



# Preparing young people to leave care during COVID-19

27 May 2020 | Philip Mendes and Jacinta Waugh

## Comments

“ Hello, Great information and webinar. I just have a question regarding extending leaving care for young people in NSW, during the COVID-19 situation. NSW has been hard hit with COVID-19 more than other states, but there seems to be little support for these young people. Do you know if other states are going to extend leaving care at this time? Thank you

*Kate | 27 May 2020*

“ Victoria formally announced that extended care supports would be available for those turning 18 between March and December 2020 till June 2021. That includes a care or housing allowance, flexible funding, and casework support. I believe most other jurisdictions have implicitly promised additional support during this period.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ My understanding is that NSW are looking to change LC process. However, would I be right in thinking they are not looking at a right to stay in foster care to 21?

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ To the best of our knowledge, NSW have not stated any intention to extend OOHC (foster, kinship or residential care) beyond 18 years. According to a paper presented by the NSW Government to a Their Futures Matter Information Session in July 2019, some financial payments are available from 18-25 years including education financial support, safer drivers course, and rent assistance for housing. But the Carer Allowance ceases once the young person turns 18 years.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ Will there be extending care, like in Vic be provided to young people in NSW?

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ That is a question that needs to be addressed directly to the NSW Government and/or the responsible Minister.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*



“ **My understanding is that TAS and VIC now have an option to stay in care until 21yo?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ The Home Stretch advocacy campaign has resulted in 4 states trialling forms of extended care. Both Tasmania and South Australia are funding foster care placements till 21 years. Western Australia commenced a trial program supporting 20 young people in May 2019, and Victoria introduced a pilot program in September 2018 providing extended support to 250 young people over five years, whether transitioning from foster care, residential care or kinship care. Additionally, the ACT introduced a form of extended care in 2014 providing financial and casework assistance to care leavers till 25 years of age.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **When you say extending care is discretionary rather than mandatory in Australia at the moment, can you expand on what this might look like?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ Extending care until 21 years would mean this would be offered as a universal option in every State and Territory. There are two possible pathways for introduction. One is that each jurisdiction would independently introduce policies, programs and required funding to provide this support. Another option is the model introduced in the USA whereby the national government provides a financial incentive to those states which introduce extended care programs.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **SA has currently extended care for young people in foster placements, however, the young people in independent living require more support as they do not have the support of foster carers. It would be good to discuss how Departments can support these young care leavers better.**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ One option is the Victorian model which includes three components: an accommodation allowance; caseworker assistance based on regular relationship-based contact; and a funding package that assists the young person to access critical education, employment and health supports. There has been a major debate in England over the Staying Put scheme which does not assist the approximately 9 per cent of care leavers from residential care (called Children's Homes) who are often the most disadvantaged. The government chose instead to introduce a Staying Close scheme whereby youth transitioning from residential care would live nearby their former homes in order to maintain existing positive relationships with their former carers. The Staying Close pilot is currently being evaluated.



*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **How do we build resilience and reduce isolation to those young people with different cultural background?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ The ecomap may be helpful, if used in a culturally responsive way. For instance, when talking to the young person, maybe asking them about anyone who is in their specific cultural community – group members, leaders and peers - will help with discovering who in the young person’s network is important to them. Additionally, when using the ecomap in conversation with the young person, a worker may be able to help the young person locate support that the young person may not have initially viewed as a source of assistance. The research on young people leaving care and social capital shows that trust is the key aspect of enhancing positive social capital, particularly for more vulnerable groups in the ‘leaving care’ population, such as those from different cultural backgrounds. If young people feel that they are not to be trusted this then can limit the opportunities open to them. If the young person is given recognition and seen as trustworthy, bridging capital is more likely to occur (Gale and Bolzan 2008).

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **Are there any alternatives to eco-maps, that might be more appropriate and relevant for Aboriginal young people and their families? Have you come across Red Dust Healing? Is this something that might be relevant?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ I sought advice from Lisa Conway about this. Lisa is a senior Aboriginal Social Worker in the Federal Government and member of Indigenous Allied Health Australia, and who teaches Indigenous studies at the ANU. Lisa's perspective is that an ecological systems approach is useful as it is important to view the young person in a person-centred way, but, as a person in their environment. So, for the young Aboriginal person, it is important to determine their current connections to the land as well as to their Elders, community and peers. This will also assist to identify possible sources of support that the young person has not yet tapped into. From talking to Lisa and viewing her resources it seems that children and young people can be nurtured and taught traditional ways that are known to lead to ongoing survival. This can resonate with traditional and contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as it highlights the importance of kinship and community. It supports the values of social justice, and belief that everyone has the right to reach their maximum potential (Conway, L (2014) Professional Frameworks for Practice). So, the ecomap can still be used, albeit in a culturally responsive way. This may mean asking questions about the young person's spiritual connections to country as well as to their peers, community and Elders. A resource that Lisa recommended is the Healing Foundation: <https://healingfoundation.org.au/>. If people would like to contact Lisa her email is [lisa.conway@anu.edu](mailto:lisa.conway@anu.edu).



*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **What can be done to increase young people’s resilience before they transition out of care?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ Certain combinations of social support and social capital help young people access resources or meet needs. My research tentatively shows the most common examples are that bonding and reciprocity social capital help meet the need of positive social relationships. Appraisal support (i.e. giving positive and constructive feedback) and bonding and norms of expectations social capital help meet the needs of emotional and behavioural development. Esteem support through bonding capital can help meet the identity needs in relation to feelings of self-worth. It seems that the more diverse combinations of social capital and social supports that a young person has the more likely they will build their resilience and strengthen their community connectedness in the long-term. These young people were more likely to trust adults and named adults as the most important person to them at the time of being interviewed. Not all young people in care have been so lucky to have people in their life to care for them and they can suffer terribly. We want to replicate how positive informal networks work in the mainstream by constructing these relationships while they are still in care. The benefits of positive informal networks for children and young people more generally occur incrementally so they go unnoticed. Not only do we want the formative benefits of the unacknowledged, incremental, informal support for young people in care but we want to have these intangible resources settled and established so they have them when they come to the sharp end of their transitions out of care and into adulthood.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **What role do care leavers play in preparing younger care leavers for leaving care?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ Peer networks and mentors may provide an effective means of social capital support. See chapter 20 by Dima and Pinkerton in In P. Mendes & P. Snow (eds.) Young people transitioning from out-of-home care, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **Working with YP 15-18 years old in care, how can we encourage YP to engage in connection for support post 18?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ Ongoing positive supportive relationships with carers and workers have been shown to be vital for care leavers accessing positive educational and employment pathways, and advancing social and emotional well-being and stability. Those relationships need to be retained in that post 18 period. See, for example, Muir, S., Purtell, J., Hand, K.,



& Carroll, M. (2019). Beyond 18: The longitudinal study on leaving care Wave 3 research report, outcomes for young people leaving care in Victoria. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **Has Philip a reference for the recent US study on covid and care leaving he mentioned? Are the 'creative strategies' to support and engage during covid Jacinta mentioned written up somewhere?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ The US study can be found here: <https://fieldcenteratpenn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Foster-Youth-COVID-19-One-Page-FINAL.pdf>

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **Are there any places across the world that have implemented really effective 'extending care' arrangements (placement and support) for young people in residential care or non-approved placements? Can you describe what these models look like?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ As mentioned in a previous question, Staying Close is being piloted in England. Scotland is the only country to currently offer extended care to residential care leavers. Have a look at McGhee, K. (2017) 'Staying Put & Continuing Care: The implementation challenge', Scottish Journal of Residential Care, 16, 2, pp. 1-19.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **Given that some young people don't have a great care experience but still need ongoing assistance after 18, would it be helpful for packages of support be made available to YP that aren't reliant on them staying connected to the services / carers that provided assistance before they turned 18? Would it be beneficial for packages to be allocated to YP rather than to the orgs who cared for them before turning 18?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ Probably the ideal would be a flexible combination of both. Some young people benefit from remaining with existing foster or kinship carers, or retaining support from existing programs and workers. Others may wish to break their ties with carers or services, and indeed move geographically to other jurisdictions. The state as the responsible corporate parent should continue to support the young person irrespective of where they live, and indeed irrespective of whether they initially wish to seek support. The Personal Adviser model in England requires the PA to retain regular contact with the young person till at least 21 years wherever they live, including for those who are in prison.



*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

**“ Would from 18 to 21 have different care framework?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

- “ The difference is that legally 18-21 year olds are adults, and no longer on a child protection order. But the state retains the same responsibility as most ordinary parents in the wider community to continue to provide a range of financial, emotional and practical support until it is no longer required.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

**“ Is there any research about the risk around school finishing and end of care often being within a few months of each other?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

- “ Anecdotal evidence suggests that most jurisdictions will make discretionary decisions to extend care for at least a few months to ensure that young people are able to complete Year 12 or equivalent. But many young people seem to move into independent living before they even commence Year 12. There is lots of evidence from researchers such as Andrew Harvey and Jacqueline Wilson about the challenges that care leavers have to enter and complete further and higher education. See, for example, Harvey, A., Wilson, J.Z. & Andrewartha, L. (2019) 'Strengthening the Evidence Base to Improve Educational Outcomes for Australians in Out-of-Home Care'. In T. MacNamara, C. Montserrat & S. Wise (eds.) Education in out of home care. Springer: 47-60. However, the Raising Expectations program funded by Sidney Myer and the Victorian Government has enjoyed enormous recent success in raising the numbers of care leavers attending university in Victoria.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

**“ With respect to extending care for yp in resi care, what are your thoughts on congregate care for those over 18 and the legal implications?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

- “ There are practical and legal challenges involved when pairing young adults and younger children. One solution may be for governments to offer new housing options targeted only at those in the 18-21 years age group. That may also reduce the risk of that cohort exiting care into homelessness. Some of the debate in England is covered in Philip Mendes and Justin Rogers (2020) "Young people transitioning from out-of-home care: What are the lessons from extended care programs in the USA and England for Australia?" British Journal of Social Work, 10.1093/bjsw/bcaa028.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*



“ **Do you think that the COVID-19 pandemic will cause a step change in 'staying put practice' in that by default , at least as long as the public health threat persists, young people will be encouraged to stay and not be transitioned out a a matter of course because of lockdown. -can we use this adverse situation as an opportunity to positively change practice and culture**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ One would hope from a duty of care perspective that this would in practice be the case. Without doubt, the current pandemic amplifies the risk involved in exiting vulnerable young people into the wider community who lack ongoing support from responsible adults.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*

“ **How does this present in the NDIS space? Young people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable and tend to face a big shift in services with COVID-19 as they have had to go without any support in some cases, would the same strategies apply within the NDIS space?**

*Participant | 24 June 2020*

“ We are not directly familiar with the NDIS programs offered to care leavers with a disability.

*Philip and Jacinta | 24 June 2020*