



YOUR NEXT STEP

**Information for young people
leaving care**



**Human Services
Community Services**



Table of contents

What's ahead?	3
What help am I entitled to?	4
What do I want in my leaving care plan?	5
How ready am I for leaving care?	6
Money	8
Housing and accommodation	12
Education and training	14
Employment	16
Health and wellbeing	18
Your rights, records and identity	20
Aftercare services	22
More useful contacts	23
My contacts	24

WHAT'S AHEAD?

Learning to look after yourself and solve life's problems along the way is part of growing up, but how ready are you to live on your own?

If you are in care, the day will come when your care order ends, usually when you turn 18. That may or may not mean moving out of your carer's home, but either way you need to be prepared for some life changes.

Preparing to leave care should start when you turn 15. At this age, you can start learning skills like cooking, budgeting and how to apply for a job. These are useful living skills for when you move out on your own, and your carer can help you learn them. Sometimes it might seem like you're just doing chores, but being able to look after yourself and your own place is a part of adult life.

Around the time you turn 17, your caseworker or care agency will talk to you about preparing your written 'leaving care plan' for after you leave care. This plan stays in place until you're about 25. The plan covers things like where you will live, whether you will be working or studying, where your money will be coming from, how you will look after any health issues, and who you can turn to if you have problems.

If you have a disability, planning might start around the age of 16 to make sure that any special supports you need are in place. Your caseworker and someone from Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) will start working together with you in preparing your leaving care plan. When your court order ends, ADHC will see to it that you are still supported along the way.

Your leaving care plan is designed to meet your basic needs. It will be written with you and will say what you and your caseworker have agreed to do. Most importantly, the plan will say who is going to help or support you, and how they will do it.

If you believe you should already have a plan but haven't heard from your caseworker, contact them or your foster care agency. You should do this even if you haven't spoken to them for some time. After all, the plan is about making sure you get the help you need so you don't miss out.

WHAT HELP AM I ENTITLED TO?

An entitlement is something you have a right to by law. You might be surprised at some of the help care leavers can get, so don't be afraid to ask.

There are a few rules around entitlements, but usually if you are in care because of a Children's Court order, have been in care for at least 12 months and are leaving care aged 15 or older you have the right to:

- a leaving care plan that involves you in the planning process
- information about support services and referral to them if needed
- follow-up support from your care agency after leaving care.

As part of your leaving care plan, you will be entitled to an assessment of your needs to see if you can get extra help from Community Services. See the Money section for information about Community Services financial assistance, which can be a short-term fortnightly payment or help with costs for education, counselling, legal representation, housing and more.

Most care leavers are also entitled to the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (**TILA**), which is a one-off payment to help you set yourself up independently. Ask your caseworker or care agency about applying for TILA.

If you turn 18 while completing full-time studies or training, arrangements can usually be made to extend your current placement.

You should expect your caseworker to talk to you about these entitlements and to include the ones you are eligible for in your leaving care plan. If this doesn't happen, contact your caseworker or care agency.

There is a lot of help available for young people apart from the care leaver entitlements mentioned here. Check out the lists of services in this booklet for other ways to get help.

WHAT DO I WANT IN MY LEAVING CARE PLAN?

Your leaving care plan is about you, what you will be doing after you leave care and what others will do to help you.

When your caseworker starts writing the plan tell them what is important to you and what will make the plan useful. To help you think about what you want in the plan, ask yourself the following questions:

- ➔ when I leave care where will I be living and who will I live with?
- ➔ what sort of work or study will I be doing?
- ➔ where will my money be coming from?
- ➔ who will I want to have contact with from my birth family?
- ➔ how much do I want to know about my birth family and my own history?
- ➔ will I want counselling or other help to deal with things from my past?
- ➔ will I be caring for a child of my own?
- ➔ who will I be able to get support from if I need help?
- ➔ what social network or activities will I have?
- ➔ will I need help with any ongoing medical or health issues?
- ➔ will I want my foster care agency to check on how I'm going every now and then?
- ➔ what else is important to me?
- ➔ what help do I need to make all of these things happen?



HOW READY AM I FOR LEAVING CARE?

After you turn 18, there are some things you should be able to do for yourself as an adult whether you stay with your carer or not. You don't need to be an expert at them now but the sooner you start to learn the better.

The living skills questions below will help you work out what you already know and what you might want to learn more about. Ask yourself the questions or discuss them with your carer. If there are some things you're not sure about and your carer can't help you, talk to your caseworker or try looking up some of the websites listed in the booklet.

If you would like to see a more detailed list of living skills, there is one on the Community Services website at www.community.nsw.gov.au/leaving_care. This checklist has been designed especially for care leavers, so it includes points like making contact with members of your birth family or what to do if you want to see your records after you have left care.

If you are 15 or 16, can you do this?

Plan a simple budget.

Get help in an emergency.

Save up for expensive items.

Use kitchen utensils and appliances.

Use an ATM and read a bank or ATM statement.

Use a washing machine, clothes dryer and iron.

Find ads for jobs.

Prepare a simple meal.

Compare an advertised job with the skills you have.

Use public transport, including reading timetables.

Keep living areas clean and tidy.

Name at least two healthy snacks.

Keep yourself clean with personal hygiene like brushing teeth and showering daily.

Manage conflict and keep your cool.

Hold a conversation and maintain comfortable eye contact.

List some birth control options.

Say what your rights are if questioned by the police or arrested.

Explain the risks of drugs, alcohol, tobacco and unsafe sex.

Treat minor injuries like cuts, burns, insect bites and splinters.

Prove who you are. Eg, do you have a birth certificate or other identity papers?

If you are 17 or 18, do the following statements apply to you?

I understand how credit cards work and the cost of buying on credit.

I know how to prepare for a job interview.

I can budget for regular bills and unexpected emergencies.

I can select over-the-counter medications for minor illnesses and follow directions for using them.

I know how and where to shop for bargains.

I understand that taking part in social activities can help me feel good.

I understand the costs of having a car, including loan payments, petrol, rego, insurance and maintenance.

I know how to find out about community resources, leisure and sporting activities or cultural groups.

I understand that if I rent a place I will need to sign a rental agreement, pay rent on time and keep the place clean and tidy.

I can avoid relationships that may be dangerous or unhealthy.

I understand the cost of setting up a rental arrangement eg bond, advance rent, utilities connection.

I can plan a weekly menu of nutritious meals and develop a shopping list within a budget.

I can list what I would need to set up my own place eg furniture, kitchen equipment.

I can cook a meal, including following a recipe and adjusting it to feed more or less people.

I have discussed my educational or training plans with career advisors or counsellors.

I know how to enrol to vote (or if 18, I have enrolled).

I know what education or training is needed for the work I'm interested in.

I have a tax file number.

I have a driver's licence or learner's permit.

I have a resume and know how to apply for a job.

MONEY

Are you any good with money? Financial independence is an important part of leaving care. Knowing where your money is coming from and being able to budget and manage money is necessary, especially when you have to pay bills. Below are some useful contacts for financial assistance, budgeting and managing your money.

Centrelink

Contact Centrelink to find out if you are entitled to government benefits. Find an office near you by visiting Centrelink's website at www.centrelink.gov.au or call the following:

- Employment Services on **132 850** for payments and services while you are looking for work
- Youth and Student Services on **132 490** for payments for students and young people, including rent assistance
- Family Assistance Office on **136 150** for payments if you are having a baby or raising children
- ABSTUDY for Indigenous students needing help with school costs. Phone **132 317** or pick up a form at any Centrelink office
- Centrelink Multilingual Services on **131 202** for help in a language other than English.

Centrelink also offers Centrepay, a free bill-paying service which helps you budget by making regular deductions from your Centrelink payment rather than having to deal with a large bill every month or quarter.

If you are unhappy with a decision made about your Centrelink entitlements, contact Centrelink to find out about the steps you can take.

Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)

TILA is a one-off payment of up to \$1,500 to help young people leave care and set themselves up independently. This can include costs such as moving and buying furniture or appliances. Your caseworker should be able to give you more information or call **1300 761 961** or visit www.tila.org.au.





Community Services

Community Services provides financial help to eligible care leavers.

The After Care Payment is a short-term fortnightly payment made to people aged 15 to 24 to help with accommodation. This is usually available only if you are studying or training full time.

Contingency payments are one-off payments available before or after leaving care to help with:

- education or training (includes buying books and other training materials and driving lessons where this would improve employment prospects)
- counselling and support

- fees to access records or certificates to resolve identity issues
- establishment costs for accommodation
- costs for legal advice where government-funded legal aid and law access services are unavailable
- dental treatment where timely services cannot be provided in the public health system
- respite or support workers to help develop independent living skills.

Not everyone is entitled to After Care or contingency payments. Discuss with your caseworker or care agency whether you are eligible for financial assistance from Community Services.



Money Stuff! website

The Money Stuff! website was developed by the NSW Office of Fair Trading and the Department of Education to help young people prepare for independent living.

Visit www.moneystuff.net.au for information on consumer responsibility and personal financial management.

Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC)

Fido, ASIC's consumer website, has lots of information and tips about organising your finances, budgeting and investing. Visit the young adults section at www.fido.asic.gov.au.

Consumer Credit Legal Centre Advice Line

This service provides over-the-phone information and advice on credit, debt and banking.

Call **1800 808 488** or visit www.cclcnsw.org.au.

Tax File Number (TFN)

A tax file number (TFN) is a unique number issued by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). While a TFN is not compulsory, without one you could have more tax taken from your pay than is necessary or be unable to receive government benefits.

To apply for a tax file number and for information about tax call the ATO on **13 28 61** or visit www.ato.gov.au.

Welfare Rights Centre (WRC)

For information about social security including payment rates, eligibility criteria, reviews, appeals, complaints and legal responsibilities, call the Welfare Rights Centre on **9211 5300** (within Sydney) or **1800 226 028** (outside Sydney) or visit www.welfarerights.org.au.



Dollarsmart

The Financial Planning Association of Australia has a web-based program called Dollarsmart designed to help teenagers improve their financial management skills. You can find Dollarsmart on the consumers page at www.fpa.asn.au.



HOUSING AND ACCOMMODATION

Moving into your own place is a big step and not always an easy one. Whether you end up renting on your own or sharing a place with others, it's important to know about things like bonds, rental agreements, the hidden costs of renting and your rights and responsibilities as a tenant. Below is a list of organisations that can help you to find somewhere to live.

It's important that you understand the requirements of having your own place. You may need to discuss this with your carer, caseworker or other support workers to make sure you can maintain a rental property including:

- budgeting well so you can pay the rent on time
- keeping the property clean and tidy
- following any rules in the rental agreement about letting people stay with you
- managing your visitors properly so you don't disturb the neighbours eg by having frequent noisy parties.

Housing Pathways

Housing Pathways is where you apply for public housing, community housing, Aboriginal housing and temporary accommodation. These social housing providers may ask whether, with or without support from others, you will be able to pay your rent on time, maintain your place in good condition and be a good neighbour. There is also a range of products to assist you to enter the private rental market such as contributions to advance rent and bond or assistance in keeping your home if you are falling behind in your rent, as well as general advice on looking for a private rental. To access any of these services, fill in the application form at www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au/How+to+apply/Application+Form/ or phone **1300 468 746** if you need assistance. For after-hours temporary accommodation call **1800 152 152**.

Youth Emergency Accommodation Line

This phone service provides support from a homelessness youth support worker and also has a 24-hour recorded message with details of vacancies in NSW youth refuges. Call **9318 1531** or **1800 424 830** if you are outside Sydney.

Homeless Persons Information Centre

This telephone information service can refer you to accommodation and support services if you are homeless or at risk of losing your home. Call **1800 234 566** any day between 9am and 10pm.

Aboriginal Hostels Limited

Aboriginal Hostels Limited provides temporary hostel accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Call **9310 2777**, email **sydney@ahl.gov.au** or visit **www.ahl.gov.au**

Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services

These services are available state-wide to provide advice about the rights and responsibilities of tenants and to assist you with rental issues. You can find your nearest service on the website **www.tenants.org.au**, or phone the Tenancy Advice Line **1800 251 101**.

Aboriginal Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Services (ATAAS)

ATAAS provides advice and advocacy on residential rentals in NSW for Aboriginal people.

You can find the details of these services at: **www.tenants.org.au** or call Greater Sydney: **9569 0222**
Southern NSW: **4472 9363** or **1800 672 185**
Western NSW: **6882 3611** or **1800 810 233**
North and North West NSW: **6643 4426** or **1800 248 913**

Office of Fair Trading

Fair Trading has useful information for first-time renters including bonds, rental agreements, tenant databases, sharing accommodation, Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services (TAAS) and the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal (CTTT). Call **133 220** or visit **www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au**

Rent/share accommodation

Places for rent or to share are advertised in newspapers, real estate agents (shopfronts and online) and on community noticeboards. Some websites are devoted just to shared accommodation, eg **www.flatmates.com.au**



EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Do you want to continue studying or gain new skills? Apart from helping you get on in life, your studies and training will increase your career choices and opportunities for work now and in the future.

A range of education and training options is available to you including apprenticeships, TAFE and university courses. There's also some advice on where to go to get help with education costs. You might be eligible for an allowance or other help before or after you leave care. Ask your caseworker or care agency about this.

NSW Department of Education and Training (DET)

Call DET on **9561 8000** or visit www.det.nsw.edu.au for information about school, further education and general training.

DET may be able to provide additional support and assistance to young people in care who attend school. Support would be based on a needs assessment.

TAFE NSW Information Centre

TAFE NSW offers more than 1,300 technical and further education courses. Call **131 601** or visit www.tafensw.edu.au

Apprenticeships Training Information Services

For information on apprenticeships and to find one that suits you call **1800 338 022** or visit www.natinfo.com.au

ABSTUDY (Centrelink)

ABSTUDY is an allowance that may help you stay at school or in further study if you are an Aboriginal student or full-time apprentice. Call **132 317** or visit your nearest Centrelink office.

University

Visit www.goingtouni.gov.au for advice on courses and how to get financial help with the cost of studying, including scholarships.

Aboriginal Education Council

For information about educational scholarships for Aboriginal young people call **9660 5696** or email aec1@bigpond.com.au or visit www.aec.org.au

Job Search

For information about training and apprenticeships see the career information section on the Job Search website at www.jobsearch.gov.au



Youth Connections

The Youth Connections program provides case management support to young people who have lost interest or are at risk of losing interest in education, family and/or the community. Contact your foster care agency for referral to your local Youth Connections service or go to www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Pages/YouthConnections.aspx and look for the list of Youth Connections providers.

EMPLOYMENT

Having a job gives you a purpose, provides you with an income and opens the door to meeting people and learning new skills. You can search for work by looking in newspapers, on internet job sites or by approaching employers directly. For advice on job hunting, interview skills or increasing your experience through volunteering, speak to your school, TAFE or university careers advisor, or visit the websites below.

Centrelink

Centrelink can help you with your job choices and with referrals to the Job Network service.

Visit www.centrelink.gov.au

Job Search

Visit www.jobsearch.gov.au for information on careers and current vacancies.

Year 12 – what next?

This government website has information about options for work, education and training. You can also find out what you do in different jobs and the skills you need for them, where to apply for an apprenticeship and even how to set up your own business.

Visit www.year12whatnext.gov.au

My Future

Visit www.myfuture.edu.au for information on a range of career-related topics.

Aboriginal Community Programs Unit

This service helps Aboriginal people find jobs and establish small businesses.

Call **9266 8704**.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING



It's important to take good care of your mind and body by exercising regularly, eating properly and minimising your use of alcohol and other drugs. You should also ask for your Medicare card before leaving care. This gives you access to free or low-cost treatment by doctors and optometrists and at public hospitals.

Medicare

If you didn't receive your Medicare card before leaving care you can apply for one in person at a Medicare office.

Or call **132 011** or visit

www.medicareaustralia.gov.au

Health Care Card

If you receive a Centrelink benefit or are on a low income you may qualify for a Health Care Card entitling you to reduced cost medicines and other concessions. To find out more visit your local Centrelink office or www.centrelink.gov.au



Lifeline

Lifeline is a 24-hour telephone counselling service for adults and young people. Call **131 114** or visit www.lifeline.org.au

Youth.NSW

For information on sexual health, mental health, smoking, drugs and alcohol as well as links to other health-related information see www.youth.nsw.gov.au/youth_links/health

Domestic Violence Helpline

This is a 24-hour telephone service for people experiencing domestic violence. Call **1800 656 463**.

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Call **9361 8000** or **1800 422 599** (outside Sydney) to access information, referrals and advice on this 24-hour telephone service.

Twenty 10

This service provides young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people with information and support on a wide range of issues. Call **8594 9555** or **1800 652 010** (outside Sydney) or visit www.twenty10.org.au

NSW Rape Crisis Centre

NSW Rape Crisis Centre is a 24-hour telephone and online crisis support and referral service for anyone who has experienced sexual violence. Call **1800 424 017** or visit www.nswrapecrisis.com.au

Family Planning NSW

For information about reproductive and sexual health issues or to locate a family planning clinic call **1300 658 886** or visit **www.fpahealth.org.au**

Kids Help Line

Kids Help Line provides information and counselling for people aged 5-25 on **1800 55 1800**. Counselling is also available online or via email at **www.kidshelp.com.au**

NSW Association for Youth Health (NAYH)

To find safe, free and confidential youth health services in your area visit **www.nayh.org.au/youth-health-services.html**. Medical, nursing and counselling services are provided.



YOUR RIGHTS, RECORDS AND IDENTITY

Your rights

Your rights and responsibilities change when you become an adult, so it's important to know what your rights are and what you can and can't do legally. For example, you can do things like vote for the first time but the penalties will be harsher if you break the law.

Below are some services which provide information and assistance with legal issues.

Youth.NSW

See the Young People page for information about legal rights at www.youth.nsw.gov.au

The Shopfront Youth Legal Centre

The Shopfront is a free legal service for homeless and disadvantaged young people up to 25 years old. Call **9360 1847** or visit www.theshopfront.org

Lawstuff

Lawstuff is designed to be used by young people and has information about many law topics and where to get help. Visit www.lawstuff.org.au

LawAccess NSW

The LawAccess NSW Legal Help Line provides telephone advice on **1300 888 529**. For links to information about the law visit www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au

Legal Aid

Legal Aid provides face-to-face advice. To find your nearest Legal Aid office see www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

NSW Disability Discrimination Legal Centre

The centre provides legal advice if you have a disability and feel you have been the target of discrimination. Call **1800 800 708**, email info@ddlcnsw.org.au or visit www.ddlcnsw.org.au

Australian Electoral Commission

Voting is compulsory in local, state and federal elections for all Australian citizens over 18 years of age. To be able to vote you must first enrol by completing an enrolment form from any post office, Australian Electoral Commission office or state electoral office. Call **132 326** or visit www.aec.gov.au

Your records

Your foster care agency

Community Services and any other agency that was responsible for you during your time in care will have records about you and may have original documents such as your birth certificate or academic certificates. Contact the agency if you want to see your records or have original documents returned to you.

Your identity

It is important to be able to prove who you are. To apply for identification such as a passport, driver's licence, NSW Photo Card or NSW Birth Card, you'll first need your birth certificate.

NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages

If you were born in NSW you can apply for a birth certificate by calling **1300 655 236** or visiting www.bdm.nsw.gov.au. If your birth was registered in another Australian state or territory, you will need to contact the relevant registry office.

Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA)

A driver's licence or NSW Photo Card from an RTA Motor Registry is a good form of identification. To find your nearest motor registry call **132 213** or visit www.rta.nsw.gov.au.



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AFTERCARE SERVICES

There are a number of support services you can tap into when you leave care. These aftercare services have information on independent living, finding accommodation, income support, education, training and health. They can also advise you on your options and refer you to specialist services if you need extra help. Your care agency may also be able to help.

Aftercare Resource Centre

Relationships Australia provides two separate aftercare services depending on your age.

The **Aftercare Resource Centre (ARC)** provides help to people aged 16-25 who have been in out-of-home care. Services include help with accommodation, legal issues, health, education and finances. Or you can call them if you just want to talk about your care experiences. Services are provided in western and northern Sydney and the Central Coast. Call **9890 3899** or **1800 656 884**.

The **ARC Support Service** is for people over 25 years anywhere in NSW who need help dealing with issues that have arisen because of their experiences in care. Call **1800 656 884**.

Marungbai Aboriginal After Care Service

To contact this service for Aboriginal young people who have been in care call **6551 3973**.

Centacare (Newcastle) Aftercare Service

For aftercare services in the Hunter region call **4979 1330**.

Centacare ALIVE Leaving Care / After Care Program

For aftercare services in inner-west and south-west Sydney call **8709 9333**.

ACE Aftercare (Burnside)

For aftercare services in south-west Sydney and the southern regions of NSW call **4628 3199**.

Community Services

Contact your local Community Services Centre (CSC) for information about aftercare services in areas not listed above. CSC locations can be found at www.community.nsw.gov.au.

Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC)

For support and assistance for young people with a disability call **8270 2000**.

MORE USEFUL CONTACTS

Need to know more? The Community Services website www.community.nsw.gov.au has information on leaving care and searching for and making contact with your birth family. Other useful contacts are listed below.

Create your future (CREATE Foundation)

CREATE provides information and services on a range of issues specifically for young people leaving care. Call **9267 0977** or **1800 655 105** or visit www.createyourfuture.org.au

Youth.gov.au

To see the Australian Government's online gateway to information, programs, services and resources for young people go to www.youth.gov.au

Reach Out

Reach Out is a web-based service that aims to improve young people's mental health and wellbeing through support, information and referrals. The service deals with many of the issues young people face including managing independence. Visit www.reachout.com.au

Inspire Foundation

The Inspire Foundation gives people aged 16-25 years opportunities to help themselves and others. To find out more about their national programs visit www.inspire.org.au

Link-up NSW

Link-up NSW helps Aboriginal adults who were separated from their families as children through wardship, adoption, fostering or institutional care, as well as Aboriginal families who were separated from their children. Call **1800 624 332** or **4759 1911** or visit www.linkupnsw.org.au

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army provides information about ways to find missing relatives, including their own Family Tracing Service. Call **9211 0277** or visit salvos.org.au/familytracing

NSW Ombudsman

The NSW Ombudsman investigates complaints from people who believe they have been treated unfairly by a NSW Government department or agency. If you have raised your concerns or complaints with your caseworker and are not satisfied with the response, you have the option of contacting the NSW Ombudsman on **9286 1000**.

MY CONTACTS

Add the contact details of services that can help you

Doctor
Dentist
Landlord
Carer
Electricity
Taxi
Public Transport
Bank

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Human Services
Community Services