Young people leaving care and protection

a report to the

National Youth Affairs Research Scheme

by

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List of acronyms

AAYPIC  Australian Association of Young People in Care
ACWA  Association of Child Welfare Agencies
AIHW  Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CES  Commonwealth Employment Service
DEETYA  Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DSS  Department of Social Security
JPET  Job Placement Employment and Training program
SAAP  Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SNYPIC  State Network of Young People in Care
VAYPIC  Victorian Association of Young People in Care
Acknowledgments

The Leaving Care research team would like to express appreciation to the project’s Reference Group for support and assistance in their advisory capacity throughout the project. A list of Reference Group members is provided in Appendix 1. The conclusions, recommendations and interpretation of data in this report are the responsibility of the authors and may not necessarily reflect the views of members of the Reference Group.

David MacKenzie, Director of the RMIT Centre for Youth Affairs Research and Development, was a member of the research team involved in the planning and general management of the project and commented on the draft report. Final editing was completed by Robyn Hartley.

The team is indebted to many people for the assistance they provided. The willingness of staff in government and non-government services across Australia to participate in the research by providing the team with written policy and practice documentation and by setting up focus groups and individual interviews was overwhelming. Appendix 2 gives details of workers and organisations who participated in focus group discussions, and lists service providers where individual workers were interviewed. All those who took part in the focus groups and individual interviews were generous with their time and provided important information about the way leaving-care issues were being addressed in their particular State or Territory.

Appreciation is extended to departmental personnel for their readiness to provide feedback on the draft policy documentation at short notice in the latter stages of the project. Special thanks are also extended to non-government staff who provided the team with written information on their leaving care policies and procedures. The research team considers that the interest and enthusiasm they encountered across Australia in relation to young people leaving care demonstrated a strong commitment to improving current arrangements.

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This research project was commissioned by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme and carried out by a team working within the Centre for Youth Affairs Research and Development at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), in association with Monash University’s Department of Social Work and Human Services and the Children’s Welfare Association of Victoria.

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the research was to describe the experiences of young people discharged from State care and to identify factors which assisted and impeded their transition to independent living. The research objectives were to:

• provide an overview of Australian Government youth policy as this relates to young people leaving care and protection arrangements;
• provide an overview of care and protection exit arrangements of Australian governments;
• identify the circumstances and needs of young people making the transition from State care; and
• identify mechanisms or initiatives which Australian governments could set in place to improve levels of support to young people making the transition from State care to independence, with a view to minimising their risk of becoming homeless.

In addressing the objectives, the research was required to examine assumptions of dependence and independence implicit in government policy, identify how the role of the family could be supported, and examine models of effective support to young people leaving care.

Methodology

Data from a wide range of sources was collected. The period of data collection was from February to September 1996. Some additional information in relation to policy changes, was received from States up to May 1997. A review of previous research in Australia and overseas was undertaken; legislation, policy and procedural documents were collected from the Commonwealth Government, and State and Territory governments; 19 focus groups and 24 individual service provider interviews with workers across Australia concerned with care and protection (involving a total of almost 200 people) were conducted; and 43 young people from five States and the Northern Territory who had left care were interviewed.

Young people leaving care

As of June 1995 there were 13,078 children on care and protection orders across Australia, the majority of whom (69%) were placed on guardianship orders which transfer legal responsibility for their welfare from their parents to the State. There are currently 2,643 15- to 17-year-olds across Australia who will be discharged at some time over the next three years, at age 18 or before.

Previous research indicates that young people leaving the care of the State will have a significantly harder time in making the transition to adulthood than other young Australians. In recent decades, young people in Australia have been remaining longer in the family home, and wage and salary earning (in full-time, career-track positions) is being deferred until completion of extended studies. They are not accepted as independent adults by the State in relation to income support until they are 21 or in some cases 25. Young people leaving State care, in contrast, are often required to live alone or with other young people in their mid to late teens, and lack an ongoing supportive base to continue and complete their education or go on to further training. Unlike their peers “leaving home”, young people “leaving care” are deprived of the opportunity to return to their former accommodation if and when they need to. When young people who have been in care leave care, they are more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, early parenthood, loneliness and despair.
Of the 43 young people interviewed for this study:
- 42% had been discharged from care before the age of 18 (17% of the male, 25% of the female and 42% of the indigenous young people interviewed);
- 57% had completed Year 10 or less and only 21% were completing or had completed Year 12;
- 64% were either unemployed or on sickness or supporting parent benefits;
- less than one quarter (22%) were living in a family setting or in independent rented accommodation (16%) when they were discharged. At the time of interview, almost half were living in independent rental accommodation while the numbers living in a family setting had decreased to less than 10%;
- when discharged, 35% were living in youth refuges and short- to medium-term supported accommodation programs or temporarily with friends;
- at the time of interview 13% were living in refuges, short- to medium-term supported accommodation, or temporarily with friends;
- half of the group reported having experienced a period of homelessness since leaving care;
- almost half reported having committed criminal offences since leaving care and
- just over one-third of the young women had became pregnant or had a child soon after leaving care.

Commonwealth youth policy

Young people leaving the care of the State were found to fall between the policy safety nets of Australian governments particularly in the areas of income support, housing, education and training.

State legislative, policy and program provisions for young people leaving care

Standards and obligations

The research found that most State and Territory child and protection legislation lacks a legal obligation to provide for the ongoing welfare of young Australians for whom the State has assumed “parenting” responsibilities. Policy and procedural manuals guide the day-to-day practice of care and protection workers across Australia. These outline broad case-planning principles but pay scant attention to preparing young people for life after care and to ensuring options for ongoing support and assistance.

Standards are the other key vehicle for the establishment of policy and practice. All States and Territories have endorsed the National Baseline Standards for Out of Home Care. The standard concerning exit planning requires that: “each child/young person leaves the out of home care placement in a planned and supported manner to enable a successful and sustainable transition”. The standards specify that young people leave in a planned way; have involvement in the decision; have a detailed post placement support (or after-care) plan; and leave with relevant documentation, possessions and life records.

New South Wales has undertaken further work to develop these standards; however, in other States and Territories there was little evidence to suggest that they were being systematically translated into the operational procedures and quality assurance standards needed for effective service provision. Around Australia, workers reported that young people were all too frequently being discharged before they were ready (often as young as 15 or 16), in an unplanned way and without secure accommodation.

Accommodation and support

The research found that the provision of accommodation by State and Territory governments cuts off abruptly once young people in care reach 18 years of age. Young people sometimes have to leave their placement “home” regardless of how long they have been living there and regardless of their readiness and personal maturity to cope with independent living. In the absence of transitional housing and financial support funded by care and protection departments, young people leaving care frequently exit into services designed for homeless young people, relying on the goodwill of friends or relatives or at worst boarding houses, bed and breakfast hostels, the streets and night shelters.

Most States have started to address the needs of high-risk adolescents in care through the provision of intensive support workers, although eligibility does not extend beyond the age of 18. However, such programs do not address the chronic lack of appropriate long-term placements for adolescents in the care of the State, an issue frequently identified by both government and non-government workers across Australia. Non-government services in Victoria and New South Wales have also taken the lead in funding after-care workers who could provide flexible and longer-term support. Some States had established or were in the process of establishing after-care programs.
New South Wales has recently established a statewide After Care Resource Centre, casework services to young people leaving care and specialist regional support teams.

**Guardianship and care issues**
Themes which emerged from the review of State and Territory legislation, policies and practices and from interviews with workers in government and non-government services included lack of clarity about the role of State and Territory governments and how they define their responsibilities; an increasing complexity of legislation and practice; changing roles in the out-of-home care system; a focus on entry into care and lack of attention to exit; lack of responsibility for transition from care; problems caused by lack of coordination; and lack of attention to gender and cultural issues.

In addition, workers reported that Aboriginal young people are over-represented in the system, are often inappropriately placed and are allocated insufficient resources for support and preparation for leaving care. Leaving care is often a low priority and given few resources and this is even more evident in rural and remote areas. Case planning is often inadequate and standards of care too low. Funds for extended support are inconsistently applied. Many young people are no longer formally admitted to care, making it difficult for them to gain financial support. The closure of residential facilities was seen as leading to earlier discharge. Workers were concerned about the impact of practices on young people, and problems of worker morale arise when policies and resources are inadequate.

**Factors influencing transition to independence**
Independence was defined by the research team as having some sense of direction in life; having a good personal support network of family and/or friends; and having stable, continuing accommodation (excluding temporary accommodation with friends or services designed for the homeless). Based on the case study evidence, the research found that factors which assisted young people's transition from care to independence were:
- a stable, positive experience of care;
- resilience and belief in self;
- the availability of mentors or advocates;
- extended support provided by previous carers and workers and/or after-care support workers; and
- family contact while in care and at the time of transition from care, or re-established after leaving care.

An overriding issue seemed to be the opportunity to establish caring relationships. In regard to family contact, it was found that family assistance can often be more valuable if it is from extended family members, or at least from members who have not been involved in abuse or conflict.

Factors which were found to inhibit young people's transition from care to independence were:
- unresolved anger towards family members, workers or the “system”;
- unsuitable and unstable placements and multiple changes of carers and workers;
- living in unstable accommodation at the time of discharge, which was frequently preceded by instability experienced in care (i.e. multiple placement, periods of homelessness);
- lack of long-term goals which commonly appeared to be related to a history of homelessness before the young person was subject to a care order;
- lack of sufficient income;
- contact with the juvenile justice system and imprisonment; and
- lack of preparation for leaving and lack of later contact with the care system.

Many of the factors which promoted independence clustered together and were not found in isolation from other factors; this also applied to factors inhibiting independence.

**Effective models of support**
The research found that effective models of support must take account of the need to provide a continuum of care for children so that they can make a graduated transition from care to increasing independence as they mature and grow. A general model including three components is proposed:

**Preparation** through:
- a high quality, stable system of care;
- improved case practice and planning; and
- a flexible support continuum which emphasises inter-dependence, i.e. the notion that well-functioning adults continue to receive support from others.

**Transition** through:
- assistance for young people to develop personal and social networks;
• provision of effective support and living skills programs;
• provision of essential and appropriate information to young people about their past, and their options for the future; and
• the involvement of suitable mentors.

After care offering:
• continuing access to support, resources and interest from care agencies.

It is acknowledged that in NSW, government and non-government agencies have already included many of the above components in their services.

Implications of the research findings
The implications of the research findings are that, in order to support the process of transition to independence and to minimise the risk of homelessness, Australian governments need to consider the following issues:
• the extension of the responsibility of State governments to provide after-care support for those who have passed through the care system at least until the age of 25;1
• the responsibility of States to negotiate with the Commonwealth to provide benefits for those who have been in care;
• the need for each State and Territory government to continuously review its practices, responsibilities and role as guardian to increase consistency;
• the provision of Commonwealth benefits at the full adult rate to young people living independently after being in care who are unemployed, studying or undertaking job skills training;
• the review of case planning and preparation for leaving care to reflect community standards of leaving home at an older age and to provide flexible options for support;
• the availability of continuing support and counselling services, until the age of 25, for those who have left care;
• the provision of programs with a range of delivery options to assist transition;
• the training of workers and caregivers to implement effective programs of transition from care;
• the maintenance of family links wherever possible and offering support to families as young people move to independence;
• the provision of basic personal items and furniture to young people leaving care to establish independent living;
• the provision of an opportunity for young people to gain access to files and documents regarding their time in care, with the support of workers to explain and interpret;
• the maintenance and storage of records;
• provision for educational and literacy needs;
• provision of affordable, appropriate and stable accommodation for those leaving care for independent living;
• the review of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (TSI) young people leaving care, in collaboration with Aboriginal and TSI care agencies and communities to ensure that the Aboriginal placement principle works; and
• the review of transition arrangements for young women leaving care for independent living.

Conclusion
The research has established a clear need for exit policies and procedures to assist young people to make effective transitions to independent, and interdependent living. The reader will observe that there is a great deal of consistency in the issues and themes identified from different sources, from interviews with workers, interviews with young people, the literature and the team’s own research analysis. The research team has not attempted to eliminate some repetition of issues through the report. Rather, it is valued for the greater confidence it gives in the accuracy of the findings reported here.

1 This does not mean the extension of statutory orders.
This chapter outlines the purpose and objectives of the research, describes the methodology used to meet them, and sets out the framework for the report. The research project was undertaken collaboratively by a team working within the Centre for Youth Affairs Research and Development at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), in association with Monash University’s Department of Social Work and Human Services and the Children’s Welfare Association of Victoria.

Purpose and objectives
The purpose of the research was to describe the experiences of young people discharged from State care and to identify the factors which either assisted or impeded their transition to independent living.

The objectives of the research were to:
1. Provide an overview of Australian Government youth policy as this relates to young people leaving care and protection arrangements.
2. Provide an overview of care and protection exit arrangements of Australian governments.
3. Identify the circumstances and needs of young people making the transition from State care.
4. Identify mechanisms or initiatives which Australian governments could set in place to improve levels of support to young people making the transition from State care to independence with a view to minimising their risk of becoming homeless.

Methodology
The objectives of the research required the collection of data from a wide range of sources on a national level. Information was obtained from:
- a brief review of Australian and overseas literature;
- an examination of Commonwealth youth policies as they related to young people leaving care;
- collection and analysis of legislation, policy and procedural documents from State and Territory governments;
- focus group and individual service provider interviews; and
- interviews with young people who had been discharged from the care of State and Territory governments across Australia.

Details of each of these methods are described below.

Literature search
Searches were conducted on Australian and overseas databases. Additional unpublished research papers were collected from interested parties during the course of the research. WELSTAT statistics were obtained from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) publications.

Commonwealth youth policy
Information regarding Commonwealth youth policy was taken from statements issued by the Department of
Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) via the World Wide Web. Other documents relating to this area were also collected via the literature search and contact with services.

**State legislation, policy documents and procedural manuals**
Details of legislation were collected from State and Territory government information services. A letter (including a project summary) was sent to government officers responsible for child protection in each State and Territory requesting copies of policies and procedure documents, review and research reports and any other relevant documents relating to young people being discharged from care. Information was received from all States and Territories. A draft of the report relevant to their State or Territory was sent to government officers asking them to confirm that this material accurately depicted their legislation, policy and procedures. Some additional information was collected at this stage and suggested changes included in the text.

**Interviews and focus groups**
The original research plan was to undertake 20 individual interviews with service providers across Australia to define models of practice and identify discrepancies between policy and practice. In order to provide an opportunity for a broad range of people with interest in the research to contribute, the team decided to also run a number of focus groups in each State and Territory. Table 1.1 gives details of the 19 focus groups which included approximately 150 people, and the 24 government and non-government service provider interviews involving approximately 60 workers. There was very little overlap between people who took part in the focus groups and those who were interviewed individually. The project thus drew on information from approximately 200 people working in care and protection systems. Three focus groups were specifically run for indigenous people and included workers from the government sector and aboriginal child care agencies. It should be noted that the comparatively small number of service provider interviews in Victoria was a result of a number of significant service providers (including non-government organisations) providing input through their membership of the Reference Group.

Data from focus groups was taped and transcribed. Data from individual interviews was recorded on a proforma. Some interviews were conducted by telephone. The schedule for the focus groups was developed with the assistance of the Reference Group and is provided in Appendix 3.

**Case studies of young people leaving care**
The project set out to interview 50 young people aged 17 to 20 who had been discharged from the care and protection of the State to live independently, for two years or more. Given significant differences in the meaning of terms such as “care and protection”, and in order to correctly identify young people in the target group for interview, the following definitions were developed. They were included in the project summary and circulated widely.

Care and protection of the State was defined as circumstances where protective investigation results in substantiation (or confirmation) of protective concerns (as defined in individual State or Territory legislation) and is followed by Court intervention.

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1 Not all the information in those drafts was included in the final report.
2 Policy and practice documentation was also obtained from workers who participated in the focus groups and individual interviews.
3 Participants in focus groups and interviews were not randomly selected. In most instances, a State or Territory officer agreed to act as a liaison and invited workers they considered appropriate. Individual interviewees were either suggested to the project team or expressed an interest in being interviewed.
4 The project Reference Group advised that the age range be expanded to include people aged 21, to provide information from young people who were assumed to be increasingly independent.
Leaving care and protection was defined as being discharged from the care of the State and “out-of-home care” after a placement of six months or more into independent living. It does not include young people who return home immediately to parents or relatives.

Out-of-home care/alternative care was primarily defined as placement in alternative home-based care or residential care. It does not include respite care, emergency care, kinship care or placement with relatives.

The sample

Young people’s participation in the research was voluntary. The research team wanted to reach young people across Australia to invite them to participate. A flyer was distributed to peak bodies and a range of service providers asking them to distribute it to young people who might be interested in volunteering. Despite providing a freecall telephone number, this strategy was of limited success. Contact with the majority of young people interviewed was made by agencies gaining consent from a young person for the research team to approach them and seek their participation. All the young people contacted in this way were eager to participate. Interviews took place in a wide variety of locations, in young people’s homes, in agency offices and coffee lounges, and in two instances in a park. Young people were provided with an easy-to-read description of the study and a voluntary consent form outlining their rights and the terms of their participation, which they were required to sign prior to the commencement of the interview. They were also paid an interview fee of $30.5

A total of 48 young people were interviewed but five were not included in the analysis as they did not sufficiently meet the criterion of having lived in an out-of-home care placement for a minimum of six months.6 Even so, a number of those included did not strictly meet target group criteria because they were either outside the age range (five were between 22 and 25 years of age), had been discharged for shorter periods than two years, or had lived in care but had not been placed on a Court order (five young people).7

Several factors influenced the decision to include these young people. The research team believed that the evidence of the older young people was significant in demonstrating that transition from care is an extended process that can take longer than two years. The needs and experiences of the young people who had lived in care on a voluntary basis did not seem to differ from those who had been on a Court order. Young people involved in youth-in-care networks strongly advocated the inclusion of young people who entered as adolescents but were not placed on a care and protection order. The stories of these young people were considered by the team to make an important contribution to the research. Workers are concerned that, while the number of children and young people in care on a voluntary basis is unknown, the number is substantial and may be increasing.

Limitations of the sample

It was not intended that the case studies comprise a representative sample of the after-care experiences of young people discharged from care across Australia two years ago. Nevertheless, the team did set out to ensure that the heterogeneity of young people in care and discharged from care, was represented. Therefore the sample included males and females, Aboriginal young people, young people with disabilities and young people from rural and remote areas.

Within the constraints of a limited budget, the team aimed to gain information from young people from a wide range of different communities. Young people were interviewed from all States (except Tasmania) and from the Northern Territory. In Queensland, all cases were from the far north. In other States, the group included young people from urban and rural backgrounds. Seventeen young people came from rural or remote areas, largely from Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Table 1.2 shows the number and gender of young people

5 The original proposal did not include payment to the young people. The Reference Group, in particular those from VAYPIC, provided compelling reasons to pay young people for their participation and this did encourage a number to take part. However, many commented that they would still have given information without payment.

6 While the research team was sometimes aware that these young people were outside the criteria before interview, the young people were eager to be involved in the research and wanted their experiences to be heard.

7 It has been suggested that changes in practice since this older group left care have implications for the validity of their evidence. While the authors acknowledge moves to improve care and protection services, they are of the view that some young people still leave the system with experiences which inhibit their transition to independence.
included from each State and Territory. Characteristics of the young people are given in Appendix 5.

Data collection and analysis
A schedule of questions was prepared with the assistance of the Victorian Association of Young People in Care (VAYPIC) and the Reference Group. The interview schedule is provided in Appendix 4. Interviews averaged between half an hour and one hour and were tape recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were summarised and a matrix developed of significant factors such as the length of time in care, number of placements, level of schooling reached, current employment and accommodation, significant relationships and difficulties experienced (e.g. homelessness, lack of after-care support, unemployment, involvement with drugs or criminal offences). In addition, transcripts were coded using the text analysis program Ethnograph v 4.0 which allowed for easy retrieval of identified segments.8

The report
The report first sets the scene by outlining the available demographic data on young people leaving care, and by suggesting a framework for providing for their needs. This framework draws on research literature concerning the transitions all young people are expected to make as they leave the care and protection of their families (or the State) and begin to establish themselves as independent citizens in their communities (Chapter 3). The report then examines key areas of Commonwealth responsibility and youth policy which have an impact on young people’s capacities and opportunities to move to independent living. Australian and overseas literature is used to assess how these government policies affect young people leaving care (Chapter 4). The second area of the project brief – to provide an overview of care and protection exit arrangements in the States and Territories – is then addressed (Chapter 5), drawing on documentation from the States and information from the focus groups and individual interviews. The report then describes the major issues concerning leaving care which have been identified in this project by workers in the various systems (Chapter 6) and by young people themselves (Chapter 7). Young people’s experiences form the basis of Chapter 8, which identifies factors promoting and inhibiting independence. Finally, all of the project’s sources of information are used to outline a model of effective support for young people exiting care (Chapter 9) and to spell out the implications of the research findings for governments (Chapter 10).

The issues which were identified concerning young people leaving care were very consistent across all sources of data included. Despite some State and Territory differences in policy and practices, reports from government and non-government workers in different States and from young people who had been in care revealed similar themes. Findings of government inquiries and previous research are also consistent in many respects. The research team is therefore confident about the research findings and about the conclusions drawn from them.
A demographic profile of
care and young people in care

This research project is concerned with young people who have spent a significant period of time living in State care. Most, although not all, will have been placed on care and protection orders by State and Territory governments.

**Numbers placed on care and protection orders**

As of June 1995 there were 13,078 children on care and protection orders across Australia. The majority of these children (69%) were placed on guardianship orders, and legal responsibility for their welfare was transferred from their parents to the State. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly over-represented. The rate of being placed under guardianship orders across Australia for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is approximately six times greater than for other children aged 0 to 17 (9.7 compared to 1.7 per 1000) (Angus, Dunn & Moyle 1996).

**Placement type**

It is important to recognise that children placed on care and protection orders are not automatically placed away from their natural and extended families. Of the children under care and protection orders as of June 1995, 53% were living in foster care, 27% were with parents or relatives and 11% were in residential care. Some children were living with adults other than parents or relatives (5%), while others were already living independently (3%).

It is interesting to note that the highest numbers of children under legal guardianship orders living with family and relatives were those aged 15, 16 and 17 (12.5% of this age group). Many of these young people are returned to live at home for a trial period, usually six months. If the return home is successful the order may be discharged, although in some States and Territories these young people will remain under guardianship orders until they reach 18 years of age (Angus, Dunn & Moyle 1996, p.9).

**Voluntary care**

Young people placed on care and protection orders make up only a proportion of the total number of children who may be placed in out-of-home care placements. There is also a significant number of children who are placed in State care on a voluntary basis for varying lengths of time, particularly in those States which have narrowed their legislative definitions.

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1 There are 51 different types of care and protection orders that can be made under different State and Territory legislation concerned with child protection (Angus, Dunn & Moyle 1996, pp.33–34).
2 Living independently is defined by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare as “a child who is living apart from parents, other adult relatives, or any other adult who has accepted responsibility for care or supervision for the child; or when a child is living as a private boarder, in rental accommodation, boarding house or refuge, private hotel or hostel for adults” (Angus, Dunn & Moyle 1996, p.38).
of “significant harm” for assessing children at risk (Fernandez 1996) and removed “status offences” (e.g. moral danger, uncontrollable) as grounds for placing adolescents on care and protection orders (as in Victoria and New South Wales). The number of children placed in care on a voluntary basis, however, is not recorded nationally. Thus the total number of children living in care across Australia, including those who are not necessarily placed on care and protection orders, is unknown.

Changing needs

The number of children under care and protection orders has shown about a 50% decrease over the past two decades. This decline reflects a change in legislation, policy and practice with orders such as State guardianship now being used as a last resort. These changes mean that children placed under care and protection orders are more likely to be those who have been subject to severe abuse, and attempts to reconcile the child with their family have been unsuccessful. The numbers of children in care who have severe behavioural difficulties, emotional disturbances, learning disabilities or physical disabilities has increased (Burston in Taylor 1990). The research literature raises questions about the adequacy of the compensatory help that is provided to children while in care, given that their growth and development have frequently been severely compromised by previous traumas (e.g. Cashmore, Dolby & Brennen 1994).

Adolescents in care

Children in Australia are entering care at an older age. The highest numbers of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect for all children between 0 and 17 years occurs at ages 13 and 14. Therefore the care population is increasingly characterised by children who enter care as young adolescents (Angus & Hall 1996).

Many will be unable to return home and rely on the care and protection system to equip them with the practical supports and skills they need to manage independently. More critically, they are dependent on the system to provide them with a secure, supportive base from which to make the psychosocial transition to adulthood.

While the national data indicate that substantiated rates of abuse are highest for young adolescents, the number on care and protection orders declines dramatically for those 15 years and over (Angus, Dunn & Moyle 1996).

Legislation stipulates that State and Territory governments have care and protection responsibilities for children up to the age of 18 (17 in some States) and reasons for the decline depicted above are not always clear. A number of reports have raised concerns that State and Territory care and protection systems are either discharging young people once they reach the ages of 15 or 16, or alternatively are not meeting their responsibilities for older adolescents in need of care and protection. These reports cite the existence of Commonwealth income support for young people 15 years and over and joint funding with the States and Territories for supported accommodation and assistance as being possible reasons for the States abdicating their responsibilities to these young people (Eco Consult Australia 1991 quoted in Moving Forward: National Evaluation of SAAP 1993; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs (HRSCCA) 1995).

Numbers of young people leaving care

For the purposes of this research it was critically important to have a national overview of how many young people leave care between the ages of 15 and 18, the reasons for their discharge, where they were living when they were discharged and following their discharge (e.g. where they went returned to family, supportive or otherwise; supported living; independent

3 The United Kingdom has experienced an increase of numbers placed in care on a voluntary basis since the introduction of the Children’s Act (1989). Stain and Carey (1986) point out that being in care and leaving care do not have the same legal currency as they did in the past when larger number of young people were placed on statutory orders. Leaving care now means ceasing to be accommodated and/or looked after by the State rather than necessarily being discharged from a guardianship order. They also note that being “in care” and “leaving” are the popular terms of young people themselves, given that many experience extended periods in and out of care although they have not been placed on care and protection orders.

4 In 1972, there were 26,846 children under care and protection orders (Taylor 1990).

5 The increasing number of adolescents entering care has shown a similar trend in both the United Kingdom (Garnett 1992; Biehal et al. 1994) and the United States (WELSTAT 1988; De Woody, Ceja & Sylvester 1993).

6 In New South Wales, however, the Children’s Court can only make limited orders for young people aged 16 and over and cannot make custody or guardianship orders for this age group.
living; the streets; youth refuges). However, the research was unable to ascertain the total number of young people discharged each year from care and protection orders, let alone information about the circumstances of their discharge. Such data is not available from all State and Territory governments (Angus, Dunn & Moyle 1996).

Past research by Taylor (1990) examined the reasons for discharge and found that there were significant differences in practice between States on some important variables. For example, in New South Wales 48% of all discharges (288 young people) occurred because orders expired at the age of 18, compared to only 10% (64 young people) discharged in Victoria for this reason. Given changes in policies and practice since, and in the absence of current comparative data, it cannot be certain that the differences still apply nor what their impact is on outcomes for young people leaving care in these States.

The current lack of national and State data meant that the research team could make only a rough estimate of the numbers of young people who would be discharged from care in any one year. Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of the numbers in care by age and State and Territory.

At least 2,643 young people across Australia aged 15 to 17 (the number currently in care) will be discharged at some time over the next three years, before or once they reach 18. But how many of these young people will be discharged in a single year and how many will be expected to live independently cannot be ascertained. A Victorian study of 352 young people in care aged between 15 and 17 found that 26% were case planned to return home (Green 1993). Similarly, overseas research indicates that up to 25% of young people placed in foster care will return to their families, even if the reason for their discharge is the expiry of their care and protection order because they have reached the age of 18 (Courtney & Barth 1996). Differences in legislation and discharge practices across the States and Territories, combined with a lack of data, make it impossible to describe both the reasons for discharge and the discharge destination of young people leaving care in Australia.

Conclusion

The data available about young people leaving care in Australia are woefully inadequate. It is difficult to ascertain total numbers nationally and impossible to find demographic data about factors such as the age of discharge. All that can be concluded is that the number of young people who are likely to be discharged from care and protection in any one year in any State or Territory is relatively small. A number of commentators argue that the ultimate effectiveness of care and protection systems can only be measured by whether or not State intrusion in a family has produced a better outcome for children (Taylor 1990; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs 1995; Auditor General of Victoria 1996). The lack of scrutiny and attention paid to collecting important discharge data for children in care at a national and State level represents a failure on the part of the States to account for the outcomes of their policies and practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Order#</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>Vic</th>
<th>Qld</th>
<th>WA*</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Tas</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>Aust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NG</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>93</td>
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<td>733</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NG</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NG</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>754</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>748</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#G=Guardianship orders; NG=Non-guardianship orders

* Western Australia does not place children under non-guardianship.


1 Non-guardianship orders are defined as legal or administrative orders giving the welfare department supervisory responsibility for a child’s welfare, such as supervising a child’s actions, providing or arranging accommodation or reporting or giving consideration to a child’s welfare (Angus, Dunn & Moyle 1996, p.36).
This chapter outlines a framework for discussing the needs of young people leaving care and moving to independent living. Leaving care is seen as a major life transition. The discussion draws comparisons between “leaving care” and “leaving home” in the light of recent community trends and expectations, and argues that current child welfare practices place young people leaving care in situations of greater risk and vulnerability than their peers leaving home.

The process of leaving care

Becoming independent of adult care is a complex process and a major life event. The concept of life-course transitions is useful for describing the set of interrelated changes in social relations (school to work, parents’ household to own household, family of origin to family of procreation) which young people have traditionally gone through to assume adult status (Wallace 1987). A major theme of the research literature on young people leaving care is that such young people are expected to cope with these changes at an early age, with poorer preparation and fewer resources than other young people leaving home.

“Leaving home” and “leaving care”

Leaving home in order to establish an independent household has traditionally been an important step towards assuming adult status. Young people, particularly those in education, are staying at home with their families for longer periods than they did a decade ago. Final home leaving is happening at later ages. Many more young adults, especially young women, now leave home between 20 and 25 years of age. The shift to independence is made gradually; a significant percentage of young people move initially into group living situations (e.g. shared flats, group households, university colleges) and they usually receive some continuing support from their parents. These trends are related to the scarcity of entry-level jobs for young people and consequent lack of opportunities to establish independence through full-time employment, the introduction of policies designed to prolong the time that young people spend in education and training, and the lack of affordable housing (Hartley & Wolcott 1994).

Table 3.1 shows percentages of young people living with their parents in 1982 and 1992. In 1992, nearly 89% of all 15- to 19-year-olds lived with their parents compared to 84% in 1982. The corresponding figure for 20- to 24-year-olds is 47% living with parents in 1992 compared to 41% in 1982. Thus a greater proportion of young people are now living with their parents for a longer period.

Young people leaving care are expected to become independent and to find independent accommodation, often with little support from State and Territory authorities. This expectation is in sharp contrast to other young people of their own age. Only 11% of young people aged 15 to 19 lived away from home in 1992, and of these only 4% lived in their own households (either with partners, children or alone). In
general, young people living away from home are more likely to live in their own households after the age of 20: almost one-third (31%) of young people between 20 and 24 years of age not living at home were living in their own households and 20% were in shared households.

It is clear from the research that when young people who have been in care "leave care" they usually do so between the ages of 16 and 18, they make the change suddenly, they live alone and they usually receive limited support from their previous carers (Cook & Lindsey 1996). Because of the experiences many of them have been through, and the lack of opportunities to gain independent living skills, young people leaving care often have fewer practical, social and emotional skills and resources than their peers leaving home (West 1995). The comments of young people interviewed for this project confirm this.

### Family support

Parental support can extend beyond the provision of accommodation. It can include income support in many forms, including loans or payment for education fees and requirements, cash transfers, food, clothing and household items. Many parents also provide support once their children leave home, with 57% providing money and 25% of parents giving household items (ABS 1995b, pp.26–27). Hartley and Wolcott (1994) note that those remaining at home are not necessarily fully financially dependent on their families, and the support families often provide for their children is designed to promote an interdependent rather than a dependent relationship. For example, many young people remaining in the family home have some personal income (from part-time or full-time work) and many have access to a family car while they continue their education.

Ellis (1996) points out that there is increasing evidence that parents are supporting young people staying at home. This support may take a number of forms, the most notable are: free accommodation, cheap rent or board and financial support. For example, in 1992 there were approximately 2.7 million young Australians aged between 15 and 24. Of these almost half paid no rent or board, with parents providing 97% of this free accommodation. While 75% of those receiving free accommodation were studying, the remaining 25% were unemployed. The 600,000 young people paying board did so at rates approximately one-third to half the amount which young people paid to private landlords, and only slightly higher than rent paid for public housing. Fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds at home were paying an average of $30 per week and 20- to 24-year-olds $41 per week. Those out of home, on the other hand, were paying $62 and $65 respectively (ABS 1995b, p.59).

Jones (1995) found that young people leaving home in Britain normally receive help from parents which includes social support (e.g. regular contact via telephone, letters and visits), practical support (e.g. laundry, loans of equipment, provision of household items), emotional support (e.g. encouragement, sympathy) and financial support (e.g. “top ups” of money, presents, “bailing out” of crises).

Longitudinal studies in Australia (Cashmore & Paxman 1996), the United Kingdom (Biehal et al. 1994) and the United States (Courtney & Barth 1996) have shown that young people leaving care cannot rely on any of this assistance. They are often ill-prepared as far as the skills for independent living are concerned, inadequately housed, manage on very low incomes, are lonely and isolated and have little advice and support. Cashmore and Paxman’s study, which followed a cohort of young people leaving care in New South Wales, is particularly relevant for the present report. Findings from the present study have shown that many of the issues they identified in New South Wales concerning young people’s lack of preparation for leaving care are reflected nationally.

In times of financial crisis, such as the late payment of benefits or getting behind with rent payments, the situation for young people leaving care is very different for those who have the option of returning home or getting additional support from parents. Just over one

### Table 3.1: Percentage of young people living with parents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age 15–19</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age 20–24</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Excludes a small proportion of persons with a partner or child of their own who live with their parents.

quarter of wards at the point of discharge in Cashmore and Paxman’s study said that there was no one other than their worker they could turn to for financial help. Even for those who could identify someone other than their worker (usually foster parents, natural parents or friends), 36.2% said that they wished that there were more people they could call on. In the present research this was true even for many of those who to all outward appearances had made the transition to independent living. Their comments reflected the loneliness and social isolation of many young people leaving care. They lack family and wider community networks, and government departments are often the only point of support and human contact once they leave care (Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) 1991).

Final leaving
Young people who have ongoing family support have the opportunity to return home when they need to. Leaving home and returning at least once is now a significant part of the process of final leaving in Australia, as in other Western European societies and the USA (Hartley & Wolcott 1994, p.25). A comparison of leaving-home patterns in Britain, the United States and Australia, showed that there was a relatively high rate of return for those who leave for reasons other than marriage (Kerckhoff & Macrae 1992).

Young people leaving care generally have no opportunity to return to their former placement or “home”. Their former bed is generally rapidly filled following their departure, or they are told that they are too old to return, as placements provided by the child welfare sector generally do not extend beyond the age of 18 years. Thus, young people leaving care, unlike their peers leaving home, are generally given one chance only to make the transition to independence, and the timing of this is determined by their age rather than their level of maturity. It is not a gradual process of separation from the adults who have been important in their lives. Their discharge from care also occurs around the time when their peers are still completing secondary school. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for young people leaving care to continue or recommence their schooling (Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies’ Working Party on Leaving Care 1991; Cashmore & Paxman 1996).

Discrimination or care?
Lindsey (1996, p.6) describes the different expectations and circumstances for young people leaving care as typifying the practice of “careism”. He argues that the test of this discrimination is “where any decision or action could not be justified in respect to any other young person”. The age at which young people leave care and the manner in which they are assumed to be able to live without additional social, emotional and practical support is an example of careism, because it is neither supported by community norms for other young people, nor by society’s obligation to offer these young people special protection and assistance. Others have described this discrimination as systems abuse (Cashmore, Dolby & Brennen 1994), treating guardianship as a “stigma” (Taylor 1990) and a policy of welfare residualism (Carney 1993).

Conclusion
On the whole, young people leaving care are a vulnerable group in view of the traumas many have suffered before entering care (such as abuse and poverty) and the extended periods of uncertainty and instability they may experience while in care (multiple placements, changing workers, carers and schools). These circumstances complicate rather than promote their health and well-being. The problems they then face in negotiating the transition to adulthood are even greater. In comparison to their peers leaving home, young people leaving care do so at significantly younger ages, with few options for ongoing support to continue or complete their education and no opportunities to return to their former accommodation when they need to as part of a gradual process of “final leaving” and assuming self-sufficiency.
HOW then does Commonwealth youth policy relate to and impact on the major life transition which young people leaving care are required to make? This section outlines the Commonwealth’s responsibilities in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, then examines significant areas of current Commonwealth Government policy in relation to young people, including income support, education, employment and training, housing and health. The implications of these policies for young people leaving care are explored with a particular focus on identifying respective Commonwealth, State and family responsibilities. The chapter draws on the research literature to illustrate the impact of Commonwealth policies on young people leaving care.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Commonwealth Government has a range of responsibilities for developing and monitoring law and policy in relation to young people. The most significant is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia became a signatory in 1990. The Commonwealth is responsible under international law for the discharge of the obligations outlined in the Convention.

The Convention declaration is about rights and responsibilities that governments and the community have towards all children and young people in Australia and in particular towards those in need of special protection. A number of articles under the convention oblige governments to provide young people with a range of services which ensure their care and protection. In relation to children under the care of the State, Articles 20 and 27 of the Convention are pertinent. Article 20 specifies that:

... a child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose best interests cannot be allowed to remain within that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State, and that State parties in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child (United Nations 1989).

Article 27 reinforces the need for appropriate living conditions where “State parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development”. Other articles of relevance to young people in care and leaving the care of the State are the rights to a full and free education, social security, adequate housing, medical services and nutrition, participation in decision making and protection against neglect, cruelty and exploitation.

Commonwealth action in adherence to the Convention

In monitoring Australia’s obligations, the Commonwealth has established a number of inquiries to examine compliance to the Convention both for young people in general and special-need groups such...
as the homeless and those in State care.\textsuperscript{1} The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's inquiry into youth homelessness (1989) found that there were thousands of children whose basic rights were being abused because the Commonwealth had not discharged its responsibility to put in place appropriate arrangements with the States for the care of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the community. The inquiry subsequently commissioned the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Social Policy Unit in Melbourne to undertake a national study of the relationship between State care and homelessness. This research examined the adequacy of State and Territory legislation, policy and programs for young people leaving care. It found a lack of consistent legislation, policy and practice both within and between States about working with young people as they leave care. In fact, at the time of undertaking the research, there were no specific programs developed by States to meet their personal and financial support needs (Taylor 1990).

As a result of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's inquiry, Commonwealth and State welfare ministers in 1989 accepted the recommendations of a Commonwealth/State working party for action to improve the situation for children under the care of the State. A critical recommendation in relation to young people leaving care was Recommendation 17 that:

\begin{quote}
... each State/Territory ensure that there is adequate planning for release from statutory care/custody and that each child and young person is released from a statutory order in accordance with an individual case plan, with suitable accommodation and with the identification of significant support structures.
\end{quote}

Recommendation 18 required that each State or Territory report to the Spring Conference of Social Welfare Administrators (1989) on programs designed to enhance the capacity of children and young people under statutory orders moving from care, especially those young people moving towards independent living. A follow-up of the implementation of these recommendations twelve months later by Taylor (1990, p.51) found that "overall there seems to have been little actual change in services for children and young people leaving guardianship, and certainly no major increase in resources to provide real support for transition to independent living".

More recently, the Morris Committee (House of Representative's Standing Committee on Community Affairs 1995, p.205) found "a crisis in confidence experienced by community organisations and parents in the child and family welfare system ... and that the increasing incidence of youth homelessness is connected to the inability of State/Territory welfare departments to provide adequate care for adolescents". The report urged the Commonwealth Government to take a leadership role in relation to meeting Australia's UN obligations by recommending that “complementary legislation on the care and protection of children up to the age of 17 years be established by the Commonwealth Government in cooperation with the State/Territory governments and the non-government sector” and by ensuring that “UN obligations be incorporated into State policy and operational guidelines” (p.240). The Morris Report also called for uniform standards and accreditation of both government and non-government child and youth welfare services. The Commonwealth and States were involved in the development of the National Baseline Out-of-Home Care Standards (Standing Committee of Community Services and Income Security Administrators 1995).

**Overseas comparisons**

In Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, the need for national legislative provisions for young people leaving care has been recognised (Cashmore & Paxman 1996). In England and Wales, the Children Act 1989 provides for five main areas of local authorities to prepare young people for leaving care and assist them afterwards in five main areas. These include preparation for after care, advice and support, financial assistance, accommodation, representation and complaints procedures (Biehal et al. 1994). In Canada, the provinces have also legislated to require State and non-government agencies to provide after-care support including leaving-care grants and/or brokerage funds (Spence 1994a). In Ontario, for example, former wards aged between 18 and 21 are eligible for ongoing financial assistance under a system of "Extended Support and Maintenance". Similarly, federal

\begin{footnote}
1 These include, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s inquiry into Youth Homelessness (1989), and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs Report into Aspects of Youth Homelessness (1995). Commonwealth monitoring also occurs in the planning and evaluation of Commonwealth/State joint funded programs, e.g. Evaluation of the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) and through Commonwealth/State committees of relevant ministers in the areas of housing, income support, youth and welfare.
\end{footnote}
legislation in the United States under Title IV-E Independent Living Program, has since 1986 provided funding for the States to offer independent living programs for young people in care. Cashmore and Paxman (1996, p.6) point out that in each of these countries, legislation has provided the necessary incentive and obligation for the provision of services for young people leaving care. Australia is clearly behind in ensuring a national approach to the support of young people leaving care. As Le Sueur (1990, p.27) points out:

... the lack of a legal mandate to provide services and, more importantly, resource problems and competing priorities have prevented welfare departments from providing anything more than minimal assistance to young people discharged from guardianship. The situation has also been complicated by Commonwealth responsibilities for income maintenance and disputes over respective State/Commonwealth obligations.

The United Nations Convention places obligations on the Commonwealth many of which must be implemented by States. The Commonwealth must therefore interest itself in the transition from care and protection to ensure that the requirements of the Convention are being met.

Income support policies

Income support is a very important youth policy issue for those leaving care. Young people leaving care are equally vulnerable to the broader social and economic trends impacting on all young people, their families and communities. Chapter 3 outlined the important demographic changes in the extent to which young people remain living with their parents, and the corresponding increase in the extent to which parents are expected to support their children.

Commonwealth policy in relation to family responsibilities and income support provided to young people by government has changed in recent years. Hartley and Wolcott observed that “there appears to be an assumption (by government) that families will or should provide major emotional and financial support for young people at least until age 18, more often until age 25, and that policies should not encourage young people to leave home until they are capable of self support” (1994, p.81). Government policy now reflects this. The Common Youth Allowance proposes to combine a number of income support measures available to young people such as Austudy and the Job Search Allowance into one single payment which will be family means-tested for young people up to the age of 21 and for students to the age of 25 (DEETYA 1996a). It seems that the Common Youth Allowance, which aims to rationalise and simplify benefits to young people, will be given only to those with parents on low incomes or with no parental support at all (DEETYA 1996b).

Ellis (1996) commented that more flexibility is needed for young people who for one reason or another do not receive the levels of family support presumed in current eligibility criteria. This is a critical issue for young people both in care and leaving care who do not have the same level of family support that is enjoyed by young people who can remain at home.

Income support needs of young people leaving care

State and Territory governments determine that the young people they discharge from care are adults at 18 years of age. However, the rates of Commonwealth independent income support for young people are age related and significantly below rates for adults. They are also significantly below the Henderson poverty line for single young people. This again reflects the assumption that there is a family to provide some

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2 Further details of the Common Youth Allowance were announced by the Minister for Social Security after this report was submitted to the NYARS Committee. Young people under 18 will have to be in school or training (or to have completed Year 12) to be eligible for financial assistance. Rates for living away from home are set to rise by $25 per fortnight and rent assistance will be extended to Austudy students. However, the entitlements for those living within commuter distance of home are unclear. Means testing eliminates anyone with a family income of over $41,000 (with one young adult in the family). Benefits will be paid to parents. AYPAC estimates that 41,000 students currently not receiving Austudy because their entitlement is less than $1000 will gain up to $38 per fortnight and up to 70,000 may gain from the extension of rent allowance. However, it is estimated that 12,800 will lose benefits entirely and 33,600 will receive reduced benefit. It is considered that the allowance will restrict the ability of young people to establish their independence (Croche 1997).

3 This was a measure developed by the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty in the 1970s to reflect the amount required to meet basic living costs at an “austere” level (Trethewey & Burston 1988 in Thomson 1993, p.6).
income support. The proposed level of the Common Youth Allowance allocates $140.05 for all (with $171.30 for sole parents), but without rent assistance for those without children. Many young people living independently on allowances without other support have great difficulty in making ends meet.

It is not surprising that many young people leaving care have difficulty surviving financially. Cashmore and Paxman (1996) found that only 20% of young people in their study were earning a full-time wage twelve months after discharge from care, with the remainder on either Job Search Allowance (35.6%), Austudy (15.6%) or other benefits (8.5% received no income at all). While income support for young people is age related and below the poverty line, the costs of accommodation, utilities, food and other expenses are not age related. An inability to afford decent accommodation was a frequent reason for mobility and homelessness following discharge for young people in Cashmore and Paxman’s (1996) sample. Poor quality accommodation and lack of maintenance was a common reason for moving for one in four young people.

Cashmore and Paxman also found that nearly half (46.8%) of the young people they interviewed found it difficult to make ends meet, with 21% saying they ran out of money on a regular basis and 10% saying they could never make ends meet. If they were unemployed, they were more likely to report difficulty than if they were working or on Austudy. No young person in the study who was living at home reported ever having to go without necessities, while 33% of ex-wards living independently said, for example, that they sometimes had to go without heating. Many could also not afford fees for courses and clothes for interviews. The most common service they had to go without was dental care, mentioned by 44% of ex-wards. This is significant in the light of the recent defunding of the Commonwealth dental program.

**Difficulties in accessing benefits**

Cashmore and Paxman (1996) found that many young people, both while in care and after leaving care, suffered additional hardships at the time they left care because they experienced delays in accessing benefits, problems in establishing identification, and problems with files lost by either the Department of Social Security (DSS) or by DEETYA. Others had to repay money that was overpaid because of administrative mistakes or changes of address or circumstances. The HRSCCA Report (1995) reported similar difficulties. Without further clarification, the Common Youth Allowance may further aggravate this situation for young people leaving care. It is proposed in the DEETYA Discussion Paper that parental means testing will not apply to young people who are homeless, orphans, refugees, married or with a dependent child (DEETYA 1996a) but there is no mention of young people in care and those leaving as an exempt group. The definition of homelessness to be used by DSS or DEETYA has not been clarified. The authors have been made aware of a young person discharged from State guardianship at the age of 18 and continuing to live with a long-term foster family who could not claim a full youth training allowance due to the income of the former carer.4

**Commonwealth and State government responsibilities**

Fifteen is a significant age in determining the way income support is provided to young people in care. Young people in care who are 15 or over are assessed as either “students in care” or as “independent students” without the need to generally meet the fairly tight eligibility requirements of the Austudy “homelessness” requirements. For the Job Search Allowance, caregivers are exempt from means testing, thus enabling the young person to receive the independent rate.5 In Victoria, State Government policy related to income maintenance is based on the principle that “where Commonwealth payments are available to clients, these payments should be obtained” (Department of Human Services (CSV), Victoria 1992).

This has had a number of consequences for young people both in care and leaving care. The financial support of young people over the age of 15 is jointly funded by Commonwealth benefits and State and Territory placement subsidies. In Victoria, for example, the young person is required to pay 55% or $58.00 of their Austudy or Newstart allowance towards the cost of their “boarding and lodging”, whether they reside with home-based caregivers or in residential care (Department of Human Services 1992). This compares with an average of $30 paid by 15- to 19-year-olds living at home (ABS 1995b). While it is acknowledged

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4 Correspondence from T. Easling, Youth South Australia.

5 The introduction of the Common Youth Allowance will change this as 15- to 18-year-olds not attending school will not receive benefits at all.
that caregiver payments are only a small part of overall funding, the State Government funding to agencies is reliant on this income and where shortfalls occur, the funded agency is responsible. But more important is the impact on preparing young people for independence. Young people are left with a minimum of $47.90 for all of their personal expenses, including school costs such as books and fees.

As the young person is the one who receives the payment, the nature of the relationship between the carer and the young person is changed and tensions may be created. For example, young people may feel that they are boarders, rather than receiving alternative family care, and caregivers may experience financial hardship when young people do not have enough money to pay board. Most fundamentally, it places responsibilities on young people in care that are beyond those expected for other young Australians who can live at home.

**Income support for young homeless people**

Previous research and government inquiries have reported a high incidence of homeless young people who have formerly been under care and protection orders (Hirst 1989; Green 1993; Fredman & Green 1994; Smith 1995; HREOC & the Australian Law Reform Commission 1997).

Estimates made by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1997) suggest that the number of homeless young people has doubled from 8,000 to 10,000 in 1991 to 21,000 in 1994. There has been an increase in the rate of payments of allowances to young homeless people and to significant numbers of young people under the age of 16 in SAAP-funded programs such as youth refuges. As a result, and as indicated in Chapter 2, a number of reports have suggested that States are abdicating their responsibilities for young people in need of care and protection (Eco Consult Australia 1991, quoted in Moving Forward: National Evaluation of the SAAP Program 1993; HRSCCA 1995; Smith 1995). It has been observed that the increase in the number of young people on the youth homeless allowance has occurred concurrently with a reduction in the number of young people being placed on care and protection orders by State and Territory governments. Shaver and Paxman (1992) found that shifting tax sharing relationships between the Commonwealth and the States have contributed to the inability of State welfare resources to keep pace with increasing demands.

A Commonwealth/State Homeless Youth Protocol was introduced in October 1994. This agreement between ministers states that “the principal responsibility for the care of all young homeless people under the age of 15 is with State and Territory governments and that homeless young people 15 to 17 years of age are the joint responsibility of the Commonwealth and States, depending on the type of support required” (Standing Committee of Community Services and Income Security Administrators 1996, p.iv). Most State legislation, however, defines care and protection of young people as a government responsibility up to the age of 17 or 18. One problem is that in reality and in practice, the distinction between Commonwealth responsibility for income support and State responsibility for care and protection is not always clear. An alarming consequence of this could be that fewer young people aged 15 and over are cared for by State and Territory governments when Commonwealth income support and housing is available. It could result in the age of independent living for young people in need of care and protection dropping even further below community norms.

**Education, employment and training**

A significant element of youth policy has been the increase in school retention rates. Between 1980 and 1991, rates of retention to Year 12 almost doubled, from 34.5% to 71.3% (Marginson 1993, p.13). Since then they have, however, begun to decline. The Howard Coalition Government has continued previous policies and states that its goal is for 95% of 19-year-olds to have completed Year 12 or be enrolled in a post-school qualification (DEETYA 1996a, p.3) This is unlikely to have much impact on young people leaving care unless State and Territory governments recognise their additional educational support needs. Over 60% of those interviewed for the present study left school at or before Year 10. Only one of the seven Aboriginal young people interviewed was at the time in Year 12, his second year at this level. Cashmore and Paxman (1996), with a more representative study of young people leaving care in New South Wales, found that just over half completed Year 10 or less and some left as early as Year 7 or 8.

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6 It appears to be Government intention that the Common Youth Allowance be paid to parents for young people aged 16 to 17. It is not clear how this affects those leaving care.
7 SAAP National Data Collection Agency estimates up to 6% of SAAP clients.
Dwyer (1996, p.6) has pointed to the tendency to minimise the significance of the number of early school leavers by describing them as a small minority deemed to be “at risk”. He points to the inclination to inflate the number of those in mainstream education and create a false impression of a homogeneous majority and a targeted “at-risk” minority, when in fact large numbers do not fit neatly into either category. Dwyer also points to assertions in the Burdekin report, later research by MacKenzie and Chamberlain, and the Morris Report that schools actively reject students in difficult circumstances (1996, p.19). Young people in care are particularly vulnerable because schools often classify them as “difficult” solely on the basis of their care status (Lindsey 1996).

The Commonwealth Government has made a commitment to the improvement of literacy to ensure all children leaving primary school have basic skills. However, it is not clear if the Government’s strategy will help children with literacy problems caused by frequent moves of care placement and discontinuity in schooling, or whether it will address the higher incidence of learning difficulties (such as dyslexia) and behavioural disabilities (such as Attention Deficit Disorder) among young people in care. The Commonwealth program, Children in Residential Care (CIRC), provides funding to improve the educational outcomes for children and young people placed in residential care. However, since State and Territory governments have moved away from the provision of residential care in favour of home-based care, the majority of children and young people in care are denied access to this program.8

A recent study by the Children’s Welfare Association of Victoria, in conjunction with the Australian Council of Educational Research, found that levels of competency in literacy and numeracy achieved by a sample of young people in care, using standardised measures, was in general considerably lower than would be expected for students of comparable age levels. In the case of students with an identified disability, the level of achievement was about two standard deviations below expected achievement levels and about one standard deviation below that for students in care without a disability (de Lemos 1996, p.48). The study concludes that “despite the fact that a high proportion of students in care have been identified as having a learning or behavioural difficulty, there is little evidence to suggest that these problems are being addressed in any effective or systematic way”.

Other policy initiatives, such as enterprise education and the Jobs Pathway Guarantee, are unlikely to benefit many of those leaving care. Most of the young people interviewed for the present study who had completed Year 12 were trying to work or study or both. It is not that young people leaving school do not value education, many do and regret not having continued for longer. The problem is that the final years of school coincide with their move to independent living between the ages of 16 and 18 (44% of the study group left care before 18) and the responsibilities of keeping house and surviving emotionally often make it difficult to continue in the education system. Schools are not always able to address the different needs and circumstances of students living without families and are not always sympathetic to them.

As few students leaving care enter higher education in their first few years of independence, the government’s changes in this area are unlikely to affect them. As many young people leaving care find it hard to make ends meet in any case, the increase in Higher Education (HECS) charges is, if anything, likely to discourage them even more.

The Commonwealth Government’s unemployment strategy is to increase job opportunities through economic growth. Its pre-1996 election policy proposed to retain labour market programs such as Skillshare and LEAP, though it has now terminated many of them. It argues that more flexible industrial relations will make it easier for young people to gain a foothold in the workplace (DEETYA 1996a). The Modern Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship System is designed to make training more attractive to employers and provide income support to encourage young people to take up apprenticeship and trainee places. It will also provide the opportunity for young people to undertake apprenticeship and traineeship training while still at school.

It is unlikely that this system will provide more job opportunities for those leaving care than previous options. Cashmore and Paxman (1996) found that 36% of young people were unemployed prior to discharge. Twelve months after discharge, this figure rose to 44%. Labour force statistics for 1994 indicated that about

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8 In Victoria, the Department of Human Services is currently examining how these funds can be used to better service the needs of young people in care.
27% of 15- to 19-year-olds are unemployed (Boss, Edwards & Pitman 1995, p.283) which suggests that young people in care are over-represented. In the Cashmore and Paxman study, the unemployment rate was 38.9% for males and 55.6% for females (excluding those pregnant or looking after young children) (1996). This disproportion becomes even more marked when their low completion rate of Year 12 is taken into account since young people who complete Year 12 are generally less likely to be unemployed than those who left care (Boss, Edwards & Pitman 1995, pp.283–4). Those living away from home experienced an even higher rate with 75% unemployed. In sharp contrast, 90% of young people in the study who were living at home were either employed or studying.

The Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) program, which is aimed at the disadvantaged including State wards, refugees and offenders, may provide for those leaving care. However, given the high rates of unemployment in these groups, it will have little value unless the majority of young people concerned have access to it and to services specialising in the resolution of family conflict.

Only about 25% of the young people interviewed in the present project had taken a course to which they had been referred by the CES. Courses taken were usually eight to ten weeks long and in some cases led to periods of employment. Rarely did they result in long-term jobs but often they helped to develop self-esteem and to clarify career goals. In Cashmore and Paxman’s (1996) study, only five young people were working at the time of discharge and of these, three were in subsidised employment (Job Start or Skillshare). All were still working at three months after discharge but at 12 months, one had been retrenched, the hours of another been reduced and the third had a work-related back injury.

Data from these studies clearly suggest that a united policy and program approach by both State and Commonwealth governments is required if the outcomes for young people leaving care are to approximate the poor but significantly better employment prospects of other young people of their age in the community.

Housing and accommodation support
The accommodation options for young people aged between 16 and 18 are extremely limited and are primarily confined to public housing, programs funded by the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) or, at worst, a range of private options such as boarding houses, hostels and similar single-room accommodation.

SAAP, however, is designed for the homeless and is not intended as a transitional program for young people leaving care. SAAP managers now emphasise the program as providing support rather than accommodation services. Nevertheless, in the absence of other alternatives, SAAP is increasingly being used for both young people in care and for those who have left care. For example, Cashmore and Paxman (1996) found that 42.8% (39) of the young people in the interview group had been placed in refuges, supported accommodation or boarding house placements at some time during their time in care (110 placements in total). Their average age at the time of these placements was 15 or 16, but several were less than 13. One young women was only 10 years of age when she was placed in crisis accommodation services. Twelve young people had experienced five or more placements in youth refuges or supported accommodation services and 21 had lived on the streets or had been missing at some stage for an average of two months (over 24 placements) while in care. Workers recorded a lack of suitable placements as the primary reason for placing young people in SAAP services. In fact, at the time of discharge, nine of these young people were homeless.

After leaving care, while some young people in Cashmore and Paxman’s study found stable, secure and affordable accommodation, about a third had moved at least three times in twelve months. A substantial proportion of young people were in, or had been in, temporary accommodation of some sort (friends, relatives, boarding, accommodation, refuge, boarding house, street) by the time Cashmore and Paxman interviewed them 12 months after leaving care.

While transience and homelessness were experienced by many interviewed in the present study, others found that placement in a SAAP-managed service provided them with opportunities to learn skills, receive worker support and find secure housing.

Young people are recognised as a target group in the SAAP program but its use as a primary exit point for those leaving care needs to be addressed by the Commonwealth in future arrangements with State and Territory governments. The SAAP agreement states that the program will not replace or duplicate services provided by, or which are the responsibility of, other government programs.
Health
The National Health Plan for Young Australians, endorsed by Commonwealth and State health ministers, aims to reduce inequalities through cost-effective use of resources and by strengthening linkages between government, the community and family. It will include regular monitoring of the health of young people and aims to encourage a friendly client focus. In addition, the National Youth Suicide Strategy plan is committed to tackling the significant rates, in comparison to other western countries, of attempted and actual suicide among young Australians.

Health, and mental health in particular, is a significant issue for young people leaving care. Disturbingly, Cashmore and Paxman found that one in two ex-wards and two out of three homeless young people had thought about attempting suicide and more than half these young people had tried to do so. Less than half had ever received any counselling while in care and even fewer after leaving care. They note that this is consistent with the lack of recognition of depression and feelings of hopelessness among young people in care (Zimmerman 1988).

Attempted suicide was found to be related to the stability of young people's placements in care and to feelings of despair and loneliness. Cashmore and Paxman conclude that “the mental health, happiness and expectations of the future for the young people without a long term placement and those forced to leave home early have clearly been compromised by their experiences in care” (1996, p.189). The need of these young people for social and emotional support is clear.

Thirty of the 43 young people interviewed in the present study had used drugs at least experimentally. Two angrily described how they were first introduced to drugs by other young people in care placements. For many, drug use was a form of escape from unhappy circumstances, and for most this took the form of marijuana use. Interestingly, while about half admitted to having committed offences, none admitted to offences concerning drugs. The possibility of drug taking in the future is an additional hazard in the transition to independence.

Before its election, the Coalition Government gave a commitment to retaining bulk billing but has shown signs that it might review that policy. Bulk billing is essential to young people trying to live independently on limited incomes. Its abolition may result in them not seeking medical attention when they need it.

Listening to young people
The Commonwealth Government has emphasised the importance of talking to and listening to young people, though action has yet to be taken (DEETYA 1996a). It is important that governments listen to young people who have had experience of the care and protection system. An appropriate mechanism for this is to work through the Australian Association for Young People in Care (AAYPIC) and its State affiliates. It is notable that while many of the States have funded care networks, AAYPIC remains solely reliant on corporate and trust fund sponsorship and receives no funding from the Commonwealth to make the views of young people in care known at the federal level.

Conclusion
Commonwealth policy and program responsibilities which have a direct impact on young people leaving care include income support, education, employment and training, and housing and health. The clarification of Commonwealth and State roles and responsibilities in the areas of income support and housing for young people, both in care and leaving care, is critical given that Commonwealth policy tends to assume that these young people have either a family to support them or that State and Territory governments have in place provisions for the ongoing financial and material supports a family would generally provide.

It is clear that although Australians are legally entitled and obliged to vote at 18 and entitled to stand for elected office, those students under 25 and workers under 21 are not regarded as fully independent when they apply for financial support from government. Income support policies assume that young people have some family support. Housing policies do not recognise that young people will not live with their families or be supported by them in living away. There is a curious double standard in government assumptions. While it is expected that families will support young people financially and with accommodation after the age of 18, no parallel provision is made for the support of those who have left State care.

9 Bulk billing is where patients do not pay directly for medical services but the medical practitioner bills government for an approved proportion of the fee.
Furthermore, they are expected to be fully responsible for knowing about and applying for benefits and fully responsible if they claim benefits to which they are not entitled.

It is difficult for young adults in 1990s Australia to be truly independent. Those living with or leaving families remain interdependent – contributing to and receiving support from parents and siblings. Those leaving care are also interdependent – with other young people with whom they share housing, and with support workers, with whom they may also contribute by helping other young people.

Policies aimed at the majority of young people disadvantage those leaving care and protection. As the State seeks to reduce its responsibilities for young people and to refrain from unnecessary interference in family life, young people who may well have had dysfunctional or abusive families are often denied the support they need to reach independence.

With the exception of a few who have stable placements in home-based care, many young people leaving care are forced to leave where they are living at about the same time as their discharge, because of inflexible arrangements based on age in most State/Territory-funded placements. The lack of accommodation options for young people leaving care provided by governments often results in them having to “choose” between returning home, accessing services intended for the homeless, attempting to live independently in the private rental market or in single room accommodation. Young people leaving care also have lower rates of educational attainment, higher rates of unemployment and higher rates of early parenting so they are generally more dependent on Commonwealth income support than other young people of the same age. This further disadvantages what the Patron of AAYPIC, David Hill (who as a child spent time in care), describes as the “least represented, least protected and most vulnerable group in our community” (Foreword in Owen 1996, p.vii).
This chapter outlines the legislative provisions for leaving care in each State and Territory, indicates recent policy developments, and describes some strategies or programs for young people leaving care. The information on strategies and programs was obtained from documents provided by the States and Territories, focus group meetings and individual worker interviews. It is not intended to be an exhaustive description of current initiatives, but aims to show the direction of recent strategies. The information presented was accurate at the time that the data was collected, up to August 1996. Summaries of this information were sent to each State and Territory for comment in November 1996 and their comments incorporated where appropriate (some documentation forwarded was not appropriate to this report). The authors have received information, following the circulation of draft copies of this report, that a number of States have made changes to improve support services to young people leaving care. Whether this was due to the “Hawthorn” effect or to changes already in train, we commend those States for their action. The chapter concludes with a discussion of guardianship and care themes and issues which were identified from the survey of policies and practices. Documents and publications referred to in this chapter are listed in the bibliography.

Provision of care and protection

All States and Territories have legislation to provide care and protection for children and all have now endorsed the National Baseline Standards of Out-of-Home Care. Most aim to provide care and protection in a manner that enables children to grow in a safe and stable environment and reach full potential. The State may intervene to promote the welfare of a child. Legislation in most States recognises that the primary responsibility for care and protection lies with the child’s family, and generally gives high priority to the provision of support and assistance to families.

Most legislation suggests that the safety of the child is the paramount consideration and that power is exercised in the child’s best interests. However, serious consideration is normally given to keeping the child within the family; preserving and strengthening family relationships; not unnecessarily moving the child from familiar surroundings or interrupting education or employment; and preserving racial, ethnic, religious and cultural identity. The basic principle of placing Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island children in their own communities is now generally accepted, although practice sometimes differs (see below).

In most States and Territories, legislation defines the appropriate Minister or Director General/Secretary as guardian of those in State care and of their property. Although the provisions vary somewhat across States and Territories, key responsibilities for children under care and protection usually include:

- the power to place the child;
- the responsibility to make arrangements for education or medical treatment;
- consideration of the desirability of permanent or settled living arrangements;
• provision for payment by relatives for the maintenance of a child; and
• the review of cases at certain intervals.

Provisions for leaving care

This section describes, for each State and Territory, legislative provisions, recent policy initiatives, and strategies and programs for preparing and supporting young people leaving care. In some instances, internal government reports were not able to be obtained, especially where departments had undertaken critical reviews of practice. Material made available is listed in the Bibliography.

Information about strategies and programs is drawn from documentation, and the focus groups and interviews. There is no consistent provision for preparing young people for leaving care, or for after care, in any State or Territory. The examples given therefore represent program strategies which have largely been developed because of the interest and initiative of a particular agency (government or non-government) in a particular region.

South Australia

Legislative and policy provisions

There is no specified State obligation to assist young people in South Australia once they have turned 18. Of potential significance for leaving care/after care is the mandate to maximise the well-being of children generally, reinforced by the broad mandate for the welfare of the community and the capacity to make grants to that end conferred under the Community Welfare Act 1972 (SA). The Children’s Protection Act 1993 (SA) also includes a specific mandate to provide or assist in provision of services for people who have been under guardianship or custody of the Minister in making a successful transition to adulthood.

Recent policy initiatives

• The proposed Vulnerable Young People policy, initiated in 1996, will bring the range of services and programs for young people under one policy umbrella in an attempt to provide an integrated response. The policy will deal with young offenders, care and protection and guardianship, generic youth services, the homeless, and aboriginal services. “Vulnerable young people” are those who, for example, do not receive the love and nurturing required to develop self-esteem, are isolated, engage in damaging behaviours or crime or are exposed to negative influences, or do not have adequate physical, emotional, social, developmental and spiritual care (Department for Family and Community Services (FACS) 1996c, Draft Position paper).

• A department Leaving Care project which commenced in the latter half of 1996 has developed a framework to assist workers in preparing young people for successful transition from care. The project has reviewed and analysed current literature and identified programs that assist in the transition to independent living or post-guardianship. The framework recognises the importance of providing comprehensive training to prepare young people for leaving care and provides a four-phase approach to such training: the value of a practice model that incorporates a holistic approach to working with young people prior to and during their transition from care; financial considerations and entitlements; standards for leaving care; and indigenous and special needs issues. Localised planning within district centres and specific initiatives related to leaving care will occur in 1996–97 (Loughnan 1996).

Strategies and programs

• The Intensive Adolescent Support Program was introduced in 1994 mainly for adolescents aged 12 to 16 who are at risk. While this is not specifically devised for young people leaving care, they can make use of it. The program is delivered by volunteers who work with young people (for a small remuneration and under FACS supervision) for up to three months. The aim is to provide adolescents at risk with support and role modelling, to assist them to increase their network of friends, and assist them to find employment or return to the education system. Appropriate behaviours are encouraged, as is strengthening family relationships and maintaining the adolescent in his or her own family (Department for Family and Community Services 1994, Guidelines for Intensive Adolescent Support Program).

• The department operates two regionally based Independent Living Support programs specifically geared to assisting young people aged 16 to 18 to become independent. Skills focused on include: finding accommodation, assisting with the purchase of household items, budgeting, shopping, cooking, personal hygiene, sex education, advocacy, negotiating direct lease agreements with the Housing Trust, teaching young people to drive, and informal contact and support. This support may be for short periods but can be up to two years. The Independent Living Program has permission
to support young people discharged from care for
periods of three to six months, depending on the young
person's individual needs.

• The department operates Lochiel Park, a residential
program for young people who frequently have
behavioural difficulties and/or mental health problems.
They have a planned exit program (including a flat
program) which focuses on living skills development for
a period of 12 months prior to their exit. They need
intensive preparation and ongoing support. Youth
workers can continue to provide this, though links are
frequently made to the Independent Living Program.

• Centacare has operated a residential program that
prepares young men for independent living.1 Preparation
includes practical experiences such as shopping,
budgeting, and cooking. The agency ensures that young
people are effectively linked into appropriate
community services and supports them in maintaining
links with their family of origin.

Western Australia
Legislative and policy provisions
There are no specific provisions in the Child Welfare Act
1947 (WA) and Children's Court of Western Australia Act
1988 (WA), for leaving care and after care. A new Family
and Children's Services Act is being drafted, but
currently has no provision for young people leaving
care.2 Departmental policy provides that, as an ex-
guardian, the department has an ongoing obligation to a
child or young person whose wardship has expired; the
obligations should be clearly defined during the process
of case closure. Staff are obliged to provide reasonable
services and support to ex-wards, particularly if they seek
help on matters related to the time they were in care.
Specific services may include information, therapeutic
support (either from staff or private agencies) or referral
to support groups or sources of legal advice (Department
of Family and Children's Services 1993, Case Practice
Manual).

Recent policy initiatives
In 1993, a research project was commissioned by the
Department for Community Development to assess
existing policies and programs for children and young
people leaving care in Western Australia and
nationally, with a view to developing policy and
guidelines for practice in that State (Western Australian
Consortium for Social Policy Research 1993). While a
comprehensive list of recommendations was outlined,
there is little evidence of these being put into practice.3

An external review of out-of-home care has been
carried out by Bandt Gatter and Associates and Purdon
Associates (1996); however, this review does not
address the issue of leaving care.4

Strategies and programs
The researchers were told that, in practice, the
procedures referred to in the Case Practice Manual,
1993, for preparing young people for leaving care are
applied inconsistently. Examples of programs for
young people leaving care include:

• The Ida Curtois Scholarship established for ex-wards
undertaking tertiary education. In 1996, five women
shared approximately $5,000, while in 1995, only one
award was made.

• Government foster care which provides placement
for children aged 8 to 17 and helps young people
obtain independent living skills such as cooking and
budgeting, and knowledge of how to access
community services. The One to One Program prepares
young people to move into independent living. This
program has an individual support team where a case
manager provides assistance to young people to find a
flat and help in budgeting and cooking. The program
also assists young children to return to parents or
prepares them for long-term foster care.

• The role of Out of Home Alternative Care (OHAC)
workers is to provide after care by finding flats for
young people and supporting them for a 12-month
period after they have left care. This after-care support
is based on the young people's willingness to accept

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1 At the time when Centacare workers were interviewed, this program was preparing young men for
leaving care. We have since been informed that it has changed its role.
2 Information subsequently provided indicates that legislation will have a statement about the role of the
department as "good parent" for young people leaving care.
3 Information provided after writing, by the WA Office of Youth Affairs, indicates that the project was not
intended to make recommendations.
4 The department has subsequently indicated that the 1997/8-2000/1 strategy plan has specified a
strategic direction to meet the needs of young people leaving care.
assistance and their stability in placement. Frequently, however, according to workers interviewed, preparation for leaving care is affected by the young people’s desire to return home. For example, they move into independent living and try to reconnect with their family (without professional support) and when this fails their living situation is jeopardised by drug use or self-destructive behaviour.

- Catherine McCauley House which provides more structured preparation and programs that teach young people independent living skills. For example, young people are required to sign a lease agreement for a nine-month period when they enter the program (to emulate the experience they will face in the private rental area). The young people will receive eviction notices if that is warranted.

- Trinity Youth Options which provides support to young people over the age of 18 years to find stable accommodation. While it is not the agency’s role to support young people who have been in care, most of their clients have been in care and are young people for whom the care system did not appear to work very well. These young people are frequently attached to the street lifestyle and, because of their behaviours, they are rejected by other services. Support is usually provided on a long-term basis although frequently workers respond to crisis situations.

- The Youth Care Program which provides an intensive support accommodation program for 16- to 18-year-olds which has a focus on transition to independence, an accommodation program for young women aged 16 to 20, a support program to help young people access accommodation in the rental market, and an intervention program to prevent the onset of youth homelessness.

Recent policy initiatives
The substitute care and guardianship program was reviewed in 1995. The specific issues raised for review were broad including service requirements across the range of areas from family support to out-of-home care, transition from care to independence, the need for the development of standards for children and young people in care and the need to address systems abuse (Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS) 1995b, Review of the Substitute Care and Guardianship program: Issues Paper).

A Proposed Plan of Action (DHCS 1995a) suggests that there will be significant change including the development of standards for the substitute care system and a program aimed at preparing young people in care for independent living. Guidelines and standards for after-care services are also to be developed.

A three-year plan for addressing the Review recommendations has been developed by the Substitute Care Coordination Unit. Actions already taken, or in process, include a new foster-care payment system, the development of an overall program model which includes an after-care phase, development of abuse in care and behaviour management policies and procedures; standards of care for placements, grievance procedures for carers, and a project designed to develop the practice tools and procedures required to operationalise the new program model.

Strategies and programs
Preparation for leaving care relies on young people having a good relationship with their worker. However, it is reported that the high turnover of workers in the Northern Territory is a significant problem. Some workers also believe that many staff lack expertise in working with young people in care. Most of the young people placed in foster care do not remain there until they are 18. Preparation for leaving care involves the departmental worker and carer working closely to help the young person move out of foster care. Young people who have been in stable placements are easier to prepare and frequently they remain in the foster placement after they have been discharged from care. Young people who have had an unstable history in care frequently are difficult to prepare, especially as they are usually not at school or training or employment. One worker indicated that often mobile young people are “followed around” by workers in an attempt to support them. Frequently these young people are not eligible for supported accommodation as their lifestyle is too erratic. Workers also indicated
that there were problems with providing a comprehensive range of services for preparing young people for leaving care as there is a very limited service infrastructure, with the majority of services being provided by the government sector.

- Preparation for leaving care is currently part of the case-planning process which is intended to help the young person set goals based on their future needs. However, there are no clear standards or pro formas for the case-planning process, which is currently reliant on worker discretion and good will.

- A non-government agency indicated that they were involved in preparing young people for leaving care, largely on a case-by-case basis, with little help from DHCS. One agency noted that most young people return home; however, when a young person moves to independence, the agency tries to support this. In such instances, the department provides private board payments.

- Anglicare develops individual placement plans to plan for young people’s current needs and their future transition from an Anglicare youth housing program. Workers in the agencies said they experienced difficulties in engaging departmental staff in preparing young people for independence.

Queensland

Legislative and policy provisions

There is no specific provision in the Children’s Services Act 1965 (Qld) related to leaving care and after care. Departmental policy specifies certain procedures when children/young people exit care. This includes ensuring that young people have all relevant information regarding their time in care, are prepared well in advance, can view files and obtain originals of key certificates where possible. Departmental staff should prepare applications for payment for educational and medical needs, and write a letter explaining release from care and protection and what it means. If the young person is released into independent living before the age of 18, the department must assess the young person’s needs and link them to available community resources, ensure a support network exists for them, and consider referral to the IPSS program (see below). In exceptional circumstances, provision exists for an ex-gratia payment (which will apply when the young person is 18, remains in placement with care providers and has not completed schooling or other further education). If income or resources are inadequate to maintain or properly care for children, or for any other reason children are in need of assistance, there is discretionary power to give assistance in such a form and for such a period as the Director-General of the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care (DFYCC) may determine. If assistance is required for education or vocational training on a full-time basis, this may be given notwithstanding the person is 17 (Department of Families, Youth and Community Care 1994b, Child Protection Procedures Manual, Chapter 14, pp.19–21).

Recent policy initiatives

Workers reported that DFYCC undertook an internal review of children in care in September 1995. Some instances were found of young people reaching 18 without being prepared for leaving care, and of others still in care at 19 and 20. Some had been in care for years, had no family contact and did not know where their family of origin was. Some files had little or no information on family of origin. Under Queensland legislation, care does not extend beyond the age of 18. The DFYCC has suggested that workers may have been referring to instances where files had not been closed when young people turned 18 or where young people were not advised that their orders expired on their eighteenth birthday.

Strategies and programs

Workers indicated that there were problems with providing a comprehensive range of services for preparing young people for leaving care as there is a very limited service infrastructure to support young people (see Chapter 6 for further details). The DFYCC informed the authors of a number of different research projects and core studies which have informed departmental practice. Examples of strategies and programs include:

- Transitional Care Agreements with “carers” which are used when there will be continuing care for the young person with a particular family. These agreements are usually developed when the young person is over 16, in preparation for them being discharged from care. According to workers, such agreements are not regularly used as they depend on the commitment of the carer and young person to the continuation of the placement.

- The Intensive Personal Support Service (IPSS) is seen as a valuable support for young people exiting care, although workers report that insufficient resources are
available. The IPSS is designed to supplement case work services and assist young people through critical life stages such as leaving care. It is used for young people who need extra care; that is, additional money, an adolescent resource worker or a specific care provider. IPSS resource workers assist with planning for young people to move out of care or out of the juvenile justice system. Family Resource Workers assist young people in transition, especially young women with children. Adolescent Resource Workers (ARWs) are involved in helping young people with budgeting and funding accommodation (DFYCC 1994a, Child Protection Practice Framework).

- A non-government family group home in Cairns, auspiced by the Uniting Church, which concentrates on developing skills such as budgeting, shopping for food and learning to cook.

- A youth shelter in Innisfail which prepares young people in medium- or long-term placement for independent living by concentrating on income and budgeting, health issues including hygiene and sex education, cooking and cleaning, recreation, responsible tenancy and housing.

### New South Wales

#### Legislative and policy provisions

Assistance to former wards and protected persons may be provided under Section 92 (1) and Section 19 (2 & 3) respectively of the Children (Care and Protection) Act 1987 (NSW) for full-time educational or vocational training (which can be for six months at any one time); provision of general financial assistance must address a specific need. A financial obligation which is potentially relevant for transition from care is the provision that the Director General may from time to time pay allowances, for periods not exceeding 6 months at a time, to a person caring for a child (immediately before the child is 18) to secure full-time education or vocational training or, subject to the regulations, for additional conditions as may be specified. Regarding former wards and protected persons, the Minister may give such a person the assistance he/she was empowered to give while the person was a ward or protected person, and such other assistance (financial or other) as is seen reasonable in the circumstances.

Government and non-government workers stated that frequently access to payments under this provision was discriminatory (see Chapter 6 for further information).

Department procedures state that workers are required to visit the young person approximately three months prior to the young person’s 18th birthday. Matters which must be discussed include consequences of discharge from care; electoral responsibilities; obtaining citizenship (in the case of a non-citizen child); medical fund membership; the advisability of making a will; consequences of hire purchase and loan commitments; moneys held in Trust, if any; ensuring the person has a birth certificate and access to information about background; and provision of information that the department may be contacted for advice, guidance and support (Department of Community Services (DOCS) 1989, Substitute Care Administration and Procedures Handbook: Substitute Care Allowances, v.4, p.15).

Substitute care allowances are available to prevent children unable to live with their parents from coming into formal types of care and to provide caregivers experiencing financial hardship with continuing financial support. However, 16- and 17-year-olds are not eligible as it is stated that the Commonwealth has accepted responsibility for their income support by way of various benefits, and continuing assistance could affect their eligibility for a Commonwealth benefit. Where such young people are left without income support and are clearly at risk, assistance may be provided for a brief period (DOCS 1989, Substitute Care Administration and Procedures Handbook: Substitute Care Allowances, v.4).

#### Recent policy initiatives

In recent years, there has been an extensive policy development process which builds on increasing attention paid to the issue of young people leaving care. This has resulted in the development of leaving-care programs which have now been put out to tender. The process recognises the special responsibility care providers have to assist young people to achieve successful transition to independence, in the same way a responsible parent in the general community would assist their child. Plans (announced during the final drafting of this report) include a leaving care/after care resource centre (ARC, auspiced by Relationships Australia) which will have a statewide resource role. It will act as a resource and advocacy service on a range of issues affecting young people and include a freecall telephone referral advice and information service. There will also be specialist leaving care/after care
teams to advise caseworkers and assist the large number of young people leaving care in urban areas (auspiced by Burnside and Centacare), and a different model of resource workers to advise caseworkers and assist the smaller number of care leavers in rural and remote areas. Young people leaving care must be linked with these services before exiting care (DOCS 1996c, Tender Package, Leaving Care and After Care; Internal Memo 27 May 1997). While there was overwhelming support for this after-care program, workers were concerned that the lack of transitional housing and other accommodation options could limit its success.

At a broader level, substitute care standards have been developed by the Department of Community Services. The standards include reference to the importance of the development of independent living skills, and planned transition from care based on work with children and young people when they are in care. A final report on trials of these standards is expected in November 1997. Leaving care should occur when the young person is ready, consistent with community standards, and not be tied to an arbitrary age (DOCS 1996b, Standards for Substitute Care Services).

A review of the legislation was under way at the time this study was undertaken and a wide consultation process was held in early 1997. New legislation had not been drafted at the time of writing. The Children (Care and Protection) Regulations 1996 are to be revised every five years.

Strategies and programs
This section refers to existing strategies, not the initiatives referred to above. A number of non-government agencies have policy statements or practice standards for leaving care and after care. Case planning and provision of support to young people making the transition from care, and to those who have already left, are inherent in these standards. After care is regarded as an essential and core service component. Guidelines for agency after-care programs have been developed and are especially intended for agencies tendering for new or continuing substitute care services. These standards set out agency responsibilities in regard to preparation for leaving care, and the development of after-care plans. The importance of young people exiting from care to independence when they are ready, consistent with community standards and not tied to any arbitrary age, is emphasised, as is the provision of follow-up regardless of the young person’s legal status (Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) 1996, Leaving Care Working Party Standards for the Substitute Care System in New South Wales).

Funding for non-government agencies for after care has only recently become available; however, a number of agencies have employed after-care workers at their own cost (see below for further information).

Preparation in most government services does not include working with young people on a holistic basis but tends to be confined to specific areas such as accommodation. Some individual skill development programs exist for young people in residential accommodation who are unable to return home and need to move into independent living.

Government workers felt that more after care was provided in government services in country areas where there is more of a sense of community and people know each other better. Departmental staff tend therefore to have a commitment to remain involved and to continue support to young people.

- The Intensive Support and After Care Service, established in 1996 by the Department of Community Services, provides support to young people over the age of 10 years. The program has been established to assist young people who have been in residential services for some time and who need intensive support to move on. Often these young people need to leave residential care at 15 or 16 years of age and there are few other placements available, or they are streetwise and do not fit into existing services so they need to be prepared for independent living.

- Most foster parents try to teach young people life skills before they leave the placement. Sometimes young people are receptive to this help and sometimes not. It was thought that most foster parents will ensure that young people leaving care have contact numbers where they can get assistance, and try to ensure that young people feel they can contact foster parents if there are any problems.

- Examples of non-government agencies that provide preparation for leaving care and after-care support include the following, most of which have been funded by the agency themselves:
  - Two agencies offering residential care for boys have after-care workers with responsibility for coordinating preparation for leaving care (Boys Town After Care Worker’s Job Description; St Vincent’s Boys Home, West Mead, After Care Manual).
Barnardos Waverley has a policy of continuity of support to young people leaving the agency’s care, although workers indicated this was becoming increasingly difficult in the current economic climate. The agency often provides support to young people who have been in care, well into their twenties. Wherever possible, the agency will ensure that the young person’s previous worker will provide the support so that he/she does not have to retell their story (Barnardos Australia, Welfare Handbook 1996).

Burnside funds an after-care program coordinator to assist young people to find accommodation; to access financial assistance and personal records, and to provide personal counselling especially in relation to experiences in care (Burnside After Care Program, Policy and Procedures).

Centacare has a policy for exiting care as part of their overall substitute-care policy. It includes providing information about decisions to leave care and the program’s responsibility for preparing young people for independence, including strategies for placement breakdown, and the provision of material and personal support regardless of whether the young person left in a planned or unplanned way (Centacare After Care Policy). Centacare also operates the ALIVE program which provides accommodation, brokerage funds, general support and after care, advocacy and information, and resourcing and referral to young people aged 15 to 21 (see Chapter 9 for further information).

Stretch-A-Family provides after-care services for its residential services and foster care program. The primary objective of its long-term service, On Track, is to prepare young people for independent living (Stretch-A-Family, Case Work Policies).

**The Australian Capital Territory**

**Legislative and policy provisions**

There is no specific provision for leaving care and after care in the Australian Capital Territory Children’s Services Act 1986 (ACT). Departmental policy and procedures state that independent living options should be investigated when a young person is approaching 16, or is over 16, or has experienced failed placements and desires independence. Case conferences are required to plan the move and the necessary on-going support, including financial support. Planning for semi-independent or independent living must ensure that the young person has an independent income before the placement proceeds. The caseworker should continue to monitor the move to independent living for a period of time specified in the case plan. The young person may approach the Branch for advice, guidance and support (including financial) should the need arise following discharge from care (Department of Family Services 1994, Policies, Procedures and Guidelines Substitute Care).

Burnside funds an after-care program coordinator to assist young people to find accommodation; to access financial assistance and personal records, and to provide personal counselling especially in relation to experiences in care (Burnside After Care Program, Policy and Procedures).

**Victoria**

**Legislative and policy provisions**

The Victorian Children’s and Young Persons Act 1989 (Vic.) has no specific provision for leaving care or for after care. Case-planning processes are seen as fundamental to practices for young people leaving care and protection. Case planning requires annual reviews of young people subject to orders, and a review six weeks prior to expiration of all protective orders other than custody to a third party. The Department of Human Services (DHS) provides services, or funds services, for young people up to 18 years of age, particularly where a protective order is in force (Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS) 1994c, Protecting Children Volume One: Standards and Procedures for Protective Workers Delegations). “Discharge of H&CS responsibility will only be on the basis that case management objectives have been met, and that effective adult support for the young person is ensured or the young person has made a safe transition to more independent living and is of the age and level of maturity sufficient to sustain a safe and secure lifestyle” (DHCS 1994a, Adolescent Service Redevelopment Position Paper).

In Victoria, unlike other States, the non-government sector currently provides the majority of accommodation and related case-management tasks in out-of-home care. DHS funding of non-government
out-of-home care programs specifies that post-placement support be available for young people leaving placements, including those leaving care (DHS 1996a, Framework for Performance Based Funding).

Departmental services to adolescents are spelt out in the draft paper Adolescent Services – A Framework for Service Delivery Within Child, Adolescent and Family Services (1995a). The paper refers to those responsibilities specified in the Children and Young Person’s Act and adds that the community has expectations that young people under 18 have dependency needs best met by a responsible adult caregiver. The department has a duty to ensure, where possible, safe passage to adulthood for young people notified to it. It is further acknowledged that the absence of a supportive and responsible adult puts the young person in a position in which they are likely to suffer significant harm particularly if they are homeless. The paper also points out that there is a lack of service coordination and continuity of care. It is suggested that amalgamation of current sub-programs could be considered in order to provide larger resource pools which might in turn produce more targeted and accountable services.

DHS acknowledges a significant interrelationship between protection and care and the SAAP program. The department recognises that a significant part of SAAP spending is focused on supporting homeless young people in their transition to independence by resolving crises and re-establishing family links where appropriate (Correspondence received from DHS 1996; DHCS 1995c, SAAP Family Reconciliation Framework and Guidelines: Working with Young People in the Context of their Families).

Recent policy initiatives
The Children’s Welfare Association of Victoria is being funded by trusts and DHS to pilot an approach to the provision of out-of-home care based on an English model. Victoria’s Looking After Children Pilot Project (1996), as it is called, is based on practice and research knowledge. It focuses on the importance of planning and assessment to meet the developmental needs of children and young people in care, particularly in the areas of health, education, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, emotional and behavioural development, and self-care skills.

Currently, the department is looking at leaving-care issues, partly because over the last two years there has been a change in practice with young people staying in care longer, and in the wake of a critical report by the Auditor General of Victoria (1996). This report stated that in exercising the same responsibilities as a natural parent, when children are under the guardianship of the State, the Secretary of the Department of Human Services (DHS) had an obligation to not only provide financial and material support, including accommodation, but also to provide advice concerning the long-term well-being of the child:

... such concerns should extend, to a limited extent, as to how a child adapts to living independently once discharged from State care, given that their capacity to adapt will be significantly influenced by their experience in the care of DHS (Auditor General of Victoria 1996, p. 270).

Consideration is being given to initiatives involving services and practice guidelines to assist young people leaving care, and work is under way with Disability Services to establish practice guidelines and initiatives for young people leaving care who have disabilities (Correspondence from DHS 1996).

Strategies and programs
Most workers felt there were few support services for young people leaving care, and that this was a significant gap given the disadvantages the young people experienced. The following examples, which are not intended to be exhaustive, give a flavour of some of the options and programs for young people leaving care.

- Adolescent Placement Programs (funded by DHS) provide transitional support to assist a young person to move into a flat from a community placement. Workers are concerned that new unit-costing models will only fund services for the work they undertake while a young person is in placement, given that the funding they receive will be based on the number of bed days the service provides, rather than the number of young people pre- and post-placement.

- Regional Adolescent Protective Teams are involved at the intake stage of protective intervention and follow the young person through the system. The Streetwork program works with young people identified as being at risk, including homeless and highly mobile young people and/or those at risk of entering the system. Behavioural Intervention Support Teams (BISTs) are available in some regions for young people with intellectual disabilities and behavioural problems, to offer support and to link the young people into appropriate services. Non-government
services stated that such teams are not available for the
young people in their residential services.

- Caregivers in medium- and long-term services prepare young people by providing them with practical skills such as budgeting and handling money. When young people receive Austudy they have to make board payments to their caregiver, and this can be seen as part of their preparation for independence. As indicated in Chapter 4, non-government workers are concerned about aspects of this practice, as the department reduced their funding on the grounds that they received board from those young people who have an income from DSS or are employed. Frequently, the young people say they cannot pay board and it may be difficult for the agency to make them, resulting in a funding short-fall and additional hardship for the agency.

- Regional Child Adolescent and Family Workers can be allocated to assist young people in government services to access a range of support options, and “walk them through” services such as DSS and TAFE as part of their preparation for independence. Non-government workers say this support is being provided on a discretionary basis and is dependent on the worker and the relationship they have with the young person. Planning and follow-up was less likely to occur if the young person was seen as particularly difficult or rejecting of the care system.

- Intensive Youth Support Services provide case management services to young people at risk. It is intended that they also include drug and alcohol services, mental health and in some cases, sexual assault workers. Three programs, funded under the Community Support Fund, work with homeless young people over the age of 18, many of whom have been in care.

- The Mission to the Streets and Lanes Napier Youth Services have volunteers providing one to one support for young women leaving their services, and a community nurse does group work with young people currently in care, or who have left care. This is particularly important for young women wanting information on health and sexuality. The Mission of St James and St John operates Choices, which provides accommodation and support to young women with children.6

- Other agencies, including St Vincent’s Boys Home, Mercy Family Care, Orana Family Services, and St Johns, run independent living skills programs for young people in residential care, based on individual needs. They cover cooking, budgeting, general life skills and accessing community resources and public transport.

- Peninsula Youth and Family Services operates transitional support and residential services for young people who are homeless or have been in care.

- Berry Street residential program for boys in Doveton provides after care. Follow-up is provided for up to six weeks after the young person leaves the program. Vacancies can be held open for this period, so young people can come back to the service if necessary. Ongoing support/after care is provided on demand for a significant period, sometimes for up to two years.

**Tasmania**

**Legislative and policy provisions**

There is no specific provision for leaving care and after care in the Tasmanian legislation. The Child Welfare Act, 1960 (Tas.) Section 45 (3–4) states that wardship can continue after a young person reaches the age of 18 years and in special circumstances may be extended by the Minister for Community and Health Services until the age of 21. However, it is very rare for wardship to continue after a young person reaches the age of 18 years; current practice is for young people to be automatically discharged when they turn 18.

Currently the case planning process deals with leaving-care issues. On leaving care, Children’s Services Workers must incorporate a “leaving care” plan within the case management plan (Department of Family Services 1993, Operations Manual). According to workers, how this occurs is governed by the size of caseloads and severe financial constraints. In very exceptional circumstances, there is the capacity for young people to remain on a worker’s caseload for up to 12 months after discharge and to access very limited financial support.

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6 These three agencies have subsequently amalgamated to become Anglicare Victoria.
7 Now MacKillop Family Services.
Recent policy initiatives
In April 1997, the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Bill 1996 was tabled in Parliament, to be debated in June 1997. The legislation has a concept of wardship (different to current legislation), which will occur only as a last resort. Section 7 (2h) of the Bill outlines the following after-care provisions: “To provide or assist in the provision of services to help persons who have been under guardianship or in the custody of the Secretary during childhood make a successful transition to adulthood”. Departmental workers will be developing a leaving-care program as part of an implementation plan for the legislation.

Guardianship and responsibility themes
The research team identified a number of themes from their discussions with government and non-government workers in care systems. Criticisms of out-of-home care and transition from care systems are consistent across the country. Underlying these are issues about the role of State and Territory governments and how they define their responsibilities. The themes are based on the data presented above. However, what follows represents more than conclusions from the data; it forms part of an important agenda for the Commonwealth, States and Territories to consider, if the problems identified in this research are to be thoroughly addressed.

How absolutely guardianship is vested in the State
In some States/Territories, the legislation is not clear about how absolutely guardianship is vested in the State. In others, it is stated quite clearly that guardianship is absolutely vested in the State. However, there may also be qualifications, for example, that permission should be sought from parents for the conduct of medical procedures on children where possible. Another example can be found in requirements for parents to pay maintenance for children in care in some States. (There are instances in which far more attention is paid to this matter in legislation than to the quality of out-of-home-care.)

The breadth of responsibility assumed by the State
Some States/Territories define the responsibility for children in their care broadly, for example, to include:

- their physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual development, i.e. a comprehensive approach to well-being;
- ensuring they grow in an environment of love (with the family) or affection (in alternative care);
- being a good parent according to accepted community standards; and/or
- seeking the development of skills for independent living as an ongoing part of the child’s development, rather than as something injected close to the time of discharge from care.

Others States define their responsibilities more narrowly and focus on concrete functions such as accommodation, food, clothing, and education. Responsibilities may be defined in terms of minimal and short-term intervention. There may be little or no reference to the child’s concept of time or for the need to plan for the child’s long-term development, which is important even if the protective or alternative care intervention is relatively time-limited. Sometimes, both sets of principles are reflected in the one legislation or policy, i.e. responsibility may be defined broadly but the operational conditions do not facilitate a broad approach.

Most, if not all, States/Territories appear to be unclear about their role as guardian. In regard to this, the research team notes that most of the legislation is several years old (in some cases decades old) and has been amended as new issues have arisen and new perceptions about those issues have developed. New amendments, together with new philosophies, have been grafted onto old legislation. This has modified the broader guardianship responsibilities of the State without a comprehensive review of what guardianship and responsibility should mean.

Thus, while there is national concern about standards in out-of-home care, many States/Territories, while looking to address this, have not yet clearly stated their responsibilities as guardians or custodians of children and young people. This is crucial for the leaving-care/transition-from-care arena, since so many States/Territories have, in practice, considered that their role as guardians concludes during the young person’s mid-teens, with little or no responsibility for follow-up.

Increasing complexity of legislation and practice
There are major differences across the country regarding the complexity of legislation. In some States/Territories, the legislation is brief and lacking in
detail, and supporting statements of policy and procedure may also be brief. In others, legislation and procedures are lengthy and highly complex. The general trend seems to be in this direction. Some States/Territories have simplified the wording of their legislation but this has not really made its administration simpler.

There are a number of factors contributing to this increased complexity. They include greater reliance on legal processes in some child protection legislation, greater scrutiny of child protection and alternative care systems by the media in some States, and the frequency with which problem cases have been debated in public in virtually every State and Territory. Dramatic inquiries into events such as deaths of children subject to State intervention have attracted particular attention (Goddard & Liddell 1995) and have led to an increased emphasis on procedures which aim to prevent such deaths. The complexity of the issues surrounding children’s versus family rights, and increased realisation of the complexity of State intervention into family life, are additional reasons why the fine detail in policies and procedures has increased in some States and Territories (Liddell & Goddard 1995).

The greater specificity of the out-of-home care standards being developed across the country seems also likely to be translated into more precise monitoring of the programs subject to those standards. In turn, this will be part of the basis on which contracting out of government funded programs will occur. Some States/Territories which have not yet headed down this path are showing signs of doing so. This will add to the complexity.

Illustrating this complexity is difficult to do briefly, because it is the sum of all the details in policy and procedure that is the issue, not particular parts of it. The grounds for intervention are more complex, and include:

- increased complexities about what is a sustainable case for a Court order to be justified;
- constraints on what orders the Court may grant and under what circumstance;
- legal representation of the various parties in Court;
- conditions governing when case conferences and reviews are held and what their role is; and
- protocols developing between the various agencies in the child protection and out-of-home care fields.

The amount of procedural detail that workers in some States must attend to is immense.

New South Wales is considering somewhat different strategies. The coordinated policy adopted in NSW, places protective intervention as one possible response in providing care and support services to children and families. Professional judgment in the assessment of safety and risk issues is an important consideration in ensuring that the response and provision of services is tailored to the needs of the child. This is a recognition that cases which come to a protective agency are often not clear-cut and may require flexible responses (Department of Community Services 1996d, Towards Better Practice).

The New South Wales response is also interesting because it provokes debate about whether the direction many States have been pursuing – of greater legal and bureaucratic regulation and greater complexity – is appropriate. Alternatively, since some complexity is clearly necessary, it may be better to ask what are the limitations to this.

**Changing roles in the out-of-home care system**

Governments increasingly see themselves as funders and regulators of programs, but not providers, except in unusual circumstances. Program providers should compete for funding within a framework ensuring quality and efficiency for a competitive cost. Families and children are increasingly defined as consumers of services, and their relationship with programs redefined as cooperative rather than adversarial (DHCS (Victoria) 1995b, Output Based Funding Framework for Home Based and Residential Care, Draft Paper; DFACS (South Australia) 1995, Policy for Planning Purchasing and Delivery of Alternative Care Services; DFACS (South Australia) 1996d, Draft Services and Funding Plan for Alternative Services).

Programs and funding will be packaged so that traditional programs may disappear and funding will be packaged around individual child and family needs. This will be the priority, rather than the traditional needs of the programs, agencies and workers. The National Competition Policy is adding impetus to the contracting out of services, though it is not responsible for it. Some States have a long history of use of non-government agencies to provide services, and in some States the more recent trend to greater contracting out pre-dated the development of the National Competition Policy.

The funder (or purchaser)-regulator-provider-consumer approach seems to assume that adversarial relationships between workers and children and families are a problem. This is clearly the case on
occasions and there is a argument for developing a system which rests on a greater degree of partnership. What is not clear to the research team is how the suggested reconceptualisation of the field will deal with those cases where there are major (perhaps justified) differences in point of view between workers and parents over whether the child’s well-being is seriously at risk. This area has not been sufficiently thought through in the new models.

The notion of cooperation has not been thoroughly developed in other ways. An identified problem which the “funder–regulator–provider–consumer” model is supposed to deal with is the lack of coordination between individual agencies. The research team is not sure how a model which is based on increased competition between those agencies for government contracts will simultaneously increase cooperation between individual agencies. It is also unclear how such a model will provide continuity in care, experiences and development for children and young people unless agencies are funded to provide a broad range of programs. The research also indicated that there is a level of antagonism between government and non-government sectors in some States. It is unclear how the new models will deal with this problem. In NSW, however, the Child Protection Council has released the Interagency Guidelines for Child Protection Intervention (1997) to assist government and non-government agencies to work cooperatively.

The new models concentrate on “outputs” or outcomes and on packaging money around individual children and families; this is a reaction to the traditional focus on programs and providers, or “inputs”. What is unclear is how this will happen and how planning of programs and responding to special needs will occur. There is also concern about who is the primary consumer – the family (a preservation and reunification perspective) or the child (a care and protection perspective). All the evidence indicates that children and young people subject to statutory intervention and alternative care usually have special and intensive needs requiring specialist intervention and training of workers and carers. As they are currently stated, the new models, in talking about individual packaging and outputs, are not clearly identifying how they will plan for the specialised inputs which children and young people require. NSW has commissioned a review of intensive support services and it is likely that significant changes in the configuration and models of services for young people with intensive support needs will occur in the next few years.

Focus on entry to the care system rather than exit
The emphasis in child welfare legislation, policy and procedures is how children enter the system, i.e. the referral and investigation process, who is mandated to report, how the Courts must function, and what is to be planned for. What happens to the child and the family from that point on is subject to far less attention, and very little attention in some jurisdictions. The emphasis on entry points is understandable because this is the point at which the rights of children and their families are put under very direct threat and it is rightly subject to close scrutiny. What is surprising is the relative neglect of how children are to be treated from that point on. The process of contracting out is currently being associated with greater specificity of the expected outcomes, outputs and standards. This is to be welcomed (with the rider, as noted above, that there is concern about how complex the system is becoming).

Lack of responsibility for transition from care
The research demonstrates that the responsibility assumed by the States and Territories for young people leaving care, both in their preparation and after they leave care, is extremely limited. After some young people become 18, the level of responsibility assumed by governments is virtually nil (though some individual agencies do provide extended support).

Problems of an uncoordinated system
Many respondents criticised the system because the specific programs frequently operate very much in isolation from each other. Each change of program may bring with it a complete change of residence, community and carers. This makes for much instability in young people’s lives and in turn may make the transition to independent living more difficult. A broader range of services is needed, but the services need to be designed on a “holistic” basis which provides continuity of experiences and relationships for young people.

Lack of attention to gender
There is a surprising lack of attention in policy and practice to gender issues. Apart from reference to sexual abuse, which is predominantly an assault against
females, the research team found four references to gender issues in all the legislation and policy reviewed: brief references in the Western Australian practice manual to workers needing to be alert to gender disadvantages, and legislative provisions in the Northern Territory, Victoria and NSW against female genital mutilation. As well, in their reports on practice, workers specifically referred to gender issues quite infrequently, even when their examples concerned young women.

Policy and practice, then, still pay insufficient attention to gender issues, suggesting that this area should receive high priority in future. For young women to overcome disadvantages, perpetuated by a family and community history in which disadvantages have been endemic, the child welfare system needs to ensure that a strong positive sense of identity and a broad range of capacities are developed in young women, both while they are in care and in preparing them to leave care. This requires, of course, workers, especially female workers, who can be role models for such behaviour (Liddell 1992). Young men require similar support; the point here is simply that young women have even greater disadvantages to overcome.

Conclusion
While some positive programs have been identified, provision of services to young people leaving care is not guaranteed and is often variable. Too often, the research team was told that services to young people leaving care are dependent on the relationship between the young person and the worker, which clearly makes them discretionary and inconsistently available. There is frequently a lack of obligation in legislation or policy to support young people as they move to independence. The comprehensive programs stand out; they are not consistently available. New South Wales stands out as a State that is trying to make comprehensive support available to young people as they leave care and move towards independence but judging by the data the research team has collected, all States and Territories have much to do. The survey of State legislation, policies and practices identified some key underlying themes and issues concerning how governments define their responsibilities to young people leaving care. It showed variations between States and Territories and a need, first, to monitor the changing role of the State as guardian, and second, to develop a consistent approach to State care. Increasing complexity of legislation also needs to be monitored in relation to its effect on those leaving care. It is clear from responses to draft copies of this report, that many States and Territories are moving in this direction.
A number of themes emerged from interviews with workers in the child-care system. Many workers were unhappy with this system. The issues they identified concerning leaving care included: a lack of clearly defined policies, lack of stability and continuity, inadequate case planning processes, failure to address the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, inadequate resources, young people being in care with no formal status, and worker morale.

Lack of defined policies
Workers in South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Victoria considered that there is currently no specific policy in their State concerning young people leaving care. For example, workers in Western Australia noted that the department has no legal mandate to work with young people after they turn 18. Accordingly, policy for young people making the transition from care is limited. Workers said that there are broad statements indicating that departments have a duty of care to make sure that children are able to look after themselves after they leave care; however, there is no documentation that articulates what planning for leaving care actually means. For example, in the Northern Territory there are vague instructions in the protective services manual about the need for young people to be prepared before they leave. Departmental workers indicated that the manual is being re-written and will include a section on after care in line with the recommendations of the 1995 review. In many instances, after care is dependent on the quality and commitment of the individual district centres/ regional offices and/or workers.

Lack of stability and continuity
After care legitimately rests on a good relationship between worker and young person. This is often prejudiced by high mobility in care and multiple placements. As a result, workers and carers change, and this means that young people often will not have developed trust in the current relationship. They frequently do not know in advance that they will only be in a placement for a short period and will, on learning this, find it difficult to settle and establish relationships.

Many workers also felt that difficulties arose immediately young people were informed that they could stay in a service for only four to six months. Young people do not form relationships or develop trust on that basis, their powerlessness is reinforced, and as one worker said: “You’ve usually lost their commitment before you start”.

Many respondents criticised the system because the specific programs (such as child protection, residential care, foster care, adolescent community placement and SAAP) frequently operate very separately from each other. Each change of program therefore may bring with it a complete change of residence, community, and carers for the child or young person.

Many workers in SAAP services also felt that the
notion that young people in crisis (and they may be 13, 14, or 15 years of age) can be moved through services after relatively short placements was inappropriate.

### Inadequacies of case planning and review

### Planning while in care

Concern about effective case planning was expressed by non-government workers in all of the States/Territories and by government workers in some. According to non-government workers, preparation for independent living can be as basic as telling the young people they are on a time limit and as soon as they are assessed as being capable of surviving in a flat by themselves, they will be “moved on”. The transition from intensive support in a residential program to having little or no support is frightening for the young people. Comments were made that some department workers are struggling to properly define their parental responsibility.

Criticisms were made of the case planning process. Case planning goals may be to maintain young people in alternative care but an example was given of a decision made to prepare young people for independent living because the young person was running away from carers. Western Australian workers also talked about the inflexibility of case planning conferences for preparing young people for independence. Northern Territory workers believe that the system operates from a crisis framework rather than from a forward planning perspective. The belief is that planning is left too late and tends to be confined to finding the young person accommodation rather than meeting a range of needs. As well, a plan which might be working at the time the young person leaves care may well break down within weeks, whether the young person is living independently or has returned home to their family. Therefore follow-up needs to occur to deal with such contingencies.

Non-government agencies felt that decisions about moving young people into independence are often made on the basis of needing to free up a bed in an agency rather than on the young person’s needs. They stated that they felt pressured to move older children on to independence (even when they were not ready or prepared) because younger children needed their beds.

In Queensland, there is concern by some workers about young people who have been in care for so long that they have been forgotten. Sometimes these young people have been lost in the system, and have not been reviewed for years. In many such situations the family has had no contact with the young person for years. When they reach 18, young people are then discharged. They are often not prepared for leaving care and can be discharged with existing medical and other problems without the resources to pay for medical or other treatment. As well, many of these young people are discharged without adequate links back to their families or communities.

### Inadequate preparation for discharge

Case practice and planning for discharge from care were frequently seen as inadequate. Most services were described as oriented to moving children and young people through their service promptly. As a result, the number of placement changes that young people experience affects workers’ ability to support or assist the young person’s transition to independence. Workers stated that the majority of adults could not cope with the number of changes to which some of these young people are subjected. Some workers start going through the file with the young people several months before the end of their order, or several months before they go into independent living, and make sure they have all the necessary documentation. However, this is not consistent practice. Frequently young people are sent a letter at the time of discharge from wardship, but there is usually no formal process for after care. Some staff continue to keep limited contact with young people but this is “under the lap”. Workers interviewed felt it was important to keep in touch with the young people to recognise and celebrate special occasions. Some workers felt that a case conference 28 days after discharge would help confirm the government’s responsibility and ensure that the young person was accessing services.

### Premature discharge and the needs of adolescents

Unless there are very exceptional circumstances, most departments will discharge a young person from care by the time they are 18. However, there is an emerging trend for discharge to occur earlier, at 15 or 16. Discharge on the basis of age rather than maturity concerned workers. Government departments mostly cater for young people who are difficult to manage, are
vulnerable, and are unlikely to be able to cope if discharged at a young age.

New South Wales workers felt that young people (as opposed to children) do not have a very high priority in the child protection system. They described young people as “being at the bottom of the barrel”. Young people are older and can supposedly look after themselves, or are not receptive to workers’ views about what they should or should not do. This can lead to an attitude that it is best to discharge them because they are seen as not wanting help. Some non-government workers felt that it was easier for the department to discharge young people who are exhibiting difficult behaviour, than to “hang in with them”. Examples were given of 16-year-olds being discharged and left to their own devices. Some of the young people described had disabilities.

New South Wales workers expressed concern that the department is ready to automatically discharge young people when they are 18. In other states, young people are frequently younger than 18 at discharge and there are no legislative provisions for an extension of wardship or for appropriate support to continue. Many of these young people are ill-equipped to cope. The contrast with community standards which apply to young people living in “normal” families in the community was made. Workers reported that there was little recognition of the young people’s lack of readiness for discharge. An example from worker is provided below:

A young woman age 16 was discharged and living independently. She had the support of her father, and had a job, but was very vulnerable. She returned to alcohol abuse and started to prostitute. She spent every second Saturday at the youth service she had previously lived in and in the company of a particular youth worker, often for up to 10 hours, because she was lonely and not ready for independence.

Insufficient standards of care

New South Wales workers found it difficult to talk about leaving care without outlining the problems about being in care which also need to be solved.

Workers reported that standards for substitute care were developed by the department in 1994 and these included some suggestions for leaving care and after care. According to non-government workers, the standards were insufficient. Responsibility for young people aged 18 and a little older was referred to but workers were not required to ensure that the young people were settled, independent and managing.3

Foster carers felt that there needs to be more efficient planning and assessment of the needs of children and young people so that they can be appropriately matched with carers who are suitable for the child’s age and degree of behavioural difficulty. It was stated that frequently young people are “dumped” overnight with whoever is available then moved to another carer just so they have a roof over their head. Serious problems can occur when placements are not properly planned, and placements can be endangered because of inadequate planning.

Foster carers, some departmental workers and most workers from the non-government sector felt that district officers have too many work pressures to adequately support children, young people and foster parents. Consequently, workers may take short cuts, and little or no coordination exists between workers and services.2

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

Workers in South Australia, Queensland, the Northern Territory and New South Wales raised concerns about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Aboriginal workers often reported that there were no specific policies for Aboriginal young people leaving care. They also observed that leaving care could only be fully understood through considering why Aboriginal young people come into care. Tackling the issues of too much intervention and the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the system was essential. Forced removal of Aboriginal children and young people from their families is sanctioned by the government and is still occurring, and it has long-term consequences.3

Most Aboriginal workers said there was too much

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1 As noted earlier a new set of standards was developed in 1996, revised in April 1997 and at the time of writing, was undergoing trials.
2 Government sources suggest that these issues will be addressed in New South Wales by the new draft standards for substitute care and additional funding of $4 million in 1997/8 and $8 million per year thereafter.
3 The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report Bringing Them Home (1997) appeared after this report had been submitted. It outlines in detail the experiences of Aboriginal people removed from their birth families and fostered by white people or brought up in institutional care.
intervention in people’s lives, which led to an over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the care system. This was partly due to insufficient resources to prevent them entering care, and not enough willingness to give young people a chance, especially young women with babies. Workers said that generations of such practice have resulted in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people losing their capacity to parent since they have not been exposed to good parenting models. Removal from communities perpetuates a historical problem rather than solving it.

Non-government workers reported that a great deal of suspicion of “the government” still exists within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Workers felt such suspicions were well founded as once Aboriginal children or young people are removed from home it is difficult to get them returned. As well, departments often have limited understanding of cultural differences and frequently fail to give parents sufficient information about what they need to do to have their children returned home.

Aboriginal workers believe decisions are still made on the basis of the colour of a person’s skin and are frequently different from decisions made with non-Aboriginal young people. Case practice fails to recognise the specific problems facing Aboriginal people. Aboriginal workers felt that some government officers did not understand the need to provide culturally specific services. Frequently young people are placed outside their community of origin, and also with non-Aboriginal families.

Government workers often fail to advocate for the young person’s ongoing contact with the family of origin when they are in non-Aboriginal foster placements. This frequently results in them being unable to identify with their community of origin and being further alienated when they become independent.

Concern was also expressed about the disparities in case-load sizes between government and Aboriginal agencies. Aboriginal agency staff frequently have unlimited caseloads and respond to clients on the basis of needs. This significantly affects their capacity to plan and effectively support all individuals and families that request assistance, and affects their ability to support young people who are being or who have been discharged from care. As well, the agency recruits and trains foster carers, and there is no provision for them to provide ongoing support to these carers, which means the carers received little if any input to ensure they adequately prepare young people for independence.

Northern Territory workers expressed concern that there was insufficient departmental accountability to the community for its response to Aboriginal issues. An example given was that following the passage of the Community Welfare Act 1983 (NT), the department failed to appoint an Aboriginal worker in Child Protection until 1995. Concerns were also raised about the adequacy of the appointment of only one worker given that more than half of the care population are Aborigines. While some States employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, it was generally reported that more indigenous workers needed to be employed to work in the child protection system.

Of considerable concern to most Aboriginal workers (and some non-Aboriginal workers in Queensland and South Australia) is the fact that many Aboriginal young people, particularly males, are discharged from the care system into the juvenile justice system. They then progress into the adult correctional system when they are 17, even if they remain in care, where the age for protection is up to 18. Other concerns are that in the Northern Territory and Queensland, around 70 to 80 percent of young people in the juvenile justice system are Aboriginal. Workers in other States reported a similar problem though the figures varied. Workers reported that the transition-from-care process is clearly hazardous for most of these young people.

Of further concern is that there have been placement breakdowns when Aboriginal young people have been adopted by white families. These young people are “dislocated” from their community and family of origin, and have no understanding or sense of their own culture.

Workers strongly supported the policy of placing Aboriginal children and young people in kinship care; however, they felt that, to maintain these placements, this policy needs to be supported by the provision of more financial and other assistance than is currently available. Workers said failure to do this significantly disadvantaged young people who are already disadvantaged in the care system.

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4 Government sources suggest that this may be up to 90%.
Resource issues

Low priorities and lack of resources

Workers in South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, Northern Territory, Victoria and New South Wales felt that young people leaving care were a low priority in their State/Territory and few resources were available for programs for young people leaving care. Workers in New South Wales felt that the budget allocation in 1996 for the development of leaving-care programs, and additional funding for foster care and residential services from 1997–8 may change this.) They were concerned that preparation to leave care is often dependent on resources and priorities in particular district/regional offices.

Workers expressed concern that after care in non-government agencies is not funded by government and therefore tends to be provided on an inconsistent basis. Victorian Government workers said it is possible to provide support in specific cases for young people over 18 which is “geared to continuing unfinished tasks”, for example, the development of a network of support from community agencies to assist the young person to become independent. However, non-government workers in Victoria reported that this practice, which enables a child protection worker to follow up a young person for up to three months after discharge, is discretionary rather than a standard practice.

Government workers in New South Wales considered that government services such as residential care and foster care have the facilities to provide thorough preparation for independence, but they were of the opinion that actual preparation is minimal and frequently non existent. They felt that it was inappropriate to have young people in stable accommodation for several months without teaching them to plan a meal or cook when they leave. They also considered that there was no consistent encouragement to caregivers to provide this support. Foster care workers reported that they made significant attempts to prepare young people for living independently but this was affected by the young person’s willingness, and sometimes by case planning decisions, particularly decisions to discharge regardless of the young person’s readiness for independence.

Government and non-government workers considered that there was a limited range of services to support young people. Workers referred to government funding and the provision of services to young people as being “compartmentalised”. This resulted in young people needing to fit into services because “we are not very good at fitting the services to meet the young people’s needs”. For example, lack of appropriate services can mean that young people leaving care can be placed in a service that caters for older men because there are no other alternatives.

Pressures also exist in foster care, and workers sometimes are forced to place children and young people wherever a placement is available. This can lead to an emergency short-term placement when the plan was for long-term foster care. Workers expressed concerns saying “we are always worried about what we are doing to these kids”. There were also concerns expressed about the lack of support to foster parents, especially financial support, and the lack of recognition of the financial and emotional help foster parents may provide to young people when they are discharged from care. Agencies will, wherever possible, visit young people when they move out and assistance is often provided to help young people negotiate the social security system.

Inconsistent allocation of funds for support

Many New South Wales respondents raised issues about existing policy that enables payments to be made to wards. Similar concerns were expressed in Western Australia. People who have been wards are entitled to assistance for education or vocational training. However, the allocation of these funds is often inconsistent, perhaps biased. Some workers believe funds are more likely to be allocated to the young people who are most likely to succeed.

Allocation can also be based on funding priorities. As available funds have shrunk, the allocation of payments has become less flexible and has depended on the interpretation of need. In metropolitan areas there is a high emphasis on prioritising resources as there has been an increase in notifications to the child protection system which need response. For example, previous payments under section 92, Children (Care and Protection) Act 1987 (NSW), would be used flexibly and creatively as workers tended to have a broad definition of support. Availability of payments is also affected by the level of knowledge that exists, as some departmental staff and foster care workers are not fully aware of the provision. For example:

A man of 30 was studying and having financial difficulties. He had attempted to obtain funds (under section 92), but the department was “giving him the run around”. He got in touch with a manager of a country district office who got in touch with the
departmental office in the area he was living. Funds were then made available. He was concerned that the funding could stop if the manager left the department so the manager ensured that he received a copy of all information that was forwarded to the Director General. The young man completed his degree in 1995.

Lack of resources for remote and rural areas

Workers in more remote areas stated that when considering the removal of a child from home they needed to critically examine whether, given limited resources, the department could offer anything better for the child. Shortage of services is part of the context in which the out-of-home care and leaving-care fields operate. According to workers, Cairns and surrounding areas, and provincial towns in the Northern Territory, have very limited services and resources to cater for young people, especially those who exhibit very difficult behaviours. Local government has a limited human service network compared to, for example, Victoria and New South Wales. Funding to churches is limited and few provide direct care. The Cairns Base Hospital often becomes a pseudo family-group home because of the lack of alternatives. The area also has problems auspicing new services as there are not sufficient numbers of appropriate organisations available to do this.

Services are provided predominantly by the State Government with the majority of alternative care funding being for foster care. Remote areas may have no placement services apart from foster care and only a few registered foster carers but, according to workers, foster care is not always successful for adolescents.

The limited access to other services such as health, social security and housing was also of considerable concern to workers, especially for workers in North Queensland, who felt this was partly due to the lack of resources and the fact that the area is made up of small farms, rural and isolated communities throughout the Cape York and the Torres Strait region.

Ideal case practice is for planning meetings to be held every four months. This does not always happen and is often conducted on an informal basis, because of high caseloads and the extensive geographical areas covered by workers. For example:

One worker said she had a caseload of 40 to 50 cases and covers an area the size of Tasmania. Other workers have to travel by plane for some hours to remote areas. Time is frequently limited on arrival to these areas or is contingent on when the plane is scheduled to leave.

The shortage of services can present particular problems especially in smaller communities. Because of the lack of resources and the need to place young people close to their family of origin, departmental workers in Atherton or Innisfail said that whenever possible they will place a young person who needs residential care in the youth shelter in Innisfail. This presents dilemmas, because it has led to an increase in younger people being placed in the shelter, and as young people are mixing with older people they may develop negative behaviours as a result. Workers indicated that the lack of resources in the area meant that the young women’s refuge frequently caters for young people when they leave care.

Lack of community understanding

Another concern for workers in remote and rural areas is that the community can be conservative and may not realise that sometimes a child can not live at home because of what has happened, and that this is not the child’s fault. Community members may make the assumption that because the mother and father are still together there must be something wrong with the child. This attitude can also lead to discrimination towards children in foster care and in the care system, and at school. As well, since every one knows every one else in a small community, this can jeopardise young people’s chances of getting appropriate housing when they are discharged from care. Workers may try not to reveal that children or young people are in care unless it is essential for the school to know, because this may stigmatise the child. However, the placement will normally be difficult to conceal. Such factors impact on the young person’s transition to independence.

Closure of residential services

Non-government workers in Victoria and some in New South Wales, believed that appropriate planning for young people is affected by the government’s policy of

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5 In NSW, DOCS funds local government authorities through a Community Services Grants Program to provide a wide range of community development projects. Approximately $12 million is also targeted to non-government youth services.
phasing down residential services. This has led to considerable pressure on the non-government sector and considerable pressure on long-term beds, resulting in young people often being discharged before they are ready. The policy is leading to young people moving from one form of care to another or being discharged without having any sense of their history while in care.

Some non-government workers expressed concern that the government’s policy and philosophy is to close down residential services completely.

Reliance on SAAP services

Many workers alerted us to problems in the relationship between SAAP and the child protection area. They indicated a strong reliance (sometimes a consequence of lack of other options) on the SAAP program to support young people who have left care. Workers pointed out that this is inappropriate in many instances. A good case plan would emphasise long-term stability and therefore not consider SAAP (which is a transition program with a significant crisis component for people who are already homeless or escaping from domestic violence).

SAAP services in some States provide outreach programs and support for preparation for independence. Workers said that their services frequently picked up young people that the government system has failed. “We’re getting multiple placement syndrome kids who have had very little stability over a long period of time in the government sector.” SAAP workers felt that the only thing they can offer in terms of preparation for discharge from care is support to maintain some stability in accommodation over a period of time.

Young people in care with no formal status

Many workers in New South Wales were concerned about the increasing number of young people aged 12 to 16 being separated from their families and entering care without any formal status. Where possible they are placed back with family or in some kind of kinship care but when this is not feasible they may “end up at a very young age in some awful situation”. Workers reported that, compared to wards or ex-wards, such young people have even less support or financial assistance available to them, except for a very inadequate homeless youth allowance, Austudy or youth training allowance. They invariably do not have the skills to manage money, relationships, or any of the other requirements for living alone. Young people who are wards and exiting care have the chance of obtaining more resources (even though these are often not sufficient) than a young person who has been in and out of care but is not on a statutory order. It was estimated by workers that the number of young people exiting care without any status is higher than those exiting care who were, or had been, on an order.

Worker morale

Workers in New South Wales, in government and non-government programs, are very aware of current policy and procedure development and are supportive of it. They are also aware of the limitations and discriminatory practices related to Section 92, mentioned above. Workers noted that there was much innovative work being undertaken in both government and non-government sectors and a long standing commitment to improve leaving care and after care for young people. In most other States, workers were highly critical of the lack of policies and procedures for young people leaving care.

Many workers were concerned about the impact of their practices on young people and about what they are required to do (statements such as “we are perpetrators of systems abuse” were made to us), a symptom of the real concern workers have about their role and its effectiveness. It is not difficult to conclude that this results in a major morale problem in services in many States and Territories.

Conclusion

It is clear that many workers in most States and Territories are concerned about the policies and procedures for leaving care. Policies are not clearly defined and support for young people leaving or who have left care is often at the discretion of local offices and is offered inconsistently. Resources are limited (particularly in rural and remote areas) and transition from care is rarely given a high priority. Workers raise concerns about case planning and review processes. The development of a range of services, which is

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6 In NSW, an Interim Review Committee is considering the circumstances of young people formerly in large residential units.
needed and in short supply in many areas, is only part of the answer. A range of services is needed (including residential care options) which provide and promote continuity of experiences and relationships for the young person. Many workers (including some in SAAP-funded programs) consider SAAP services are inappropriate for young people leaving care but see no other options. Many workers are concerned at a perceived failure to advocate for Aboriginal young people and the lack of support offered to Aboriginal young people after placement. There is a lack of adequate resources, support and services for young people leaving care in rural and remote areas of Australia. Many of the concerns raised by workers may contribute to a problem of morale and are reflected in the experiences of young people outlined in the case studies in Chapter 7.
This chapter draws on evidence from young people who have left care. It discusses their views of how they are prepared for discharge and the actual process of discharge including information they are given about leaving care, their feelings about independence, and their future needs.

Many of the young people interviewed were contacted through agencies which serve young people. It appears that, compared with other studies of young people leaving care (for example, Cashmore and Paxman 1996), a greater proportion of the young people in the present study had had more placements, longer periods in care, were less likely to have completed Year 10 and, in general, did not have a stable base of experiences from which to move to independence. In this regard, the sample includes young people who are less well-represented in previous studies.

Preparation for discharge

Young people were asked about the process of preparation and discharge from care, how they felt on being discharged and their views about what form of preparation and support should be offered to young people leaving care. Only 18 of the 37 young people (discharged from care) reported some form of formal preparation. This included those involved in independent living programs. Of the 18, 11 thought they were not well prepared. Others were given the impression that the State could offer little after their discharge.

They basically said that they can’t offer me the services that they offered beforehand but if I got into any trouble, I could go there and they could see what they could do. (Bill)1

Where help was offered, it was not always enough.

I got help with budgeting ... but it was a slow process and it doesn’t clock straight away. I mean, I am 19 and I went into independent living at 17 and I am still suffering from where I pushed away (did not pay) rent for a couple of weeks and then it (the arrears) sky-rose to $340 ... (Alice)

Some learned from foster parents, relatives or other significant adults.

(My aunt) was encouraging me and teaching me all the things I never learned, so I was prepared basically. How to budget, how to talk socially to people, how to feel good about yourself, how to dress, how to wear make-up. (Diane)

My sisters, my older sisters have helped me. (Ben)

Systematic preparation

The most systematic preparation came from supported living programs, provided by State governments, SAAP services or refuges.

1 Bill and all other names used in this report are pseudonyms. It should be clearly recognised that any person formerly in care with a name used here has no connection with this research.
... they help you with cooking, cleaning, money. The units do nothing, they don't help you with basically anything. They don't teach you how to budget. (The youth support team) they taught me (that) my gas and electricity automatically gets taken out, $10 each pay, my rent gets taken out, it's so much easier. (Linda)

They (the support team) help you with your licence too, they have an instructor and it costs you nothing. (Linda)

I’ve had Gloria (worker with a support team) all the way through. She’s helped us out in all sorts of ways. Budgeting. She was going to get me some cooking tips. (Jane)

When he was discharged from care at age 18, Keith was given pamphlets with basic information on budgeting, but he just put them to one side. He gained more from his association with the independent living team which took him to pay his rent and gave him driving lessons.

Young people spoke highly of programs run by some refuges. After six months, Judy was placed in a self-contained unit with her own bathroom, bedroom, lounge and kitchen. She had her own food. She was taught to be clean and tidy, to make a three-course meal, to dress to go out, and to feel that “I am not stupid and I can do things”.

When Donna left one refuge she was given:

... a little leaving care kit and it had information in it about safe sex and places you can go to, other crisis refuges and the housing department ... It was really helpful.

According to Kirstin, the same refuge also organised budgeting workshops. The staff from one of the refuges in which Raelene stayed would come shopping and “show you how to budget when you were shopping”.

The discharge process

Given the fairly small number of structured preparation programs, it is not surprising to find that the process of discharge from care was often very haphazard. Most young people were discharged at 16 or 18 (Table 7.1). The means by which they were informed of their discharge varied, with less than one-third being involved in any discussion about it (Table 7.2).

Peter, who is still a State ward, agreed to defer his discharge because he was concerned about further conflict with his stepfather.

They were going to discharge me from my wardship when I was living at my dad’s but then a bit of stuff happened with my dad and I left home for two weeks to live with the lady across the road. Then I went down and saw (the social worker) and told him about it and he said it would be better keeping the State ward on to you now (i.e. for you to remain in care) and let’s see how it goes.

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1 This group does not include young people who were not subject to care orders, who had not been discharged or were not aware of the time of their discharge.

Table 7.2: Young people interviewed, means of learning about discharge (n=35)

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<td>Discussion</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told in person</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing said</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self initiated</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 One interviewee did not give this information.

Formal notice

Nine young people were informed that they were discharged, by their social worker in person, by phone or letter. For some this was an abrupt separation.

... when I went in they said (on this date) you’re on your own, sort of thing. You can’t come here any more. (Ken)

On my 16th birthday, I got a phone call saying that I am at the age of 16 and that I’d no longer be in care any more and that was it. (Raelene)
Interviewer: When you were discharged from State care did you know it was going to happen, did people tell you about it?
George: Yes, they said I was going to leave at 18.
Interviewer: How did they tell you?
George: They wrote me a letter.
Interviewer: They had discussed it with you before?
George: No.

For others, the care workers turned it into a small ceremony.

He (the social worker) had actually watched the process of me growing up, seeing all the problems I was having as a young teenager and also because I was in care as well. He'd actually made quite a good discharge as well. I was taken out to lunch ... I was given a KFC lunch and a $200 cheque for my birthday to buy, like I wanted to buy a stereo or something. Then I got my discharge letter about a month after and that came with photos of my siblings. So that was pretty good. (Alice)

Ten young people engaged in some discussion prior to the event.

We all sat down together a couple of weeks before my 18th and they said what was happening and they said they were there to help if I need help; I'm not just in the gutter and she could administer help. (Keith)

They asked me. I did not have to if I did not want to but I wanted to. So I would not have all these workers. (Adam)

Termination without recognition

Some had no formal discharge but had been informed when they entered care that their period of care would end at a certain age.

No one told me. I knew. I knew because I've got a legal document stating that, as soon as you turn 16, you're on your own. But I think that's wrong, 16 is too early. (Frank)

Judy waited for the day and then declared her independence.

When I went into the Court room, they said to me "when you are 16 you are out of the care of the Director General". I said "All right". So come to about a week before my birthday, I said to my (social worker): "Look, my birthday is in a week, you know what that means?" She said "No." I said "I don't have to deal with you any more". So I actually just told her to piss off. I hated her.

For Graham there was no recognition that care had ended.

When I first went up to welfare that was when I was about 13, I had a welfare officer I had to report to every week, once a week, because I was in trouble and I had to let the cops know I was going to report there. Then I finished and I didn’t have to report there any more. I just rang them up and asked if they can help me and that and they didn’t.

Interviewer: So nobody notified you formally?
Graham: No, I didn’t even know anything about it.

Colin actually negotiated his own discharge.

Well, I actually brought it up myself and said: “When can I get off this?” Because I was virtually sick of living in hostels. I'd had enough.

Tina was on the run and went to a State far distant from her home State where she applied for the Young Homeless Allowance. She was 15 and was told that she needed an exemption from school. She gave the number of her social worker in her home State.

They rang my social worker in (city) and my social worker said: “Fine, I’ve had enough of her. Give her Young Homeless Allowance, we are releasing her on the run ...”

Lack of continuing contact

Sixteen of the 43 interviewees reported that they had had no contact with care systems since being discharged. Of these, three thought they could go back for help if they needed it. “They are just there if you need anything and later on they’ll be there if you need them, all you have to do is ring them up.” (Tania) Eighteen had had some contact and the remainder of the young people did not provide this information. Many of those who had received on-going support had received it from non-government agencies. As Clare commented, the non-government agencies were available out of office hours.

When you’ve got a welfare officer, they work 9 to 5. When you are off your face all day, it doesn’t hit you until maybe 8 or 9 at night (you think), “Oh God, where am I going to sleep tonight?” By that time the welfare have packed up and gone home. To many young people, most of the problems that come up, come up at night time, after 5 o’clock ... I got really close to a lot of people, but when I needed them they were never there and I didn’t have their home phone number.

Young people leaving care and protection 47
Several benefited from the workers in an independent living program. Colin had irregular visits from a worker from the non-government program which had cared for him for the first six months after he began to live independently. Frank, one of the older respondents, still keeps in touch with his care agency. If he has trouble with DSS he asks the agency workers to use their networks for him: “Because they know people they get it done that day, whereas if you go down there yourself it takes more than a day”. Rose had no contact with her State department, but a non-government care agency is helping her to find public housing.

These stories complement the information given by care workers that they and agencies have few resources for discharged wards and often these are discretionary. Workers are faced with dilemmas of allocating limited funds, having to choose, for example, between providing school books for children in foster care or helping with housing for those who have left care. Young people are reluctant to approach workers they do not know if, as is often the case, their former worker has moved on. It is clear that, as many young people find the transition to independence a battle, some ongoing support facility is needed.

Feelings about independence

The young people interviewed talked about their feelings on gaining independence in varied ways although a number were probably hiding their feelings with the typical Australian response: “It didn’t bother me”. As already noted, some young people had no clear discharge from care and so felt that it made no difference to their lives.

Initial jubilation

Some were clearly happy to be discharged from care. Judy was ecstatic. “I was dancing around the room doing a jig, man. I was thrilled.” For Ron it was one less thing to worry about, and gave the chance for a beer at home which foster care would not allow. James was happy to get out of care. Several interviewees felt that discharge gave them more freedom. Don was glad not to have anyone waiting up for him, asking where he had been or how much money he had left. He felt that discharge from care helped him more organised and less dependent. Keith initially had a sense of freedom but later felt a little lonely. Colin, who had initiated his discharge, wanted to do things he could not do in care. He would stay out all night and hang around with friends. Tina, who had been discharged on the run, also felt free. “Free. Oh, wow! It took so long that it nearly made me sick when they said ‘go’. ” However, this feeling did not last and Tina now feels that she would trade independence for support and freedom from worry.

“Dumped again”

More frequently, interviewees identified negative feelings. Sonia, Kirstin, Raelene and Janet found it hard. “I had everything and then suddenly nothing” (Janet). Bronwyn found it a shock. “I had all this responsibility and I just did not know what to do with it.” Jane moved quickly from fantasy to reality. “I had this vision of how it was going to be. And it was different. When the bills started coming in, that’s when it hit me.” George did not think he was ready to live on his own at 18.

Ten interviewees felt lonely, forgotten or rejected. Janet felt as though she had been hit in the face. “Just like I had been dumped again. Like my parents had dumped me and now these people had dumped me. Even though I didn’t love these people ...” Sonia and Kirstin got lonely and looked to drugs for solace. Frank felt rejected “because I was there for four years and then got asked to leave”. Rose found the freedom “weird”.

I felt very lonely. I was confused, I didn’t know what to do, there was no one there to guide me, basically and no one ever pushed me to do something, you know, “You can do it!” I was really lonely.

Rose found herself pregnant and concluded, “If I had had parents all my life I know in my heart I would not be like this today”.

Scared and empty

Several interviewees felt empty or scared.

I must admit I felt a little bit empty. I just felt a bit scared and empty because “where am I going to go” type thing, because my worker was very supportive for me and she’d come around quite a lot. I was just scared because I knew I had to try and do it on my own. (Jane)

I was always scared of the dark and they knew that but yet they put me in a flat in (suburb) which is not a great area. I basically felt that when I was put in that flat that I was put there and forgotten ... (Bronwyn)
I also felt scared because I was moving out and that no one was there. (Bridget)

I was very scared when I left that residential care unit in (State). Very scared. But then I was glad to leave there because things happened to me in that residential care unit. (Kirstin)

**Depression**

For some, fear or loneliness was overtaken by depression. Ray felt very stressed. Jane felt depressed because people around her don’t actually understand. Even Bridget, whose transition could be considered a positive one, admitted to getting a bit depressed sometimes. Raelene attempted suicide and spent some time in a psychiatric unit. Bronwyn had a breakdown and has been on medication ever since. Sonia got depressed and “overdosed on alcohol”. It was not only those living alone who became depressed. Kirstin recalls:

I got depressed a lot, I almost had a breakdown. I would not do anything by myself, I wouldn’t cross the street. I felt, like, the only person in the world that was there for me was my partner and I mean all. I could not speak to anyone. That’s probably the scariest thing that’s happened to me. My partner got me into counselling and then we broke up for a while until I got myself in check and then he came back.

With discharge from care often accompanied by feelings of loneliness, fear or even depression, how do young people cope with independent living? Most consider that they cope reasonably well, because as Harry said, “I’ve had to. It’s swim or drown”. Some cope emotionally but have trouble with finances or priorities. In some instances, coping emotionally and coping in other ways are interconnected.

**Coping with responsibility**

Some of the young people clearly had difficulty in coping in the early stages of independent living. Like Ken, Linda had trouble with paying bills. Janet says she still cannot handle money, but otherwise copes pretty well. Others did not let that worry them.

First of all I didn’t cope very well but I didn’t really care. It wasn’t really important. I was more interested in partying. I was glad that I had a house but I didn’t really care about what went with it. As I went along it just got better. (Jenny)

Interviewer: How well do you think you coped with living independently to start with? Keith: Shocking. I was a shocker. My place looked like World War III had started and finished there.

Interviewer: And now? Keith: My bedroom still looks like it started and finished there. It’s not too bad, my bed is never made, but I’m not worried.

Ben was lonely and spent a lot of time out of his flat. He did not cope with some requirements and so was evicted. Keith feels now and then that he cannot handle things. This is brought on by special memories such as his mother’s birthday or the day she died. Ron feels he copes well enough until he starts getting into alcohol: “When I get angry, I drink. It makes me feel better but it doesn’t make the trouble go away”. Drugs and drink are a problem for those who are battling with independence. Brian explained:

I believe I do it (live independently) pretty well because I’ve got my head screwed on straight. But kids that haven’t could just sit down and smoke dope all day. I’ve got friends that actually do that.

Colin feels that he is coping now, but was not when he was first discharged. Clare, who was struggling to give up glue sniffing, found it a bit of a battle. By the time bills were paid, there was not much money for food, but she and her partner were getting better at budget management. It was taking time. Brett felt that there were still times when things get out of hand but that he could now handle them a lot better. Brett is a little older than some of the group. His experience suggests that many do not experience a steady, ever increasing ability to cope with independence but have ups and downs. Perhaps Rose can speak for a number of others:

I’ve coped. I’m not proud of what I am today but people that have been down the road I have, they’ve turned out
Conclusion

Coping with independent living is partly about learning living skills in the context of growing up. For young people leaving care, the transition process also needs to comprise a number of interrelated elements. Firstly, young people need some formal notification, which should be delivered in person, (not by mail or phone) by the young person's case worker, following a preparation process which should begin well before the time of formal discharge. Secondly, some rite of passage in the form of a ceremony or celebration needs to mark the formal acquisition of independence, while at the same time, young people need to be assured that continued support is still available to them. Thirdly, an information kit could play a useful part in giving information and contacts, particularly for young people who may not be receptive to information and advice and who may later realise their need for it.

Young people need to be reassured that they have not been once again “dumped” but that on-going support and contact will be available. The need for on-going support is recognised even by young people who rejected it. This accords with the findings of Resnick, Harris and Blum (1993). Government is now requiring families to be responsible for young people economically beyond the age of majority and the same must apply to those in the care of the State.

Good practice requires that young people should be prepared for independence years before their discharge. There needs to be acceptance of where young people want to live and also of the need to return to care if this proves unsuccessful. There needs to be agreement between department and agency workers on a process of continued care prior to the young person leaving care. Young people rarely identified any formal process of preparation and those who were offered it were often in situations such as refuges.

The suggestions made by young people point to the need for an organised system of transition. It would need to be effectively staffed and resourced and also made known to its potential users, particularly those who have run away from care. It would need to be available outside office hours and able to cope patiently with still angry young people and those who are still struggling to establish independent living in their twenties.
Chapter identifies factors which contribute to independence and factors which inhibit it. The former include a stable care experience, resilience, the availability of mentors, support and after-care services, and contact with families. The latter include unsuitable placements and carers, anger, lack of affordable accommodation, lack of long-term goals, lack of sufficient income, and committing offences.

Defining independence

It has already been observed that young people are remaining longer in the family home, and wage and salary earning (in full-time, career-track positions) is being deferred until completion of extended studies. Young people are not accepted as independent adults by the State in relation to income support until they are 21 or in some cases 25. Young people leaving State care, in contrast, are often required to live alone or with other young people at a much earlier age.

The research team’s studies of young people who have experienced leaving care suggest factors which assist or obstruct the transition to independence. The majority of those interviewed were between 18 and 21 years. They were predominantly Anglo-Australian but included seven Aboriginal persons. Most had completed Year 10 or less at school. Thirteen were in work, 17 were unemployed and nine were on sickness or supporting parent benefits.

Attributes of independent living were defined by the research team as:

• having some career goal or sense or direction in life (not living from day-to-day);
• having a good personal support network of family and/or friends; and
• having stable, continuing accommodation which excludes temporary accommodation, such as living temporarily with friends or in youth refuges.

These factors correlated with interviewers’ judgments that certain young people were effectively in control of their lives. Such young people appeared to be working towards goals even if they could not obtain employment. A strong personal network was considered essential for independent living, and accommodation was seen as a crucial factor in this. However, the research team believed that young people leaving care should not be classified as “successes” or “failures”, as many attributes of independence take some years to achieve. Young people leave care with different experiences and skills as starting points for establishing independence. Some workers in the care and protection system considered that there are lower expectations of young people who had been in care or who had been abused than those held for other young people of the same age. A negative view of the care system led to a more cynical response from one worker, who said that a measure of success included “young people being alive at the time of discharge”.

Of those interviewed, 16 young people were deemed to be living independently and 21 to be still in transition. One was still in care. Of the five who had never been formally admitted to care, four were considered to be living independently. Thus a total of 20 of the 43 young people (almost half) had moved to
some level of independent living. This should not be seen as a general pattern for those leaving care, as the researchers (within the limitations of a voluntary sample) actively sought a range of different experiences.

Two of those living independently were living with a parent or foster parent and it is acknowledged that transition to independence may be reversed. One young woman (Raelene) had previously fulfilled the criteria for independent living, had later been homeless, and had suffered severe mental trauma. A forced change of accommodation or loss of a job could seriously affect the level of independence for many more.

The research found that those exhibiting the attributes of independence were more likely to have left school later, to have maintained some contact with professionals after leaving care, and to be currently in work or study. They were somewhat less likely to have committed offences after leaving care.

**Factors contributing to independence**

A stable experience of care, some personal determination and resilience, an adult model or mentor, some form of after care or continuing support, and contact with the natural family were found to be positive factors. However, factors often interact and experiences which are likely to promote independence may be neutralised by other experiences which inhibit it.

**A stable, positive experience of care**

Stability in placements and a sense of belonging are essential for the positive personal development and growth of children and young people in care. Thus the transition towards independence will be more likely to include family support or continuing contact with alternative care. Placement success increases the likelihood of young people feeling that they have some success in their lives before they are discharged. Many young people either returned to live with the foster carer, or continued a supportive relationship with them or their past residential care worker, analogous to relationships which would exist in a well-functioning natural family.

Only two of the group of young people interviewed had stable, long-term care placements. Their experiences are described below.

**Bridget**

Bridget is a young woman of 19 who now shares a house with two of her sisters and a friend and is studying full-time for a tertiary qualification. To extend her Austudy income, she works part-time in a restaurant. She has a strong personal network and maintains contact with her natural family.

Bridget was taken into care at the age of nine. She came from a family of 11 children. Because her parents became unable to care effectively for all the children, Bridget and one brother and four sisters went into care. She was placed in a family group home where she stayed until the age of 18 with the same house parents. She developed a strong relationship with them, even wishing that they were her real parents. She says of John, the house father:

> He's one of those men that you can go to, and he seems to know all the questions. And if you do something wrong, he will explain it a way that you see the light ...

She went to a private school, left in Year 11 to take a TAFE course in business studies and got a job as a medical receptionist. She did not like the work and so arranged a transfer to the X-ray department, working in the darkroom. She began to think of becoming a radiographer.

Bridget was discharged from care at 18. It was explained to her that others needed the place in the home more than she did. Arrangements were made for her to board with a young couple but she maintained contact with the house parents. She admits that:

> ... the first few months, if Dad (i.e. the house father) had asked me back, I would have been there.

Interviewer: Does he know that?

Bridget: Yes, he knows that. He even told me that one time when I rang up and I was a bit upset. He said “Bridget, I know if I asked you back here, you’d be back here. I am not going to ask you back because I know you can do it”.

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**Table 8.1: Young people interviewed, current accommodation (n=43) and at discharge (n=37)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th>At discharge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refuge/shelter/homeless</td>
<td>3 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>5 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported accommodation program</td>
<td>7 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renting house/flat</td>
<td>21 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison</td>
<td>1 –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends</td>
<td>2 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With parent/relative</td>
<td>3 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster parent</td>
<td>1 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After six months, the house parents were transferred to another town several hundred miles away. Bridget decided to move to the same town. She got a job quite easily and enrolled in a tertiary course.

Bridget feels that 18 is young to be totally independent and she sometimes feels depressed at having to be independent.

Sometimes I think it would be nice to be brought up in a nice normal family, still living at home and you don’t have to work, you can just study and you don’t have to work for everything you get, which is good because it teaches you.

Bridget’s single, stable, care situation provided a more positive environment than her natural family. She also maintained contact with her sisters, her older brother and her natural mother, and related well to the social workers responsible for her within the department. This positive experience of care enabled her to almost complete school, to move into TAFE and then the work force, to a job which interested her and then to return to TAFE to study for a qualification. She was also assisted with gaining satisfactory and secure accommodation. She has had only minimal unemployment (when she moved to the other town) and has not experienced homelessness. She has clear career goals and hopes of marriage. A strong personal support network of adults and peers has steered her away from drugs (excepting some brief experiments) and she does not smoke.

Ruth

Ruth is a young woman of 18 who lived with her father after her parents separated when she was young. It was discovered that she was being sexually abused by her father when he tried to abuse a friend of Ruth’s who had come to sleep over. Ruth was taken into care at age nine and after a short time in a reception centre and a brief foster placement, was placed with a foster family for nine years until her discharge from care at the age of 18. She completed Year 12 and was accepted for university but was tired of study and gained employment with a TV station. She enjoys swimming, goes to a gym and loves socialising with friends made through church. She keeps in contact with, and gets on with her natural mother who has remarried. She hopes to have a car of her own, to get married and have children.

When Ruth reached 18, her wardship lapsed without any formal notification. She had been told when she was quite young that she would cease to be in the minister’s care at 18. Her foster parents told her that she was part of the family and was welcome to stay and she has been living there ever since. Being in a family increased Ruth’s sense of independence rather than limited it.

As I got older, I felt more independent, being with the family and everything. I am independent now. I have a job, I pay for my stuff. I am independent from welfare too.

A caring and stable placement enabled Ruth to succeed in education and to get an interesting job. She has life goals, stable accommodation and a strong personal support network and will be well placed to meet difficulties when she chooses to leave the family home.

Bridget and Ruth show the care system working effectively, providing substitute family care of a standard which exceeds that of the families from which the children came.

Resilience and belief in self

A factor contributing to independence is sheer determination and will to succeed. This resilience is a significant factor for Ben and Frank. Both have people who have supported them, who have been models or mentors, but their own determination seems to have been crucial in overcoming the difficulties they have faced. It could be argued that this resilience is a consequence of family or mentor support, or that it is a result of temperament. Most factors contributing to the development of independence are interrelated and the stories of Ben and Frank suggest that determination is a factor worthy of consideration.

Ben

Ben is a young man of 19 who has recently been employed as a technician repairing computers and automatic teller machines. He hopes in time to start his own business to market an electronic invention:

The main reason I want to start my own business is that I want to prove everybody (wrong) that said I am not going to make it, seeing that I’ve been in care, I am not going to do it because I am too dumb. I’m going to prove them wrong.

He now lives in a flat with his girlfriend in a youth housing cooperative. He has a small, strong circle of friends, formed at school. He is involved in an organisation which works for young people in care and he visits young people in care placements to advocate for them.
Ben did not have a stable placement experience. He was placed in care at the age of three and a half when his parents split up, went initially to a children’s home and was fostered after a year or so. The first foster placement finished when he was eight as he became increasingly violent. He returned to the children’s home for a year and was placed in a second foster family. This family offered genuine affection and helped Ben to re-establish contact with his sisters from whom he had been separated. However, his anger still raged and the family found it difficult to care for him. Ben explained that the family wanted him to stay and he wanted to stay. They did not have the experience to care for a difficult child and asked for counselling and support which was not provided. The care agency removed him to a children’s home which was followed by a period in secure care and three years in a family group home. From the age of 15 he lived in refuges and with friends, until at 16 he secured a place in a youth housing cooperative. He was “kicked out” after a year (he seems unsure of the reason) but was later allowed to move in with his girl friend who had a flat in the same cooperative.

Ben left school in Year 11 with a strong goal to work in technology. It took him a year and a half to get the job he wanted. He undertook training, rang up firms to see if they had vacancies and began to get a few days work each month. Eventually he was engaged on a full-time basis. The second foster parents maintained contact after he was taken from them. They are offering to help fund his business when he is ready to start it. The business is a crucial goal. Ben is driven by his strong ambition and determination and the continued support of caring adults and peers has helped him become independent.

Frank

Frank feels that he is missing many things in life as a result of being in care. He is 24, older than many of the other interviewees. He has a manual job with a local council and is licensed to drive tractors and similar machines. Frank lives with his de facto partner in a house rented from the State housing department. They have one child and are expecting another. When Frank was two, he and two of his brothers were taken into care as his father was in jail. His experience of care was marked by frequent changes of placement and he feels that he had to leave some foster placements because of his brothers’ behaviour. He had at least four foster placements and spent a year in a children’s home which he had to leave when it closed. Two of his foster parents physically abused him. At 13, he was placed in group care under the auspices of a church agency and stayed for four years. He then lived in youth accommodation before entering Bible College at the age of 18.

Frank left school in Year 10 and was offered an apprenticeship in welding but was not able to maintain employment for long enough to complete it. He suffers from dyslexia and reading is an effort. He drifted for a while with no permanent home and had difficulty in getting benefits. One problem seemed to be that in foster care he had a range of different surnames which the bureaucracy found difficult to cope with. After he was 18, the only emergency accommodation available to him was “an old men’s home”. He entered Bible college as a way of getting a bed and relieving the stress of trying to survive. He “got kicked out” for borrowing a car without permission. After returning to the city he shared a unit with friends and began to work for a youth crisis centre but had to leave when he subsequently formed a relationship with one of the young women. She became pregnant and they made a successful application for priority housing.

Frank felt rejected by the church group care agency. He felt that they made him leave school and move out before he had mastered reading. The agency offered support for schooling which ceased when he had to leave. He was scared of the freedom, though the agency did provide some training in cooking, shopping and budgeting. The agency provides some after care, particularly in dealing with social security matters.

Frank maintains contact with his mother but not his father. He feels that his mother should look after her grandchild more often. He also has contact with former foster parents and the care agency which organises a barbecue and get together about once a month.

Frank feels rather isolated, his family against the world. He says he feels as if he has just arrived from another country. He would like to get married but has nobody to invite to the wedding. He used to play football but finds it difficult to get there without a car as his house is in an outer suburb. He works Saturdays and he relaxes by smoking pot or playing with his son.

To an outsider, Frank is an independent adult. He has a job, house and family. He has on-going support from the care agency, which provides something of a support network. Yet he sees his life as a battle to survive and he feels isolated. It is taking him longer to get established than those who were not in care. Minor setbacks, like a heater breaking down, can be a major drama for people with a low income. His dyslexia limits his ability to train, get qualifications and get a
better job. He also has to work long hours to make ends meet. He sees his workmates getting married and buying houses with financial backing from their families.

Ben and Frank have found transition a greater struggle than those who had stable, caring placements. Their determination, coupled with adult support and advocacy, has enabled them to gain independence, at least to some extent. Resnick, Harris and Blum (1993) suggest that resilience is connected to a relationship with a significant adult and involvement with a caring institution or service. Both of these factors seem to be present in the lives of Ben and Frank.

Mentors and advocates
Mentors and advocates can help young people move to independence in many ways. Workers identified the need for intensive support for young people as they try to establish themselves. Young people often encounter problems when they re-establish contact with their family, and support and guidance from a third person can be helpful. Often, having someone to take an interest in their sporting or other activities helps to sustain their interest in positive community activities and avoids them becoming isolated. Practical help in dealing with institutions, government departments, real estate agents and a variety of other bodies is often needed. While most of the young people already described also identified adult mentors or advocates, for Diane and Brett this seemed to be a crucial factor in reaching independence.

Diane
Diane is a young woman of 25 who works in an hotel in a tourist resort. She shares a house. Since leaving school in Year 10, she has had little difficulty in keeping in work. This is largely because she is living with her aunt who worked for an international employment agency and helped her to get office work experience. Diane was taken into care at the age of 15 as her stepfather had physically and sexually assaulted her from the age of five. She was placed in a family group home with five foster children and three of the carers' children. This was by no means a warm and caring environment. The foster parents continually put her down and told her she would never get a job because she was too ugly. Diane recalled that the carers' children "belted the daylights out of you". There was a culture of not talking to outsiders about life in the home so the authorities did not intervene. Diane ran away a number of times and finally left to live with her aunt. She moved in with the foster family's son and daughter in a flat for a few months but as they were into drugs, she moved back to her aunt and stayed for five years. "My aunty mainly just brought me up and showed me the rights and wrongs of life."

Diane has not spoken to her mother for several years and refuses to do so while she remains with her stepfather. She re-established contact before her 21st birthday but her stepfather attempted to assault her again. She took him to Court but withdrew the charges due to family pressure. The government department did provide some counselling for a time. Diane's life experiences made it difficult for her to develop a sense of self worth. At times she engaged in heavy drinking and used a lot of marijuana but has now stopped. Her long association with the foster family made it difficult for her to reject the relationship even though they were not a helpful influence. After holding a job and living away for five years, she went to join the foster family's daughter in another town. The negative relationship re-emerged. The foster family were keen to exploit her financially when they thought that she might receive compensation for her assaults.

Diane finds it difficult to trust people but has a small circle of friends, which is now widening as her confidence increases. Her goal is to work with young people who have similar life experiences to herself. Diane felt that her aunt's influence and help to become established in the work force was a significant factor in her successful transition. Conversely, her foster family inhibited her progression to independence. Her aunt also taught her how to present herself, to apply for a driving licence and to control her sugar level (she is a diabetic). Even so, Diane struggled to become independent of drugs and alcohol.

Brett
Brett is a young man of 22 currently on sickness benefit. He is awaiting an operation to prevent his shoulder from dislocating. He feels he is only just getting his life together and that without his "stepmother" he would have ended up in jail.

It was mainly my stepmum. The way I was going, I was confused, lonely, I think I would have got to jail and probably be a bit of criminal. She taught me how to be a straight out person and I've got to thank her for that a lot. It was mainly her that put in the time and the effort and helped me out.
Brett was placed in care at the age of nine as his mother was an alcoholic and physically abused him. He was placed in three children’s homes, and at 16 was placed with his departmental officer, whom he now regards as his “stepmother”. Brett completed Year 12 but did not take the exam. He has worked as an extra in TV commercials and in a large hotel. His discharge from care was preceded by discussions about accommodation and budgeting. He had to find accommodation but assistance was given with the bond. He now lives with his “stepmother” once more.

Brett went through a period of heavy drinking and drug use and was convicted of assault. He went through rehabilitation and found value in sessions with a psychiatrist. He now only occasionally indulges in marijuana. His “stepmother” “hung in there” for him and he now has regular contact with his natural mother. He feels that care workers give up on young people when they need to hang in. “People need a big heart to work in this field.”

Brett is hoping to return to boxing after his shoulder is fixed and he hopes to make a name for himself. (He was introduced to boxing in the children’s home as an outlet for aggression.) He has also played in a football team. Brett feels that he needs a trade to fall back on. He has been offered the opportunity to work in a smash repair business and to train as a panel beater.

Like Frank and Ben, Diane and Brett are determined to break through the barriers which face them. They have been supported by adults who have provided positive influence and support.

**Extended support and after care**

One clear difference between those interviewed who had reached independence and those still in the process of transition was after care. The “independent” group was more likely to report some form of after-care contact. Sixteen informed us that they had had no contact with care systems since being discharged. Eighteen had had some contact. Several of those interviewed had established independent living situations with the assistance of supported accommodation programs and some went on to become lead tenants.

**Brian**

Brian, now 18, came from a country town. He left his family at 14, because he considered his mother favoured his elder sister and constantly put him down, saying he would end up as a bum. His mother borrowed money from him and he took it back by forging her signature on his trustee account. There were arguments over rules and he also “decked” his dad and pulled a knife on him. The police were involved and Brian was placed in the care of a non-government agency. In spite of less freedom and agency rules, he was happier there, away from family conflicts, and he established good relationships with the youth workers.

Brian was discharged from care at about 16 but there seems to have been little formal preparation or formal discharge. However, the agency workers helped him to get the Young Homeless Allowance and he moved into a supported boarding house (with a lead tenant). They also taught cooking, budgeting and skills for living independently and a youth worker occasionally visited in the first six months after he moved into independent living. After that, they phoned periodically. Brian still maintains contact with the agency and with his parents.

Brian had had some casual jobs in retailing. He travelled after his discharge and worked on his uncle’s cray boat. He has had some minor brushes with the law and has tried and rejected drugs. His major goal is to be a writer and he belongs to the local writers’ group. He has had some poems published and been interviewed by the local radio station about this. He hopes to publish his own book and intends to return to TAFE to complete Year 12 (having completed Year 10 at age 16).

Brian felt that he was coping well with independent living. He had a good group of friends and was involved with an agency which supports young people in care. Brian has a strong support network, life goals, and stable accommodation.

**Karen**

Karen was helped by a program committed to supporting young people in independent living. Karen is a young woman of 18 who was admitted to care at 13 due to violence from her father. She ran away to her mother and her stepfather who had already abused her when she was seven or eight years old. Her mother could not cope with Karen’s anger and drinking and she was placed in crisis care. She had about nine placements over the next four years, mainly in group care, and was “kicked out” of three of these placements. Before leaving care at 18, she was placed in a house under the supervision of an independent living program. She has committed offences in connection with underage drinking and assaulting a police officer and was sentenced to a community service order.
Karen has reduced her drinking and drug usage and has become involved in a church and wants to return to playing hockey. She has a lot of friends. Her anger towards her mother has abated and she baby-sits her stepsisters. She hopes to work in retail, have a steady boyfriend and a house and a car.

Karen has gained from positive relationships with community workers.

Interviewer: ... What assistance have they given you?
Karen: Quite a lot. They taught me how to budget quite a bit.
Interviewer: So if you are in any difficulty they will help you out?
Karen: Yes, and driving lessons and stuff like that. I've got my learners, I've had it for about a year now.

As mentioned previously, workers considered that intensive support is needed for young people leaving care. In addition, this can assist a young person to re-establish contact with family and help them to manage these relationships in a positive and acceptable manner.

Family contact
Research suggests that restoration of family contact is an essential part of planning for independent living (Barth 1986; Anderson & Simonitch 1981). However, in this study, both those reaching independence and those in transition, had similar levels of family contact. Where young people were unable to return home, they needed to be helped to accept the reasons for their being in care in order to make the transition to independence. Aboriginal young people placed away from their families needed to have resources available to maintain contact with their community of origin.

Most of the young people interviewed keep in touch with some family members. It is important to distinguish between parents and members of the wider family. Many young people who have come into care have been abused by one parent (occasionally both) or a step-parent and feel anger against the other for allowing it to happen. Of the 43 young people interviewed, 14 spoke of violence from one or more parents and a further seven spoke of sexual abuse from a parent or sibling. Interviewers consider that others may have experienced sexual abuse but were unwilling to speak of it. Three spoke of other conflict with step-parents. A further four had parents who suffered from a chronic illness or were alcoholic.

Many of the young people spoke of being rejected by a parent. Brian's mother continually made unfavourable comparisons with his sister. Jenny's mother's remarriage left no room for her in the house. Kirstin's mother often moves without telling her where she is going. Kirstin claims the most dysfunctional family ever.

My family are ... lunatics the whole bunch of them ...

My family are going to be here tonight ... I don't want them to come. I'll just take my sisters and the rest can go back to where they came from.

Janet was sexually assaulted by her older brother and reacted with violent and antisocial behaviour. She was taken into care at 12. Her parents have never been told about the assaults and Janet has demanded that social workers not tell them. As a result, her parents regard her as having no morals or values, no hopes or dreams. She rarely sees them.

Many of the families of young people who have been taken into care are clearly unable to care for and protect their children. Yet nearly all young people have a desire to maintain family ties and try to establish links with family members that they have not known in childhood. It gives a sense of belonging, of having roots. Diane has recently begun to get to know her stepsister, Michelle, who was adopted, and is now getting to know her natural mother. Frank wishes that his mother would look after his son more often and establish herself as grandmother. Ruth often has lunch with her natural mother and is going on holiday with her. The relationship changed after she separated from Ruth's father and remarried. On the other hand, young people who are unable to maintain some family links have a feeling of sadness or regret.

Family preservation and reconciliation is a significant priority in government policy. Care and protection services aim to return young people to their families; homeless youth strategies often aim to do likewise. These strategies are often only successful when considerable resources are devoted to them (Cashmore & Castell-McGregor 1996, p.128) and when intervention is made early enough. Young people, such as Julie, who leave care to return to family (in her case her grandmother) do not always stay long. It cannot be assumed that they have the resources to support transition to independence. When young people have been abused by a parent, they will often reject their other parent if the two are still together. Reconciliations are sometimes effected when parents separate. When young people become old enough to understand and accepted their parents' failings, or are provided with
reasons and counselling, then relationships can develop. Yet it is understandable that they do not want to be under any obligation to parents who have failed them in the past. Occasionally, families make some material contribution to the transition of their children. Ron’s mother is giving him money to buy a motorcycle but this appeared to be rare in the sample interviewed.

What role should natural families play in transition from care? Many families from which children are placed into care are poorly off and have few resources to support their children. Many have serious problems of their own. The team was told of parents who take drugs or move house rather than face their difficulties.

A distinction needs to be made between parents (or step-parents) and the extended family. Parents and step-parents have often, at best, let young people down and at worst, abused them. It can hardly help young people’s emerging confidence and esteem as they approach independence to be reminded of this or be at risk of it happening again. This is not to deny young people the right to see their parents, merely to recommend that they may need support in maintaining these relationships. With extended family members, different factors apply. Some young people have gained much from the interest of relatives. Diane learned a lot from her aunt with whom she lived after leaving group care. Brian worked for his uncle on a fishing boat. Aboriginal young people who were cared for by white families gained a sense of identity by getting to know their biological family. The importance of family in Aboriginal culture has not been always considered in placement policy or practice.

All young people leaving care can be helped to gain a feeling of belonging or identity by establishing or maintaining family ties, particularly with family members who have not abused them or condoned abuse. Those involved in supporting transition and after care can support and encourage this. What should be avoided is a policy context which stresses family reconciliation without evaluating individual family situations. Young people should not be put under pressure to re-establish or maintain relationships which have been abusive or disruptive in the past. Not all parents are caring, and “wicked” step-parents are more than fairy tales; many young people are placed in care as a result of abuse from step-parents.

Given that many young people in care come from severely dysfunctional families, what would be an appropriate family reconciliation strategy? First, young people need to maintain contact with family members who are not associated with abuse or conflict. This particularly relates to siblings and members of the extended family such as grandparents, aunts and uncles and so on. Second, young people need on-going counselling about their relations with those who have abused or neglected them. Finally (and significantly in light of diminishing resources and higher case loads), it needs to be recognised that if a young person returns to live with a family member, support is still needed as the “lived happily ever after” ending does not automatically occur.

Factors inhibiting independence

A number of factors, over and above the absence of those which promote independent living, seemed to inhibit the growth of independence. They include unresolved anger, unsuitable placements or inappropriate carers or workers, lack of affordable accommodation, lack of long-term goals, lack of income, imprisonment and teenage pregnancy. The needs of Aborigines or people with a disability also create a barrier to independent living. It is not suggested that any of these factors by themselves automatically inhibit independence. Most young people interviewed who were struggling for independence faced a combination of problems. Illustrations for each factor are given from interviewees who had experienced them.

Unresolved anger

A number of young people interviewed carried feelings of anger against their family, social workers or the “system”.

Tina

Tina, aged 21, explained her experience in care. She was adopted at three months and her adopted parents split up when she was four years old. When she was 10 the adopted mother became sick and finally died. She then lived with her “adopted brother” and “adopted grandmother”, alternating between them. She was placed in foster care with a woman who was a faith

1 Information from workers and young people indicated that some young people leaving the care system did not want contact with workers either because they wished to prove themselves or because they were disenchanted with the care system.
healer and a Christian fundamentalist. Tina blamed God for taking her adopted mother away from her and expressed her anger by declaring herself a Satanist. She had the Lord’s Prayer written backwards under her pillow. When the foster parent discovered this while making the bed, she called the police and Tina was taken from school in handcuffs, ending her schooling in Year 8. She was placed in a secure facility and then in a hostel. She ran away again and was returned to the secure facility, then to the hostel and a transition care unit, in a frightening merry-go-round. At 14 she took to the streets and was sent to a correctional facility for stealing cars. In the hostel, she was forcibly introduced to drugs. She eventually developed an expensive heroin habit but overcame it without help, though she continues to indulge in a little marijuana.

Tina ran off, living in hostels and working at fruit picking. She ended up in a northern State and applied for the Young Homeless Allowance at 15. She was informed that she could not get this as she was a State ward. Contact was made with her social worker who discharged her from care. According to Tina, the authorities were happy to see the back of her.

Tina is lonely but does not want friends. She feels rotten and would trade her independence and go back to the hostels where she did not pay rent, have to cook her own meals or worry about anything. She had no preparation for independent living and would not have participated if it had been offered. Too many social workers walked away when they encountered her anger and swearing, though one did hang in.

Other young people talked about their anger. Ron had taken an anger management course while in prison. He had coped with anger through drinking which “makes me feel better but doesn’t make the trouble go away”. Wendy was currently in prison for malicious wounding and had been addicted to drugs. Young people recognised that their behaviour was often difficult for people but they did not know how to control this. They were disappointed when workers did not have the skill or patience to “hang in”. Tina summed this up by saying:

A lot of kids need to punch it out or scream it out and then sit down and talk about it. And there weren’t a lot of people who can handle that. It frightened a lot of people. When a kid yelled it frightened them, which meant that they were not really prepared for their job.

There is an agenda here for professional training courses, to ensure that workers have the patience and skill to deal with young people who reject their support. In addition, State and non-government agencies have to maintain an interest in young people who, at some times, resent their attention. There is also an imperative to monitor screening procedures for abusive carers.

**Unsuitable placements, carers and support workers**

There are unfortunately more accounts of inappropriate placements than there are of happy ones. Workers expressed concern at the high turnover of workers in government departments which can reduce the opportunity for young people to form valuable and long lasting relationships. Young people were concerned about inappropriate environments and workers.

Tina and Clare were both placed in hostels where there was a high level of drug use and they were unable to resist becoming involved. Clare was only 12 and had left home as a result of domestic violence.

Where the welfare system stuffed up my life is that being a 12-year-old, a young girl that is not street-wise, doesn’t smoke cigarettes, doesn’t do anything wrong, goes to a hostel with street kids, glue sniffers, drug addicts and criminals ... that is the worst thing they ever did to me. If I had a choice, I would rather have gone straight to a foster home.

Julie spoke of being placed with “these two old people. I could not go anywhere, I could not go out, just stay in the house ...” Jane had 18 foster care placements between the ages of 13 and 15. Frank had two foster placements where he was physically abused. Jenny and Bronwyn reported inappropriate behaviour by a worker in a non-government agency.

She is always telling dirty jokes to the girls and to the boys too. She’s always turning everything you say into something dirty. (Jenny)

I was going to sit on the vacant chair which was next to the manager. She said “Oh don’t sit there, sit on the floor where you belong”. I’d never met this woman in my life and I was so insulted. I didn’t know what to say. I just looked and was so shocked. The worker that was there, she’s really lovely, she told me to go and get a chair out of the kitchen. (Jenny)

She made most of us girls feel like trash. I went out on a date. I was a virgin until I was 18. I came back and the first thing she said to me was “Has he got a big dick?” Those were her exact words ... Insinuating that on my
first date I had slept with him. Even to this day she does not believe that I did not sleep with him. (Bronwyn)

Young people felt that closer screening was necessary to exclude inappropriate carers. Tina’s experience led her to conclude that foster care does not work. Although scrutiny is closer than in the past, there are obviously still significant problems. The case studies suggest problems continue. Training to enable carers to better understand the needs of young people may also improve the experience of care. Better matching of carers to young people (assuming that sufficient options exist) and practical support of young people and their carers also need consideration.

Lack of affordable, stable accommodation
Finding and maintaining affordable accommodation can be a problem for young people living independently. A significant proportion of those interviewed were not in stable accommodation at the time of discharge. Upon discharge, 35% were homeless (in a refuge or shelter or without accommodation) or living temporarily with friends (Appendix 5, Table 8). Five of the 37 (14%) went to live with parents or relatives when they were discharged but three of these moved on fairly soon for various reasons. At the time of interview, 57% were renting accommodation. However, 13% remained homeless or with friends and 10% were living with family or foster parents which could be a potentially unstable option. Of the whole group, 22 young people (51%) informed us that they had experienced homelessness at some time, usually for short periods.

Adam
Adam is almost 20. He had been in care since the age of 18 months with several sets of foster parents, and also had periods in group care and a junior correctional program. He returned to his mother for a while at about age 14 and prior to his discharge from care at 17 had been in short-term units and refuges. When interviewed, he was living in a refuge run by a large non-government agency.

Lack of affordable, stable accommodation
Although having stable accommodation was regarded as an essential component of independent living, defining stable accommodation presents a problem. Unstable accommodation is easily agreed to include shelters, refuges or living temporarily with friends. Many “stable” options can soon become unstable if loss of job or ill-health reduces income, rented accommodation may no longer be secure. Living with relatives or a foster family can be secure for long periods but can change if conflict arises. The authors have cautiously accepted rented independent accommodation as stable and have assessed other situations in relation to information available. While this may not provide a completely objective measure, we consider that we give a fair assessment of the circumstances of the young people interviewed.

Adam left school at year 10 and had worked in casual jobs. He felt confused by the care system and was glad to be discharged but had little preparation. A non-government program helped him to learn budgeting after his discharge and he had learned to cook adequately. He had committed a number of offences and had used soft drugs. Under the influence of drugs and alcohol, he stole a car. He had been participating in counselling. Adam stated emphatically that he wanted to steer clear of drugs and to stay out of jail.

Adam was taking a course in carpentry but rather had a strong desire to join the army and hoped that this training might help. He had applied previously and had been turned down.

Lack of stable accommodation presented only one of a number of problems for Adam. His offences might result in going to jail. He also seemed to lack the influence of a significant adult and his friends were largely people he met in care and refuges. While he seemed committed to joining the army, this might prove to be an unreachable goal for him.

Raelene
Raelene is now 24, older than most of the interviewees. She did have stable accommodation on discharge from care as she remained with her foster parents and worked as a sales assistant and clerk for four years after leaving school. She currently doesn’t have independent accommodation and is living with temporarily with friends; she has spent four years living on the streets. She was taken into care at age two because her parents split up and her father had abused her. She had many changes of placement starting with a children’s home until the age of nine when she was fostered. Her brothers were fostered with a different family. Raelene was placed with a number of families and with others for weekends. She does not maintain contact with them but is in contact with the care agency which was primarily responsible for her. She considers most of her social workers were very good. On her 16th birthday, she received a telephone call to tell her that she was no longer in care.

Relationships with her final foster parents were good at the beginning of the placement but
deteriorated over time. She tried to commit suicide and spent some time in a psychiatric unit; she also admits to a tendency to cut herself with a razor blade. Her reasons for self mutilation are mixed: a form of self punishment or "to make yourself feel alive and not so numb". Raelene has used marijuana. She does not have many friends nor does she get close to people.

... if you have been in care and you make friends and then your friends leave, it's just something that, after a while, you can't keep going through ...

Raelene re-established contact with the non-government agency which had placed her. She has assisted with their professional conferences and is also involved with an organisation for young people in care. She is now hoping to do her Year 12 certificate and to go into social work. She now feels she is surviving quite well.

If Raelene had been interviewed two or three years after being discharged from care, she would have been employed and still living with her foster parents. She found leaving care hard, felt the loss of support and felt that she was not prepared for it. Relationships with the foster family appear to have soured as she grew older. Alternative independent accommodation may have countered some of the problems she experiences. Her case demonstrates the need for on-going care, even for those who seem to be well set to become independent.

Lack of long-term goals
Many of the young people interviewed had no clear goals or sense of direction in life. They lived largely from day-to-day. They generally had no regular work and had been involved in the juvenile justice system or with substance abuse. Lack of direction may largely be a consequence of inadequate preparation for leaving care, frequent changes of placement resulting in low feelings of self-worth or lack of educational success or opportunities for achievement. It is a difficult factor to address (though contributing factors need to be reduced) but continued support services and the identification of mentors may contribute to a solution.

Colin
Colin lives as a boarder with Tina and her de facto partner. He is 18 and had been physically abused at about two or three years of age and was placed in State care for up to 12 months. He returned to live with his father until he was about 12 and was then placed in care because of conflict with his three brothers, two of whom were intelectually disabled. He was placed in a hostel and finally with a non-government agency. He felt relieved to be in care; there was less stress than living with his brothers. The hostels gave him a good preparation for independent living, teaching budgeting, cooking, cleaning and applying for benefits, but he had been under the supervision of 20 to 30 social workers; some of whom understood, but the odd one or two were "complete arseholes". Colin had been involved with the law, for stealing cars, shoplifting and marijuana and was on probation.

He left school in Year 9 and has some difficulty with reading. He had worked casually as a driver's assistant in furniture deliveries and for a go-kart track. He had played for a football team but found it difficult to get to matches. He had been discharged from care at about 17, initiating the move himself as he was sick of living in hostels. Colin had few friends and preferred to keep to himself, although he was close to Tina and her partner, with whom he boarded. He was trying to get work, looking for unskilled physical jobs. Colin has no real support network beyond the people he boards with and he lives from day to day.

Clare and Graham
Clare and Graham are both 18. They live together in a rented house and have a child. The child is currently in kinship care fostered by Graham's aunt. The child may be returned to them when the authorities feel that they are able to offer a safe and caring environment. They have both lived for long periods on the streets, and live in fear that their former associates will burgle them for their few possessions. Former street companions make prank phone calls threatening to smash their possessions and cut their dog's throat. They are supported by a youth worker who has been encouraging them to give up regular glue sniffing.

At 17, Clare became pregnant and got a flat with the help of a woman magistrate who also was a member of the housing commission. Despite this, the child was taken into care almost immediately due to Clare's record as a street kid. It is her major goal to get their child returned to her. She was thinking of studying by distance education as she didn't feel comfortable in school.

Graham was told at the age of 13 that his father was actually his stepfather. His stepfather used to beat him and Graham would run away and hide. He got into trouble with the police and his stepfather packed his suitcase, "chucked it out the front door and told me to piss off". For the next five years, he lived on the streets,
in hostels and in correctional centres. He dislikes hostels as they are “full of crims”. He has stolen guns and committed other offences. Graham spent some months living with Clare in a motel and some time camping in the bush or living in a caravan.

Graham has re-established contact with his mother. He enjoys fixing things (TVs, videos, cars) and looking after animals. He is currently fixing cars to sell. He hopes in future to live in the bush with some animals and fix cars. He spends most of his time around the house.

Clare and Graham have set some goals: to be reunited with their child, to live in the bush, to be self-sufficient and free of the welfare system, but they have no specific plans as to how to achieve them. They need help and support to do this. The lack of plans is not the only barrier to achieving independence: the combination of substance use and abuse, homelessness, and involvement with the justice system present significant barriers to the achievement of successful and stable independent living. These factors are seen as the outcomes of poor placement experiences in care, a lack of effective preparation for leaving care and lack of support in dealing with their anger. These young people also had little contact with their natural families.

**Lack of access to adequate income**

A number of those interviewed reported difficulties in maintaining themselves independently on benefits. Some also reported difficulty in getting information about their options or entitlements. Young people could often only navigate through the regulations with the help of a social worker.

**Keith**

Keith found the Austudy application a barrier to re-entering school. The complexity of the requirements has been identified many times as a factor contributing to the difficulties which some young people experience in returning to study.

I applied for Austudy but they wanted all these documents, there was so much paperwork. With social security, I was still getting benefits from them and my social worker came down to social security with me and we had an interview with another social worker down there and they just put it down that I was on a course and that was why I could still receive benefits. For Austudy, they wanted so many documents it was unbelievable. When I was getting Austudy in high school, all I had to do was fill out the information and sign it and that was that. Now they want so many things that you basically need to take a truck in with all the paper work and then they’ve got to go through it. So I just did not worry about it after that.

**Bronwyn**

Bronwyn was repaying $2,500 with interest to DEETYA at $10 per fortnight. She incurred the debt at 17 when she was attending school, living independently and receiving “homeless Austudy”. She wished to transfer to unemployment benefits part of the way through a year of study as she was missing school and not sleeping. She was informed that there was a 13-week waiting period. She concluded: “I live in my own flat, I am self supported. There’s no way I can go 13 weeks without eating and paying my way”. She continued to receive Austudy and was caught at the end of the year and required to repay a total of $2,500 plus interest. Four years later she still owes about $2,000. She later was told that she could have applied for hardship payments designed to meet situations like hers. Bronwyn concludes that DSS officers will try to get people off benefits if they possibly can. She wanted to take a TAFE course in community welfare. If she went back on to Austudy she was told that she would have to repay a minimum of 30% or $60 per week.

So now if I want to do full time study, I have to pay back the $2,500 or use a fake name. I don’t like lying but you can’t get anywhere without an education, can you?

It is not clear if the Howard Government’s Common Youth Allowance proposal will meet this situation. It recognises that some people find themselves without support because they do not fit neatly within set categories (DEETYA 1996b). It emphasises the need to encourage part-time study and to not refuse benefits to those undertaking it for refusing full-time work. Above all the proposal claims to be more flexible. Some young people (Graham is an example) found that when they succeeded in getting on benefits, they could be cut off without fully understanding why.

Every time it was my pay day and my money was not in there, I’d go to social security and they had cut me off for some reason. They still do it.

Young people leaving care found great difficulty in making ends meet, particularly with limited experience of budgeting. Frank found that his income on Austudy
was quite good when he was in care, as he paid a percentage to the care agency, but he could not survive on Jobsearch. At one stage he claimed benefits for which he was no longer eligible and is now repaying this. Adam survived on Newstart for a while “but then I started taking stuff that was not mine”. Julie could not make ends meet as a supporting parent and wrote unsupported cheques to buy food and clothes. She hoped that with a new housing option, which would only cost 20% of her income, she would be able to make ends meet more easily. Sonia, another supporting parent, found that sometimes she did not have enough to pay bills and buy food and when it rains she needs plastic nappies which are expensive.

The Common Youth Allowance is to be means tested up to the age of 21, and for students to the age of 25. It is intended to provide a more flexible and consistent form of income support and may serve to eliminate the problems experienced by Bronwyn or Frank. While those leaving care may be free of means tests (though this has yet to be determined), they have no access to the support which even poor families often manage to provide: a meal here and there, a bed, use of family possessions, or a small loan.

**Imprisonment**

Shortage of income steered a number of young people towards theft and some were imprisoned. Three interviewees had been recently released from prison and one was interviewed in prison. The experience of two of them illustrates the situation.

**Ron**

Ron is a young man of 19 who has recently been released from custody having served a sentence for passing false cheques. He is now living with his mother. There is an outstanding case for unlawful wounding against which he says he will argue self defence. His mother left him with his married sister when he was 15 and went with a stepfather to another town. His sister could not afford to keep him and he was placed in care in a foster family. The foster placement had certain rules and Ron did not relate to “the lady”. He ran away and spent some weeks in a youth shelter and returned to the foster placement. He applied to be discharged from care and, with Austudy, could provide enough money for his sister to support him. This did not last and after an argument he moved into a caravan park on his own and finished Year 11.

Ron had no preparation for independent living in care, but in custody has taken courses in life skills and anger management. He was about to start an apprenticeship in horticulture with a nursery and saw himself in the future as a green keeper on a golf course. His mother had given him money to buy a motor bike to get to work and he was applying for his licence. He was once again living with his mother “on the condition that I get work and get myself into line again...” Ron felt that he coped well with independent living except that when he got angry he drank and became violent. While prison had set back his independence, family support has offered him the opportunity to re-establish it.

**James**

James is a young man of 18 who has been released from care for nine months and has spent half of that time in prison for breaking and entering and car theft. He ran away from home and was placed in care at 14 as a result of violence from his stepfather. His school informed “welfare” and he was made a ward of State. He is immature and virtually illiterate. He had three foster placements before being discharged at 17. He worked briefly as a kitchen hand but has since been unemployed for three years. He is living with the family of a mate who has also recently been released from jail. Most of his mates are just going into or coming out of prison. He sometimes drinks too much and smokes “ganja”. His criminal record excludes him from the cricket competition he previously played in, which offered a more positive network. James found independence more lonely than being in care: “It was all right in care. It is just when you get out, really, being on your own”. When asked where might he be in five years time, he replied: “Could be in prison for all I know. Could have got into some stupid things, some trouble and that”.

Ron has a greater chance of achieving independent living than James. He has a job, a home and family support. It must be recognised that these are newly achieved and therefore might not survive. Living with his mother had broken down before. Ron also had achievable goals and the motorcycle was a physical manifestation of independence. James had none of these advantages and seemed reconciled to a return to prison as a likely outcome. His mother was living in a different State with a new family and other children and he was continually hurt by her rejection.

Prison is a set back but it can be overcome with effective support, stable accommodation and some clear goals.
Teenage pregnancy

Cashmore and Paxman (1996) found that nearly one in three of the young women leaving care in New South Wales became pregnant or had a child soon after leaving wardship. This was the case with our sample also (just over one in three of the young women or nine of the 24). Pregnancy for a teenage young woman brings a whole set of everyday life difficulties. While it might be argued that these difficulties beset any young mother without adequate support, young women leaving care who generally have less support available are more vulnerable. Becoming a mother may signify the transition to a more adult role, but achieving the means of independence becomes more difficult for a teenage mother. The second important point is that the available evidence suggests that young women leaving care are more likely to become pregnant than other young women in the same age group. These issues do not allow conclusions to be drawn about pregnancy and the experience of the care system but pregnancy soon after care emerges as an issue in both this study and Cashmore and Paxman’s earlier longitudinal research.

The first case study, Rose, is a complex case loaded with a number of entangled issues; however, Rose believed her pregnancy was a significant factor in the difficulties she had in securing her transition to independence.

Rose

Rose is a young Aboriginal woman of 18 who became pregnant after leaving care. At the age of seven she was fostered with an aunt and uncle but “didn’t know them from a bar of soap”. Her mother was alcoholic and depressed and used to bash the children. The foster parents were also alcoholics, their sons and daughters were on drugs and the house was filthy. Rose had to wear the same clothes for several days before washing was done. No lunches were provided to take to school. Children were bashed and the family was more crowded than her natural one.

Rose was visited by her mother every three months or so. She left the placement at 16 and lived with friends and a boyfriend. She is now living with friends. She was given no preparation for independent living:

I wasn’t prepared for nothing. I didn’t know what was outside that front door. I found out the hard way for myself.

Through an employee of her bank, she was put in touch with a care agency which is now helping her to get housing through the State housing department. Other youth workers have helped and told her about her rights.

Rose worked for a while in an hotel for several months following an eight-week course. She would like to complete her Year 12 and get a really good job, possibly in an hotel or as a flight attendant. She saw her pregnancy as limiting her opportunities in these areas. She had been using drugs but no longer does so.

Rose is very critical of the foster placement and its supervision.

They should know where they are putting these children and know the people and the background of the people. They should keep in contact and make sure these things are happening in the house that they think are happening.

Rose feels that she is coping well with independent living but would like to cope a lot better. “People that have been down the road I have turned out a lot worse than what I am.” With a more suitable placement, she considered that she would not have been on drugs, could have stayed at school and would not have become pregnant. While Rose sees her pregnancy as a setback to her independence, she clearly sees it as a result of her placement experience and the care system. For others, however, having a child can bring meaning to life that otherwise has been lacking.

Sonia

Sonia provides another example of teenage pregnancy following a care placement. She is a young woman of 19 who lives on a sole parent pension in public housing, in a rural and fairly remote region. Sonia is epileptic and dyslexic and left school in Grade 9. She started a forestry course but could not get employment and has worked in takeaway shops and as a topless barmaid.

Sonia was placed in care at 13 as her stepfather hit her and threatened to kill her. She was placed in a girls’ refuge and women’s centre and then with a foster family. This remote region has very few foster families (Sonia tells us only two) and she considered this one “not very nice”. Sonia was subjected to abuse by the foster parents’ natural children and an uncle attempted to rape her. Most of her clothes and possessions were stolen. She ran away and stayed a while with friends and then moved into a caravan. The caravan was lonely but she liked the freedom. The loneliness steered her to drugs and alcohol and she became addicted. She ended up in hospital with alcoholic poisoning.
Sonia tells us that her child has brought stability and meaning into her life. She gave up drugs except for cigarettes. Her goal is to be a good mother; she sews, and has thoughts of later taking a course so that she can make articles to sell in markets. She feels that she is coping well with independent living. Sonia's view is in contrast to Rose's in seeing positive outcomes of her pregnancy. Linda, however, regarded pregnancy negatively and resulting from inadequate sex education.

Linda
Linda is 18 and has a son of 12 months. She was critical of the lack of sex education for young women in care and considered that there should be more single-sex units.

Linda: They don’t teach you anything about sex education. (In) the units, most of the girls there don’t use anything.
Interviewer: So they don’t tell you about contraception?
Linda: No. That’s why I reckon they should have just girls units so they can teach the girls about these things instead of being with the boys and stuff. That’s where I reckon the stuff-up in the system is. Lots of girls get pregnant.

There is evidence that more advantaged young women also lack knowledge of safe sex practices and that even when young women are well-informed, power relations often negate safe practice (see, for example, Wyn 1991, pp.96–103).

Julie
Julie is a 20-year-old whose life revolves around her two and a half-year-old son. She has no permanent accommodation and is currently living in a youth refuge. She left home at 13 due to violence from her alcoholic father and was placed temporarily in refuges. She was then placed in foster care which did not work as the foster parents were old and restrictive and the placement isolated. She ran away and was placed with her grandmother at 15. Because she was with her grandmother, she was discharged from care but she did not stay there long. She stopped going to school in Year 8 and worked in a restaurant and then had a job in a child minding centre until she was 18. When she became pregnant she returned to her mother who had remarried. After the birth, she rented a house for a while, then moved back to her mother “and we had a big fight” so she returned to the refuge.

Julie would like to find stable accommodation and eventually to return to work in the hospitality industry. Child-care work is less appealing now that she has her own child. She finds relaxation in smoking dope. At one stage she wanted to do youth work but feels there is too much studying involved. She needs money to provide stable accommodation for her son. She has recently been to Court in connection with writing cheques for food and clothes without funds to back them.

Julie is confident of getting housing at an affordable rent which will make it easier for her to make ends meet. Many other single mothers have public housing which is a significant factor for their independence. Julie has a small and fragile support network, essentially her mother, sister and one friend. She speaks very positively of the social worker who helped her to leave care by moving to her grandmother but that contact was five years ago. As a supporting mother it is likely that she will be successful in getting accommodation which she can afford.

Being a supporting mother can give young women a sense of commitment and purpose, though motherhood responsibilities restrict freedom and increase responsibility and financial commitments. The welfare system tends to be more supportive; benefits and housing are a little easier to come by because of the needs of the child involved. It may not be politically acceptable to some people for young women to use motherhood as a way of achieving social citizenship. However, there is little evidence from these case studies that motherhood is a carefully thought out plan to access support. In all of these cases the issue of pregnancy does not stand alone. While becoming pregnant does attract a certain special consideration of support, including benefits from the welfare system, the difficulties for a young mother should not be underestimated, in particular, by limiting options for entering the labour force. One respondent believed that her pregnancy adversely affected her life after placement. Another suggested that sex education during placement might have helped her avoid pregnancy soon after leaving care.

Young women leaving care are more vulnerable because their support networks are usually less adequate. Young women leaving care are more likely to become pregnant than other young women of the same age. Pregnancy is thus an outcome, rather than a cause of incomplete transition to independence. It is related to the vulnerability of young women leaving care.
Indigenous young people

In most states, Aboriginal children and young people are over-represented in care. In our study, Rose, Tania, Paul, Mary, John, Ray and Michelle are of Aboriginal descent and from three different regions. Did being Aboriginal increase the difficulties faced by young people in gaining independence? The workers interviewed considered that it did. They suggested that Aboriginal young people enter the care system at an earlier age and remain in care longer than non-Aboriginal children. This results in them leaving care at 18 with very little knowledge of their community of origin. Aboriginal young people can be disadvantaged by being placed with extended family because families often have few resources and young people receive very little support and financial assistance when they leave care. They frequently move into the juvenile justice system. Ray, now 19, is an example. He has spent three periods in prison since his release from care at the age of 16. Workers also considered that unrealistic expectations were held by carers, Aboriginal elders, police, communities and educators and this can affect young people's views of themselves and their potential to succeed.

Paul

Although placement policy no longer encourages the practice, Paul and Michelle were brought up by white families. Paul is now a young man of 19. He was taken into care at eight months and placed in foster care with a white family. This lasted until he was 12. Paul was not told that he was Aboriginal until he was 10. This placement ended with the death of the foster mother two years later. He had several other placements up to the age of 15 and then lived with his grandmother until the age of 18 when he was discharged from care. He completed Year 11 at school.

Paul has worked occasionally as a kitchen hand and is now unemployed. He enjoys playing the piano and would like to study it further but other study does not interest him. He would like to play in a band or orchestra. He finds smoking marijuana relaxing and does it often. He plays touch football for a regular team and has a strong personal support network. Paul is now boarding with friends. He has not been homeless but he may be considered as still moving towards independence.

Mary

Mary is a young woman of 17 who has two children. She was taken into care at age nine and spent four years with an aunty and was moved to another for a year and a half. Both moves were occasioned by alcohol abuse. At 16 Mary got her own place. She has been locked up a couple of times for “little things”. She regards welfare workers as too nosy. She used to drink and smoke marijuana but does not do so now.

Factors supporting the successful transition of indigenous young people do not seem to differ from those supporting other interviewees. However, for Michelle, being brought up by a white family created further difficulties, though for Paul the death of the foster mother caused a breakdown. Michelle and Mary are on their way to being independent adults.

Young people with disabilities and recurrent illness

The young people interviewed who had a disability had similar experiences to those without (this may or may not be typical) and did not seem to be further disadvantaged by disability. Strong support networks played a significant role in them achieving independence.

Don

Don has a mild intellectual disability but is connected to a strong community support network. He is a young man of 21 and has been fairly successful in living independently. He had a much more stable care experience than many, attending only one primary and high school (to Year 11) and having one foster placement from the age of 10 until his discharge from care. He was admitted to care as a result of his mother’s illness which was accompanied by heavy drinking and some physical abuse. The foster placement was a success. The foster parent, in association with his aunt and uncle, initiated the possibility of him moving into a unit at 16. He resisted this and then stayed in the unit at weekends. He felt he could not afford the expense of both and moved from the foster home. Leaving caused some tension which has since been resolved. Don shared his unit but did not like some of his flat-mate’s friends. Don receives a disability support pension. He had also inherited some money from his grandparents but $10,000 had in his own words, been “basically blown”. He now has his bank passbook held at the bank and a financial adviser looks after his bills. A social worker and the independent living program maintain occasional contact. He also sees his mother for dinner. Don is a member of a football social club and regularly attends matches. He hopes to gain
employment in a big hotel as a porter or similar.

Don seems to have been reasonably well prepared for independent living, because he had a number of supportive adults in his life, though he was not sure if he was ready for it when the time came. He feels that there should be more support, emotional, physical and financial.

Harry

Harry has been diagnosed as manic depressive. He was not a State ward though he was in the care system. Harry (now 20) left his family at 15 due to conflict with his mother’s partner and moved six times over a year living with friends and relatives. He then spent six months in hospital with an eating disorder first diagnosed at the age of nine. He was discharged to a large church-based institution of care which he originally thought would provide stability in his life. He remained with the care agency for three years and developed a very negative view about the agency: “They should put a bomb under it”. He feels that they tried to control him, to develop dependency and to alienate him from his mother and sister. He is a very outspoken character and was older than most of the others in care. He felt that he had no preparation for independent living and that he was left to sink or swim.

Harry was admitted to hospital with depression and after attempting suicide. His mother visited him and he returned to live with her on leaving hospital. Contact from the agency is resented and seen as trying to maintain dependency. He has a job as a receptionist and telephonist in a large hotel. He has ambitions to travel to the UK and to earn a large salary. Harry is working with clear goals for his life but has chosen to live with his mother again. Bronwyn, who has a stronger support network, is working and pursuing career goals but is not settled in her accommodation.

Bronwyn

Bronwyn is a young woman of 21 who left home at 15 after a violent conflict with her stepmother and reported that she was made her own guardian by the department.3 For the next two years she lived with friends, travelled interstate, lived in a youth shelter and finally went into supported accommodation, having had 30 placements. She was involved in drugs and has been diagnosed manic depressive. She is currently working in a coffee lounge and is engaged as a peer educator. She has had training and other work in the retail sector. She had difficulty in moving from Austudy to unemployment benefit without losing money and has a debt for unauthorised payments. She now boards and although she has been there 11 months has not unpacked in case she has to move again. She would like to study at a university to be a veterinarian or a social worker.

Bronwyn has a large group of friends and is now being more selective, establishing “quality friends”. She has a two-year relationship with a young man, goes to church and is involved in church welfare activities.

Those with disabilities in this study are still in transition but some have negotiated support structures in relation to their needs. Don is more or less independent but has support with handling his money. Had this been given earlier he might not have wasted some of his inheritance. Harry is working with clear goals for his life but has chosen to live with his mother again. Bronwyn, who has a stronger support network, is working and pursuing career goals but is not settled in her accommodation.

Conclusion

It is important to recognise that factors promoting independent living interact with each other and multiply positive or negative effects. On their own they have little significance. Individual responses to similar situations may differ, and personal resilience and determination can be important. Many of the young people in transition (i.e. those who had not fully met the criteria for independence defined at the beginning of this chapter) also identified mentors. Some (Raelene, for example) had long-term placements which did not provide a foundation for independent living. Stable placement did offer the opportunity for longer schooling and, as is shown in Appendix 5, those in transition were more likely to leave school earlier than those reaching independence. One factor which was more often present in the independent group than those in transition was after care and continued support after discharge. Family contact was not signif-

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3 This is an unusual situation. Bronwyn became involved in violent conflict with her mother and approached the State department. She provided evidence from neighbours who had witnessed the situation and was given youth homeless allowance to live independently. She continued to attend school and got into trouble for writing her own absence notes. She returned to the welfare officer who said she would make her own guardian so that she could sign her own notes. He provided a letter to the school to confirm this.
icantly different between the groups, though acceptance and understanding of the family by the young person seems to be necessary for achieving independence. There is a need for appropriate strategies of family reconciliation involving extended family members rather than the nuclear family alone, and for continued contact when young people return to live with family members, as this is often not a permanent situation.

Resnick's research into causes of disturbed and acting out behaviours by teenagers in the USA concludes that “caring and connectedness” have a positive impact on adolescent health and well-being (Resnick, Harris & Blum 1993). The most powerful protective factors were family and school connectedness. Family connectedness referred to a sense of belonging and closeness to family, in whatever way the family was comprised or defined by the adolescent. At the core of this was the experience of being connected to at least one caring, competent adult in a loving, nurturing relationship. Resnick's team conclude that caring relationships both inside and outside the family, are central to the development of resilient adolescents.

This is supported by the evidence outlined above. Stable placements provide a basis for caring relationships, though many young people find mentors and caring adults without them. After care provided a continuation of relationships with adults. The determination to succeed shown by Ben and Frank may have been the result of caring relationships though their determination may have also encouraged the support. Many factors interact and it is difficult to determine which are cause and which are effect. However, it is clear that care and protection services must work to establish stable, caring placements, to widen the opportunity for young people in care to develop caring relationships with competent adults, and to help young people understand and accept their natural family situation.

As with the factors which promoted independent living, those which inhibit it also interact. Many of them underscore the need for continuing support from a nurturing adult and for extended support beyond discharge from care. The issues of accommodation and sufficient income are also matters of policy which are especially significant in a climate where unemployment for young people is high. In many cases, law-breaking seems related to lack of sufficient funds. There also seems to be a strong case for more sex education, though teenage pregnancy may also be related to factors over and above ignorance, such as the need for love and affection. There is also evidence, in some cases, that motherhood assists independence both by increasing resources and by developing a sense of purpose in life. However, having a child may tie a mother to depend on benefits and restrict her long-term career options and life chances.
Models of effective support

This chapter proposes a model for transition from care, and reviews existing programs and strategies for supporting young people leaving care.

Policies and programs for the future will need to deal with problems identified in the guardianship responsibilities assumed by governments and with the limitations placed on those responsibilities. Envisaged is a notion of guardianship:

- which is broad; and
- obliges the State to function as a good parent, meeting good community standards; and
- ensures the effective, continuous and stable development of children and young people through to adulthood; and
- supports children and young people in the family where possible and desirable; and
- preserves the children’s and young people’s cultural heritage; and
- includes, where necessary, a combination of State and family care in whatever mix will work in the child’s or young person’s interests; and at the same time
- appropriately limits the nature and length of statutory orders.

Any effective framework for the support of young people leaving care needs to operate with a number of underlying assumptions. Young people need to be supported through education and training in order to be able to enter the work force. They need sufficient income to house, feed and clothe themselves, and recognition that standard levels of benefit available for young people often make it difficult to survive with no family support. In addition, young people leaving care need to have opportunities to connect or re-connect with their family (parents and/or range of other family members) and be supported in coping with this. They also need to be supported over time if contact with their family is not appropriate or possible. Some families can be stressful, even if young people are approaching independence and do not have to live in them. Aboriginal young people need also to maintain contact with their communities.

A model for leaving care

A model of effective transition requires three basic components:

- Preparation through high quality, stable care, with case planning;
- Transition through effective support programs, independent living programs, information and the involvement of suitable mentors; and
- after care offering continuing access to support, resources and interest from care agencies.

Preparation: In-care factors

A stable and effective system of alternative care

Effective transitions from care must be underpinned by an effective and stable care system. Young people who have been abused or unhappy in care, or who have had frequent changes of placement will inevitably find the process of transition to independence more difficult.
Improved case practice and planning
Case practice standards need to be developed and the practice of working with young people needs to be significantly improved. The Looking After Children project (described later in this chapter) provides a vehicle to improve case practice and case planning processes.

A flexible support continuum
Young people’s level of maturity and preparedness for leaving care is critical and varies considerably across individuals. The idea of a continuum of care is well established. This implies that young people receive intensive support when necessary as they move towards independence. The emphasis is then on “interdependence”, which reflects the notion that well-functioning adults continue to receive support from others and are not independent in any absolute sense. Support needs to include assistance to help the young person work through problems when they re-establish contact with their family, and to manage the relationship in a positive and acceptable manner. (Research in England (Bullock, Little & Millham 1993; Spence 1994a) found that as high as 80% of young people return to family after they leave care.) Failure to provide this support will result in feelings of failure and loss of positive identity. Support needs to be provided even in instances when young people express a lack of interest or hostility. A worker in a non-government agency spoke of a young person who, on leaving the agency, said “I’m never coming back to see you, you bitch”. The next week she was on the phone asking to come to tea.

Transition: Preparing for independence
Training for living skills
While young people in successful foster placements are likely to naturally learn independent living skills, there is a strong argument to provide a “living skills course” for young people independent of their placement. Often, learning with peers is more productive for young people than in the placement environment. Although teaching skills through a course cannot substitute for experience, intensive skills development would be most valuable just prior to gaining independent accommodation.

Personal support and social networks
It is essential that workers assist young people in developing personal support networks. Where young people have difficulty in developing networks through school, youth or sporting organisations, the Big Brother Big Sister programs that operate in some States have been shown to be of enormous benefit to young people in care or leaving care. Other programs use volunteers to provide mentor support and peer support agencies are also valuable. Re-establishing or maintaining links with natural family may also be of considerable value. Lack of someone to take an interest in sporting or leisure activities will reduce the young person’s interest in them, thereby reducing their involvement in positive community activities and increasing the likelihood of isolation.

Accommodation
An essential factor in the process of transition is the availability of stable, affordable accommodation. Young people need to be included as a priority for public housing. Youth-focused accommodation (such as the French Foyers de Jeunes Travailleurs) along the lines of tertiary student residences could fulfil this role.

Information
Information needs to be provided to young people leaving care at least in the following areas:

• a collated history of the young person’s time in care, including information on placements and people who have cared for them (copies of this information need to be kept in case it is lost or stolen);

• a “treasure chest” of valued keepsakes and possessions, including toys and family photos (arrangements must be available for this information to be stored if the young person feels unable to take it with them);

• telephone numbers of relevant staff, parents, siblings, and the local Young People In Care organisation;

• information about the nearest refuge in case the young person requires urgent accommodation;

• phone cards to a predetermined value;

• the young person’s original birth certificate;

• a post office box number if the agency is not able to accept correspondence for the young person; a number of workers felt that young people needed to have their own post office box;

• information about how to access ongoing services from the agency they are leaving, such as counselling services, especially related to their time in care (Burnside in New South Wales offers this service);
• all relevant information on their entitlements when they leave care and any entitlements/assistance they can access over time;
• reunions or “get togethers” that the agency is planning;
• information on education, training and employment programs; and
• tenancy laws, etc. in plain English. (In South Australia, a booklet, The Rental Kit, is distributed to young people and contains information about house finding, renting and sharing, lease agreements, tenants’ rights etc.)

After care: On-going support

An important element in an effective system is that States and Territories be required to provide an adequately funded system of after care. It was noted that while many services already provide this support, government funding is provided only for short periods of after-care support. Funding is usually provided for the number of young people the agency accommodates and after care is usually not recognised or funded as a legitimate part of service delivery.

Strategies that may be working at the time the young person moves to independent living (or returning home) may break down and contingency planning needs to occur as part of the follow-up plan. Failure to do this can result in the gains the young person has made being eroded very quickly. One strategy suggested was that an “after-care” case conference should be held 28 days after a young person leaves care to identify gaps and ensure support services are being accessed.

It is essential for people who have been in care to be able to access services later in life if they need them. It may be 10 years after being in care before young people feel they are ready to deal with some of their past problems. They may also need to talk to someone who understands the care system. Relinquishing mothers can go back to adoption agencies years later and talk to social workers. A counselling system similar to this needs to operate for young people who have been in care. As well, young people need to be able to access sexual assault counselling services at no cost. These could be linked to the counselling service.

Existing initiatives for young people leaving care

The following examples include components which contribute to effective transition from care. It is not claimed that this is a comprehensive list and the research did not set out to evaluate or extensively review such programs.

Planning and preparation

The Looking After Children Project

The Looking After Children Project is a participatory assessment, review and monitoring of needs strategy adopted in the United Kingdom following the Children’s Act (1989). It is being piloted in Victoria by the Children’s Welfare Association of Victoria with the support of the Stegley Foundation and the Victorian Department of Human Services, and in Western Australia by a team at the University of Western Australia. The project provides Assessment and Action Records for a number of different developmental stages from birth to 18 years. The Assessment and Action Record Forms have been used by a number of non-government agencies as a planning tool. There are also processes for involving all key participants in reviewing progress and identifying new goals. Services that have used the Looking After Children systems in Victoria have found them useful both in engaging young people in a structured process for identifying their needs and in developing a plan of concrete goals to be achieved during preparation for leaving care and after leaving care.

Transition

A Leaving Care Kit

A computerised program called the Leaving Care Kit has been developed by the Australian Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (AACWA) and Sydney University. This has proved to be a valuable resource for some agencies in assisting young people in preparing for leaving care and is currently being updated. Other examples are information currently being developed and piloted by the New South Wales Leaving Care Committee, and information kits developed by some non-government agencies in New South Wales (often in conjunction with the young person who is leaving care).

“In house” independent living skills programs

Independent living skills programs operate in a number of residential services (both government and non-government) that were consulted for this research. These programs usually have a planned exit program (sometimes including a flat program) which focuses on
living skills development for periods of around 12 months or longer prior to the young person’s discharge from the program. One agency, as part of the young person’s preparation for independence, gets them to sign a lease agreement to emulate the experience they will face in the private rental area. The young person will receive an eviction notice if this is warranted. Workers felt that these programs were an essential part of their duty of care to young people, commenting that not preparing young people for independence, with basic skills such as cooking, shopping, planning a meal, budgeting and so on, is negligent.

**St John’s Youth Services (Adelaide) Home Start-up Kits**
St John’s provide substantial kits consisting of new linen, crockery, cutlery, pots and pans and some furniture to assist young people in becoming independent in their own accommodation. Costs are met from fundraising.

**Effective support programs**
A number of States have programs that provide personal support to young people leaving care. The Intensive Personal Support Program, a government program operating in Queensland, is seen as valuable for young people leaving care. Workers from these programs can assist with such matters as planning for the transition from care, finding accommodation and helping young women with children. Workers noted, however, that there are insufficient resources for the program to cater for all young people exiting care and it is difficult to operate in the more remote areas of the State.

Programs that were highlighted by government and non-government workers as being highly effective models worthy of replication for young people in transition to independence are briefly outlined below:

- **The ALIVE program** is a Centacare program in Glebe, New South Wales. The program offers a comprehensive range of accommodation and support programs to young people from 15 to 21 years of age. It is a SAAP program aimed at young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Its emphasis is on resourcing and empowering young people to make informed choices which will hopefully lead to better quality in their lives. Practical help is offered in selecting and securing appropriate accommodation, assisting with all types of housing applications, negotiating with real estate agents, signing leases, moving house, and budgeting. Brokerage funds are available to young people to purchase services, and these funds are predominantly used for initial rent, bond, security deposits (gas, electricity, phone) transport, furniture and the utilisation of services such as the dentist, optometrist and counsellor. After-care support is available on a regular basis (two to three times a week) and/or as the young person requests it. This may be a home visit, phone call, help with the shopping, or having lunch at a cafe. It can involve identifying life goals and developing plans to achieve these, talking about overall problems or just “being there”. Advocacy is a large part of the overall program and after care also assists young people to access employment opportunities, education and training, mediation and counselling, and social and recreational opportunities. The emphasis of the program is on young people living independently through empowerment (Spence 1994b).

  The program’s success appears to be related to workers forming “partnerships” with young people and assisting them to make informed choices about their lives. Workers primarily embrace a framework of the young people’s views rather than being judgmental or directive. The strong advocacy component of the program assists young people to obtain knowledge and skills about how to advocate for themselves.

  - **The Independent Living Support Teams** operate in the northern and southern areas of Adelaide. These programs are government run and specifically geared to assisting young people aged 16 to 18 years to become independent. Skills focused on include finding appropriate accommodation, negotiating direct lease agreements with the Housing Trust, negotiating with DSS and other government departments, assisting young people with the purchase of household items, teaching young people to drive (a government car is able to be used for this purpose), and informal contact and support. This support may be of a short duration but can continue for up to two years in total, including support for three to six months following the young person’s discharge from care, depending on their individual needs. It was interesting to note that some of the young people interviewed were still in contact with workers, although they had been discharged from care between one and three years previously.

  The program’s success seems to be related to stability of workers, workers being prepared to unconditionally support young people in a non judgmental way, flexibility in working hours, and being prepared to work through with the young person any problems
or difficulties they might have. Workers have also established good working relationships with housing providers which has resulted in the program being approached if there are problems with the young person. This ensures that young people are not unnecessarily evicted and has led to the program being successful in obtaining very acceptable private rental properties for young people.

Peer and mentor support
The Australian Association of Young People in Care (AAYPIC) and its State-based groups are a significant initiative for providing support, skills training, and advocacy for young people who are in care or who have left care. This is a relatively new initiative, with groups being established in New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia two to three years ago, and more recently in Queensland, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory. Recognition of the value of these groups is increasing, in both government and non-government agencies, and along with this more funding is being made available. For example, the State Network of Young People in Care (SNYPIC) in New South Wales received $300,000 in the 1996 budget. The national body, AAYPIC, however, receives no funding from the Commonwealth or the States. There is a problem in determining Commonwealth responsibility in this area as the responsibility for young people in care lies currently with the States.

Education, training and employment assistance
A number of agencies in Victoria, for example, have employment and training programs available to young people who are in care and leaving care. St Augustine’s in Geelong run a business which provides opportunities for young people to prepare for employment. The Salvation Army’s Crossroads program and BAYSA in Geelong also run Skillshare and other employment assistance programs.

There needs to be an increased emphasis by State and Territory governments and care providers on enabling educational achievement, including:

• financial and moral support to young people to complete courses;
• access to tutoring; and
• assistance to negotiate the education system.

In the USA there is a strong emphasis on educational attainment for young people in care and leaving care, with all services recognising that without this young people are confined to a lifetime of limited employment and lifestyle opportunities. Heavy emphasis is placed on liaison with young people in schools to ensure that they can remain in education for as long as feasible. Specialist career workers are employed to assist young people in training and employment. Corporate sponsorship of programs to meet the training and employment needs of young people is highly developed in the USA. Such sponsorship is in its infancy in Australia and is mostly related to providing accommodation options for young people.

After care
After-care workers
A number of non-government agencies in New South Wales have funded after-care workers to support young people in their transition from care to independence. These positions have been funded in recognition of the need to prepare young people for independence and provide them with support and assistance when they move into independent living or return home to family. A significant part of the role of such workers is geared to providing practical support, such as financial assistance, and helping young people access community services or negotiate with DSS and housing providers. Assistance by some of the agencies is for as long as the young person wants it, regardless of whether they left the agency in a planned or unplanned way.

It is important to note that non-government agencies in all States/Territories in which the research team consulted have a commitment to providing some support to young people when they are discharged from their service. The capacity to undertake this is dependent on the agency’s resources. As well, many government workers interviewed indicated that ongoing support was provided to young people who had been discharged from care but this was generally unofficial. This was commented upon by some of the young people interviewed who greatly appreciated the ongoing support.

Ability to stay in contact with carers and/or departmental workers was regarded as essential for young people’s transition. The research team was told of the closure of residential services in country New South Wales and how young people return to the area over a period of time to reconnect with carers and departmental workers to get help in their transition to independence. According to government and non-government workers (and case examples) the support
provided by these workers has been instrumental in enhancing young people’s transition. One young man interviewed said that reconnecting with past residential workers had helped him through some difficult times and had contributed to him being settled enough to find employment and to re-establish contact with his father.

**Services for tracing significant people**

In Victoria, for example, the Victorian Network for Adoption and Self Help has been specifically funded to provide a search service for young people who have been wards of the State. While the majority of users of the service to date have been older people, an increasing number of younger people are using the service to trace and reconnect with family members (for example siblings) and other significant adults in their lives such as previous foster carers.

**Conclusion**

Much has to be done before the key elements of the model for transition from care proposed in this chapter (planning and preparation, transition and continuing after care) are implemented. There is now (and has been for some time) recognition of the importance of effective standards of care, though they are slow in being applied. There is also increasing recognition of the need for a process of transition; but the need for after care, given limited resources and conflicting priorities, is far less recognised. All elements of the model are nevertheless essential. There are a number of programs and practices already in existence or being piloted which could be incorporated in much more coordinated systems of preparation for care and after care for young people.
Implications of the research findings for current policy and practices

This chapter reviews the research findings and suggests areas in which States and Territories might review policy and practices for leaving care. The major areas suggested are income support for those leaving care; the need for a stable care system; the need for clear policies and procedures; meeting educational and accommodation needs; meeting the needs of Aboriginal young people; attention to the needs of young women; and the duty of the State as parent at a time of changing structural arrangements, and in relation to Commonwealth policies requiring extended family support.

It is clear that a number of States and Territories are aware of the problems in out-of-home care and leaving care, and are actively considering or developing new approaches. Some States and Territories have a promising philosophical and practical framework on which to build. However, the research suggests that a number of aspects of Commonwealth and State policy and practice need to be reviewed.

The duty of the State as parent

In Chapter 4, it was shown that Commonwealth policy increasingly places responsibility for adolescents and young adults with their families. Means testing of benefits and allowances in relation to family income, in the case of Austudy (soon to be the Common Youth Allowance) up to the age of 25, reflects this. Young people living with families, even families with low incomes, often have the benefit of advice, support and some assistance in kind, which is rarely available to those who have been in care unless foster families provide it.

Child protection and alternative care systems are increasing in complexity. Furthermore, many States are reviewing their role as service providers and are tendering out responsibilities to the non-government sector. Recent legislation and practice has resulted in many children and young people being offered care facilities without being under a formal guardianship order. Others are returned to the care of their family before becoming independent. In all of these cases, State authorities need to maintain their duty of care. New contractual arrangements may overlook the process of transition and after care. Those who were not formally in care also have need of ongoing support; those who return to their families may experience difficulties in becoming independent and family problems re-emerge. All of these matters need thorough consideration and an appropriate response so that young people in care are not disadvantaged in making the transition to independent living.

It is of paramount importance that each State accept the extended responsibilities of parents and support those who have been in care until at least the age of 25. In addition, the States should accept responsibility to negotiate with the Commonwealth on behalf of any young person who has been in care in order to secure benefits to which they are entitled.

1 This should not be read as a recommendation for statutory orders to be extended into the 20s; only that a strong after-care system should be in place.
There is a need for each State and Territory to continuously review of its practices, responsibilities and role as guardian in relation to children, young persons and their families to whom care and protection is offered. Consideration of increased consistency across States and Territories is recommended.

The provision of sufficient income

Many of the young people interviewed clearly had difficulties in making ends meet. They identified better funding and financial support for those leaving care as essential. Food and other necessities cost as much for people under 18 as over. Young people leaving care are expected to bear the total cost of setting up and maintaining independent living situations, costs which are often part of the interdependent relationship between families and young people who leave home rather than leaving care. Private rental is often not affordable and young people have to resort to less stable accommodation arrangements. Even documentation required to establish eligibility for allowances, such as a birth certificate, may be an additional expense for young people leaving care if they have to replace such documentation. The research team therefore concludes that:

Consideration needs to be given by the Commonwealth to providing benefits at the full adult rate to young people living independently after leaving care who are unemployed, studying or undertaking job skills training.

The need for a stable care system

It was not within the scope of this research to investigate the care system, but workers and young people interviewed were clearly aware of deficiencies. Most States and Territories have only recently considered the quality of out-of-home-care and quality processes for leaving care. Care and protection agencies operate with considerable constraints and have limited resources. All States should give high priority to developing comprehensive policies and procedures for children and families after the initial investigation and Court proceedings. It is considered important to establish greater consistency across States in terms of their role and responsibilities as guardian.

Evidence from both young people and workers indicates strongly that many young people in care have very negative and unhappy experiences through, for example, abuse, frequent placement changes, inappropriate carers or inappropriate care settings. On the other hand, it is apparent that those who have a happy, stable experience of care are more likely to make the transition to independence with less difficulty. Jane’s statement is a strong argument for more stability in the care system.

Where they have actually gone wrong is ... if they had put me in a place like (a group home) I would have been a lot happier and stable. Because I had no stability in my life... one week you are here and “sorry, your time is up here. You’ve got to go to this place now”. It was scary, because you’d just get to know these people that are strangers and then you are on to the next lot of strangers, and it is frightening.

States and Territories need to continue to develop stable, secure and happy care placements and to ensure that carers and care settings are appropriate.

The need for clear policies, procedures and programs for leaving care and after care

This project has shown that there are few clear policies and procedures for young people leaving care and that resources to support young people who had left care were often discretionary and scarce. While this matter has been reviewed recently in New South Wales, all other States and Territories need to give urgent consideration to establishing programs preparing young people for leaving care, formally recognising the termination of care, and providing access to continued counselling and support until at least the age of 25. Young people interviewed are quite emphatic about the need for ongoing support from well-trained, flexible professionals.

Case planning and preparation for leaving care

Preparation for leaving care should begin when children and young people enter care and, where possible, needs to be considered at an early age (similar to the processes which occur when young people live with their family) by starting with simple
tasks such as opening bank accounts, linking young people into community organisations, sporting clubs and the like. Living skills need to be built into the normal process of development, and not seen as something to be tackled close to when the young person is ready to leave care.

Carers in residential care or foster care are ideally placed to work with the young person and their case manager to make the transition from care as smooth and successful as possible. Recognition and acceptance of where the young person wants to live when he/she moves to independence, and preparedness to accept the young person’s return if the move is not successful, is essential and is consistent with “family norms”. That is, prior to the young person leaving care, agreement needs to be reached between carers and workers (departmental or agency) on the continuity of care, even after discharge from placement.

The project indicates that there is generally very little formal policy or practice documented for preparing young people for leaving care, outside the general case planning processes. Often, very broad case planning goals such as “move to independent living” are developed without any planning or reference to the skills and resources that a young person will need to realise this goal.

Planning for discharge tends to be left to the discretion of the case workers and may be dependent on the case worker’s relationship with the young person, the commitment of the worker to the needs of young people leaving care, and the resources of the particular government department. Many of the non-government workers consulted were critical of the lack of collaboration between statutory and non-government services in the planning processes, particularly where case management was not contracted out.

Exit plans should be developed for young people as part of the case management and planning strategy. As part of this process, reviews should be conducted on all young people leaving residential care and foster care to ascertain their readiness to leave care. At present, the decision to discharge young people from care would seem to be often made predominantly on the basis of age, the young person’s nuisance value or the fact that they have run away, rather than on their readiness to leave care (see Chapter 7).

Standards of practice in case planning for leaving care need to mirror standards in the general community where most young people leave home to live independently much later than young people who have been in care. There is a tendency to discharge earlier, with fewer young people remaining in care until they are 18.

Workers cited examples of some young people disclosing sexual abuse close to the time of discharge. One worker commented that you cannot just say, "oh well, off you go, and have a nice life". In these situations it is imperative that the young person remains in a stable situation until the issues are addressed.

Preparation needs to acknowledge that leaving care for many young people can evoke a sense of abandonment by carers and caseworkers and can be accompanied by an overwhelming sense of loneliness. While some young people will feel a sense of relief to “be free of the system”, they also need to be prepared for the sense of sadness that they may experience later. Assistance needs to be provided to young people to help them form valuable relationships that can be ongoing after they leave care so that this “sense of loss” is reduced.

State and Territory governments need to review practices of case planning and preparation for leaving care to strengthen them and ensure that they are documented. They need to reflect community standards of leaving home at a later age and to take account of individual need with flexible discharge options. The pattern of earlier discharge needs to be viewed with concern and be subject to review.

Support

Preparation (and planning) needs to recognise the value to the young person of having a “significant person or persons” to provide support and to remember special occasions. Many workers felt that there needs to be unconditional support and assistance to young people when they leave care. They also felt that there needs to be more flexibility so that young people can return frequently to past carers for visits and to stay if their placement is not working out. Some workers believe that agencies need to remain involved even when there has been a breakdown in the placement or the young person is deemed no longer suitable for a placement. They believed that this will reduce young people’s sense of failure and increase the possibility of future success. As well, it will assist young people to leave an agency with “dignity and self worth”, a factor workers considered essential for transition to independence.

Linking young people into community supports and showing them how to access these supports was
seen as a critical part of the preparation for independence. Some workers reported a dilemma in helping young people to gain access to welfare benefits, indicating that "we are training them to be welfare recipients". The strongest theme emerging from the recommendations of young people was the need for continued support, for workers to be adequately trained to cope with young people’s needs and committed to “hanging in there with them through the tough times” and “hanging around” for at least six months after discharge. Judy’s comment reflects this strong need.

I think they should support you in the way of telling you that they are there for you if you need them and that they are not going to let anything happen to you. I think they should be more caring and understanding to you for what’s happened in your life. Like, I’ve had a fair few horrible things happen to me in my life and I’ve never ever got support from them about it. I’ve always been asked one hundred questions. I’ve never been asked: “Do you want to talk about it?” It’s always been: “Tell me about it”.

State and Territory governments need to make provision for continuing support and counselling services for young people who have left care, at least until the age of 25.

Living skills programs
Young people indicated that formal preparation for the transition to independence was necessary in many cases. Many felt that they needed more information about independent living skills and courses to develop them. Simple skills like cooking meals, budgeting, shopping and buying food to give a balanced diet, basic hygiene, and cleaning were mentioned. So too were how to look for a flat, look for a job, and do a course.

State and Territory Governments need to ensure the provision of independent living skills programs for all young people leaving care, and their delivery in a range of different ways appropriate to differing needs of young people.

Training for workers
Training for workers in government and non-government services needs to emphasise the importance of preparing young people for independence. Strategies and information kits need to be made available for workers and carers to assist them in these areas. Young people endorsed the need for workers to provide information to young people which is important to their being able to live independently. This includes information about young people’s rights.

States and Territories need to ensure that workers and care givers are trained to implement effective programs for leaving care and to provide after care in a flexible, patient and supportive way.

Family contact and reconciliation
A “link up” service should be developed for all young people so they can locate their families and be assisted to cope with separation from family. There are a number of models for such a service including the New South Wales “link up” for Aboriginal people, and that which operates via the Adoption Service in Victoria.

Support services need to be provided for families so they can understand and cope with children who have grown up away from their family and community. This is very important given that a large percentage of young people re-establish contact with parents after leaving care (and their experiences in doing so are mixed). Such services need to address the expectations of parents who often prematurely view their child as an adult and have significant and sometimes unrealistic expectations of them.

States and Territories need to support young people in establishing or re-establishing links with family members wherever possible and appropriate, and ensure that support is provided to families in dealing with young people leaving care and moving to independent living.

Personal effects
Young people leaving care need to move to independent living with dignity, and have the chance to take with them some possessions in the same way as do young people leaving families. This may include beds, other items of furniture and appropriate luggage in which to carry their possessions. Workers reported that young people frequently had to use green garbage bags or pink and blue stripped nappy bags, which as one worker put it, “reinforces the notion that they are incredibly disposable”. The St John’s program in Adelaide provides an example of a service which provides young people with essential effects.

The process of leaving care should provide young people with basic personal items and furniture.
Access to files and relevant documentation

Workers felt that there needed to be standard practices to ensure that young people peruse their files (with the support of a worker/carer) before they leave care. All relevant original documentation (not photocopies) needs to be provided to young people. (Copies of documents such as birth certificates should remain on the young person’s files.) As indicated in the National Standards For Out of Home Care, young people need to have a comprehensive record of their time in care when they leave. Materials such as copies of information and negatives of photographs need to be retained on file.

Procedures for leaving care should include the opportunity for young people to have access to their files and documentation with the support of workers to explain and interpret when necessary. Departments should ensure that records are maintained and stored.

Meeting the educational needs of young people leaving care

This research supports the findings of Cashmore and Paxman (1996) that young people leaving care and protection include a high proportion of early school leavers. Interviews with young people for the present research project, and research conducted overseas (Spence 1994a) demonstrate the importance of educational achievement and attainment in increasing the young people’s view of their ability to cope with independence and encouraging a positive outlook on life.

Education levels and literacy issues need to be given a high priority in planning, and be continuously monitored, after children and young people come into care. Continuity of education is critical. Tuition needs to be provided to children and young people as soon as necessary and as a matter of right. Young people need to have access to and payment for special courses. More confidence needs to be shown in young people undertaking such courses.

Accommodation and support for young people leaving care

The present research has shown that over a third of those interviewed were discharged into insecure or temporary accommodation and half had experienced homelessness at some time, usually for short periods. Workers expressed concern at the use of SAAP facilities by young people leaving care. While these services provide an important safety net for homeless young people, workers considered that State and Territory governments should ensure that those leaving care are offered specific and appropriate options.

A wide range of accommodation options that are affordable, stable and clean need to be developed, and should include different levels of support for young people. Some examples are “independence units” within residential facilities; supported lodgings; lead tenant units; supported flats; living skills units, for teaching skills such as budgeting and cooking; and cluster housing (as exists in the USA) with “drop in” support. There needs to be flexibility and sufficient housing stock for young people to access public housing and private rental properties. In addition, workers need to establish links with housing providers and connect young people to community housing and housing cooperatives.

Supported accommodation services need to be developed for special groups, such as:
• those living in country areas, especially for young people who have challenging behaviours so that a range of accommodation programs can be available for young people in their local area; and
• young people leaving care who are intellectually disabled or who have severe behavioural problems, as these young people will often not be able to live on their own without support.

Such accommodation will need to include a supervisory support worker. Some workers interviewed proposed the establishment of a half-way house for young people.

Resources need to be obtained for expansion of housing options for young people. While consideration can be given to securing private funding, housing for young people leaving the care system needs to be provided by government.

State and Territory governments should ensure that young people leaving care have appropriate, affordable and stable accommodation options on leaving care and are not left to seek accommodation in facilities provided for homeless persons.

The needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people leaving care

Interviews with workers suggest that appropriate services need to be developed to prevent Aboriginal
children and young people from entering care. This was seen as important, if not more important than planning for exiting care, given the high proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in the care system. In order to provide personal support to Aboriginal young people, Aboriginal worker positions need to be provided. Funding for the development of support for Aboriginal young people needs to be allocated in proportion to the high representation of Aboriginal children and young people in care. As well, specific services need to be developed for Aboriginal young people as they do not survive well in mainstream services and are likely to become homeless. If Aboriginal young people become homeless they are far more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system than non-Aboriginal young people. There needs to be sufficient placement options for Aboriginal children and young people in all areas, including foster care, and with Aboriginal families close to their community of origin. Maintaining community relationships may help young people in making the transition to independence. Support services need to be provided for those young people who are in voluntary placements with extended family. Services and staff need to be placed in locations where there are high proportions of young people in care.

Services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in care and leaving care need to be reviewed and improved in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care agencies and communities.

The needs of young women leaving care

Services need to be reviewed and improved for young women and especially for young women with children, given the high rate of young women who have been in care who have children. These services need to include education, personal support, priority access to the health system and other services, and access to baby-sitting and day care. Lack of services can lead to young women being “pushed back” to family for the provision of these services and this can obviously be problematic when young women have had extreme difficulties in their family.

Sex education programs need to be provided, especially for young women, as a large percentage become pregnant while in care or soon after leaving care. Training needs to be provided for foster parents and caseworkers to help young people understand their own sexual development.

State and Territory governments need to review care systems and transition arrangements to ensure that the needs of young women, including young women with children, are effectively met.

Conclusion

The research highlights the need for States and Territories to accept extended responsibility (at least until they reach the age of 25) for young people who have been in care. They need to accept this responsibility whether or not young people have been formally or voluntarily in care. Young people need this extended support. For young people moving from the care system to independence, income support benefits for those who are unemployed or in education and training should be made available at the maximum adult rate irrespective of the young person’s age or income of a former foster care giver.

Each State and Territory needs to continuously review its guardianship responsibilities and to define clear policies and procedures for leaving care and after care. Specific transition from care programs need to be developed by each State and Territory. In the context of after care, policy and practice need to support young people in maintaining or re-establishing links to family and extended family members where desirable and possible, and ensure that support for all concerned is available.

Young people leaving care need to be provided with basic material goods (personal effects and furniture) and to be able to obtain basic personal details and to have access to their files. Young people also need to be provided with access to continuing education. States and Territories need to ensure that they have access to appropriate, affordable and stable accommodation.

Services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are inadequate and need review in cooperation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and agencies. Leaving care arrangements also need to ensure that the specific needs of young women and young people with disabilities are addressed.
NYARS Project: List of Reference Group members

Mr Bill Frost
Department of Human Services
(Protection and Care) Victoria

Mr Peter Jones (Ms Gina Fiske from 1997)
Representative of NYARS Committee

Mr Brendan Smith
Department of Human Services
(SAAP) Victoria

Ms Meredith Kiraly
Napier Youth Services

Ms Amanda Jones
Crossroads

Ms Danni Melidio
Victorian Association of Young People in Care

Mr Shane Chapman
Victorian Association of Young People in Care

Mr Peter Renkin
Copelen Child and Family Services

Ms Jenny Cummins
Gippsland and Southern Services
Berry Street

Ms Donna Jaggs
Researcher

Ms Janet Taylor
Social Policy and Research Unit
Brotherhood of St Laurence

Mr Victor Coull
Glastonbury Child and Family Services
Appendix 2

Focus groups

South Australia (3)
- Department of Family and Children’s Services (FACS)
- Y SAAP (NGO)
- Aboriginal Child Care Agency (ACCA), NGO

New South Wales (6)
- Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) Leaving Care Working Party
- Aboriginal workers, Department of Community Services (DOCS)
- Policy staff, DOCS Central Office
- Foster carers, NGO and DOCS
- Kings Cross Adolescent Referral and Support Service, DOCS
- Minali Recovery Service, DOCS

Queensland (3)
- Department of Family Youth and Community Care (FYCC), Atherton
- Department of Family Youth and Community Care, Cairns
- YUDDIKKA Aboriginal Child Care Agency, NGO

Western Australia (2)
- Department of Family and Children’s Services (FACS)
  NGOs, General

Victoria (4)
- Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Children’s Welfare Association of Victoria (CWAV) members, NGOs
- SAAP
- Peninsular Youth and Family Services (PYFS), NGO

Northern Territory (2)
- Department of Child and Family Protective Services and SAAP
  NGOs, general
Individual worker/service provider interviews

(number of individuals interviewed given in brackets)

Victoria
Berry Street Adolescent Unit, NGO (2)
Napier Street Youth Services, Mission to the Streets and Lanes, NGO (3)

South Australia
CentaCare, NGO (3)
Lutheran Family Services, NGO (1)
Modbury Office, (2)
Independent Living Program, FACS (2)
Lochiel Park Resi Service, FACS (1)

New South Wales
Barnardos, NGO (1)
Intensive Support /After Care Program, DOCS (2)
Stretch-A-Family, NGO (1)
Bowral, DOCS (2)
Burnside, NGO (1)
St Vincent’s West Mead, NGO (1)
ALIVE, NGO (1)
SNYPIC, NGO (1)

Queensland
Youth Shelter Innisfail, NGO (2)
St Margaret’s Youth Shelter Cairns, NGO (1)
Uniting Church Cairns, NGO (1)

Northern Territory
KARU Aboriginal Child Care Agency, NGO (1)
St Marys, NGO (1)
Anglicare, NGO (3)
Alice Springs Youth Accommodation Agency, NGO/SAAP (1)

Western Australia
McCall Residential and Support Service, NGO (1)
Mofflyn, NGO (1)
Appendix 3

Questions for focus groups

1. What policies and procedures exist in your State for young people leaving care?

2a. What preparation occurs in a government service when young people leave care in your State?

2b. What preparation occurs in a non-government service when young people leave care in your State?

3a. What support services are available for young people when they leave care?

3b. What support services need to be developed?

4. How can preparation for leaving care be improved?

5. How would you define a “successful transition” for young people leaving care?

6. What factors are more likely to lead to a successful transition when young people leave care?

7. What factors are likely to lead to an unsuccessful transition when young people leave care?
# YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE PROJECT

## Interviews with Young People

### PART 1

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### Personal Details

This section is not to be included in the taped interview. Tapes will be labelled with a code number and date. Personal details will be filed in a secure cabinet.

1. NAME
2. AGE
3. SEX
4. RESIDENCE POSTCODE
5. TYPE shared/own house/flat; parents; squat; board; homeless
6. ARE YOU EMPLOYED OR STUDYING? DETAILS
7. MARITAL STATUS Married; de facto; single; separated; divorced
8. DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN?
9. WERE YOUR PARENTS BORN IN AUSTRALIA?
10. WHERE DID YOU LIVE IN AUSTRALIA BEFORE GOING INTO CARE?
11. DO YOU IDENTIFY AS AN ABORIGINAL PERSON?
12. DO YOU HAVE ANY PHYSICAL DISABILITY?
13. EXPERIENCE OF THE CARE SYSTEM:

1. Can you tell me at what age you first left your parents and were placed in care? Who did you live with, how long and why did you leave?

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</tbody>
</table>

Can you tell me about other placements you had. Which was the last one?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>who lived with</th>
<th>how long</th>
<th>why left</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. WHAT SORT OR ORDER(S) WERE YOU ON?

Guardianship  q  
Correctional  q  
Other  q  

15. DATE OF DISCHARGE FROM STATE CARE
PART 2

Principal questions are printed in bold. Italic questions are prompts or follow up questions which may be covered in the original answer or may not be relevant.

Checklist.
Before interview:
1 Give summary of project.
2 Sign agreement form.

After interview:
3 Pay $30 and get receipt.
4 Thank for participating and say we will provide information at the end of the project.

***********

1 Can you tell me about your experience of school? How many schools did you attend? When did you leave school? Were you encouraged to stay at school, pass exams or go to higher education? Do you have any qualifications? Did you apply for Austudy? Did you know about it? Were there difficulties in getting it?

2 Have you worked? What jobs have you had? Have you been unemployed?

3 How adequate is the money you receive? Do you have any benefits? Job Search Allowance, Youth Training Allowance, Young Homeless Allowance, Supporting Parent Benefit, Emergency Relief? Were there problems in getting benefits?

4 How did you know you were going to be discharged from care? Were you involved in the decision? Were you informed?

5 What sort of accommodation did you have when you left care? Did you move frequently? Were you homeless?

6 How did you feel about leaving care? Did you have different moods – depression, anxiety, freedom, happiness? Did you have more privacy? Were you lonely? Do you still feel that way now?

7 Were you given any information or help in relation to what it meant to be discharged from care?
   · budgeting (looking after money)?
   · applying for social security?
   · finding somewhere to live?
   · learning about the new area you lived in?
   · finding a job?
   · applying for an education or training course?
   · coping with how you felt?

8 After you left care, have you been in trouble with the law?

9 (Respondents with child/children) How did you get information about having and looking after a child? What sort of help did you get with the child? Do you see the child?

10 Do you feel comfortable in telling me why you came into care? Who was in your family? Did brothers and sisters come into care with you? Were you placed together?

11 How did you feel about coming into care? Did your feelings change?

12 Who were the adults responsible for taking care of you? Can you tell me about them? Residential staff, foster parents, department officer. How did you get on with them? Did you trust them? Did they trust you? When you were feeling upset and needed to talk to someone, who did you go to?

13 How was it different in care to living at home? Were there rules? Were you punished for not keeping to them?

14 Did you maintain contact with your family? How?
15 When you left care, did you keep in touch with people who looked after you? Did you keep in contact with your family/brothers/sisters?

16 Did any of the adults you met after leaving care become special?

17 Can you describe to me a typical day in your life? How do you relax? Do you have difficulty in coping? Do you sometimes do things that are unhealthy? Do you want to tell me about them? Smoking, drugs, stay out late.

18 What do you enjoy doing/what are you good at? Is there something you would like to be better at? Do you hope or intend to return to study?

19 Do you have many friends? How did you make them? Do you stick to your friends? Do they stick to you? (Do friendships last? Are you loyal to your friends?)

20 Do you belong to any sports team, club, church or organisation? If no, are there financial or social reasons which stop you?

21 How well were you prepared for leaving care? very well,

OK,

not sure,

not very well,

badly.

22 Did the “department” or agency maintain contact after you had been discharged from guardianship or left care? How was this done? Did you feel you could go back to them if you needed?

23 How did you cope with living independently? very well,

OK,

not sure,

not very well,

badly.

24 What support should have been provided/should be provided in future after leaving care?

25 What do you think you will be doing in five years time? What would you like to be doing?

26 Is there anything I should have asked you about leaving care OR is there anything further you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in the interview. We will let you have some information about the outcomes of the project.
Appendix 5

General characteristics of young people interviewed

<p>| Appendix Table 1: Interviewees by age (n=43) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty-seven (63%) subjects met the strict age targets of age 18 to 20, with a further eight being 21, just above (a total of 81%). Nineteen were young men and 24 young women.

| Appendix Table 2: Subjects by ethnicity (n=41) |
|-----|-----|
| Aboriginal | 7 (16%) |
| Anglo-Australian, NZ | 32 (75%) |
| Other (Korean, Melanesian, Indonesian, Yugoslav) | 4 (9%) |

Indigenous young people are over-represented in care. In some States they account for 30 to 40%. The seven cases included are taken from four different States.

<p>| Appendix Table 3: Age of entry to care (n=38) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of entry</th>
<th>No. of children</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>6 **</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Two of these young people were admitted as infants, returned to their families and were admitted again later.

The sample is slightly over representative of young people coming into care at a young age. However, most were admitted or re-admitted in their early teens. This relates to the observation of Cashmore and Castell-McGregor (1996, p.124) that there is a trend to an increase in the average age of children in care and that those aged 12-17 are the largest group.

<p>| Appendix Table 4: Experience of care: Total years in care and number of different placements |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total years in care</th>
<th>No. of different placements in care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3</td>
<td>1-3 4-6 7-10 &gt;10 Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 6</td>
<td>1 4 1 1 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to 10</td>
<td>5 4 3 4 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 10</td>
<td>- - 2 4 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12 10 7 9 38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less than one third of the interviewees had any degree of stability in care. Those in long-term care had higher numbers of placements.

---

1 Information not clear in two cases.
2 Excludes those not formally admitted to care and one case not clear.
Only 21% reached Year 12 and not all completed it, compared with a national average of about 70%. Cashmore and Paxman (1996) found that just over half of the young people leaving care in New South Wales had completed Year 10 or less.

Four young people had an emotional, social or intellectual disability. One of these was mildly intellectually disabled, two had been classified as manic-depressive and one was diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder. Three were temporarily unable to work due to injury from accident and were on sickness benefit.

Clearly a number of young people are discharged into insecure accommodation. Those homeless or living with friends at discharge accounted for 35% and a further 21% lived with family or foster parents. This compares with 13% and 10% at the time of interview. In addition, 22 (51%) informed us that they had experienced homelessness at some time, usually for short periods. Twenty-one had committed some offence since leaving care and three had recently been released from custody. Thirty admitted to having used drugs at some time and about half of these admit to still using them. Three admitted to having attempted suicide. It is not difficult to conclude that the general characteristics of the subjects interviewed include a greater incidence of difficulties than the general population of young people.

---

Appendix Table 5: Level of schooling completed (n=42)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year level</th>
<th>Young people in transition</th>
<th>Living independently</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix Table 6: Current labour force status of young people (n=42)

| Full-time work | 10 |
| Part-time work | 3  |
| Study: school  |    |
|                | 2  |
|                |    |
|                | 1  |
| Unemployed     | 17 |
| In prison      | 1  |
| Sickness benefits | 3 |
| Supporting parent benefit | 6 |
| Supported accommodation program | 7 |
| Renting house/flat | 21 |
| Prison         | 1  |
| With friends   | 2  |
| With parent/relative | 3 |
| Foster parent  | 1  |

Appendix Table 7: Young people interviewed, current accommodation (n=43) and at discharge (n=37)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th>At discharge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refuge/shelter/homeless</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported accommodation program</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renting house/flat</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With parent/relative</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster parent</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1 Information not clear in five cases.
4 One case did not give this information.
5 One case did not give this information.
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