

Brittany Witnish

YACVic Young Thinker in Residence

# Why Young Care Leavers Need Each Other's Support

## The situation

What is a young care leaver?

When a young person living in out-of-home care turns 18 years of age (but sometimes earlier), the young person's care and protection order or permanent care order finishes. The young person is then required to leave their out-of-home care placement and care for themselves independently. The process of leaving care is called 'transitioning from care'.

## Statistics

- In 2016, there were an estimated 46,500 Australian children in out-of-home care (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2017).
- Each year, approximately 500 young people aged 16 to 18 leave out-of-home care (DHHS, 2017).
- 35% of young care leavers who leave out-of-home care at age 18 experience homelessness (The Home Stretch, 2016).
- Over the course of a young care leaver's life, if the young person is unable to successfully transition to independent living it will cost taxpayers up to \$70,000 per young person (Berry Street, 2016).
- Over 50% of young care leavers experience significant mental health issues such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders, depression and substance abuse problems (Berry Street, 2016).

## Barriers young care leavers face

Young care leavers have a higher risk of homelessness, unemployment, young parenthood, imprisonment, prostitution, suicide or self-harm, low education levels, poor social connections, and a dependence on social welfare, in comparison to young people who have not lived in out-of-home care.

## The solution

What is peer support?

A peer group is defined as a group of people who share a similar age, status, background and/or interest/s. For young people who do not have family supports to turn to, peer relationships become increasingly important sources for guidance, security and emotional support.



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Brittany Witnish is one of the inaugural Young Thinkers in Residence at the Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) where she has recently produced a research report, 'Young care leavers: The need for peer support'. Brittany is currently finishing her Bachelor of Community Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs while also volunteering part-time at a 4Cs crisis relief centre. She is interested in working in the community service and youth work field, with a goal to complete a master's degree in social work. Through her own personal experience and knowledge of out-of-home care, Brittany hopes to raise awareness for the issues young care leavers face to advocate for better outcomes for young people in out-of-home care and those leaving care.

[Read all about the Young Thinker in Residence program over on the YACVic blog.](#)

Peer support models can assist young people by:

- Decreasing isolation and loneliness.
- Enabling young people to speak about their experiences in a safe and supported environment, with others who have shared their feelings and experiences.
- Drawing on a young person's strengths.
- Enabling young people to assist and support one another through hard times.
- Enabling young people to use their knowledge and experiences of services to recommend and help other young people to access services.
- Assisting young people in obtaining further education and finding employment.
- Assisting young people to learn new skills.
- Supporting a young person's overall wellbeing.

### Start a peer support group with your young people

The peer support group should be enjoyable, with the objective of building supportive relationships among young people who share the leaving care experience. Young care leavers would also have the opportunity to learn life skills in a positive group setting.

### Two age brackets to focus on

Late adolescence (15-18): Young people who are currently living in out-of-home care, have been referred to a leaving care service, and are required to leave placement and transition to independence within 6 months-3 years.

Emerging adults (19-24): Young people who have left out-of-home care within the past 5 years and are currently living independently.

### Topic suggestions

Budgeting, cooking, obtaining and maintaining housing and accommodation, obtaining and maintaining employment, support services available and how to access them, assistance pursuing further education, law and rights, drug and alcohol information, healthy diet/exercise, mental health information, self-care and positive coping skills, social skills.

[Read Brittany's full report over on the YACVic blog.](#)

