her future health.

## **Sexual health**

Health issues that are related to sexual activity should also be considered under the health plan. For instance, following questions could be addressed:

- would the young person like to have an appointment to discuss family planning;
- would they like to discuss gender identification;
- if the young person is, or may be pregnant, what ante-natal care is in place; and
- does the young person have an adequate knowledge about how to avoid sexually transmitted infections?

## **Wellbeing including emotional and behavioural development**

Young people in care require considerable support during adolescence. Anxieties and worries should be explored and addressed. These may be identified through behaviours such as:

- self-harming behaviours;
- unsettled sleep and bed wetting;
- being withdrawn and uncommunicative;
- getting into fights; and
- episodes of rage/anger.

The Case and Care Planning – information sheet outlines areas that should be considered including the need to recognise the young person's strengths that promote resilience.

If there is a need for specialist intervention this should also be recorded in the Case and Care Plan.

## **Education**

The Department of Education (DoE) Pathway Planning process helps young people in the State education system plan for their future. The Pathway Plans identify the student's strengths, interests and goals and support the most informed decision about future education, training and work pathways. Guaranteeing Futures teams within each DoE region consist of pathway planning officers and youth learning officers who work with individual or small groups of students in years eight, nine

and ten. The pathway plans provide insight into the student's aspirations as well as the resources to help the student and overcome potential barriers.

The young person's Pathway Plan will inform the education component of the Case and Care Plan. If the young person has an Individual Education Plan (IEP), the IEP together with the Pathway Plan may cover the strategies to achieve the educational outcomes for the young person. In that case the Case and Care Plan need only refer to the other plans that are in place and highlight proposed expenditure to meet the young person's educational goals.

Research highlights that the educational outcomes for children in state care are not as high as their peers who are not in care. For Tasmania the research indicates that the educational performance of children in State care in year 7 deteriorates when compared to their peers (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2007). Given the importance of education in life outcomes, it is important for child protection workers to explore young people's education needs, especially the factors that support education within the placement such as:

- having a suitable place to study;
- the carer's role in supporting the young person's educational progress; and
- whether or not additional resources are required.

Informing the young person's parents about the educational progress should be considered and where possible the parents should be involved in the planning processes and outcomes achieved.

The Pathway Planning program for state school students in years eight, nine and ten supports the exploration of individual student identity. In particular the Pathway Plan for year eight students explores questions related to identity, such as:

- Who are the important people in my life?
- What are my dreams?
- What am I good at?
- What am I proud of?
- What are my goals for the future?

The Case and Care Plan for young people who are enrolled in a private school may still need to address the aspects that are covered by DoE's Pathway Plans.

The education plan for young people who are not attending school should outline appropriate strategies for the young person to re-engage with mainstream education. If a return to mainstream education is not an option or is not appropriate, alternative pathways to develop skills and knowledge should be explored based on preferred employment pathways. The young person should be linked with employment support agencies.

## **Identity and social needs**

Identity formation is a critical developmental stage during adolescence and planning for leaving care must include sensitive and detailed discussions about identity. Identity issues are generally more complex for young people who are in care. For instance they may have to provide explanations as to why they are not living with their parents to peers and other adults. If the young person feels awkward or unsure about this, the identity plan should include strategies to equip the young person successfully handle such situations.

## ***Family of origin***

Planning around identity formation should focus on the young person's knowledge about their family of origin and understanding of the reasons why they entered care. The planning should be responsive to individual circumstances. Some young people who have left care report that they do not understand why they entered care or experienced placement changes. The potential for gaps in information and confusion about significant changes during childhood should be explored. Unresolved anger towards family members and instability experienced in care inhibit the transition to independence. Negative factors should be acknowledged and addressed prior to the young person transitioning from care to independence (Maunder and colleagues 1999).

Workers report that there is a potential for young people in care to experience feelings of abandonment by their birth families when faced with the process of leaving care. If carers and workers do not recognise such feelings and allow the opportunity for young people to talk about them, there is a risk that the young person's sense of abandonment is widened to include carers and workers during the leaving care process.

Exploring family background may involve an exploration of what family members the young person can name or know something about. The young person could develop a family tree that includes what information he or she has. This could be the basis for young people to think about what sections of his or her family background have been "filled in" and what sections are blank. A goal in the identity plan could be to find out more about some of the areas that are blank. Family history is often relayed by word of mouth and the activity in the plan may be to contact a member of the family who is able to provide answers to the young person's specific questions.

## ***Photographs and personal documents***

Photographs and personal documents are extremely important for identity formation. If the young person has a life story book, this should be a good source for considering identity issues. If the young person does not have photographs, it is important to plan for ways to assist the young person to build up a collection of photos that tell his or her story. To some extent, the past can be filled in with photos of previous schools and other significant places. The leaving care package *Outta Here! Your Options Your Choices* has a folder to store photos and personal documents and the young person should be encouraged to take responsibility for collecting and storing identity items. There may be documents on the young person's file that can contribute to identity formation.

## ***Cultural background***

Understanding cultural background is an important aspect of identity formation and the identity plan should assist the young person to explore information about his or her cultural background.

The Case and Care Plan should outline specific strategies that aim to develop the young person's links with community events and activities that enhance and celebrate the young person's cultural background.

## ***Information on personal files***

Young people may benefit from accessing the information that is contained in their personal files. The discussion and activities that inform the *Case and Care Plan* should inform the decision on when a young person will commence the process of exploring the information contained in his or her personal file.

All persons who are or were under the custody or guardianship of the Secretary have a right to access their personal information and are not required to lodge a Freedom of Information (FOI)

application. The option of reading the file should be discussed as part of process for preparing to leave care and young people should be encouraged and supported to read the file before they leave care.

Child protection workers should generally invite young people on their caseload to read their personal file as soon as possible after their fifteenth birthday. If children protection workers make a professional judgement that a young people under the age of 15 years would benefit from accessing information on a personal file or a young person under 15 years of age asks to read the file, the young person should be supported to commence the process of accessing their personal file.

The child's primary worker must support the young person to read and understand the information contained in the file. Young people are likely to have a range of expectations about their personal file. A common reason for young people wanting to access their file is to better understand the reasons why they entered care. They may also expect that the information will provide answers to other questions. A young person's file may have been maintained over many years and the sheer volume of the file may be initially daunting. Alternatively there may be a scarcity of information and gaps in information.

Young people who decide to view his or her file, must be informed that:

- they may bring along their support person if they wish;
- the file is a State record and that they cannot take the original file from the office;
- they do not have to read the file in one sitting;
- they can have original personal documentation, such as photos, school reports, birth certificates, and letters to them from family members;
- they are unable to read confidential information pertaining to other family members;
- the appropriate timing of the release of personal documentation will need to be agreed with young person; and
- they cannot take or photocopy psychological or psychiatric reports.

Before the young person reads his or her file, the child protection worker who will support the person to read the file must:

- read the file;
- identify any information that may be stressful for the young person;
- seek advice from the FOI unit if there is any doubt about what information should be disclosed;
- remove or block out any information that should not be disclosed (e.g. identity of notifiers);
- create an open and honest environment that enables the young person to make their decisions in relation to accessing information on their personal file;
- arrange a suitable time for the person to read the file by consulting the young person, the carer and other significant adults;
- consider the most appropriate way to assist the young person to gain a better understanding of their life story, including painful events; and
- exercise professional judgement in considering the level of maturity the young person has.

Confidential assessments of family members cannot be released to the young person, though other information about siblings including their full name, date of birth and previous placements should be provided. Child protection workers should seek advice from coordinators and senior practice consultants on what information that cannot be released.

**Some young people may decide not to read their personal file. Their decision should be respected and they should not be encouraged to read the file if they do not want to.**

When the appropriate opportunity arises for young person to read his or her file, the child protection worker must:

- be present when the person is reading the file;
- provide support by explaining the content and responding to any issues raised by the persons or the person's support person; and *most importantly*
- help the young person understand and come to terms with their personal history.

Young people who have not had the opportunity to read their file before leaving care should be advised that they may request to see the file at any stage after leaving care. If the person has left care and at the time that he or she requests to see the file is not known to the Area Office they should be advised that they will need to provide proof of identity.

The personal file may contain assessment reports about the young person prepared by other professionals and the child protection worker should consider the need to refer the young person to the professional to explain the contents of the report. The personal file may also contain information that could be distressing and there may be a need to refer the young person to counsellor to assist the young person to resolve any issues that arise from information contained on the file.

If original documentation is being provided to the person, the child protection worker will photocopy the original/s and place the copy/ies on the file and record on the file a list of documentation provided and the date provided.

### **Family and social relationships**

Positive family and social relationships contribute to the young person's resilience. The Case and Care Plan for young people aged 15 years and older should explore the young person's social world with the aim to build on positive social relationships. Encouraging the young person to complete an ecomap may be a good way to explore family and social relationships with the young person.

The Case and Care Plan for young adults should also identify the level of contact between the young adult and the child protection worker. The reality is that the relationship with the child protection worker is not a sustainable relationship for the young adult and a primary focus of contact during the period of after care support should be to assist the young person develop sustainable and ongoing relationships within the young person's local community. For young adults contact with the child protection worker should reduce, as contact with other supports within the community and where possible family members should increase.

### **Peer relationships**

Peer relationships are important during this developmental stage. Friends are important for talking about personal things, testing out ideas and sharing everyday experiences. The reality for many young people in care is that placement disruption undermines the young person's capacity to make and maintain friends. Bullying is an issue for young people in care and can be an impediment to school integration (Create Foundation 2006). The potential for bullying should be explored with the young person and where there are concerns strategies developed with the young person.

## **Former carers**

The family and social relationships planning should explore the possibility that the young person would like to meet with former carers.

## **Community activities**

Consistent with the need to build resilience for the young person, the Case and Care Plan should explore and promote participation in community activities, especially participation in community activities that are likely to provide ongoing support for the young person after care. Linking the young person with a mentor may also be helpful.

Proposed expenditure in the Case and Care Plan should promote the person's participation with sporting/or cultural team events and or individual skills development programs (e.g. driving lessons) that parents of intact families would normally pay for. Incidental social activities such as going to the movies/swimming pool or hiring videos will not be approved as part of a Case and Care Plan for young adults who have left care.

## **Social presentation**

Social presentation is a critical aspect for young people aged 15 years and older. Social presentation is linked to the identity and the family and social relationship dimensions. Young people who are unsure about their identity and have fragile relationships with adults and peers may seek to resolve any underlying tensions through their social presentation. Identifying with a sub-group and adopting the "behaviours" and the "look" of the group members creates a sense of belonging and place in the social world.

The Case and Care Plan for young people who are preparing to leave care should recognise that the developmental stage generally involves an expansion of social settings. The Plan should promote the development of communication skills in a variety of settings such as to adaptation of language to suit the circumstances.

Social presentation involves how a person dresses/grooms, how a person behaves and how a person interacts (especially the choice of language) with others. Most adolescents are keen to experiment with different images and through such experimentation they master different roles and greater capacity to interact within diverse social groups. However, the experimentation can be challenging to others as well as the young person. Social presentation that does not fit the social context is likely to result in some form of expulsion and or embarrassment for the young person concerned. Thus planning with this age group requires sound feedback on the impact of their social presentation. The challenge for all young people is to learn how to present in different situations. What may be considered normal behaviours or interactions within the young person's peer group is not likely to be accepted in the classroom or when being questioned by the police. Young people need assistance to develop skills in this area and the social presentation plan should address the skills development in terms of specific abilities and goals rather than vague goals that do not provide the young person with a sense of the challenges and the mechanisms to achieve the desired outcomes.

Some young people may have limited control over their social presentation. A significant disability may impact on their speech and restrict their capacity to test out specific roles that contribute to social presentation. They are likely to need specific interventions to improve their social presentation skills.

## ***Clothes and grooming***

The Case and Care Plan should explore if there is a need for the young person to develop skills in looking after themselves, including selecting appropriate clothing for different social situations. The plan should also ensure that the young person has suitable clothing for particular situations. This developmental stage is likely to include “rites of passage” events such as grade 10 leavers’ dinners that involve an emphasis on dress and grooming.

## **Self care skills**

### ***Community supports and living skills***

Self care skills include the development of skills and knowledge that care leavers require to make a successful transition to independence. The planning should focus on the young person’s capacity to develop skills in relation to household chores and managing money. The *Outta Here! Your Options Your Choices* leaving care package contains further information on these skills and has been designed to encourage the young person to seek out relevant information to support the transition to independence. The package has an essential living skills checklist that young people together with their carers and workers can use to assess how their level of skill development in practical matters such as using kitchen appliances, making transactions with financial institutions and applying for a job.

### ***Opening a bank account***

Young people aged 15 and older should have a bank account in their own name. Financial institutions vary in relation to the age at which they allow a child to open an account in their own name, though some institutions allow children aged 12 to 17 years to open an account in their own name.

### ***Managing money***

Young people should be supported to manage their clothing allowance. If the young person does not have skills in managing money and purchasing clothing the plan should set clear goals in this area.

Young people who are receiving Youth Allowance or other pensions and benefits should receive the payments in their bank account. If the young person has extremely limited capacity to manage money because of an intellectual disability, the care and placement plan must detail the arrangements for managing the young person’s income.

### ***Youth Allowance***

Young people 16 years and older who are in state care are eligible for Youth Allowance at the dependent rate. Young people aged should be assisted to apply for Youth Allowance before they turn 16 by lodging an *Intent to Claim with Centrelink* form. Young people under guardianship of the Secretary can only receive the higher independent rate of payments if Child Protection Services does not provide financial support towards “necessities of life” such as accommodation, food and transport.

## **ABSTUDY**

ABSTUDY (managed by Centrelink) helps indigenous students aged 14 or over at 1 January in the year of study through income support payments and supplementary benefits.

### ***Disability Support Pension***

A young person aged 16 may be eligible for a Disability Support Pension if the level of impairment means that the young person is unable work full-time for at least two years.

### ***Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)***

The Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) assists young people moving to independence. TILA provides one off support up to the value of \$1,000 for young people aged 15 to 25 years. It complements other support services provided by Child and Family Services. TILA funds may be approved to cover costs associated with skills development or establishing accommodation. TILA does not involve a direct payment to the young person. Further information is available at [www.tila.org.au](http://www.tila.org.au)

### ***Obtaining a tax file number (TFN)***

Secondary students may apply for a tax file number via the secondary schools tax file number program. Under this program the school verifies the young person's identity. If this option is not available and a young person aged 15 or older does not have a TFN, the self skills plan should outline the agreed steps to obtain a TFN.

### ***Enrolling to vote***

A young person aged 17 years who is an Australian citizen may enrol to vote but is not entitled to vote until he or she is 18 years. However, as the young person is required to inform the electoral office when he or she changes address, it is likely to be preferable to advise young people to enrol when they turn 18 years.

### **Contact**

Most young people in care require significant support to develop relationships while members of their immediate family. Although family contact may have been problematic, planning for young people leaving care should recognise the potential impact of changing circumstances including:

- the young person's increasing autonomy;
- emerging identity issues that may trigger a desire to seek out family members; and
- uncertainty about the young person's future living arrangements may result in a plan to live with family members after leaving care.