

# National Leaving Care Survey and Research Study

FUNDED BY AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

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## BACKGROUND AND AIMS

Australian child protection services have been slower than some of their overseas counterparts, such as the United Kingdom, to recognise the need for specific services for young people leaving care. The last 10 years, however, have seen a body of research into the needs of young people leaving care in various Australian States, with the resulting establishment of specific services in some States. As each State is governed by different Acts that regulate the services provided to young people in care, the development of new services has, of necessity, been on a state by state basis, with little or no coordination or consistency of service provision across Australia.

The aim of this research was to map the range of legislation, policies, programs and services that are specifically focussed on the needs of young people leaving care across Australia, and to identify the common and divergent approaches, and gaps within the service system as well as to highlight issues for ongoing research or advocacy.

## METHODOLOGY AND DATA SET

Several strategies were adopted to gather the information required to achieve the stated aims:

- A questionnaire was designed to gather information from service providers about the background to their programs, the service provided and the methods used to evaluate the programs.
- Information provided to the 2005 CREATE Face 2 Face Conference on Leaving Care by the different state funding bodies was summarised and returned to the funding bodies for review and update.

## SERVICE PROVIDER QUESTIONNAIRES

The researchers attempted to identify all the providers of leaving care/after care services in each State and Territory in order to gather the required information. In the States that have programs specifically focussed on providing services to assist young people in their transition from care (New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria), a questionnaire was sent to each program.

The other States and Territories (Tasmania, Queensland, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory) did not have specifically funded leaving care programs. They did, however, have more general programs that included work with care leavers in their suite of services (for example, CREATE, Barnardos, Care Leavers of Australia Network (CLAN), as well as lead tenant services.) In an attempt to canvas activities that support young care leavers in all States and Territories, questionnaires were also sent to the general programs in these States and Territories. The questionnaire was, however, not appropriate to capture the

activities of the general programs in these States/Territories. Although responses were received from general programs in ACT and the Northern Territory, their responses are not included alongside those of the States that have specific leaving care programs, but rather are summarised at the end of this report. It is noted that all States and Territories have general programs that include work with care leavers (e.g. CREATE, CLAN).

The Lead Tenant program in Tasmania has, however, been included in the specific after care services since its case management model is more similar to that group than the more general support group.

A further service type has been identified in Queensland and the Northern Territory, where the State/Territory Departments (which directly provide the services to young people in care)

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can open individual cases to support young people who have recently left care if required, although there is no specific leaving care service. The Queensland State Department provided a response to the specific services questionnaire, and their response on the range of services that they provide is included in Table 9. No questionnaire was sent to the Northern Territory Department.

**Table 1: Details of service provider questionnaires**

|                                   | <i>Surveys sent</i> | <i>Surveys received</i> | <i>Proportion received</i> | <i>Number of young people supported by programs that returned surveys over previous 12 months</i> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Specific programs</b>          |                     |                         |                            |   |
| WA                                | 4                   | 4                       | 4 / 4                      | 240 (2005/2006)   |
| SA                                | 2                   | 2                       | 2 / 2                      | 160 (approximate)   |
| Vic                               | 13                  | 9                       | 9 / 13                     | 117   |
| NSW                               | 12                  | 6                       | 6 / 12                     | 462   |
| Tas                               | 1                   | 1                       | 1 / 1                      | 4   |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>32</b>           | <b>22</b>               | <b>69%</b>                 | <b>983</b>  |
| <b>General and other programs</b> |                     |                         |                            |   |
| ACT                               | 2                   | 2                       | 2/2                        |   |
| NT                                | 1                   | 1                       | 1/1                        |   |
| QLD                               | 1                   | 1                       | 1/1                        |   |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>4</b>            | <b>4</b>                | <b>4/4</b>                 |   |

## STATE AND TERRITORY FUNDING BODIES

Each of the State and Territory Departments returned a revised version of the Face 2 Face report. Some also provided additional relevant material. The responses were summarised around the 8 original themes from the Face 2 Face Report:

- number of young people discharged from care over a recent 12 month period
- legislation and policy requirements
- budget allocation
- current initiatives
- specific services
- minimum standards
- challenges
- evaluation.

Contact was originally made with the funding bodies in December 2006, with follow up contact in May 2007 to accommodate any updates and confirm the accuracy of data.

## RESULTS

### LEGISLATION AND POLICY REQUIREMENTS

Table 2 provides a summary of the legislative and policy requirements in each State and Territory in relation to support for young people in preparation for and after leaving care.

Most States and Territories have policies in relation to assistance for young people leaving care and for after care support, with some States and Territories currently reviewing their legislative positions. Not surprisingly, there is a strong link between legislation and service provision, with the States that are established providers of after care support services (NSW, Victoria, SA and WA) all having legislation for the provision of after care support. Although Victoria has only just proclaimed its legislation, pilot after care support services have existed for the past three years. However, legislation directing State/Territory support to young people past age 18 is not per se a sufficient reason to provide specific stand-alone after care services. Not all States and Territories feel that specific after care services are the most appropriate vehicles to support young people leaving care, given population and geographic considerations.

**Table 2: Comparison of State and Territory policy and legislation responses**

|   | VIC  | NSW                        | WA                         | SA                                      |
|---|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Legislation re preparation for leaving care         | Yes  | Yes                        | Yes                        | Yes                                     |
| Legislation re after care support                   | Yes  | Yes                        | Yes                        | Yes <sup>1</sup>                        |
| Policies re preparation for leaving care            | Yes  | Yes                        | Yes                        | Yes                                     |
| Policies re after care support                      | Yes  | Yes                        | Yes                        | Yes                                     |
| Upper age of support for transition to independence | 21   | 25 <sup>+2</sup>           | 25                         | Not specified                           |
| Specific after care services                        | 14 regional and 1 statewide Aboriginal service | 6 regional and 2 statewide | 3 regional and 1 statewide | 2 govt run services over 3 metro sites. |

|   | QLD   | TAS   | ACT  | NT  |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| Legislation re preparation                          | Yes   | Under Review <sup>3</sup>   | Yes  | Not specific. <sup>6</sup> But proposal for specific response in Draft bill   |
| Legislation re after care support                   | No  | Under Review  | No   | Draft Bill  |
| Policies re preparation                             | Yes   | Yes (in draft form)   | Yes  | Yes   |
| Policies re after care support                      | Yes (specific cases can be opened up, but not universal)  | Yes (in draft form)   | Yes (the State can support young people after turning 18 if they are completing education)   | No, although flexibility to provide voluntary response  |
| Upper age of support for transition to independence | No upper age limit. Nominally up to 25. A small number of cases continued past 18 years, although in reality most complete by 19 years  | 25  | 18+ (the additional time post 18 limited to the months required to complete year 12)   | Draft Bill to provide support to 25. Currently discretionary provision of service post order  |
| Specific after care services                        | No specific services – govt staff can continue to support young people after formal care completed if there are outstanding tasks from the transition plan (support service case) | One after care support program commenced on 23/4/07 <sup>4</sup><br>Tasmanian care leavers make up a high proportion of the clientele of Reconnect programs | No formal leaving care service. Young people leaving care referred to Barnardos Transition to Independence program or SAAP services <sup>5</sup> | No (The small number of young people leaving care annually across a large geographic region make the idea of a specific service impractical.) |

<sup>1</sup> The legislation in South Australia provides for support to young people who have been in care to 'prepare for transition to adulthood' with no guidelines around age, so can be interpreted as after care support.

<sup>2</sup> States/Territories that indicated that they had discretion to work with people over the stated age limit are indicated with a '+' sign.

<sup>3</sup> The Tasmanian legislation contains a principle of preparation for leaving care, but is ambiguous in the implications for practice. A 2006 review (Report of Child Protection Services in Tasmania) recommended strengthening the legislation by further exploring what an 'exemplary parent' role entails (i.e. in terms of preparation for leaving care and post care support). Draft policies will assist to operationalise the legislation.

<sup>4</sup> As the Tasmanian after care service is new, no information appears about it along with responses from other service providers of leaving care/after care services.

<sup>5</sup> The Face 2 Face response listed Barnardos as a specific service. The survey received from Barnardos, however, indicated that they provide services similar to the general services in ACT.

<sup>6</sup> NT indicated that their legislation has been reviewed and a draft of a new Bill is currently being prepared for Parliament.

## NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE

Table 3 shows the numbers of young people aged 15-17 years who left care over the 12 month financial period 2005-6 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007) based on figures provided by the State and Territory Departments.

**Table 3: Numbers of young people leaving care across Australia 2005-2006**

| Vic | NSW | QLD | WA  | SA  | ACT | Tas | NT |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| 657 | 539 | 293 | 127 | 106 | 32  | 55  | 8  |

## STATE AND TERRITORY BUDGET ALLOCATIONS FOR AFTER CARE SUPPORT

As indicated earlier, the different States and Territories have very different numbers of young people leaving care each year so will necessarily have differing budget allocations. Table 4 gives some indication of the size of the budgets for after care support where the information was available. Once again, there is a strong link between the existence of legislation for after care support and the existence of a budget to provide that support.

**Table 4: State and Territory budget allocations for after care support**

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| <b>Vic</b> | Two streams from State Government: *<br>Office for Housing: \$843,461 SAAP money for 2006-2007 to fund 15 after care services. Program currently being reviewed.<br>Office for Children: \$2.09 million allocated in 2007- 2008 (new money, and rising over coming 3 years) to help young people leaving care up to 21 years of age. |
| <b>NSW</b> | For 2007/2008 DoCS will expend a total of \$3.98 million on the provision of after care assistance across the state, including direct financial support, support for specialist services and support for family tracing/reconnection services.   |
| <b>SA</b>  | \$500,300 in 2006-2007, which includes post care services.   |
| <b>WA</b>  | Total funding for the four services in 2006-07 was \$929,922.  |
| <b>QLD</b> | No specific budget for after care support.   |
| <b>Tas</b> | From March 2007, \$100,000 per year to assist care leavers up to the age of 25.<br>Some of this is used to fund CLAN, but the bulk is to brokerage funding for young people leaving care up to 25 years  |
| <b>ACT</b> | No specific budget for after care support.   |
| <b>NT</b>  | No specific budget for after care support.   |

\* In Victoria, the Office for Housing (through SAAP) has developed and funded regional after care services for the past three years, while the Office for Children (the provider of in-care services) is about to inject further funds. The funds will be allocated regionally and may either go to the existing Commonwealth/State SAAP funded services to strengthen them, or to other service providers, resulting in two services in a region. There is a requirement of service alliances in each region to oversee the use of the funds.

## COMMONWEALTH FUNDING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE

Although the bulk of leaving care services are funded and delivered alongside out-of-home care services at a State and Territory level, the Commonwealth Government introduced the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) in 2003 as a response to the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce report *Footprints to the Future*.

TILA is intended to be provided as part of a young person's transitional plan in order to help reduce his/her reliance upon crisis intervention and other community services at a later time. It is an additional support to link young people into education, training and community life, as well as to provide practical support around housing needs. A 'one-off' TILA payment of \$1000 is available to all young people, regardless of cultural background, aged between 15 and 25 years who are about to exit, or have exited, state-based care and/or informal care such as: juvenile justice; out-of-home care; or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander kinship care arrangements.

There is a requirement of only one application for any young person, although the money for which an application is made does not have to be spent all at once. However, if a plan changes and the young person has not called upon the entire \$1000, he/she is not able to fund the costs associated with a new plan through TILA.

A review of TILA in 2004 identified the ease of determining eligibility and the relatively speedy turnaround time for applications as strengths of the program. However, a number of changes to the program were recommended. Some of those (for example, broadening the eligibility to include young people who had been in informal care as well as formal care) have been acted on. Other recommendations from stakeholders in the evaluation process have not been adopted (e.g. raising the upper age limit from 25 to 30 and increasing the amount for each young person to closer to \$2000). The evaluation recommended a further evaluation once the program has been running for a longer period of time. It is intended for a further review to occur before 2009.

TILA was previously administered by a range of NGOs in each State/Territory. As a result of the recent review, the process will change to one national service provider administering TILA (with the ability to contract out administration across States and Territories if they wish). The national provider (from July 2007) will be Southern Youth and Families Services, based in New South Wales. Until they establish processes, the existing providers will continue to administer the funds, being a single provider in each of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania, with the provider in Victoria also servicing ACT, and a Western Australian provider covering Northern Territory and South Australia.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIFIC AFTER CARE SERVICES

Services were established in clusters across the States in line with cultural and policy shifts within each State. South Australia and New South Wales were the first states to develop specific programs to assist the transition from care. The South Australian

programs were run by the State Department while those in NSW were contracted out. Services in Western Australia, Tasmania and Victoria began at about the same time, with Victorian services all currently running as pilot services.

**Table 5: Establishment dates for specific after care services**

| Year | SA (2) | NSW (6) | WA (4) | Vic (9) | Tas (1) | Total direct service (n = 22) | % direct service (n = 22) |
|------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1989 | 2      |         |        |         |         | 2                             | 9%                        |
| 1992 |        | 2       |        |         |         | 2                             | 9%                        |
| 1994 |        | 1       |        |         |         | 1                             | 4%                        |
| 1996 |        | 2       |        |         |         | 2                             | 9%                        |
| 1997 |        | 1       |        |         |         | 1                             | 4%                        |
| 1998 |        | 1       | 1*     |         |         | 1                             | 4%                        |
| 1999 |        |         |        |         |         | 1                             | 4%                        |
| 2003 |        |         | 3      | 3       | 1       | 7                             | 32%                       |
| 2004 |        |         |        | 4       |         | 4                             | 18%                       |
| 2005 |        |         |        | 1       |         | 1                             | 4%                        |
| 2006 |        |         |        | 1       |         | 1                             | 4%                        |

\* Funded through Commonwealth/State Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

The majority (77%) of services were initially funded by the various State government departments with a small number funded either by particular non-government agencies or by philanthropic trusts.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of agencies (95%) now receive State Government funding, although there are still contributions by philanthropic trusts and the parent agencies.

Half of the agencies reported receiving Commonwealth funding by way of TILA (Transition to Independent Living Allowance) funding to distribute to young people leaving care, capped at \$1000 for each young person.

#### AIMS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF SPECIFIC AFTER CARE SERVICES

The specific after care services indicated that their services had a number of particular purposes and expected to improve the outcomes for young people in relation to the overall transition from care and particular aspects such as housing, education, social and emotional support and the provision of information. Table 6 presents the most frequently mentioned aims.

**Table 6: Service aims and objectives identified by at least 3 specific services**

|  | Number of services identifying aim | % of services identifying aim (n = 22) |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Aims</b>  |                                    |  |
| Assist transition to independence  | 16                                 | 73%                                    |
| Housing related aims (provision or procuring sustainable housing)                | 9                                  | 41%                                    |
| Skill development  | 8                                  | 36%                                    |
| Support to access education/employment   | 7                                  | 32%                                    |
| Social/emotional support/personal growth   | 5                                  | 23%                                    |
| Information provision/referral/linkages  | 5                                  | 23%                                    |
| Prevent homelessness   | 3                                  | 14%                                    |
| <b>Expected outcomes</b>   |                                    |  |
| YP access/maintain safe, supportive long term accommodation                      | 9                                  | 41%                                    |
| YP have increased knowledge, skills and confidence to support independent living | 8                                  | 36%                                    |
| Successful transition to independent living                                      | 5                                  | 23%                                    |
| YP develop a social/support network/community supports                           | 5                                  | 23%                                    |
| YP feel/are supported and included   | 5                                  | 23%                                    |
| Increased education/employment participation                                     | 4                                  | 18%                                    |
| YP established links with appropriate services                                   | 3                                  | 14%                                    |
| Improved income/financial situation  | 3                                  | 14%                                    |

<sup>1</sup> Four of the specific leaving care services had sources of funding other than government funding for their initial funding: in Victoria, *St Lukes Leaving Care and After Care Support Service* was initially funded by the Colonial Foundation; in Tasmania, the *Moving On* Program was (and is currently) funded through Boystown Charity; in NSW, *Burnside Aftercare* was funded by Uniting Care Burnside; *Marist Youth Care* in NSW has also indicated that they were only self funded; in WA, the first service was funded through the Commonwealth/State Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

The stated aims and expected outcomes from the after care service providers map closely onto the services mentioned in various State policy and legislation.

### SERVICE FRAMEWORKS AND MODELS OF SPECIFIC AFTER CARE SERVICES

The services were also asked whether they adhered to or used any particular theoretical framework in planning and conducting their service. Table 7 indicates the responses provided by at least 3 of the 22 after care service providers to the question of frameworks relevant to their program. A large proportion of services provided no response to this question. Of the States that have specific services, Western Australia had the highest proportion of services that mentioned utilising theoretical approaches.

The 12 services that did make reference to theoretical frameworks listed 29 separate approaches, the most common of which were strength-based, relationship-based and solution-focussed approaches. Most services who mentioned frameworks indicated that they called upon a variety of different frameworks in their work.

**Table 7: Frameworks described by at least 3 specific after care services**

| Framework                   | Number of services mentioning a particular framework |        |         |         |         |    | Total direct service (22) | % direct service (22) |
|-----------------------------|--|--------|---------|---------|---------|----|---------------------------|-----------------------|
|                             | WA (4)   | SA (2) | Vic (9) | Tas (1) | NSW (6) |    |                           |                       |
| No framework stated         | 1  | 2      | 4       | 1       | 2       | 10 | 45%                       |                       |
| Strength based practice     | 3  |        | 4       |         | 1       | 8  | 36%                       |                       |
| Relationship based practice | 2  |        | 1       |         |         | 3  | 14%                       |                       |
| Solution focussed           |  |        | 1       |         | 2       | 3  | 14%                       |                       |

### SERVICE ACCESSIBILITY

Table 8 identifies accessibility for client of the services in different States in a range of factors.

Overall, it appears that the services are not able to provide a great deal of targeted support for clients with particular cultural needs (ATSI or non-English speaking) or to provide access to the service outside office hours. A number of services indicated that access to bilingual staff was through a telephone interpreter service.

**Table 8: Service accessibility**

|                                      | Number of services |            |             |             |             |   | Total direct service (n = 22) | % direct service (n = 22) |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
|                                      | WA (n = 4)         | SA (n = 2) | Vic (n = 9) | Tas (n = 1) | NSW (n = 6) |   |                               |                           |
| Ability to contact staff after hours | 0                  | 0          | 2           | 1           | 2           | 5 | 23%                           |                           |
| Access to ATSI staff                 | 2                  | 0          | 2           | 0           | 3           | 7 | 32%                           |                           |
| Bilingual staff                      | 2                  | 0          | 3           | 0           | 3           | 8 | 36%                           |                           |
| 1800 number                          | 2                  | 0          | 3           | 0           | 2           | 7 | 32%                           |                           |

### SERVICES PROVIDED

Table 9 outlines the range of services that the respondent agencies provide to their clients. The response from Queensland was included in this data, making the data set 23.

State and Territory legislation and policies include requirements for the provision of a range of services to young people leaving care and after leaving care. Table 10 compares the variety of services mentioned across the State and Territory Department responses (i.e. not all States/Territories listed all the services) with the percentage of overall leaving care agencies that mentioned that they provided those services (i.e. this is an aggregated comparison, not a state by state one).

Further to the services expected within legislation/policy, agencies mentioned that they also provide:

- case management (100%)
- access to recreation (91%)
- informal ongoing support (91%)

- access to mentoring services (70%)
- brokerage (70%), and
- emergency housing funds (65%).

**Table 9: Service provision reported by agencies (including Queensland)**

|                                    | Number of agencies that provide this service |        |         |         |         |         | Total service (23) | % direct service (23) |
|------------------------------------|--|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------------------|-----------------------|
|                                    | WA (4)                                       | SA (2) | Vic (9) | Tas (1) | NSW (6) | QLD (1) |                    |                       |
| Case management                    | 4  | 2      | 9       | 1       | 6       | 1       | 23                 | 100%                  |
| Assistance with housing            | 4  | 2      | 9       | 1       | 6       | 1       | 23                 | 100%                  |
| Training, education, work          | 4  | 2      | 9       | 1       | 6       | 1       | 23                 | 100%                  |
| Accessing health services          | 4  | 2      | 9       | 1       | 6       | 1       | 23                 | 100%                  |
| Independent living skills          | 4  | 2      | 9       | 1       | 6       | 1       | 23                 | 100%                  |
| Community connection - integration | 4  | 2      | 9       | 1       | 6       | 1       | 23                 | 100%                  |
| Access to information              | 4  | 2      | 9       | 1       | 6       | 1       | 23                 | 100%                  |
| General support                    | 4  | 2      | 8       | 1       | 6       | 1       | 22                 | 96%                   |
| Assistance with finances           | 4  | 2      | 7       | 1       | 6       | 1       | 21                 | 91%                   |
| Access to recreation               | 4  | 0      | 9       | 1       | 6       | 1       | 21                 | 91%                   |
| Informal ongoing support           | 4  | 2      | 8       | 1       | 5       | 1       | 21                 | 91%                   |
| Family reunification               | 4  | 0      | 8       | 1       | 4       | 1       | 18                 | 78%                   |
| Access to Dept or agency files     | 4  | 0      | 8       | 0       | 5       | 1       | 18                 | 78%                   |
| Counselling                        | 1  | 2      | 8       | 1       | 4       | 1       | 17                 | 74%                   |
| Mentoring services                 | 4  | 2      | 5       | 1       | 4       | 0       | 16                 | 70%                   |
| Learning to drive                  | 2  | 2      | 8       | 0       | 4       | 0       | 16                 | 70%                   |
| Brokerage                          | 4  | 2      | 5       | 1       | 3       | 1       | 16                 | 70%                   |
| Emergency Housing Funds            | 2  | 0      | 8       | 1       | 3       | 1       | 15                 | 65%                   |

**Table 10: Comparison of State expectations with services provided by agencies**

| Service mentioned in State/Territory Legislation/Policy      | Percentage of 23 respondent agencies that provided this service |
|--|---|
| Information provision  | 100%  |
| Accommodation assistance                                     | 100%  |
| Employment assistance  | 100%  |
| Education and training assistance                            | 100%  |
| Health assistance  | 100%  |
| Skill development  | 100%  |
| Community connection and integration                         | 100%  |
| Support  | 96%   |
| Financial assistance   | 91%   |
| Accessing personal information from services and Departments | 78%   |
| Family connection/reunification                              | 78%   |
| Counselling  | 74%   |
| Obtaining a drivers licence                                  | 70%   |
| Establishing leaving care plans                              | Not included / asked in survey                                  |
| Transport  | Not included / asked in survey                                  |
| Accessing community services                                 | Not included / asked in survey                                  |
| Legal assistance   | Not included / asked in survey                                  |

## MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR AFTER CARE SERVICES

The leaving care/after care agencies were asked about the existence of minimum standards for leaving care. Although the State/Territory Departments were not asked exactly the same question, there were elements of their responses that reflected standards required of agencies. The Standards described by the State/Territory Departments are mostly focussed on leaving care plans and the development of independent living skills during the period of care. None of the Department responses indicated any requirements for ongoing support. There do not appear to be any clear standards that reflect outcomes for after care services.

Table 11 summarises and compares the responses of the service providers and the Departments in each State that has specific after care services.

**Table 11: Standards in WA, SA, Vic, NSW and Tasmania**

| State | % services referring to standards | Standards as described by services               | Requirements as described by State Departments  |
|-------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| WA    | 75%                               | SAAP standards and State Government Agreement    | Additionally, standards are under development for children and young people in protection and care including standards in relation to preparation for leaving care, and requirements for planning to commence 12 months prior to leaving care<br><br>Protocols and procedures exist for leaving/after care services, including the use of a common assessment tool across all 4 services.   |
| SA    | 0                                 |  | New practice guide detailing standards for preparation for young people to transition from care, commencing at 15 years of age  |
| Vic   | 44%                               | SAAP standards, Funding agreement, DHS standards | Registration standards for OHC services state requirement to work with young people throughout the life of placement ( <i>in care</i> ) to develop age appropriate living skills to prepare young people for transition to a new placement, independent living arrangements or return home, as appropriate to the young person's age and situation. Standards also require Looking After Children Framework used by out-of-home care services addresses transition planning.<br><br>No standards relating to after care support, although guiding principles have been developed. |
| NSW   | 50%                               | AASW ethics, 6.2 of NSW OOH Standards            | Designated agency responsible for supervising the placement must prepare a plan (prior to young people leaving care) that includes reasonable steps to prepare the child or young person for leaving care. The designated agency is to implement the plan when the child or young person leaves care.<br><br>The Act also provides for the young people to have free access to agency information about themselves.   |
| Tas   | 0                                 |  | A set of minimum standards has been developed through the National Plan for Foster Children, Young People and their Carers 2004-2006 that includes the transition to independent living.<br><br>Looking After Children Framework used by out-of-home care services addresses transition planning.<br><br>SAAP standards are used in SAAP services.  |

Table 12 highlights the information that the States and Territories which do not have specific leaving care services provided about their requirements in relation to leaving care. Although these States and Territories do not have specific legislation in relation to after care support, they clearly all have strong positions relating to support and the preparation for transition for each young person in care.

**Table 12: Standards in NT, ACT and Queensland**

| State/Territory | Requirements  |
|-----------------|---|
| NT              | Children in Care Assessments resulting in Leaving Care Case Plan are expected practice with young people over age 15, and younger if appropriate. However, most of the case management is directly carried out by Department (not contracted) and there are no minimum standards as such.<br><br>Preparation for leaving care activities will recognise the family customary laws and kinship practices of all cultures. Young people are helped to access local community services and networks as part of their transition to independence.                                   |
| ACT             | Young people leaving care have the right to feel that they have been sufficiently prepared to live independently.<br><br>Implementation of LAC results in requirements for a leaving care plan to be developed post age 15.<br><br>Legislation that a leaving care plan has to be completed 3 months prior to leaving care.   |
| QLD             | The Department of Child Safety is responsible for ensuring that young people receive appropriate help with the transition from being a child in care to independence, including (where appropriate) having the right to financial assistance, connection to support services and social networks, provision of information about their history in care and taking part in decisions about their future. Decisions about an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person are made in consultation with the recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander agency. |



## EVALUATION PROCESSES FOR AFTER CARE SERVICES

At a time when evaluation is high on the agenda in the welfare sector, it is interesting that there was little clarity or consistency about the processes required to evaluate service provision to young people leaving care from the perspective of the service providers. A summary of the responses is provided in Table 13. (Full details of the 32 responses can be obtained from the authors.)

**Table 13: Evaluation strategies for specific after care service providers**

| Strategy type                       | Number of different types of strategies listed in this group | Strategies listed in this group by more than two services (out of 22 possible services) |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| General strategies                  | 7  | Action research framework/reflection (4 services)                                       |
| Specific outcome related mechanisms | 13   | Analysis of completed tasks on case plan (3 services)                                   |
| Client feedback                     | 5  | Questionnaires/surveys to young people (8 services)                                     |
| External review                     | 4  | General external review (3 services)  |
| Internal review                     | 3  | General internal review (6 services)  |

As well as indicating the variety of different strategies used to evaluate program effectiveness, Table 13 highlights the lack of consistency *within* States in relation to evaluation, with very few strategies utilised by more than two services.

There was similar variation in the nature of data collected, with 40 different responses recorded from the 22 services. Table 14 summarises the most common forms of data, and highlights, once again, the inconsistency within States, with only seven forms of data listed by more than two services. (Full details of responses can be obtained from the authors).

**Table 14: Nature of data collected by at least 3 specific after care services**

| Nature of data collected                       | Number of services |
|--|--------------------|
| Demographics                                   | 6                  |
| Number of young people accommodated            | 6                  |
| Number of young people in education            | 4                  |
| Number of young people employed                | 4                  |
| Training in independent living skills achieved | 4                  |
| Goals achieved                                 | 3                  |
| Client feedback                                | 3                  |

Of the five State Departments that oversee specific leaving care services, four (NSW, SA, Tasmania and WA) detailed a range of factors considered important in evaluating leaving care and after care services (summarised in Table 15). As well as listing the strategies used, the NSW Department response posed the problem of the difficulties in measuring outcomes and successes for a young person: How do you measure a person feeling more secure, more confident, more self-assured and more supported?

The Victorian Department response listed a general in-care evaluation response, the Quality Assurance Strategy (now obsolete, to be replaced by Registration Standards), as well as a framework for monitoring a Leaving Care Mentoring project. There were no strategies listed for evaluation of the specific leaving care services in Victoria. It is noted, however, that an external review is under way that includes those services, the results of which will soon be available. The Office for Children is yet to develop standards for the new services, which will assess whether services are effective in meeting the needs of young people.

The South Australian Department response also indicated an external review of specific after care services to occur in the near future. The Tasmanian response indicated that the 'After Care Support Program will monitor the provision of support to care leavers'.

Further to the outcomes-related strategies for evaluation listed above, the South Australian response indicated monitoring of activity levels: for example, the number of calls made to the service, number of contacts made by the service, number of referrals made, and the number of interventions. The West Australian services also collect data about activity (output) levels. Some services noted use of computer software in their data collection processes.

In summary, a range of performance indicators have been identified across four States for leaving care/after care services. The results from the specific service providers indicated some congruence in the factors that they considered important to be evaluated but there was little consistency of response across services within States. Some of the discrepancy may be due to the

question being ambiguous; some services provided information about the form of evaluation, some about the regularity and some about the content (i.e. what was evaluated/measured). The type and reliability of the evaluation tools were not assessed, but informal discussion with some service providers suggests that they are keen to see an appropriate evaluation tool developed. If young people leaving care are to be provided with effective services, reliable and valid findings require the development and use of a comprehensive and consistent evaluation approach by all services at least within each State. The process of this report has highlighted a broad range of strategies for review, as well as a range of standards and components for evaluation. This material can be utilised to further refine processes within the States.

**Table 15: Factors considered important for evaluation, as indicated by State Departments in states that have specific leaving care/after care services**

| Evaluation strategy/success indicators                           | NSW | SA | WA | Tas |
|--|-----|----|----|-----|
| Finding suitable accommodation                                   | ✓   |    | ✓  | ✓   |
| Finding employment   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Accessing education and training                                 | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Managing health issues   | ✓   |    | ✓  | ✓   |
| Acquiring financial management skills                            | ✓   |    | ✓  | ✓   |
| Developing independent living skills/life skills                 | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Developing knowledge of personal history                         | ✓   |    | ✓  | ✓   |
| Meaningful community connection                                  |     | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Improved personal, family and social relationships               |     | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Young people develop a network of personal and social supports   |     |    | ✓  | ✓   |
| Enhanced links to appropriate community and support services     |     | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Proportion of client's transition plan goals/objectives achieved |     | ✓  | ✓  |     |
| Customer perception survey for young people                      |     |    | ✓  |     |

## CURRENT INITIATIVES

Table 16 summarises information provided by the State and Territory Departments about initiatives in their region that support care leavers. Initiatives include programmatic, legislative, networking, resourcing and specific service delivery responses. The table highlights both the range of different initiatives across the States and Territories, as well as differing interpretations of what constitutes initiatives from the Departments.

## SERVICE GAPS AND CHALLENGES

Table 17 summarises the service gaps that were identified by more than two specific leaving care/after care service providers. In all there were 33 separate gaps identified by the specific service providers.

The State and Territory Departments were not asked specifically about service gaps, but they were asked to identify the challenges for their State or Territory. Table 18 lists 25 of the different challenges identified by the Departments. Some challenges were indicated across most States and Territories (such as a consistent, state-wide approach; responding to complex, and cultural needs; remote service provision; instability in care; lack of stable, long term housing; and general lack of resources). Other challenges, however, were noted by only a small number of States/Territories (such as lack of national guidelines; development of a policy framework; and legislation and information sharing between states) highlighting the importance of regional issues for the Departments.

Although questions were asked about the numbers of ATSI and NESB young people leaving care, the responses were not consistent enough to appear in the tables in this report. However, service provision to these groups was identified as a challenge by almost all States and Territories, and individual responses suggested high proportions of young people in care having poor outcomes, particularly for ATSI young people. It would be useful for further research to provide a focus for the particular needs of this group.

**Table 16: Current initiatives to support care leavers**

| State | Initiatives  |
|-------|--|
| Vic   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Legislation that extends age of support from 18 to 21 years</li> <li>• Looking After Children Case Management Framework</li> <li>• Development of a package of materials for service providers in relation to supporting young people in care to prepare for their transition from care (including focussed attention on living skills post 15 years, living skills assessment tool and other resources, Zoom manual, use of LAC)</li> <li>• New Office for Children funded leaving care services in each region and extension of Mentoring Initiative to all regions</li> <li>• Development of a model of preparation for leaving care and post care support</li> <li>• State-wide Leaving Care Forum</li> </ul>                                 |
| NSW   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case management</li> <li>• Continuing assistance for young people completing major studies</li> <li>• Leaving care resource guide</li> <li>• Access to information</li> <li>• Supporting young people dealing with legal action</li> <li>• Agreement with Department of Housing and NSW Human Services to cooperate in provision of services to mutual clients, including young people leaving care</li> <li>• Protocols between DoCS and NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care to allow for extended planning period (2 years) for young people leaving care who have a disability</li> </ul>   |
| SA    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaving Care, Transitioning and Post Care Project for young people 15-25 years, commencing while still in care. Four senior practitioners across the services to work with young people over 18 (i.e. after guardianship finishes).</li> <li>• Leaving Care kits</li> <li>• Shopfront service for those not requiring intensive support</li> <li>• Policy and procedure development, including new practice guidelines</li> <li>• Youth Support Teams (metro)</li> <li>• New Housing Referral Guidelines to ensure a rapid access to housing for young people leaving guardianship</li> <li>• 'Rapid Response' initiative across all government departments includes 'preparation for the successful transition from care to independence'</li> </ul> |
| WA    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaving Care Policy</li> <li>• Leaving Care Guide</li> <li>• An overall in-care assessment and planning system including <i>Protocols and Procedures for Preparation for Leaving and After care Services, February 2006</i> was developed and funded by the Department</li> <li>• Scholarships for young people who have been in care to assist with studies</li> <li>• Production of guides to assist people who have been in care to find information about themselves or their families</li> </ul>   |
| QLD   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Web based information package</li> <li>• Case planning for all young people in care</li> <li>• Use of structured decision-making process</li> </ul>   |
| ACT   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of Looking after Children Case Management Framework</li> <li>• Turnaround – a departmental program for young people with complex needs (in care and leaving care)</li> <li>• An increase in CREATE funding</li> <li>• Galilee LIFT program funded by SAAP</li> <li>• Leaving care is regarded as a key area under National Plan for Foster Children</li> <li>• Inclusion of OCYFS in Department of Disability, Housing, and Community Services leading to streamlined services</li> </ul>  |
| Tas   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a leaving care package (backpack 'Outta Here –Your Options, Your Choices')</li> <li>• Department funding for CREATE and CLAN to deliver services that support people leaving or having left care</li> <li>• New funded after care support service (from April 2007). Two components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— access to information re care stay, referral and support to make family contact, available to all care leavers at any stage</li> <li>— access to brokerage funds (total pool of \$90 000 per year, for young people who have been in care, up to 25 years of age)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |
| NT    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Bill for the Care and Protection of Children Act</i> has been drafted which introduces legislative leaving care and after care provisions to age 25 for the first time in NT.</li> </ul>   |

**Table 17: Service gaps identified by at least 3 specific after care services**

| Summary of themes of service gaps                                 | Number of services that identified this gap |           |            |            |                              |
|---|---|-----------|------------|------------|------------------------------|
|   | WA<br>(4)                                   | SA<br>(2) | Vic<br>(9) | NSW<br>(6) | % direct service<br>(n = 22) |
| Specialist housing/accommodation                                  | 2   | 2         | 5          | 2          | 50%                          |
| Education/training/employment support and funds                   | 3   |           | 5          | 2          | 45%                          |
| Parenting programs/support  | 3   |           | 1          |            | 18%                          |
| Ongoing support as would have from family                         | 1   | 2         | 1          |            | 18%                          |
| Lack of funding for leaving care programs                         |   |           | 1          | 3          | 18%                          |
| Legal services  | 2   |           |            | 1          | 14%                          |
| Financial counselling services, especially when receiving payouts | 2   |           | 1          |            | 14%                          |
| Mentoring programs  |   |           | 3          |            | 14%                          |
| Specialist disability/behavioural support                         |   |           | 3          |            | 14%                          |

\* The Tasmanian response does not appear in this table as there was only one response from the single service provider that simply said the gap was 'not enough services to cater to number of care leavers'.

**Table 18: Challenges identified by State/Territory Departments**

| CHALLENGE   | Vic | NSW | SA | WA | Tas | Qld | ACT | NT  |
|---|-----|-----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| <b>Consistent state-wide approach</b> including referral, use of legislation  | ✓   | ✓   |    | ✓  |     | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   |
| Integrated services locally   | ✓   |     |    |    | ✓   |     |     |     |
| <b>Ensuring services to meet diverse needs of young people especially:</b>  | ✓   | ✓   |    | ✓  |     |     |     |     |
| • Complex needs of young people (mental health, addiction, disability) > specialised therapeutic services, dealing with trauma  | ✓   | ✓   |    | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   |
| • ATSI and NESB young people  | ✓   | ✓   |    | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   |
| • Rural and remote service provision  | ✓   |     |    | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   |     | ✓   |
| • Inter-state provision   |     |     | ✓  |    |     | ✓   | ✓   |     |
| <b>Limited resources for ongoing after-care support</b> , and more specifically:  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  |    | ✓   |     |     | ✓   |
| • Limited resources or access to generic services to meet needs, e.g. health, counselling, teach independent living skills  |     | ✓   |    | ✓  |     | ✓   | ✓   |     |
| • Access to LT/stable housing/any housing/appropriate housing   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  |    | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   |
| • Limited resources (places, workers) in after care programs  |     |     |    | ✓  | ✓   |     | ✓   | n/a |
| • No funded after care programs   |     |     |    |    |     | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   |
| <b>Relationship building between after care services, Department workers and young people</b><br>NSW especially – confusion about receiving both after care support and support from State Dept |     | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |     |     |     |
| <b>In care provision problems</b> , e.g. instability, multiple workers, crisis focus  | ✓   | ✓   |    | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   |
| <b>Early engagement and preparation for leaving care</b> inc new models, use of LAC   |     |     | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   |     | ✓   |
| <b>Support networks after leaving care</b>  |     |     | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   |     |
| <b>Lack of local and national research and statistics on best practice models</b> , indicators of success   |     |     | ✓  |    |     | ✓   | ✓   |     |
| <b>Lack of national guidelines or standards re leaving care</b>   |     |     | ✓  |    |     | ✓   | ✓   |     |
| <b>Information sharing between states</b>   |     |     |    | ✓  |     |     |     |     |
| <b>Development of policy framework</b>  |     |     |    |    | ✓   |     |     | ✓   |
| <b>Lack of legislation re after care services</b>   |     |     |    |    |     | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   |
| <b>Changing service models and technology</b>   | ✓   |     |    |    |     | ✓   |     | ✓   |
| <b>Administration required to complete submissions</b>  |     | ✓   |    |    |     |     |     |     |
| <b>Increased numbers of young people entering care generally</b>  |     |     |    | ✓  |     |     |     |     |
| <b>Mechanisms to learn from young people</b>  |     |     |    |    | ✓   |     |     |     |

## GENERAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

The number of surveys received from general service providers was small (3) and it was difficult to draw meaningful data from them. Some interesting results:

- General service providers had a higher level of service accessibility than specific services through ATSI staff (67%) and access to an 1800 telephone number (100%).
- General services were able to work with all young people who had been in care (without exclusion, targets or age cut offs).
- The main services provided by general services were community connection/integration, access to information and general support. To a lesser extent, general services provided access to recreation, assistance with independent living skills and informal ongoing support.
- Like the specific after care services, general services are predominately funded through State and Territory Departments.

## AREAS FOR FUTURE ENQUIRY AND IDENTIFIED GAPS

Not only does leaving care policy and practice differ markedly between different countries, significant variations also exist between States and Territories within the same country. As Liddell et al. (2006) note, Australian child welfare and protection systems are State and Territory based, resulting in eight different systems in a country of 20 million people. These research findings suggest that the leaving care and after care services vary considerably between States and Territories in relation to distinct legislation, funding, policies and practice. More comprehensive studies examining the similarities and dissimilarities in policies and practices across different States and Territories within Australia could provide valuable insights into the national perspective on leaving care.

Although not limited to the following, future enquiry could address the following areas:

- discrepancies in service provision, and eligibility for service provision across Australia.
- minimum standards for after care services
- evaluation of after care services
- research on best practice models
- examination of identified service gaps and challenges, including accessibility and uptake of leaving care services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

□

## REFERENCES

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