

Report Card 2008

# Transitioning from Care

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# What is a Report Card?

- A national research project conducted by CREATE
- Designed to evaluate Government performance in a selected area
- Provides an opportunity for children and young people in care to comment on how they are affected by the Governments' policies and actions
- Has the capacity to influence decision makers

# Care Leavers Defined

- Young people leave care for a variety of reasons
- When they turn 18 years, they “age out” of care
- This is the group of interest in this study

## Number of 15 - 17 year olds discharged from care 2005-06 in Australia

- NSW: 539
- VIC: 657
- QLD: 293
- WA: 127
- SA: 106
- TAS: 55
- ACT: 32
- NT: 8

# Report Card 2008: Research Issues

- What assistance do these young people transitioning from care need?
- What is being done in Australia to assist them?
- Is the support system effective?

# Report Card 2008: Overall Method

Study divided into three parts:

Part A: Literature review

Part B: Survey of relevant Government Departments

Part C: Survey of Young people:

- those who have left care (Post-Care or PC group);
- those who are in care approaching the phase of transition (In-Care or IC group)

# Care Leavers' Characteristics

(Tweddle, 2007)

More likely to:

- be undereducated (not have completed high school);
- be unemployed or underemployed;
- be earning lower wages;
- become a parent at a younger age;
- be incarcerated or involved in the criminal justice system;

## Care Leavers' Characteristics *continued*

More likely to:

- experience homelessness;
- live in unstable housing arrangements;
- be dependent on social assistance;
- have mental health issues;
- not have medical insurance (in the US);
- be at a higher risk of substance abuse.



# Suggested National Leaving Care Provisions

(Osborn & Bromfield, 2007)

- There is a need for minimum leaving care standards;
- Legislative changes concerning care leavers need to be evaluated in each state and territory;
- NSW is an example of best practice in this area;
- A range of support services is desperately needed for care leavers;
- An integrated model of leaving-care support for young people up to age 25 years is recommended;
- Spend a little now to save a lot in the future

How have Governments responded to these recommendations?

Part B of Report Card 2008: The Government Survey

## Government Survey: Method

Six questions were asked of relevant Departments in all State and Territory Governments regarding children and young people leaving, or who have left care:

- What **legislative and policy provisions** exist?
- What **formalised arrangements and partnerships** with other Departments and key stakeholders are in place?
- Are all young care leavers involved in developing a **Leaving Care Plan**?

## Government Survey: Method *continued*

- What specific **supports and resources** are available for those transitioning from care?
- Are **funds set aside** for assisting children and young people to leave care, and for supporting them after they have left care?
- Does your Department **monitor** the outcomes for young people leaving care?

# Respondents

- Australian Capital Territory: Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services
- New South Wales: Department of Community Services
- Northern Territory: Department of Health and Community Services
- Queensland: Department of Child Safety
- South Australia: Department for Families and Communities
- Tasmania: Department of Health and Human Services
- Victoria: Department of Human Services
- Western Australia: Department for Child Protection (formerly Department for Community Development)

## Legislation and Policy (1)

While legislation differs in clarity, policy frameworks tend to be more detailed but significant (and unnecessary?) variability exists, e.g.,:

- Five jurisdictions (QLD, SA, TAS, ACT, NT) recommend beginning planning at age 15 years;
- WA: 12 months before leaving;
- VIC: 6 months before leaving;
- NSW: no time frame mentioned.

## Legislation and Policy (2)

Age at which support will end generally is increasing. However, still considerable variability:

- Four governments (NSW, SA WA, & NT) continue support until 25 years;
- Two governments (VIC & TAS) have chosen 21 years as the end point;
- ACT has set 18 years as termination point (but can be extended to complete year 12);
- QLD has not set an upper limit (relies on Ministerial discretion)

## Legislation and Policy (3)

In the interests of the young people, there should be equity across the jurisdictions and times for significant milestones made explicit (reduce “discretionary” decisions to minimise uncertainty).

Recommend to standardise on:

- beginning planning at 15 years;
- expect to end support at 25 years (but for special needs, can be extended at Ministerial discretion)



## Formalised Arrangements and Partnerships (1)

Diverse range of partnerships available depending on demand;

However, the coordination of a variety of services can become difficult;

- SA has addressed this problem by establishing its *Rapid Response* system (for general inter-departmental coordination);
- VIC is proposing the introduction of Regional Leaving Care Alliances to maximise the impact of each DHS region's leaving care response.

## Formalised Arrangements and Partnerships (2)

- One partnership that fortunately has been established in most areas is that between child protection and disability services;

## Formalised Arrangements and Partnerships (3)

Unfortunately, few of the responses received from Departments addressed connections with Indigenous agencies;

- VIC mentioned a formal link with a peak Indigenous body (the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency);
- QLD requires that any decisions made regarding Indigenous children in care must involve the relevant Recognised Entity;
- Given the disproportionate incidence of Indigenous children in care (for ages 0-17 years, a rate of 29.8/1000 compared with 4.1/1000 for non-Indigenous), more attention should be directed to forging strategic alliances here.

## Transition from Care Planning (1)

- All jurisdictions now require some form of Leaving Care Plan in preparation for transition;
- Most factor after-care support into final case plan;
- QLD requires a special Support Services case to be opened (if relevant CSO determines a need for support exists);
- NT intends to require the preparation of an After-Care Plan (as well as a Leaving Care Plan).

## Transition from Care Planning (2)

- Many Plans include the seven Looking After Children domains:
  - Health;
  - Education;
  - Identity;
  - Family & Social Relationships;
  - Social Presentation;
  - Emotional & Behavioural Development;
  - Self-Care Skills
- Individual needs should be assessed with reference to these areas.

## Transition from Care Planning (3)

- One major weakness in most government submissions was regarding the monitoring of the LC Plans' implementation:
- Who is responsible?
  - WA: Caseworkers (develop) and Leaving Care Services (report);
  - NSW & VIC: Community Service Agencies ;
  - QLD: CSO;
  - SA: District Centres;
  - ACT: No monitoring after 18 years;
  - TAS: Possibly the new After Care Program workers;
  - NT: Monitoring process not discussed.
- Consistency?? Effectiveness??

## Areas of Support / Resources (1)

- Extent of support (e.g., number of services) varies because of differences in care leaver populations in each jurisdiction;
- A problem for care leavers is finding out what assistance is available and how services can be accessed;
- Department Web sites useful;
- Quality variable (extent and relevance of content, ease of navigation);
- However, not all young people have ready access to the internet; other sources of information must be available:
  - Hard copy “Leaving Care” Kits (e.g., *TAS Outta Here: Your Options, Your Choices*);
  - Phone “Help” lines;
  - TFC Officer

## Funding (1)

- Five governments were able to identify specific amounts of funding that had been set aside specifically to support care leavers;
- When divided by the number of care leavers in each region, the following notional *per capita* support rates are obtained:

– NSW:	\$3.9m	\$7235
– VIC:	\$3.8m	\$5783
– SA:	\$500,300	\$4719
– WA:	\$929,922	\$7322
– TAS:	\$90,000	\$1636
- QLD, ACT, and NT fund out of general budget



## Funding (2)

- Desirable for governments to make extent of funding for care leavers explicit:
  - Make equity of treatment more likely;
  - Give care leavers an indication of level of support to which they are entitled:
    - reduce uncertainty;
    - Increase their confidence in asking for support
- Better to invest a relatively small amount now to avoid substantial costs in the future

## Funding (3)

- The total cost of leaving care in Victoria has been estimated by Forbes, Inder, & Raman (2006):
  - They compared life outcomes of young people who had been in care with peers from the general population;
  - Matched on cost factors including child protection, GST revenue loss, general health, mental health, drug and alcohol, police, justice and correctional services, and housing;
  - The differential per young person was \$738,741 (or a staggering \$332.5m a year when all care leavers are considered!!!)
- Early action is strongly indicated

## Monitoring Outcomes (1)

- Monitoring of outcomes, across all jurisdictions (except WA), is either non-existent or ineffective;
- Only WA could give an indication of what procedures were in place to gather data, and had an idea of how care leavers were responding to the support system;

## Monitoring Outcomes (2)

- WA's example points to other issues that should be considered by Departments engaged in monitoring:
  - Ensure accuracy and reliability of data reported by Non-Government Agencies;
  - Need to maximise response rate:
    - In WA's 2006 Customer Perception Survey 25% response rate from 80 surveys
    - The young people who didn't respond (for whatever reason) may have an important story to tell; every effort must be made to contact all care leavers

How effective has been the care leaver support provided?

Report Card 2008: Young Peoples' Survey

# Participants (1)

Group	Sex	Jurisdiction								
		ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Total
Post Care	Female	4	17	2	10	6	1	9	8	57
	Male	1	5	1	6	0	1	1	5	20
In Care	Female	2	25	0	20	5	0	9	0	61
	Male	1	12	0	9	3	0	0	1	26
Total		8	59	3	45	14	2	19	14	164

## Participants (2)

- Mean Age (and SD) for groups:

– Females PC:	20.7	(2.9)
– Males PC:	20.4	(2.7)
– Females IC:	17.3	(1.2)
– Males IC:	16.9	(1.0)

- 37 Indigenous
- 16 NESB

## Structured Interviews

Questions dealt with broad categories:

- Demographics (age, sex, place of residence, Indigenous status, NES background);
- In-care and Post-care experiences (age entered care, time spent in care, number of placements, residences since leaving care and/or extent of homelessness);
- Involvement with education, employment, Juvenile Justice;
- Social contacts (carers, workers, birth family);
- Services accessed;
- Ease of completing tasks (for which support services were available);



## Findings (1): In-care Experience

- Overall mean of 9 placements in 9 years in care;
- 42% experienced 2 - 5 placements
- 16% experienced over 10 placements

## Findings (2): Planning for Leaving Care

- 58.3% of PC group did NOT have a LC Plan (66.7% of IC group);
- Differences across states in percentage of young people who had LC Plans:
  - 75% in VIC ( $n = 12$ );
  - 10% of SA ( $n = 10$ );
- When informed about leaving care:
  - 64.5% before 18 years (IC = 75%);
  - 10.2% at 18 or older (IC = 5.8%);
  - 25.4% never notified officially (IC = 19.2%).

## Findings (3): Accommodation

- Moderately strong correlation between number of placements (in care) and number of places (lived post care):  $r = .46$ ,  $p < .01$ ;
- Number of locations:
  - 42.9% at one location;
  - 38.6% between 2 & 5;
  - 14.3% between 6 & 10;
  - 4.3% more than 10;
- 16.4% living on own (majority shared accommodation);
- 34.3% homeless at some stage (33.3% of these for longer than a year).

## Findings (4): Education

- Highest educational level achieved:
  - 43.4% completed Year 10;
  - 25% completed Year 12;
  - 14.5% completed tertiary studies (one at Uni);
- 19.2% involved with Juvenile Justice (significantly lower educational achievement);
- 53.3% had been suspended or expelled (detrimental to education: Riordan's "Deficit" theory);
- Encouraging: 60.5% still involved in some educational program (compared with 82.5% in general population for age group).

## Findings (5): Financial Support

- 38% obtained most of their income from paid work;
- 56.3% depend on social assistance from government.

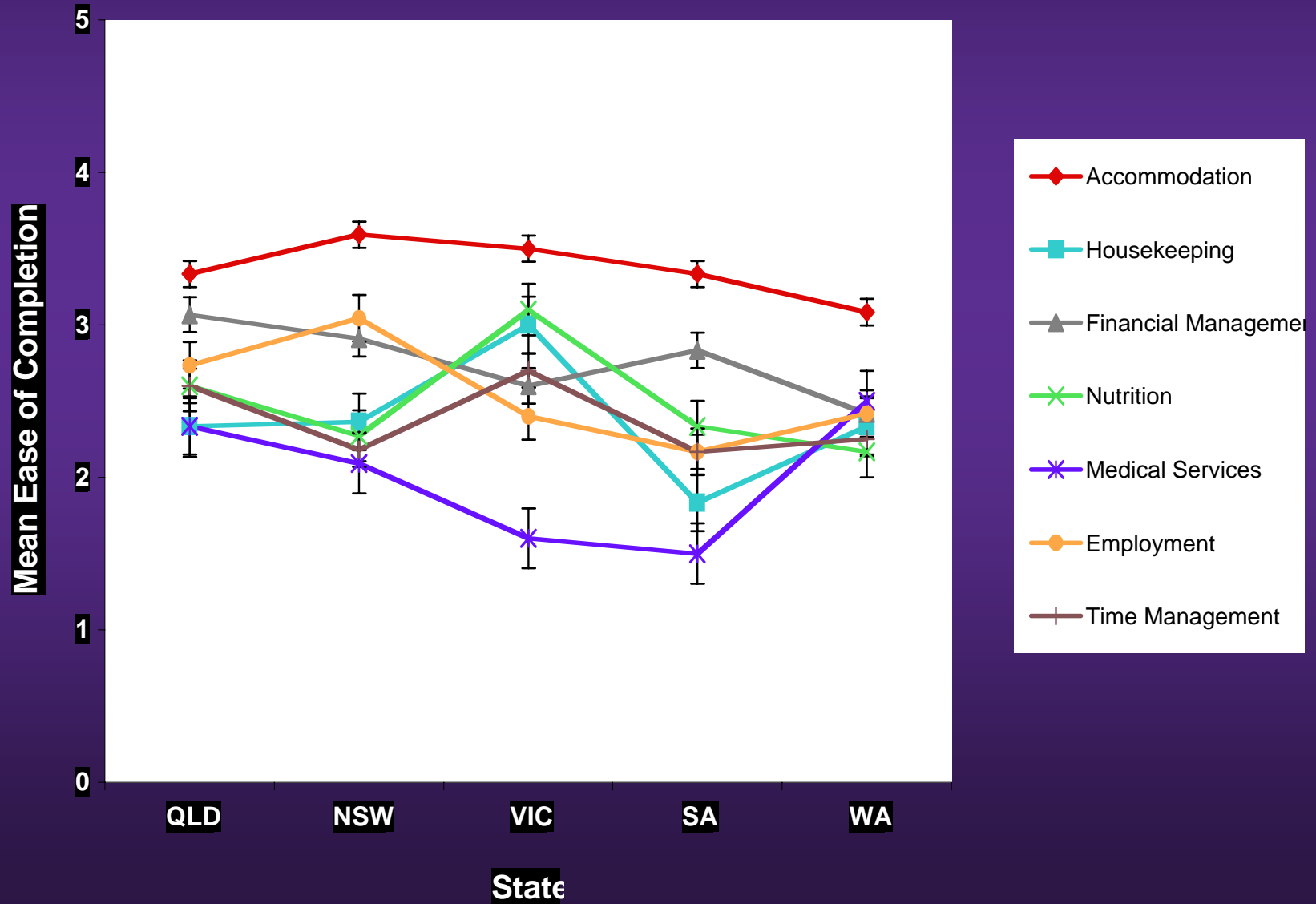
## Findings (6): Social Contacts

- Contacts made in last month:
  - 48.6% with Carers;
  - 38.2% with Workers;
  - 73.3% with Birth Family member

## Findings (7): Services Accessed

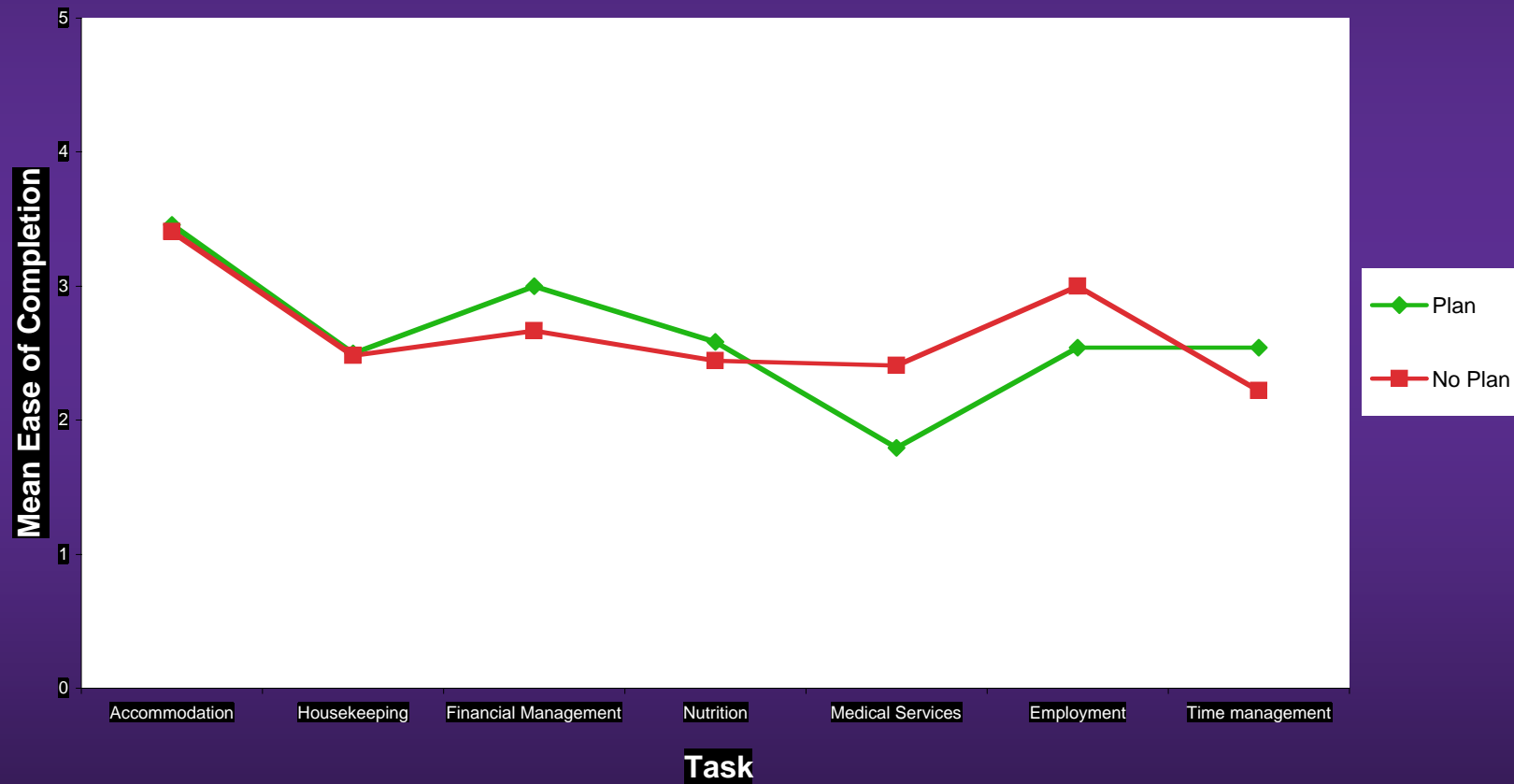
Support Services	CL Access (%)
Housing	40.8
Financial Support	36.8
Counselling	38.2
Medical (doctor/hospital)	64.5
Cooking (classes/support)	14.5
Employment	38.2
Education	50.0
Legal (lawyer, legal aid)	26.3
Case File	43.1

# Mean ease-of-completion ratings by care leavers in response to tasks receiving support services (states selected on sample size)





## Mean ease-of-completion ratings as a function of having a Leaving Care Plan



## Recommendations (1)

- Establish consistent standards regarding planning and support:
  - Begin transition planning at 15 years;
  - Maintain support until young person reaches 25 years;
  - Assess young transitioners' needs with reference to the *Looking After Children* domains
- Create and publicise explicit support relationships between Departments and Agencies. Would help to clarify:
  - Responsibility for provision of support;
  - Type and level of support;
  - Expectations of care leavers;
  - Ensure mechanisms in place to coordinate services (no “cracks”);
  - Connections developed to benefit Indigenous young people.

## Recommendations (2)

- Improve quality of LC Plans and implementation practices:
  - Establish Transition-from-Care Officers in each region to develop, implement, and monitor outcomes of planning;
  - Assess individual needs of young person to inform Plan;
  - Provide continuity of contact post-care (mentors);

## Recommendations (3)

- Enhance care leaving information systems:
  - Specialist and non-specialist services must be identified;
  - Information provided in a variety of forms (hard copy, Web, “help” lines);
  - Mechanism put in place to integrate information and coordinate services.
- Ensure that Leaving Care Plans:
  - Place the highest priority on housing provision;
  - Address Life skills training, preferably before the young people leave care;
  - Include mechanisms to encourage participation in continuing education;
  - Provide care leavers with every possible support to become self-sustaining in terms of employment.

## Recommendations (4)

- Institute effective monitoring procedures:
  - Need accurate estimate of costs of leaving care;
  - Departments need to:
    - set KPIs;
    - Train agency workers and assist in data collection (to maximise accuracy and reliability of data).
- Introduce equitable, transparent, explicit funding allocations:
  - Reduce uncertainty about entitlements;
  - Reduce the need for discretionary powers.

# Conclusion

Attention now must be focused on:

- **IMPLEMENTING** the legislation and policies already established, and
- **FACILITATING** access by care leavers to the programs and services they need.