



Leaving care planning: What are the views of young people in out-of-home care?

Snapshot

- Young people legally leave statutory out-of-home care (OOHC) at 18 years of age. While some remain living with their carer/s, many are making a critical move to adulthood much earlier than their peers.
- This transition, combined with their trauma experiences prior to entering care, makes these young people extremely vulnerable to negative outcomes. Supporting them to navigate this transition is key.
- Two thirds (66%) of young people who completed the 2018 NSW OOHC Survey felt they received as much help as they needed to make decisions about their future. The responses in the 2018 NSW Residential Care Survey were less positive with less than half (42%) of young people reporting they received as much help as they needed.
- Young people leaving care said they needed more support in key life domains including in 'education, training and work', 'managing money', 'accessing legal services', and staying in touch with family, friends and culture.
- Young people were more likely to say they received adequate assistance to make decisions about their future when they had been in a long term placement.
- More timely and thorough leaving care planning and support could help young people feel more satisfied with the leaving care planning process, and achieve better quality and tailored supports during this critical time.

Introduction

Young people leaving care are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged social groups in Australia.^{1 2} This FACSIAR Evidence to Action Note provides an overview of what young people think about the leaving care support they receive. We discuss implications for policy and practice and provide links to resources that practitioners can use in their work with young people to prepare and plan for their transition to independence and adulthood.

The findings are drawn from two surveys conducted by the Department of Communities and Justice (formerly Family and Community Services) in 2018 – the NSW OOHC Survey and the NSW Residential Care Survey. The leaving care indicator was one of eight high level indicators in these surveys. For the leaving care indicator, young people were asked a series of questions about whether they get as much help as they needed in eight life domains (Box 1).



Further information about the methodology, sample and survey responses for other indicators in these surveys are available in the FACSIAR Report, [‘The views of NSW children and young people in out of home care, 2018.’](#)

Box 1: Leaving Care indicator survey questions



Young people aged 15-17 years were asked nine questions related to the leaving care indicator:

- Do you get enough help to make decisions about your future?
- Do you get enough help with:
 - a) education, training and work?
 - b) managing your money?
 - c) keeping healthy?
 - d) learning household skills like cleaning and cooking meals?
 - e) staying in touch with friends and family?
 - f) staying in touch with your culture and religion?
 - g) housing/accommodation?
 - h) accessing legal services?

Why is leaving care planning important?

Many young people leave care at a critical time in their lives. In NSW, young people legally leave OOHC at the age of 18 years. Whilst some young people stay living with their carer/s, others return to live with their birth families or transition to independent or semi-independent living. Most have just finished school, and are moving into employment, further study or training. Many young people do not have the skills they need to live independently.

In Australia, outcomes for OOHC leavers are not routinely monitored.³ What we do know from Australian and international research is that young people leaving care are more likely to experience:

- homelessness and housing instability
- mental health issues
- unemployment and underemployment
- substance misuse
- involvement in the criminal justice system
- early parenthood
- poorer educational outcomes.⁴

Research shows that thorough leaving care planning leads to better post-care outcomes.⁵ Unfortunately, many young people do not receive adequate leaving care support to prepare them for independent living and life after care. The Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study, which has followed the trajectories of children and young people in OOHC in NSW since 2011, found:

- Of the 46 young people* who completed interviews about leaving care in Waves 2 and 3 (2013-2016), just under half indicated a caseworker had been talking to them about a plan for the next few years.
- Of the 20 young people (Waves 2 and 3) who answered the question about a written leaving care plan, 50% reported they had a written plan and 40% had written information about possible services and support available.⁶

The Beyond 18 study reported similar findings. This study consisted of a three-wave online survey of young people who had an OOHC experience in Victoria commencing in 2015. In the first wave of the study, 22% of young people in OOHC and 46% of care leavers said they had a transition plan. Similarly, young people in Wave 2 of the study also reported low levels of engagement in formal leaving care planning with only 22% of young people in OOHC and 33% of care leavers reporting they had a transition plan.⁷

What did young people say about leaving care planning?

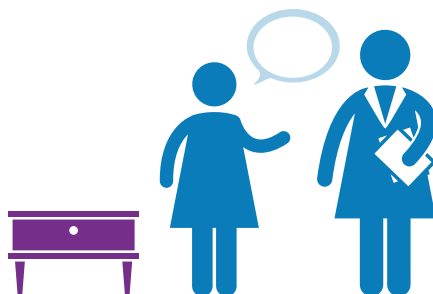
Of the 71 young people aged 15-17 years who answered the question about leaving care in the 2018 NSW OOHC Survey, two thirds (66%) felt they received as much help as they needed to make decisions about their future. These findings were comparable to the National OOHC Survey results.

The responses in the NSW Residential Care Survey were less positive with less than half (42%) of the 79 young people who completed the survey reporting they received as much help as they needed to make decisions about their future.

Who needs more help?

1 in 3
NSW OOHC
Survey

6 in 10
NSW Residential
Care Survey



Note: Young people (aged 15-17 years) who reported they needed more help in leaving care planning.

Source: 2018 NSW OOHC Survey dataset and 2018 NSW Residential Care Survey dataset.

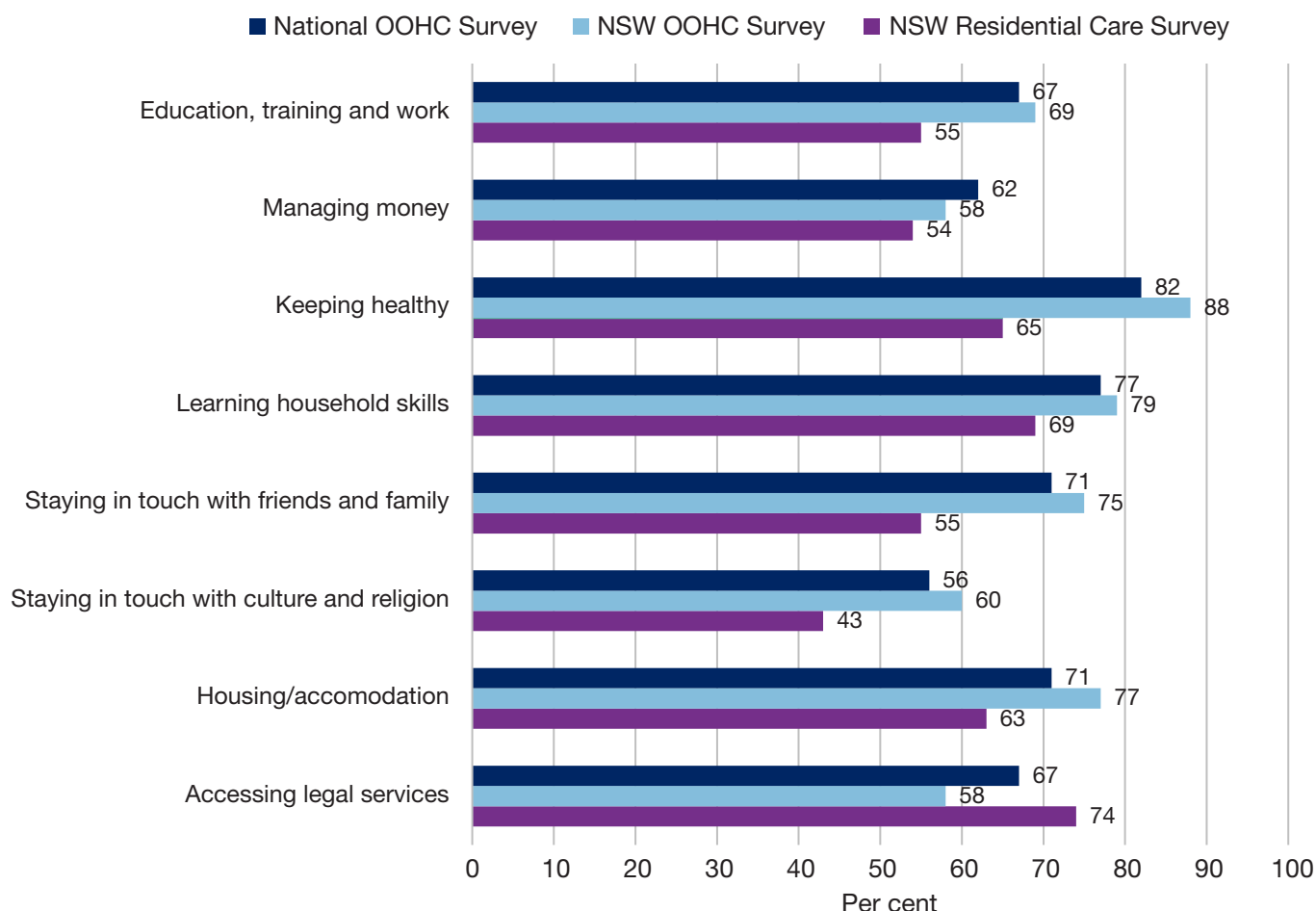
Young people need more support across key life domains

Young people were asked a series of questions about whether they get as much help as they needed in eight life domains (see Box 1). Across both surveys, young people leaving care reported they needed more support in almost all of the eight domains.

* The young people who participated in the survey entered OOHC for the first time during middle childhood therefore are not representative of all young people leaving care.

NSW OOHC Survey results were generally more positive than the national results for most domains except 'managing money' and 'accessing legal services'. Compared to both the NSW OOHC Survey and the National OOHC Survey, young people who completed the NSW Residential Care Survey were less likely to report they were getting as much help as they needed across all domains except 'accessing legal services' (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Young people in care by adequacy of leaving care assistance overall and across eight life domains, 2018



Source: 2018 NSW OOHC Survey dataset and 2018 NSW Residential Care Survey dataset. National data based on AIHW material.

In the NSW OOHC Survey:

- Around 88% of young people reported they were getting as much help as they needed in 'keeping healthy'. This compares to 82% in the National OOHC Survey and 65% in the NSW Residential Care Survey.
- More than 70% of young people were satisfied with the help they received in the domains of 'housing/accommodation', 'staying in touch with friends and family' and 'learning household skills'.
- Around six in ten young people were getting as much help as they needed in 'accessing legal services', 'staying in touch with culture and religion' and 'managing money'.

In the NSW Residential Care Survey, responses were less positive:

- Around half of young people reported they were getting as much help as they needed in 'staying in touch with friends and family', 'managing money' and 'education, training and work'.
- Around six in ten young people reported they were not getting enough help to stay in touch with their culture and religion.

Who is getting as much help as they need?

Legend: ■ NSW OOHC Survey ■ NSW Residential Care Survey

Education, training and work

around
7 in 10
and
5 in 10



Housing/accommodation

around
3 in 4
and
6 in 10



Staying in touch with family and friends

around
3 in 4
and
5 in 10



Staying in touch with culture and religion

around
6 in 10
and
4 in 10



Note: Young people (aged 15-17 years) who reported they were getting as much help as they need in leaving care planning.

Source: 2018 NSW OOHC Survey dataset and 2018 NSW Residential Care Survey dataset.

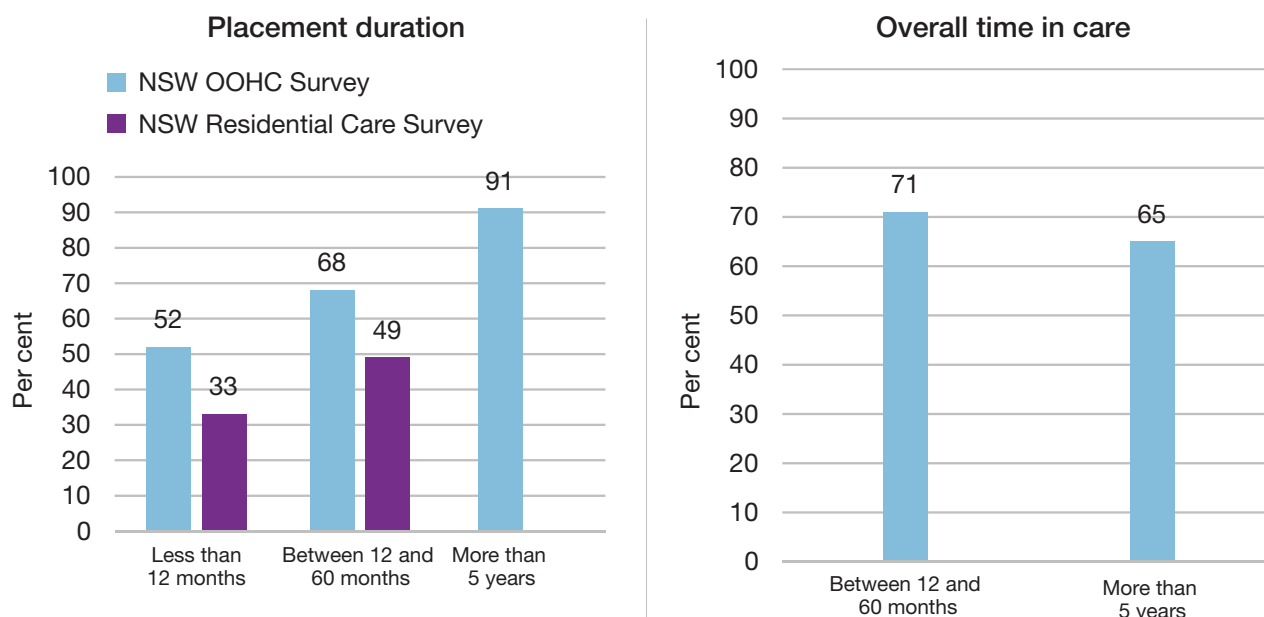
Those in long term placements are more likely to be getting the help they need

Young people were more likely to report they received adequate assistance to make decisions about their future when they had been in a long term placement. In the NSW OOHC Survey, 91% of young people reported they were getting as much help as they needed when they had been in a placement for more than five years. This compares to 68% for placements between 12 and 60 months and 52% for placements less than 12 months (Figure 2).

In the NSW Residential Care Survey, young people who had been in a placement for between 12 and 60 months were more likely to report having received adequate assistance compared with those who had been in a placement for less than 12 months. A difference of 16 percentage points separated these two groups (Figure 2).

In the NSW OOHC Survey, young people were less satisfied with the assistance they received to make decisions about their future the longer they had been in out-of-home care, overall. Around two-thirds (65%) of young people who had been in OOHC for more than five years reported receiving adequate assistance with leaving care planning, compared with 71% of young people who had been in care between 12 and 60 months (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Young people aged 15-17 years who received adequate assistance when leaving care by placement duration and time in care, 2018



Source: 2018 NSW OOHC Survey dataset and 2018 NSW Residential Care Survey dataset.

Female versus male: How do they compare?

In the NSW OOHC Survey, the proportion of female young people who reported receiving as much help as they needed in leaving care planning was 12 percentage points higher than male young people (73% and 61%). However, for young people who completed the NSW Residential Care Survey, male young people were more likely to report receiving as much help as they needed in leaving care planning compared to female young people (47% compared to 34%).

What do these findings mean for policy and practice?

There is a need for more thorough leaving care planning

The findings from the NSW OOHC Survey and NSW Residential Care Survey are not unique. Research shows that leaving care planning is often piecemeal, making young people even more vulnerable to negative outcomes.⁵

More thorough leaving care planning and support could help young people feel more satisfied with the leaving care planning process and their involvement in decision making, making the transition from out-of-home care a smoother one. Overall, young people who completed the NSW Residential Care Survey were less positive in their responses to most questions, highlighting a need for improved leaving care planning with this cohort.

Quality aftercare supports are vital

The literature highlights a number of other approaches that could improve outcomes for young people leaving OOH. For example, improving the quality of care and providing more specialised aftercare supports.³

In NSW, there are a number of leaving care and aftercare supports and services available to young people in OOH or those who have left OOH (see Box 2). At the time the surveys were conducted, OOH services provided by the NSW Government and Funded Service Providers were undergoing significant reform. This reform included introduction of the Permanency Support Program (PSP), the primary program that delivers OOH in NSW.

Young people need to be aware of available supports and access them

It is unclear how well leaving care and aftercare services are utilised in NSW. What we do know is not all young people in OOHC are engaged in thorough leaving care planning and not all young people who leave OOHC access the full range of aftercare supports and services that are available to them.

A qualitative study, published in 2019, involving biographical narrative interviews with a subsample of 22 young people who had left care found there is an absence of a clear pathway into aftercare services in NSW. Whilst this study involved a small sample and focused only on access to specialist aftercare services, the study highlights some important findings about aftercare service use. For some young people, they were unaware of the services available to them and how to access them and for others, they were not ready to access services and wanted a break from the care and protection system. A key theme that emerged from the interviews was that most young people wished they had been supported by aftercare services sooner to avoid or better manage instability immediately after leaving care.

In 2018/2019, DCJ and specialist aftercare services funded by the Aftercare Program collected data on the needs, interventions and outcomes of more than 450 young people and care leavers in NSW. This analysis found that the most common needs of young people and care leavers were around seeking help with accommodation and obtaining financial assistance. About one in three specialist aftercare service users identified securing stable accommodation and/or reducing their risk of homelessness as a primary need.

These findings highlight that earlier planning, timely support and continuity of aftercare support could help to identify risks, prevent crises and support young people to achieve stability and success.

Box 2: Leaving care and aftercare supports and services in NSW



- Young people who are leaving care or have left OOHC in NSW can access leaving care and aftercare services through DCJ and funded service providers.
- Leaving care and aftercare services are provided through the Permanency Support Program (PSP). PSP offers the following services:
 - The 15+ Years Old Reconnect Package helps practitioners to provide additional support for young people who have limited or no family connection whilst in care to support reconnection.
 - The Leaving Care Package helps practitioners to spend extra time with young people to develop their leaving care plans. Practitioners should start having leaving care conversations when a young person is 15 years of age. These conversations should include the young person, their carer and other significant people in the young person's life.
 - A written plan should be developed that includes key information such as culture and connection; health and wellbeing; education; training and employment; living skills; legal issues; financial support and entitlements; and accommodation. This leaving care plan should be modified and adjusted as needed to reflect the young person's needs and goals. Young people should also be informed during the leaving care planning phase about the aftercare supports that are available to them until 25 years of age.
 - DCJ and funded service providers are required to continue supporting young people who have left OOHC until they reach 25 years of age, to help them achieve a successful transition to adulthood.
 - The Care Leaver's Line provides advice and guidance to young people in OOHC and care leavers.
- Specialist aftercare services are also available if young people have more complex needs or are unable to obtain the aftercare support from the agency that managed their OOHC placement.

Resources for practitioners and policy makers

[Leaving care and aftercare resources for caseworkers](#) are available on the DCJ website.

[Leaving care and aftercare resources for young people leaving care](#) are available on the DCJ website.

[Leading the way: Preparing young people for leaving care](#) is a resource to help foster, relative and kinship carers support young people for leaving care. It provides useful and practical information on teaching life skills, helping young people to make plans and supporting young people to deal with change.

The [YOU website](#) is for 15-25 year olds who are currently or have been in OOHC. This website is about encouraging young people to plan for their future, to know their rights and what to ask for to support them to make informed decisions for their future.

The Care Leaver's Line provides advice and guidance to young people in OOHC and care leavers and helps young people navigate the system in NSW. Contact: 1800 994 686 or email CareleaversLine@dcj.nsw.gov.au

The Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study team have published a research report, [Leaving care cohort \(15-17 years\) statistical report: Experiences of young people who entered out-of-home care aged 9-14 years](#)

About the Surveys

- The NSW OOHC Survey and NSW Residential Care Survey were last conducted in 2015. The 2018 NSW OOHC Survey was collected as part of the National OOHC Survey and was completed by 322 children and young people aged 8-17 years residing in OOHC under the NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1988.
- The 2018 NSW Residential Care Survey was completed by 143 children and young people aged 8-17 years residing in residential OOHC under the NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1988.
- Further information about the methodology, sample and NSW results are available in the FACSIAR Report, '[The views of NSW children and young people in out of home care, 2018.](#)'
- National results are available in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report, The views of children and young people in out-of-home care: overview of indicator results from second national survey, 2018 [available at www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/ab21f8c3-3d5b-423e-9d36-2050ebe17ea6/aihw-cws-68.pdf.aspx?inline=true].



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Endnotes

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- ⁶ Burke, S, Hopkins, J, Paxman, M, Zhou, A, & Butler, M 2019, *Leaving care cohort (15-17 years) statistical report: Experiences of young people who entered out-of-home care aged 9-14 years. Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care, Research Report Number 5*, Department of Communities and Justice, Sydney.
- ⁷ Purtell, J, Muir, S, & Carroll, M 2019, *Beyond 18: The Longitudinal Study on Leaving Care Wave 2 Research Report: Transitioning to post-care life*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- ⁸ Skattebol, J, Hamilton, M, Thomson, C, Blaxland, M, & valentine, k 2019, *Stories of aftercare services and support needs after leaving care: A snapshot from the Stories of Resourcing and Resourcefulness project*, SPRC Report 11/19, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW, Sydney.