



NSW Department of
Community Services

OUT OF HOME CARE SERVICE MODEL

SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT LIVING

This service model for Supported Independent Living has been developed by the NSW Department of Community Services in consultation with non government sector. The paper describes the key elements of a Supported Independent Living service which are considered to reflect best practice. As such, the service model is not designed to be prescriptive but should be read as a guide to current service development priorities.

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SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT LIVING MODEL

Summary

Supported Independent Living (SIL) services will extend the continuum of care to include young people in the parental responsibility of the Minister, aged 16 to under 18 years at the time of entering the program, who require assistance to successfully make the transition to independence and adulthood. The overall aim is to better prepare and support young people in making a smooth transition from out of home care to independent living, self-reliance and adulthood through the provision of accommodation and support services.

This paper describes the key components of the Supported Independent Living program. These include:

- a focus on young people leaving statutory out of home care to live independently or young people who have left an out of home care placement who require a period of additional support before assuming full independence.*
- access to case management and caseworker support within the program for a maximum of 24 months;*
- provision of stable (and potentially long term) accommodation. Development of skills, competencies and connections young people need to be able to successfully live independently;*
- agreement of young people to contribute 30% of their income (wage or Centrelink payments) towards rent and utility costs;*
- three 'best practice' semi independent living arrangements that meet the different support needs of young people (lead tenant households, supported tenancies, supported shared housing);*
- independent living skills training and peer support;*
- assistance (re)establishing social networks including family relationships;*
- assistance with access to education, training and employment assistance, health and counselling services, other required support services, and Aftercare Services, based on assessment of need.*

Upon exiting the program, young care leavers are a priority group for access to Aftercare Services, where assessed as in need of these services.

1. Introduction

This paper outlines the key components of the Supported Independent Living (SIL) model for young people in the parental responsibility of the Minister, who have left or are leaving care to live independently, and require transitional services that address their core needs for accommodation, financial assistance, employment and social networks in order to successfully make this transition.¹

Young people leaving care face greater challenges and obstacles to independence than young people who have the support of a stable family and community networks.² While most young people are now taking longer to transition to adulthood, the transition for young people leaving care can be accelerated and chaotic.³ They are more likely to experience low levels of educational attainment and high rates of unstable accommodation, unemployment, poverty, health problems,

¹ Stein M, *What Works in Leaving Care?* Barnardos 1997

² Children's Action Alliance, *Transitions Building Better Lives for Youth Leaving Foster Care*, September 2005, Voices for America's Children, *Effective Approaches to Supporting Foster Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*, Issues Brief, August 2004

³ UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Transitions Young Adults with Complex Needs*, Social Exclusion Unit, November 2005

substance abuse and early parenthood.⁴ Young people who have left care are also more likely to experience isolation, loneliness and suicidality.⁵

Outcomes for care leavers are influenced by many factors including their personal histories and experiences which have helped shape their interpersonal skills, abilities and motivation.⁶ This includes their care histories and the effect of systemic factors such as stability of placements, preparation for independence, accelerated transitions to adulthood and availability of extended support.⁷ Outcomes are also influenced by structural factors that affect all young people such as job markets, housing markets and social welfare policies.

Leaving care programs in the UK and US that offer a range of well planned preparation services and follow on support have been found to play an important role in improving outcomes for care leavers.⁸ Typically these programs provide life skills training, educational support, employment and career development support, befriending services, community outreach activities, supervised independent living and health care.⁹

2. Research

The main research resources relied on to develop this model are listed in the research bibliography at the end of this paper on pages 12-13.

3. Target group

The target group for the Supported Independent Living program is young people aged 16 to under 18 years at entry into the program who:

- are in the parental responsibility of the Minister;
- are unable to continue living with foster carers or return home;
- are leaving out of home care to live independently or who have left and out of home care placement but who require support to successfully transition to independence; and
- have been assessed as having the capacity to live independently after a period of support.

To be considered for Supported Independent Living services a young person must also:

- be receiving a wage or Centrelink payment;
- agree to contribute towards their share of the rent and utilities; and
- agree to be responsible for all personal costs such as food, clothes, toiletries, fares, entertainment;
- be willing to fully participate in daily activities as agreed in the case plan such as school, work, courses, counselling;
- be willing to have regular contact with caseworkers and other support workers as agreed in the case plan.

⁴ Courtney M & Dworksky A, *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19*, Chapin Hall, 2005. Lemon K, Hines A & Merdinger J, *From Foster Care to Young Adulthood: The Role of Independent Living Programs in Supporting Successful Transitions*, Elsevier 2004. Mendes P & Moslehuddin B, *Moving Out From the State Parental Home*, Children Australia, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2004

⁵ Green S & Jones A, *Improving Outcomes for Young People Leaving Care*, Foster Care News, Number 28, January 2003

⁶ Biehal N, Clayden J, Stein M & Wade J, *Moving One: Young People and Leaving Care Schemes*, 1984

⁷ Green S & Jones A, *Improving Outcomes for Young People Leaving Care*, Foster Care News, Number 28, January 2003

⁸ Biehal N, Clayden J, Stein M & Wade J, *Moving One: Young People and Leaving Care Schemes*, 1984

⁹ The Youth Transition Funders Group Foster Care Work Group, *Connected by 25*, 2004.

4. Program description

Supported Independent Living is an integrated accommodation and support program that aims to prepare and support young people in making a smooth transition from out of home care to independent living, self reliance and adulthood through the provision of public or private rental accommodation, case management and support services for up to 24 months. The goals of the program are:

- to prevent young people transitioning from statutory care to homelessness services;
- to maximise young people's capacity to live independently in the community;
- to improve social, economic and health outcomes for care leavers.

Young people are regularly assessed throughout the transition period and levels of support are responsive to the individual's changing needs. The main difference between most forms of supported accommodation such as refuges, hostels, group homes, or traditional lead tenancies, is that Supported Independent Living provides young people with the option of remaining in the property rather than having to move on.

Permanency planning principles are embedded in the program. Where reunification, adoption, legal guardianship, or placement with a relative is not an option for older adolescents in care, independence can be a permanency goal if the services and support identified in the leaving care plan could reasonably be expected to provide the young person with:

- long-term accommodation (as opposed to crisis/temporary accommodation); and
- the skills, competencies and connections they need to be able to eventually live and manage on their own.¹⁰

The leaving care plan must be developed in consultation with the young person prior to their entry into the program. Young people are to be given a copy of the approved plan which may include (depending on their assessed need) a written description of the Supported Independent Living services they will receive to help them prepare for their transition from care to independent living. These services must be designed to meet the core needs of young people for:

- accommodation which is stable, appropriate and affordable;
- living skills which include home management and budgeting;
- financial self-sufficiency through education, training or employment;
- relationships with family, significant others and friends;
- health, welfare and community resources;
- parenting skills; and
- ongoing crisis support after completing the program.

Not all young people will need this level of support, participation is voluntary and a young person may exit the program when they are ready to move on. However, the maximum amount of time a young person can remain in the program is 24 months. Alternative accommodation and support strategies must be developed for young people who, at any point during the program, are assessed as not having the capacity to live independently without long-term support. In this situation, Supported Independent Living caseworkers will work with relevant government and non government agencies to ensure the young person gains timely access to required mainstream or specialist accommodation and support services.

4.1 Outcomes

Acquiring life skills necessary to becoming fully self reliant is the long-term intended outcome of the program. The medium term outcomes participants would be expected to achieve by the time they exit the program are the demonstrated ability to:

¹⁰ Pokempner J, Rosado L, *Dependent Youth Aging Out of Foster Care: A Guide for Judges*, Juvenile Law Centre, 2003

- meet their personal care needs (eg. wash, iron, cook, clean, shop);
- meet the obligations of a tenancy agreement (eg live peaceably and respectfully with neighbours or co-tenants, respect property and meet financial obligations);
- meet work, training, education or voluntary activity requirements;
- manage their budget;
- use public transport;
- access local health and community services.

4.2 Key components

The key components of the program are:

- **Accommodation services**
 - accommodation that is appropriate and affordable;
 - supported living arrangements that vary in intensity of day to day support provided;
 - 'stay put' option available to young people exiting the program who have demonstrated the capacity to maintain a tenancy.
- **Support services**
 - independent living skills training;
 - education, training and employment assistance;
 - (re)establishing social and family networks and peer support;
 - health and counselling services;
 - other required services (education/training/employment support, recreational support, psychological counselling, therapeutic intervention, specialist medical, allied health and dental services);
 - aftercare services, where needed.

5. Options for service provision

A range of flexible time limited supported living arrangements are required to give young people the best chance of making a smooth transition from care to independence. The accommodation and support needs of a young person are likely to be influenced by their care experiences, how well they have been prepared for independence, their developmental level and other factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability and health.¹¹

There are 3 options for providing the service: (1) supported shared housing, (2) lead tenant and (3) supported tenancies. All 3 options share the following components:

- agency sets up a furnished house or apartment rented from the public or private sector;
- young person contributes a proportion of their income towards the rent and utilities or their share of costs.¹² They are also responsible for paying for their own food and personal items;
- agency pays the difference between young people's contribution towards the rent and the actual rent charged for the property;
- agency maintains appropriate insurance and pays for the repair of deliberate property damage caused by residents and negotiates the repayment of property damage debts with the resident responsible for the damage;
- levels of caseworker support depend on how much support a young person actually requires at any particular time with levels of support gradually decreasing as a young person's competencies increase. Initially, some may require intensive daily support (10-20 hours per week). Most will only require weekly support (2-4 hours per week);
- the maximum length of time young people should remain in the program is 24 months;

¹¹ UK Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, *Care leaving strategies – a good practice handbook*, 2002

¹² Aligns with proportion of income currently paid in rent by NSW public housing tenants

- agency develops alternative accommodation and support strategies in consultation with relevant government and non government service providers where a young person requires ongoing specialist support in order to live independently;
- agency assists young people exiting the program with establishing their own tenancies in the private or public sector if the option of remaining in the property is not available, or if the young person wishes to move to be nearer support networks, educational services, or employment;
- agency assists young people exiting the program to receive priority access to required aftercare services.

The differences between the 3 options are outlined in the following table.

Supported shared housing (Least intensive option)	Lead tenant households (More intensive option)	Supported tenancies (Most intensive option)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable for up to 3-4 young people able to cope with share living who do not require daily supervision or intensive caseworker support. • Staff/volunteers do not live on the premises. • Weekly caseworker support provided to young person in home, at school, college, or workplace. Caseworker support may be increased to prevent a crisis situation from developing, where required. • Share housing is not time-limited. A young person may stay in share accommodation after exiting the program. • Young person cannot take over the tenancy as vacancies in share housing are to be filled when they become available. • A property owned by the agency can be used for this type of arrangement because it remains open to new participants and is essentially a cost neutral option. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable for up to 2-4 young people requiring daily supervision. Limited to 2 if young persons have difficulty coping with share living situation. • Live-in volunteer lead tenants receive free rent and utilities to oversee the day-to-day running of the home and provide positive role modelling and informal personal support. The lead tenant is not expected to take on a caseworker role and has access to 24 hour support. • Weekly caseworker support provided to young person in home, at school, college, or workplace. Caseworker support may be increased to prevent a crisis situation from developing, where required. • Young person(s) may have option of assuming the lease in cases where they have demonstrated the capacity to meet the obligations of the tenancy agreement (eg pay their rent, look after the property, not cause a nuisance to neighbours). If they have not demonstrated this capacity the tenancy is likely to fail without ongoing support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable for 1-2 young people who are unable to cope with share living situation, are not suitable for lead tenant arrangement and require daily caseworker support. • Staff/volunteers do not live on the premises. • Intensive daily caseworker support provided to young person in home, at school, college, or workplace. Support is gradually reduced as young person's competencies increase. • Young person(s) may have option of assuming the lease in cases where they have demonstrated the capacity to meet the obligations of the tenancy agreement.

6. Support Services

6.1 Independent living skills training

Agencies will be required to develop an independent living skills program that teaches young people what they need to know to live independently. Key areas to be addressed in the curriculum include food shopping, cooking, housekeeping, laundry, budgeting, tenancy issues, accessing local services and supports, stress management, personal care and safety, relationship building, health, including mental and sexual, parenting skills, and drug and alcohol education.

Participation in skill building activities is to be based on a young person's needs identified through a comprehensive life skills assessment. Training may involve a combination of hands-on experience, one-to-one planned activities and group workshops. It may be delivered by the agency

through support staff such as caseworkers, youth workers, or lead tenants and through key partners such as community health services, youth services and local council services.

6.2 Education, training and employment assistance

Successful education, training and employment outcomes are closely linked to stability, continuity and encouragement.¹³ To help improve outcomes for Supported Independent Living participants in these areas, caseworkers will assist young people in identifying their career goals and actively engage them in career planning. Caseworkers will also make links with education, training and employment agencies to secure the services and support needed to help young people overcome barriers to learning and the achievement of set goals.

6.3 Social networks and peer support

Supported Independent Living plays an important role in building young peoples social networks, self-esteem and confidence. Caseworkers will help young people establish and maintain family relationships, including relationships with siblings, grandparents and extended family members, by encouraging ongoing contact and mediating between young people and their families. Caseworkers will also link young people into local youth and leisure activities to facilitate social contacts, help combat isolation and strengthen a young person's interpersonal skills.

Peer support can offer young people a different type of relationship to professional help and traditional adult mentoring which tend to be goal focused.¹⁴ The peer support component of the Supported Independent Living program is similar in design to peer mentoring projects in the UK in which slightly older carer leavers who have successfully transitioned to independence may offer befriending services to young people leaving care. The rationale behind peer support is that someone the young person views as their peer acts as a role model who guides them through the complex process of moving to independent living through sharing their experience of care, leaving care and aftercare.¹⁵

Agencies may recruit, select, train and supervise young people who have already passed through the OoHC system and transitioned to independence, or young adults from the young person's wider kinship network, who are willing to act as volunteer peer supports for young people willing to participate in this aspect of the program.

6.4 Health and counselling services

Young people leaving care with mental health or emotional or behavioural difficulties are more likely to experience post care instability, homelessness, poor employment outcomes and deterioration in physical and mental health.¹⁶ Caseworkers will engage young people in health service planning and decision making so that they are prepared for assuming responsibility for decisions affecting their health and learn how to access required services. Caseworkers will also establish links and work collaboratively with mental health clinicians, health professionals and health services to improve young people's access to these services.

¹³ Stein M, *What Works in Leaving Care*, Barnardo's UK, 1997

¹⁴ Clayden J, Stein M, *Mentoring young people leaving care 'Someone for me'*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK, 2005

¹⁵ Clayden J, Stein M, *Mentoring young people leaving care 'Someone for me'*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK, 2005

¹⁶ Dixon J, Wade J, Byford S, Weatherly H, Lee J, *Young People Leaving Care: A Study of Outcomes and Costs*, University of York, 2004

6.5 Support services

Additional support services required to help young people make a smooth transition to independence form part of the service model. Determined on the basis of need, all young people participating in the program will have access to these supports in cases where their assessed needs cannot be met by universal services, or where available services are unlikely to be provided within a reasonable timeframe. Types of additional services that may need to be arranged or purchased include: education and training, employment and recreational support; psychological counselling and therapeutic intervention; and specialist medical, allied health and dental services.

6.6 Aftercare services

Supported Independent Living recognises that a successful transition from dependence to self-sufficiency is an ongoing process that for many will not neatly end at age 18, or within the timeframe of the program. To build on the stabilising and preparatory work already undertaken through Supported Independent Living, caseworkers will continue to help young people to effectively transition from out-of-home care services to mainstream community services, as required. This includes helping young people exiting the program find and establish themselves in appropriate and affordable accommodation where the option of assuming the lease is not available, or if the young person wishes to move to be nearer support networks, educational services, or employment.

Caseworkers will also engage the young person in aftercare planning and link young people into required services identified in the plan approximately 3 months before they are due to exit the program. The caseworker will retain responsibility for effectively managing and implementing the young person's aftercare plan after the young person has exited the program.

Types of aftercare assistance that may be available to the young person, based on assessed need, include:

- counselling and casework support;
- support for vocational or educational activities;
- professional therapy;
- legal advice and representation;
- rental bond or establishment support;
- medical and dental.

7. Staffing

7.1 Program Management

Key functions of this position include:

- overseeing the running of the service in accordance with DoCS policies and Out of Home Care standards specified by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian;
- actively promoting a positive culture within the service, which is reflected in the organisation's policies and procedures;
- ensuring that the program's goals and philosophies are understood and implemented by all staff;
- providing supervision that aims to support staff in providing a consistent quality;
- facilitating ongoing staff training; and
- ensuring that the program is objectively evaluated, and reviewed in light of evaluation.
- coordinating the provision of accommodation services including locating suitable properties and property management activities;
- recruiting, selecting, training and supporting lead tenants;

- recruiting, selecting, training and supporting volunteer peer supports;
- matching young people with lead tenants and peer supports;
- follow up support after leaving the program.

7.2 Case management and caseworker responsibilities

Agencies are responsible for undertaking case management functions and performing casework tasks in accordance with the each young person's leaving care plan, the Office of the Children's Guardian's Out of Home Care standards and policies, the *Children and Young Persons' (Care and Protection) Act and Regulations* and the Service Agreement and Specifications.

Key case management tasks include:

- working in collaboration with other agencies, relevant professionals, young people, past carers willing to be involved in the young person's life, families and appropriate cultural and community representatives to ensure that all relevant parties are involved in leaving care planning and review processes;
- coordinating services identified in the leaving care plan so that they are provided in a timely way, and ensure effective channels of communication between the service providers are maintained;
- providing individual advice and support to young people in their home, school/college, or workplace;
- encouraging family contact and mediating between young people and their families as outlined in the case plan;
- regularly monitoring, reviewing and recording progress in meeting case plan objectives and goals;
- supervising and supporting lead tenants in a way that aims to provide a consistent, quality service;
- arranging or providing timely and appropriate transitional and/or aftercare services for young people exiting the program.

7.3 Volunteer lead tenants

The primary role of volunteer lead tenants is to act as a positive live-in role model for a household of young people in a safe, stable and supportive living environment. Lead tenants are expected to continue with their own work or studies and young people are expected to be at school, college, or work, during the day. Lead tenants are not expected to take on a carer or caseworker role and will have access to training, supervision and 24 hour on call support. Ideally, relief lead tenants should also be recruited to enable primary lead tenants to participate in outside social activities in the evening and have weekends away.

Specific responsibilities of the lead tenant are to:

- stay each night (including weekends) in the property;
- be a positive role model to young people living in the shared household;
- oversee the day-to-day running of the household;
- assist and encourage young people to develop domestic skills;
- assist and encourage young people to develop routines and practice their independent living skills;
- participate in training sessions, house meetings and discussions;
- participate in fortnightly supervision with the caseworker;
- liaise with agency staff and caseworkers when issues in the household arise;
- contact the Supported Independent Living caseworker in the case of an emergency;
- act in the best interests of the residents at all times;
- maintain confidentiality; and

- ensure agency policies and procedures relating to the program are implemented.

Lead tenants should be able to volunteer the time and energy needed to develop supportive relationships with young people and demonstrate the following competencies:

- ability to communicate with young people and liaise with agency staff;
- humour, patience, consistency, flexibility, initiative, honesty and maturity;
- ability to resolve minor household disputes;
- good housekeeping skills;
- understanding of the role of a lead tenant including a minimum 12 months commitment.

7.4 Family and volunteer peer supports

Older care leavers or young adults from the young person's wider family and kinship network may be recruited to act as volunteer peer supports for young people willing to participate in a peer support scheme. Their primary role will be to provide social support during the transition to independent living. Volunteers will receive regular supervision, training and reimbursement of expenses and must be willing to:

- make a minimum 6 month commitment to the young person;
- participate in training that focuses on the skills required to provide appropriate support specifically to young people transitioning to independence including training on how to negotiate levels of contact, establish boundaries, ensure privacy, and minimise dependency;
- undertake a comprehensive peer support assessment and matching process;
- negotiate the type and frequency of contact with the young person;
- have regular contact, including outings, as agreed with the young person;
- help to (re) connect the young person to family or kin; and
- have at least fortnightly supervision with a caseworker.

7.5 Specialist staff

Specialist staff will not be specifically employed or contracted as part of the program but required specialist services will be accessed on a needs basis. Services will need to have appropriate access to and links with specialist service providers such as psychologists, speech pathologists or tutors.

8. Promoting participation and rights of young people

8.1 Participation of young people

Supported Independent Living services will:

- conduct genuine, ongoing consultation and facilitate participation of young people, and their families in the making of decisions that affect them; and
- provide young people and their families with information (in a manner and language that they can understand) which facilitates their participation.

8.2 Promoting the rights of young people and families

Supported Independent Living services will:

- inform young people and their families of their rights (in a manner which is appropriate to their age, developmental capacity and cultural and linguistic background). This includes information about their rights under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and information about complaint and appeals processes;
- provide all young people with the *Charter of Rights* and ensure the agency advances and complies with the Charter;
- ensure that the privacy of young people and their families is respected, confidentiality is maintained and information is collected and exchanged in accordance with the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*; and
- have policies and procedures in place to appropriately process complaints and appeals by young people and their families within clearly stated timeframes.

APPENDIX: Research Bibliography

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