



# Positioning Paper

## Improving housing outcomes for young people leaving state out of home care

authored by

**Guy Johnson, Kristin Natalier, Naomi Bailey, Nola Kunnen, Mark Liddiard, Philip Mendes, Andrew Hollows**

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## ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACP	Adolescent Community Placement
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Ltd
CAP	Crisis Accommodation Program
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
DCP	Department of Child Protection (W.A)
DHS	Department of Human Services (Vic)
CSHA	Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
ILP	Independent Living Program
JPET	Job Placement Employment and Training
NAHA	National affordable Housing Agreement
NRAS	National Rental Affordability Scheme
PRSS	Private Rental Support Scheme
RLCA	Regional Leaving Care Alliance
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
TSS	Transitional Support Service (WA)
TILA	Transition to Independent Living Allowance
YHAP	Youth Homelessness Action Plan (Vic)
YPLCH & SI	Young People Leaving Care Housing and Support Initiative (Vic)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The problems facing young people leaving state out-of-home care are among the more pressing issues facing Australian policy-makers today. The number of young people in out-of-home care placements in Australia has almost doubled in the last decade, with over 28,000 children and young people currently in formal out-of-home care placements (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008a). Each year about 8,000 young people are discharged from care. The majority (78 per cent) leave care before they are 15 and many of these young people return to their family homes. However, some do not.

Just over 1,500 people between the ages of 15-17 are discharged or 'age out' of the care system each year (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008a:Table 4.4, p.50). Young people 'ageing out of care' have to manage multiple transitions – moving into independent accommodation, leaving school, and trying to find work or other means of support and becoming financially independent – in a shorter time, at a younger age, and with fewer resources and supports than their peers (Stein 2006; Cashmore & Ainsworth 2003; Biehal & Wade 1999). Some of these young people are at risk of lifelong poverty, poor health and chronic social exclusion. Those at greater risk of poor outcomes include young people who have had multiple placements while in care (Cashmore & Paxman 2006b; Bromfield & Osborn 2007); those that leave care at a younger age (Wade & Dixon 2006; Cashmore & Paxman 2006a); young people who experience sexual or physical abuse and/or trauma prior to care (Department of Education and Skills 2006; Green, Brueckner & Saggars 2007), and young people who have been in residential care (Department of Education and Skills 2006; Dumaret 2008). The struggle to access or maintain accommodation is a key factor contributing to these poor outcomes.

Housing is a particularly important dimension in the experiences of care leavers and policy responses to their needs. Providing care leavers with stable housing is linked to better outcomes (Cashmore & Paxman 2006a; Forbes, Inder & Raman 2006; Wade & Dixon 2006). At the same time, research shows that accessing and maintaining accommodation is one of the most 'difficult tasks confronting care leavers' (McDowall 2008:50). Local and international research indicates a lack of appropriate housing for care leavers, with the result that housing instability and homelessness are common outcomes. In turn, housing instability is linked to high levels of drug and alcohol abuse (Mauders, Liddell, Liddell & Green 1999), poor mental and physical health (Cashmore & Paxman 1996) and considerable educational and employment deficits (Clare 2006).

Research also highlights an over-representation of care leavers among the homeless. In Australia, there are limited accommodation options for care leavers (Mendes & Moslehuddin 2004:23), and many are forced to rely on programs designed to assist the homeless. This puts further pressure on a system that is already struggling to meet demand (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008b:55). There is particular concern over the use of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) or other forms of transitional housing as an exit point from care. These options are often inappropriate because they are designed as short-term transitional housing programs, with a significant crisis component for those who are already homeless or escaping from domestic violence (Bonnice 2002; Green & Jones 1999; Mauders et al. 1999). Housing in these programs is often time-limited and while providing shelter, they often fail to provide the three basic conditions that characterise a home – permanency, stability and continuity. In short, young people leaving care are placed in insecure housing that often 'kick starts their homeless career' (Centre for

Excellence in Child and Family Welfare 2007:2). In recognition of this, in December 2008, the Rudd Government released its white paper on homelessness, *The Road Home* (FaCHSIA, 2008). In *The Road Home* the Rudd Government identifies, as part of a \$800m joint commitment with the states to reduce homelessness, the prevention of young people leaving custodial and statutory care exiting into homelessness as a key goal.

The failure to assist care leavers to make a smooth transition to independent living results in cost shifting from Child Protection authorities to other government departments, such as housing, health, justice and income support services (e.g. Centrelink). State housing authorities are often relied upon to provide accommodation for young people, but they are under considerable pressure in fiscal terms and the residualisation of public housing has decreased the availability of low cost accommodation to the broader community. Nonetheless, the recent increase in funding for public and community housing announced by the Rudd Government offers housing authorities new opportunities to set aside some housing stock exclusively for care leavers, as has been done with considerable success in the UK.

Leaving care programs are one strategy favoured by Governments around the world to improve care leavers outcomes. In Australia, most states have implemented legislation and funded a range of post-care support and housing programs to assist care leavers, but there is little information that can confirm the effectiveness of these programs (Morgan Disney & Associates & Applied Economics 2006:28). A review of the international literature on leaving care programs highlights that, while post-care programs have been in place for over two decades, few studies have evaluated their effectiveness. In the US, where a number of evaluation studies have been undertaken, the overall impression is that leaving care programs make a positive difference in the lives of care leavers. Improved outcomes include housing, health, educational and employment outcomes, a decrease in services usage, and long-term fiscal efficiencies for governments. While these findings come from overseas where different policy, legislative and cultural arrangements apply, it is important to bear in mind that when compared to the general population of young people, post-care support participants still report 'extensively poor outcomes' (Montgomery, Donkoh & Underhill 2006:1446). Consequently, policies, programs and service delivery models can still be improved in ways that will more effectively contribute to positive and successful transitions to independent living for care leavers. Improving housing outcomes for care-leavers is identified as an important and necessary step in improving young people's experiences once they leave care (Boese & Scutella 2006; Keys, Mallett & Marven 2005; Manicaros & Lanyon 1999). There is, however, little understanding of what forms of housing assistance care leavers might require to further improve their housing and non-housing outcomes.

Responding to the lack of information in Australia on the effectiveness of leaving care programs generally, and the role of housing in leaving care programs more specifically, this project aims to inform policy and service practice to promote positive and sustainable housing outcomes for young people ageing out of the state out-of-home care system. The project is driven by the research question: Which support model(s) most effectively facilitate positive housing outcomes for young people leaving care? Four additional questions arise:

1. What are the housing experiences, needs and outcomes of care leavers?
2. Do they vary by the age people leave care and/or by biographical circumstances?



3. What current forms of housing assistance and transitional support are offered, and to what extent do stakeholders (care-leavers and service providers) assess such assistance and support as effective?
4. What information can be obtained from (1), (2) and (3) to provide knowledge about minimum standards, best practices, and effective housing outcomes?

To answer these questions, this project proposes to use qualitative data generated by 100 semi-structured interviews with those who age out of care at 18 and those who leave care before the age of 18. Data will be collected from care leavers in Victoria and Western Australia, hence the focus throughout this paper on those states. The interviews will focus on the ways in which care leavers gain access to secure and affordable housing, and whether an improvement in housing outcomes enables improvements in wellbeing and other areas of care leavers' lives. The study will also explore the barriers to gaining and maintaining housing.

The project will contribute to current and future policy by:

- generating data that can be used to improve responses to care leavers' needs, and in particular their housing needs, with a potential reduction in demand for linked services
- identifying which accommodation options are best suited to meet the diverse needs of care leavers
- developing a best practice framework for integrating housing and transitional support services for care leavers
- improving the measurement of leaving care outcomes
- identifying opportunities for integrated policy responses for care leavers, with a specific focus on appropriate housing and support programs assisting care leavers' transition to independence
- exploring the broader strategic housing implications that emerge from the research findings.

This project offers the opportunity to develop evidence-based policy that can effectively address the high social, personal and economic costs that occur when young people are not effectively supported to make the transition from state care to independent living.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Independent living without housing is like driver's training without a car (Kroner 2007:52).

The experiences of young people leaving state care present significant social and public policy challenges. In part, the difficulties arise from increasing numbers of young people being placed in out-of-home care, putting further pressure on a system where resources are already over-stretched. However, just as important are the issues that arise when young people leave care. At age 18, young people 'age out' of the care system, a process marked by an abrupt transition from state support to independence. There is now an emerging legislative framework and set of practices that acknowledge the state's responsibility to properly prepare and support young people who are leaving care, but these advances occur in an on-going context of negative outcomes for those young people.

This project addresses the high risk of homelessness and insecure housing faced by young people when they leave care. Australian and overseas studies consistently indicate that large numbers of homeless young people come from state care backgrounds. Recently, the Federal government released its white paper on homelessness, *The Road Home* (FaHCSIA 2008) which included an additional \$800m over five years to combat homelessness. A key focus in *The Road Home* is the prevention of young people leaving statutory and custodial care exiting into homelessness. However, housing difficulties are just one of a number of issues faced by these young people: they are also at risk of low educational achievement, unemployment, physical and mental illnesses, and isolation and social exclusion. These challenges are inter-related and they all need to be addressed in order to maximise young people's life chances. This is important for care leaver's quality of life, and it also has significant financial implications for the state (Morgan Disney & Associates & Applied Economics 2006).

This Positioning Paper points to both the individual and structural factors that contribute to care leaver's negative housing outcomes. Some young people in care experience abuse and upheaval that contribute to mental and physical illness, low self-esteem, a sense of insecurity, and social isolation. Additionally, these young people may not have been taught necessary money management and life skills. However, structural factors also play a role in housing – and other life – outcomes. In contemporary Australia, many young people experience a delayed adulthood that is partially defined by on-going reliance on parents to help meet their housing needs and costs. In contrast, young people leaving care face an abrupt transition (Stein 2006), often with limited economic and social resources upon which to call. Further, their housing needs may not be acknowledged within general housing policy and support programs, and there are variations and limitations in the level of support provided within transitional support programs for care leavers.

## 1.1 Aims and focus of the study

In light of the importance of housing, this project aims to inform policy and service delivery and practices to promote positive and sustainable housing outcomes among a group where homelessness and tenancy breakdown have been widely reported for almost two decades. It also aims to establish a basis for policy development that has the capacity to enhance the wellbeing and the social opportunities of young people who 'age out' of the state out-of-home care system.

The project is driven by the research question: Which support model(s) most effectively facilitate positive housing outcomes for young people leaving care? Four additional questions arise:

1. What are the housing experiences, needs and outcomes of care leavers?
2. Do they vary by the age people leave care and/or by biographical circumstances?
3. What current forms of housing assistance and transitional support are offered, and to what extent do stakeholders (care-leavers and service providers) assess such assistance and support as effective?
4. What information can be obtained from (1), (2) and (3) to provide knowledge about minimum standards, best practices, and effective housing outcomes?

The project examines the experiences, needs and outcomes of two groups – those who age out of care at 18 and those who leave care before the age of 18. It focuses on the ways in which care leavers gain access to secure and affordable housing, and whether an improvement in housing outcomes enables improvements in wellbeing and in other areas of care leavers' lives. Of equal importance, we will also examine what factors prevent people from gaining access to housing and what factors compromise their capacity to maintain housing. We will examine their experiences in care and at the point of leaving care and what impact these experiences have on their housing outcomes.

This paper is interested in both the material (or hard) aspects of housing – affordability, quality, location and size – as well as the interpretive (or soft) aspects of home. We use the idea of ontological security to focus attention on the interpretative aspects of home. Dupuis and Thorns (1998) contend that ontological security is promoted when the home provides a site of constancy in the social and material environment and a spatial context in which the day-to-day routines of human existence are performed. Home can be a base from which people focus on developing new skills, routines and opportunities; a place where people feel free from the surveillance of the modern world, and a place in and around which identity is constructed. Stable, safe accommodation underpins the development of ontological security.

## **1.2 Structure of the Positioning Paper**

Chapter Two of the Positioning Paper identifies the legislative, policy and programmatic landscape in which this study sits. It starts with an analysis of Child Protection and Housing legislation and policies across the country. The chapter then examines in detail legislation, policy and programs relevant to care leavers in Victoria and Western Australia, the two states where the study is being undertaken. While Chapter Two provides information on what current forms of housing assistance and support are available for care leavers, empirical material collected from care leavers and service providers on the effectiveness of current models of housing assistance and support will be presented in the final report.

Chapter Three is framed by our interest in the needs, outcomes and circumstances of care leavers (questions 2 and 3). It reviews local and international literature on the outcomes (housing and non-housing) associated with young people leaving state care. And it highlights the importance of housing as both an outcome, and as a resource and barrier to other life chances. Chapter Three also reviews local and international evidence on the effectiveness of leaving care programs, highlighting

along the way the paucity of Australian evidence with respect to the effectiveness of existing leaving care programs.

Chapter Four outlines the methods to be used in the study. The conclusion sums up the Positioning Paper and acknowledges a number of policy issues on the horizon that may have a bearing on policy frameworks specific to young people leaving care. Throughout the Positioning Paper we emphasise the need to acknowledge and address both the individual and structural factors that contribute to the housing challenges faced by young people leaving care, and highlight the importance of conceptualising young people's housing experiences as one, albeit important element, of a broader set of outcomes that arise from living in and leaving state care.

## **2 AUSTRALIAN POLICY AND PROGRAM CONTEXT: LEAVING CARE**

This chapter examines the policy context that informs the research questions and aims of the project. Recent changes within child protection legislation and policy approaches acknowledge the state's responsibility for managing young people's transition out of the care system, but to date the implementation of transition planning and post-care support differs across jurisdictions. The workings of this legislation are further complicated by two factors. First, the need for a joined-up approach to managing the needs of young people leaving care is often articulated, but, to date, this has not emerged in practice. Housing for care leavers involves interdepartmental coordination, managing the (sometimes competing) demands of the departments of housing and child protection, and this coordination must take place in an unprecedented period of housing crisis. Generally, the needs of young people are not embedded within housing policy, and additional support for young people who are at risk of social and economic marginalisation is also lacking. When the marginal position of young people in the housing market is acknowledged, it is done so through homelessness support policy and services, and thus support is focused at mitigating rather than avoiding housing crisis. Second, the funding tensions between Commonwealth and state governments pose significant challenges to and opportunities for the development of comprehensive service provision to young people leaving state care.

### **2.1 Leaving care – legislative, policy and program initiatives**

#### *2.1.1 Australian context*

Children and young people who experience difficulties at home often require assistance. While the main policy emphasis across all jurisdictions is to keep families together, this is not always possible and in these situations out-of-home care is often the only alternative. When we use the term state out-of-home care we are referring to those situations where the state assumes a 'statutory responsibility for ensuring the child's needs are met' (Cashmore & Paxman 1996:1).

Young people can be placed in either residential care or home-based care. Residential care involves the placement of young people in buildings owned by the state which are 'typically run like family homes, have limited number of children and are cared for around-the-clock by resident substitute parents' (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008a:52). Home-based care involves the placement of a child or young person in a home in the community where a carer looks after them, although statutory responsibility for them remains with the state. Carers are reimbursed for the financial costs they incur in looking after the young person. There are two main types of home-based care. The first is foster care. This involves placement in a home with a non-related household whose role is to look after the welfare of the child or young person. The second form of home-based care is known as relative or kinship care. This is where the caregiver is a family member or person with a pre-existing relationship to the child.

On the night of 30 June 2007, the majority of children and young people were accommodated in foster care (53 per cent) with 41 per cent in relative or kinship care. The remaining four per cent were in residential care. In recent years the number of people in kinship care has increased and there has been a marked reduction in the use of residential care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008a).

Although young people leaving care are consistently depicted in research as being acutely disadvantaged, care leavers are a heterogeneous group and not all of them experience poor outcomes. This raises the question of why there are marked differences in what happens to young people when they leave care. Local and international research highlights that how well young people are faring is a:

[f]unction of the complex interactions of factors relating to their in-care experiences (and their experiences before coming into care) the timing and circumstances of their transition from care and the extent of the supportive networks they had around them in the period after leaving care (Cashmore & Paxman 2006b:22).

Research shows that those at greater risk of poor outcomes include young people who have had multiple placements while in care (Cashmore & Paxman 2006b; Bromfield & Osborn 2007); those that leave care at a younger age (Wade & Dixon 2006; Cashmore & Paxman 2006a); young people who experience sexual or physical abuse and/or trauma prior to care (Department of Education and Skills 2006; Green, Brueckner & Saggars 2007), and young people who have been in residential care (Department of Education and Skills 2006; Dumaret 2008).

Stein (2008) provides a useful framework for thinking about the different needs of care leavers. Stein developed three categories: the 'strugglers', the 'survivors' and those who just 'move on', to describe the different pathways at the point of leaving care. These pathways are shaped by young people's experiences prior to and while in care, as well as the resources and opportunities they have on the point of leaving care. Stein suggested that some young people 'move on'. This group typically had more stability and continuity in their lives while in care, and their moving on was likely to have been planned. The second group, who he terms 'survivors', had more disruptions in care, but they generally responded positively to any support or assistance they received once leaving care. The third group, 'strugglers', have had the most 'damaging pre-care experiences, and had numerous placements. On leaving care this group were likely to be 'unemployed, become homeless and have great difficulty maintaining their accommodation' (p.302). While the needs of the 'strugglers' presents policy-makers and practitioners with the greatest challenges, many care leavers require some form of assistance to make a smooth transition from care to independent living.

The problems facing young people leaving state out-of-home care are compounded by the increasing numbers of young people in out-of-home care which has almost doubled in the last decade. Currently there are over 28,000 children and young people currently in formal out-of home care placements in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008a). Each year, about 8,000 young people are discharged from care. The majority (78 per cent) leave care before they are 15, and many of these return to their family homes. However, some do not. Just over 1,500 people between the ages of 15-17 are discharged or 'age out' of the care system each year (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Number and percentage of young people aged 15-17 discharged from out of home care, by states and territories**

<i>Age (15-17)</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld*</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>Act</i>	<i>NT</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<i>N</i>	508	645	n.a	132	124	44	48	50	1,551
<i>%</i>	21.0	20.1	n.a	23.3	34	14.5	44.4	14.2	21.2

Source: (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008a: Table 4.2, p.55)

\*Data not provided due to the implementation of a new information management system

Young people 'ageing out of care' have to manage multiple transitions – moving into independent accommodation, leaving school, and becoming financially independent – at a younger age and with fewer resources and supports than their peers (Cashmore & Ainsworth 2003). These young people are at risk of lifelong poverty, poor health and chronic social exclusion. The struggle to access or maintain accommodation is a key factor contributing to these poor outcomes. The problems faced by care leavers suggest that many have not been assisted in such a way that enables them to make the smooth transition from care to independent living. The importance of this information for our study is that the greater the number of people in care and thus leaving care, the greater the number of potentially disadvantaged young people in our community.

The leaving care debate in Australia is of relatively recent origin and has tended to be fragmented because the services and programs are a state and territory responsibility (Mendes & Moslehuddin 2004). Care leavers first caught widespread public attention in the late 1980s as a result of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children, which identified a relationship between foster care and subsequent homelessness (Burdekin & Carter 1989). Despite this finding, and one that was supported by other studies around that same time (e.g. Hirst 1989; Taylor 1990), the Commonwealth Government did not – and indeed still has not – worked to establish uniformity across the states and territories. Thus, the rights of care leavers and the responsibilities of government arise out of a patchwork of state and national legislation and international agreements. While the Commonwealth Government has committed to developing a National Child Protection Framework to create consistency between states, it does not legislate directly in relation to children leaving care. In the following section we outline the principal legislative responses across the country. We then examine policy and program responses in Victoria and Western Australia, the two states where the study is being undertaken.

### *2.1.2 Child Protection*

Until recently, the state, in its role as corporate parent, relinquished statutory responsibility when a person in care turned 18 'regardless of the young person's wishes, maturity or readiness for independence' (Smith 1992:8 cited in Cashmore & Paxman 1996:1). As the state was not required to provide any formal assistance with the transition to independence, many care leavers were forced into adult life before they were ready, and some experienced periods of housing instability in the early years of their independence. The policy landscape has begun to change in Australia with the introduction of legislation in most states requiring formal transition planning and support for young people after they leave care. These legislative regimes attempt to provide formal protections that address the rights of care leavers and fulfil the obligations that states assume when removing children from their birth families.

While child protection authorities in Australia have been slow to implement transition planning and post-care support, these authorities now recognise the role of government in assisting young people leaving care to make a 'smooth transition to adulthood' (Department of Education and Skills 2006:84). States as corporate parents have begun to acknowledge the importance of a coordinated whole-of-government response to, and responsibility for, the needs of care leavers across a range of areas and beyond the age of 18. This coordination extends not just to health, education, finances, psychological and emotional wellbeing, but also to housing.

The role and scope of child protection activity in Australia is primarily prescribed by the principal Child Protection Acts in each jurisdiction. Appendix A lists the principal child protection acts in each jurisdiction and also outlines other Acts of Parliament pertinent to the operation and delivery of various services to children and families. Legislation typically covers two areas. First, it identifies the need for transition planning for young people while they are still in care. Second, legislation recognises the importance of post-care support and assistance for young people when they leave care. However, as each state is governed by different legislation there are inconsistencies in service provision across the country. Some states, such as Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia, have specific legislation that provides 'clear stipulations as to the type and level of support young people leaving care can expect to receive' (McDowall 2008:21). In contrast, South Australia, Northern Territory, the ACT and Tasmania have more general legislation, although both Tasmania and the Northern Territory are currently drafting new legislation that specifically addresses the needs of young people leaving care.

With respect to transition planning, while there is a consensus that young people require a leaving care plan, states differ as to when the planning process should commence. Five states (ACT, Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland) recommend the planning process commence at the age of 15. In Western Australian the approach involves modifying the final case plan in the 12 months prior to leaving care. In Victoria, planning begins six months prior to discharge, while in NSW there is no specific time frame to start the planning process. Similarly, in respect to post-care support there is no consistency as to length of support provision or when that support should end. In four states (New South Wales, South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia) young people can expect to receive support up to their 25th birthday. In Victoria and Tasmania, the age is 21, in the ACT it is 18 years of age, while Queensland does not specify an upper age limit instead relying on ministerial discretion. The variation in legislative responses means that, depending on which state they live in, care leavers may receive different responses. In this context, Forbes et al (2006) argued for the introduction of minimum national standards to increase parity and to promote consistency in leaving care and transitional planning.

### *2.1.3 Victoria – Department of Human Services (DHS)*

In Victoria 600 young people aged between 15-17 leave care each year (Table 1). In April 2006, the Victorian government, through the Child, Youth and Families Division of the Department of Human Services (DHS), initiated the Every child, every chance reforms which acknowledge that 'every child has the right to live a full and productive life in an environment that builds confidence, friendship, security and happiness, irrespective of their family circumstances and background' (Department of Human Services 2008). With respect to care leavers, the Children, Youth and Families Act (2005) (CYFA) is the principal legislation shaping policy and program responses in Victoria. The CYFA (s.16(4)) places responsibility on the Secretary of the DHS to provide assistance to young people up until the age of 21 to enable them to make the transition from care to independent living. Departmental responsibility for young people in care resides with the Children, Youth and Families Branch of the DHS which currently funds three specific programs for care leavers. The state-wide budget for post-care programs is \$3.17m in 2008/2009 increasing to \$3.65m in 2011/2012. The three programs are:

1. Post Care Support, Information and Referral Services. This program is designed to assist young people after they have left care. Post care support services are targeted to young people between 16-18 years of age who are (or were) subject to



a custody or guardianship order on their 16th birthday and have transitioned from care. In addition, young people aged 18-21 subject to a custody or guardianship order on their 16th birthday and who still require assistance, are also eligible. The core elements of the program are:

- to provide case work support to young people making the transition to independent living and continue this support for a period of time following their transition
  - to provide information and ongoing support in accessing and maintaining links with education, employment and training
  - to provide assistance to maintain existing accommodation
  - where appropriate, to support the re-connection with their family
  - to provide assistance in obtaining more permanent or appropriate housing options as required
  - to access brokerage funding for young people under 21 years who have left care and require funding to support them to maintain their independence.
2. Leaving Care Brokerage Funds. Brokerage funds are available to young people up to 18 who are transitioning from care, and young adults between 18-21 who have left care but subsequently require some assistance. Brokerage funds can be used for accommodation costs, education, training and employments costs. They can also be used to facilitate access to health and community services.
  3. Leaving Care Mentoring Services. These services are designed for young people aged 16-18 years preparing to leave state care. Mentoring services are meant to be in place at least 12 months prior to a young person's statutory order expiring, and at least three months before they leave care. Mentoring services are targeted to young people with limited or no formal support networks outside the care system.

These initiatives also recognise the importance of coordination between services and integrated support for care leavers. In Victoria, eight regional leaving care alliances (RLCA) have been developed – one for each DHS region in the state – to ensure that linkages between leaving care services and services such as education, training, counselling and housing are developed and maintained.

#### *2.1.4 Western Australia – Department of Child Protection (DCP)*

In Western Australia, over 100 young people leave care each year (Table 1). The Department of Child Protection is responsible for young people in care and those leaving care. With respect to young people leaving care, the Children and Community Services Act 2004 (Part 4, ss.89-100) places responsibility on the CEO of the DCP to assist people aged between 16-25 who have been the subject of a protection order or a negotiated placement for at least six months, to obtain accommodation, education and access to health, legal and social services. They can also provide financial assistance to obtain accommodation, set up accommodation, as well as meeting expenses incurred in seeking employment or training.

The DCP funds leaving care services to assist young people to:

- access alternative, safe long-term accommodation
- improve relationships with their families or communities
- establish links with appropriate services

- develop a network of social and personal support systems to assist in managing independent living.

There are three stages through which leaving care support is provided.

1. Preparation for leaving care which focuses on those aged 14 to 17 currently in care. This stage focuses on education and life skills to enable a successful transition to independent living. A Care Plan for young people leaving the CEO's care is prepared 12 months prior to the person leaving care, or 24 months if the person has a disability.
2. Moving to independent living which focuses on those aged over 16 years. This stage focuses on assisting young people to access and maintain accommodation, education, training and employment.
3. After care while living independently which provides aftercare assistance until the person is aged 25 and includes advice, referrals and encouragement regarding employment, housing, health and other areas (Department of Child Protection 2006). Provision is also made to assist care leavers up to the age of 25 with a point of contact for occasional practical assistance.

Through SAAP, which is managed by the DCP, four specialist support services are funded to provide supported accommodation for care leavers (referred to as Transitional Support Services). These are: Leaving Care and Aftercare Services with Mission Australia, Wanslea Leaving Care Services with Wanslea Family Services, Transitional Support Services (TSS): Moving to Independence with Salvation Army Crossroads West, and Transitional Support Services: Statewide with Salvation Army Crossroads West (Department of Child Protection 2006). Current annual funding is \$929,922. The DCP also has formal arrangements with the Disability Services Commission who provide full accommodation and support funding beyond the age of 18.

## **2.2 Improving the outcomes of young people leaving care: key principles for policy and practice**

Research tracing the often negative outcomes of young people leaving care has given rise to a number of recommendations on how care leavers needs should be managed within a policy context. Moslehuddin and Mendes (2006:121) describe necessary responses in terms of a social inclusion model. They argue that the poor outcomes experienced by many young people leaving care are indicative of social exclusion, in that they point to care leavers systematic marginalisation from mainstream social and economic systems. Thus, it is important to offer a range of supports to assist young people in engaging with family and social and economic institutions. Green and Jones (1999:66) point to three issues that need to be incorporated into the management of how young people leave care: 1) permanency planning that begins before the formal exit from state care; 2) extending the support available to young people leaving care; and 3) acknowledging the state's responsibility to young people as their corporate parent. These principles, they argue, need to be built into legislation and supported by a quality assurance framework and clearly articulated standards of best practice.

Moslehuddin and Mendes (2006) also describe a set of issues that must guide service provision to young people leaving care. They argue the value of encouraging young people to actively participate in their own life planning. They also note the importance of acknowledging the diversity of care leavers' experiences so that programs are flexible enough to respond to young people's broad range of needs (see also Broad 1998:84). This is important as care leavers are not a heterogeneous group and their

pre-care and in-care experiences strongly influence their outcomes (Green & Jones 1999; Moslehuddin & Mendes 2006).

The needs of young people leaving care highlight the importance of a joined-up approach (McDowall 2008). This includes an inter-agency approach within states and territories and cooperation across different levels of government, in terms of the formal arrangements for the provision of services, policy frameworks, and an agreement on minimum leaving care standards (Bromfield & Osborn 2007). McDowall (2008:31) also points out the need to address the lack of clarity over who is responsible for implementing and evaluating leaving care plans. In a recent report, McDowall (2008:43) found that while states have articulated approaches to leaving care planning (albeit in slightly different ways), the way legislation has been implemented in each state has been uneven. For instance, McDowall found that 58 per cent of the young people in their sample who had left care (N=77) 'reported they did not have such a plan'. Worse still, McDowall found that nearly two thirds of those still in care but approaching discharge (N=87) 'did not know of the existence of any leaving care plan' (McDowall, 2008:43). The importance of leaving care plans was highlighted in Forbes, Inder and Raman's (2006) study of 60 care leavers. They found that having a case plan was significantly associated with stable housing on leaving care. Young people with such a plan were twice as likely to be in stable housing, three times more likely to be employed, and reported that receiving a range of advice and support 'significantly improved outcomes' (p.28).

In a series of discussions of the characteristics of successful support for care leavers in the UK, Stein (1997) makes the following points. Leaving care support services do best when they are focused on accommodation, social support and financial needs of young people leaving care. They are also more successful when they meet care leavers needs through a variety of means, including advice, counseling, group work and drop-in facilities. Services also worked when they actively involved young people in making decisions about their lives, rather than imposing goals and programs upon them. Stein (1997) also pointed to the importance of joined-up approaches and inter-agency collaboration.

Drawing recommendations together, the following principles are important in any response to the needs of young people leaving care.

- a transition period where young people receive training in independent living skills, and are offered appropriate information and mentoring
- care leaving should be managed acknowledging age (people who leave care at older ages are less likely to experience negative outcomes, see Moslehuddin & Mendes 2006) and other life events, such as graduating from high school
- the diversity of care leavers and their needs is recognised
- support for young people leaving care is ongoing
- support for young people leaving care is embedded in legislation, and supported by detailed policy frameworks and shared benchmarks
- the development of a joined-up approach to care leavers, reaching across policy areas and levels of government
- support recognises young people's agency and actively involves them in their own life planning.

These recommendations are important in their articulation of key principles for policy and program responses to young people's needs. Existing policies go some of the way to addressing these key principles, but gaps remain within these formulations

nonetheless. In the first place, such recommendations are generally made with reference to leaving care policy, but there is very little understanding of how the needs and outcomes of care leavers might be incorporated into the broader housing policy context. This is particularly evident in the limited range of accommodation options available to care leavers (Mendes 2005:167), a point we elaborate on in subsequent pages. Following from this, few researchers have engaged with the absence of young people's needs and circumstances from housing policy, and the absence of marginalised young people's needs in particular. When young people are acknowledged as an identifiable group with specific requirements, it is most commonly within the context of homelessness and housing crisis.

Second, the lack of consistent standards across jurisdictions and the discretionary nature of assistance in some states mean that there is 'considerable variation in the levels of financial support and assistance available to care leavers' (Cashmore & Paxman 1996:142).

Improving the housing outcomes for care leavers is critical in the policy shift towards assisting care leavers. The imperative is two-fold. First, research shows stable housing improves a range of negative non-housing outcomes (Wade & Dixon 2006; Cashmore and Paxman 2006b). Second, improving housing outcomes is part of a global concern for meeting the legal and moral obligation created when the state assumes the role of parent. While this move toward corporate parenting is promising, the role of housing in post-care planning and support suffers inconsistent implementation. There is a need for more information on how to effectively integrate housing and support, and what works and what does not work when it comes to housing options for care leavers as they are transitioning to independent living.

## **2.3 Housing market and policy frameworks**

Recommendations arising out of previous research highlight both the importance of a joined-up approach to supporting care leavers, and housing as one of a broader suite of resources necessary if young people are to achieve positive life outcomes. To date, however, there have been limited attempts to identify and improve connections between care leavers' transition to independent living and housing policy frameworks. In the following section we examine the relevance of general housing policies in Australia, before considering specific housing policy responses to young people leaving care.

### *2.3.1 Leaving home and leaving care*

Over the last decade the Australian housing market has experienced serious affordability problems. While these affordability issues reflect a complex range of global and local factors, it is generally acknowledged that Australia has been particularly affected, with a median house price to average annual income ratio of seven to one. This is one of the highest rates in the developed world (OECD 2005). Within the Australian housing market, however, some groups are particularly disadvantaged due to their economic vulnerability. Most housing problems are problems of low income and unemployment, and young people are over-represented in both. Unemployment rates for young people in Australia are dramatically higher than the average, and 16 and 17-year-olds who work earn just a third of the average adult wage.

As a social group, young people often experience difficulties in securing appropriate housing. Young people are at the start of their housing careers and their experiences of housing are typically more fluid than older people (Beer, Faulkner & Gabriel 2006;

Flatau, Hendershott & Wood 2004). The private rental market is seen as the natural and most common form of housing young people enter at the start of their housing careers, but young people in general are often disadvantaged in this tenure (Lazzari 2008; Cobb-Clark 2008). In a tight rental market young people are often discriminated against because of their age, their lack of experience, and the fact that they often have few financial resources to draw on (McDowall 2008). Similarly, problems maintaining accommodation are often explained due to a lack of income combined with high rents (Cobb-Clark 2008). For many young people this means that the only option is to search in areas where housing is cheaper. This comes at a price – cheaper areas are often far removed from public transport and work opportunities. As a result, young people can experience acute social isolation. Public housing is rarely a realistic option, because of the long wait times and also a general reluctance by young people to view public housing in a positive light (Burke, Neske & Ralston 2004).

Difficulties gaining access to and maintaining housing is just one, albeit important, factor that has altered the way young people manage the transition to adulthood. Whereas once young people left school at 15 or 16, got a job, married in their early twenties and set up a home, young people are now much more likely to stay in the family home until their mid to late 20s, stay in school longer and delay marriage and having children (Arnett 2000; Stein 2006; Wyn 2004). Whereas in the 1960s about 10 per cent of people aged between 20-29 years lived at home, now approximately a third do (ABS 2000).

By staying in the family home young people benefit from ongoing financial and emotional support, in addition to enjoying the benefits of a stable and secure place to live. They also have the security of knowing that they have a safety net to return to if things do not work out when they leave home (Green et al. 2007). Many young people return home at least once to save money or if things do not work out, and the entire process of leaving home is often an extended one (Fitzpatrick & Clapham 1999:178). This highlights the point that the transition to independence is rarely a linear process (Cashmore & Paxman 1996:146; Moslehuddin & Mendes 2006), but more effectively understood as a process of achieving interdependence that takes place within 'the context of larger interdependent social networks, connection, [and] collaboration' (Green et al. 2007:63).

The transition to independence is generally premised on the view that young people will be supported through the process by their families and friends in a stable environment. While this is the case for most young people, the notion is problematic when applied to care leavers, particularly those who 'age out' of the care system and who may have no home to return to. Leaving the care of the state is a 'final event' (Stein 2006:274) and young people leaving care often do so in an unplanned way that can result in a sense of abandonment.

Prior to entering care many children have experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect. In addition, many of these young people have experienced inadequacies while in state care, including poor quality caregivers, multiple placements, and a consequent lack of continuity in their education and in their relationships with carers and workers. These experiences continue to impact on people as they move to independent living. Young people who 'age out' generally have little, if any, family support, few financial resources (McDowall 2008), minimal life skills (Reid 2007), and they often suffer from low self-esteem and have to deal with the emotional trauma of abuse or neglect (Tweddle 2007). These factors, combined with the abrupt cessation of care at 18, often create serious difficulties for care leavers making the transition to independence. What is a difficult period for most young people is doubly so for many care leavers. As Stein (2006:274) notes: 'Care leavers

are expected to undertake the journey to adulthood, from restricted to full citizenship, far younger and in far less time than their peers’.

Like all young people, teenagers who ‘age out’ of care have to cope with major changes in their lives. Unlike other young people who can fall back on their families if things do not work out, many care leavers face the daunting prospect of making the transition to adulthood and independent living on their own. Combined with little financial support and inadequate life skills, these factors make some care leavers particularly prone to poor outcomes including homelessness.

Safe, secure, affordable housing is linked to better health, improved social cohesion and increased social opportunities, particularly employment (Forbes et al. 2006:28). It should come as little surprise then, that housing is also a critical element in young peoples’ transition from care. When their housing needs are appropriately met, care leavers are more likely to experience an enhanced sense of well being, educational and employment success (Wade & Dixon 2006). Assisting young people with their housing needs is a crucial element in the overall process of improving a range of outcomes for care leavers and, ultimately, in assisting them to make a successful transition to independent living.

While Federal Government involvement in care and post-care support is minimal, its role in housing is far more influential. Prior to 2009 the Commonwealth was a partner in both the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and the Commonwealth/State SAAP V bilateral agreement. While the states implemented these agreements according to their own requirements and circumstances, both the CSHA and SAAP outlined broad policy and outcomes for public and social housing and homelessness respectively. Since 1 January 2009 both the CSHA and SAAP have been incorporated into the National Affordable Housing Agreement, although the details for these new arrangements have yet to be finalised.

### *2.3.2 Private rental market*

Renting privately was once seen as a transitional tenure for households while they waited to enter home ownership or public housing (Jacobs et al. 2005). A decrease in public housing and difficulties entering home ownership has resulted in more low income households seeking longer-term accommodation in the private rental market (Yates, Wulff and Reynolds 2004), as well as increased demand by middle income households (Yates and Wulff 2000). Finding appropriate accommodation is made more difficult by the reduction in the number of low rent properties. Even though the overall level of rental housing increased between 1986 and 1996 (AIHW 2003), the proportion of low rent homes has fallen by 15 per cent in the last ten years (National Affordable Housing Forum 2006). Currently, Australia’s private rental market is characterised by low vacancy levels, high rental costs, and competition for accommodation. These conditions are challenges for most young people, but for those who are leaving care with few resources, the challenges are greater still.

Currently, support for people in the private rental market primarily takes the form of income support, largely through Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). CRA has been promoted as a more efficient means of providing housing support, compared to public housing. It decreases government expenditure and, theoretically, offers choice, flexibility and market responsiveness to recipients (Burke 2001). The Productivity Commission (2008:16-27) offers a more formal account of the CRA objectives ‘... to provide income support recipients and low income families in the private rental market with additional financial assistance, in recognition of the housing costs that they face’. CRA is also governed by other objectives relating to the primary income support payment. This is payable to people who are paying private rent above a rent threshold

and are receiving income support payments. It is not available to young people who are living with their families, even if they are paying board.

Work by Burke, Neske and Ralston (2004), has explored the impact of rent assistance payments on young people's housing choices and housing outcomes, and offers some insight into its usefulness as a source of housing support. They found that recipients of rent assistance were less likely than non-recipients to report dissatisfaction with the location of their current dwelling (relative to the tertiary institution at which they studied). They conclude that rent assistance contributed to the level of finances necessary for greater choice about where to live (Burke et al. 2004:21). However, their data also indicate that greater choice may mean that young people end up living in dwellings with poorer amenities (Burke et al. 2004:22). Choice is also associated with greater housing mobility, the reasons for which are varied (Burke et al. 2004:22-23). When CRA recipients moved house, they experienced difficulties in raising money for moving and establishment costs, as well as a lack of suitable accommodation options. Discrimination by real estate agents and landlords was also reported, particularly among older students (Burke et al. 2004:24). Overall, half of the respondents agreed that the receipt of rent assistance had made a positive difference to their housing situation.

Burke et al. (2004:31) also found that the receipt of CRA influences young people's education choices. Around 70 per cent of respondents in their study said that rent assistance had influenced their decision to study. The influence of rent assistance was particularly strong for young people moving from rural and remote areas, but it also had a greater impact upon secondary students, compared to tertiary students. The material impact of rent assistance was also important, with almost one quarter (23.3 per cent) of respondents stating that they could not have undertaken study without the additional financial support. This was particularly important for young people attempting to finish their secondary education (Burke et al. 2004:32). These findings offer some indication of the ways in which housing support also offers opportunities to improve other life chances.

To some extent, the particular circumstances of young people leaving care are acknowledged, in that they, unlike young people who are still supported by their family of origin, are eligible to receive CRA under the age of 25 years. However, as a group, they are not included within the definition of 'special needs access', which includes Indigenous households, households with a member receiving disability support, and households in particular geographic areas.

Additional financial supports are available to those housed in the private rental market. Private Rental Support Schemes (PRSS) are available to low income households, as a loan or a grant, depending on the jurisdiction. They are commonly one-off payments directed towards the costs of establishing a household in the private rental market (Jacobs et al. 2005). The Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) is a one time grant of up to \$1000 available to people aged between 15-25 who are preparing to, or have left care, and need assistance in setting up their new accommodation. TILA can be used to cover any housing related costs that cannot be covered by other forms of support, such as PRSS or Centrelink payments (e.g. maternity payments). The money can be used for costs such as moving, bond, utilities and expenses incurred purchasing household items, counselling, education or transport costs (Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services 2003). Its availability is not limited to those renting in the private market.

Financial support, whether in the form of a one-off payment or on-going support, conceptualises the challenges of access and maintaining private rental as primarily individual and economic issues, rather than the result of how the housing market is

structured. Regardless of a tenants' income, short-term leases, competitive rental markets and landlords selling investment properties means that private rental accommodation is not always secure. Further, even with the additional income provided by CRA, a high proportion of households remain in housing stress (spending more than 30 per cent of their income on housing). According to this measure, the Productivity Commission (2008) found that 34.4 per cent of households in receipt of CRA were in housing stress.

Previous AHURI research has found that PRSS can be used to mitigate immediate costs of entering a lease, but their impact on the long-term affordability and sustainability of tenancies is limited through structural factors and the complex needs of some recipients (Jacobs et al. 2005). On the first issue, the high cost of rent, in addition to utilities and living expenses, when combined with low income, means that some households require on-going financial support. On the second issue, financial support alone is insufficient to maintain a tenancy when recipients have limited budgeting and life skills, limited education, and small appreciation of their rights and responsibilities as tenants – characteristics of many young people leaving care (Cashmore & Paxman, 1996; Tweddle, 2007; Reid 2007). These critiques are also relevant to TILA payments.

More recently, the Rudd Government has explicitly acknowledged the structural constraints on affordability through the implementation of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). This is aimed at the supply side of the equation, and proposes tax concessions for investors, with the aim of building 100,000 new, affordable rental properties. The NRAS envisages that tenant selection criteria will be similar to those for public and community housing, although without long term security of tenure. Streamlining development applications is also part of this process. States have agreed to offer an extra \$2,000 per dwelling in cash or in-kind tax cuts or concessions (FaHCSIA 2008). This plan is only in its early stages, and therefore we have no indication of its failures or successes. However, in keeping with a key theme of this Positioning Paper, we suggest that addressing the cost and availability of rental housing, while an important step in improving the long term housing outcomes of young people leaving care, cannot address the complex and inter-connected range of factors that often undermine their housing outcomes.

### *2.3.3 Home ownership*

The Australian Government has focused, with much publicity, on supporting first home owners' entry into the housing market. In 2000, a first home buyers' grant of \$7,000 was introduced. This was raised to \$14,000 for a period in 2001. The Commonwealth was also offering tax concessions to other owners, in the form of negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions, which further increased the demand for property, and placed home buyers and investors in competition with each other. More recently, the Rudd Government, in response to the global economic crisis that emerged in the second part of 2008, has announced plans to increase the first home buyers grant to \$14,000 for those buying an established property and \$21,000 for those buying a newly built property. However, home ownership grants and support have not led to increased affordability. Despite (and indeed, perhaps because) of the grant, housing prices rose by a median of \$32,000 in the year after the introduction of the grant.

In addition to this support, states and territories offer further financial incentives for home ownership. First home buyers are offered concessions on the payment of Stamp Duty (through reduced rates or staggered payments). States and territories also provide housing purchase support through CSHA funding, available to households who would not be funded through private sector finance. These supports include direct lending, interest rate assistance and deposit assistance, counselling



services and advice and mortgage relief, depending on the jurisdiction (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2005). They are aimed at low income households and are generally contingent on no additional ownership of house or land. The Victorian Government's mortgage interest relief scheme<sup>1</sup> is an example of this scheme (Productivity Commission 2004).

While these initiatives may relieve some of the pressure on the private rental market, they are, nonetheless, unlikely to have a significant impact upon the housing circumstances of young people leaving care. In common with other young people, young people leaving care have not yet reached a stage in their life course where they are ready to purchase a home – their finances, career prospects and relationship status all make this unlikely (Beer et al. 2006). More pressingly, the challenges faced by young people leaving care mean that they do not have the resources to enter home ownership in the short term. And, for many, the long term prospects of home ownership are also grim.

### *2.3.4 Public Housing*

Over the last two decades public housing has been under on-going pressure from a decrease in real funding levels, the selling of stock, and high levels of demand from low income households, many of whom have complex needs. Recently, the Rudd Government announced an increase in funding to public and community housing of over \$12b in the next five years. The additional funding will translate into approximately 20,000 additional units.

Public housing offers important benefits to tenants: rents are lower than in the private rental market and recent studies indicate high levels of satisfaction among public housing tenants. A recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study (2006) found that since tenants moved into public housing they felt more settled, more able to manage their rent and money, and more able to cope with their lives. Phibbs and Young (2005) also report that public housing tenants associate better educational outcomes for children and improvements in their health with their tenancy. People also generally felt safer in their homes. The AIHW (2006) has concluded that public housing is currently the best system we have to offer cheap housing.

However, there are also negatives. Tenants' greatest dissatisfaction is directed toward the condition of their homes, day-to-day maintenance and emergency maintenance – issues that go to the quality and management of public housing stock (AIHW 2006). There are also mismatches between existing housing stock and client need and preference. Public housing stock was built in response to the housing needs of the low income families who were once the most common tenants. Nowadays, the configuration and size of social housing accommodation does not match the needs of the increasingly high proportion of single people who require social housing. The location of public housing may also be a concern. Foord (1994) describes the difficulties people face in accessing services (e.g. shopping, community services, health services) and public transport. These may be of particular concern to young people who may not own cars or have their licence. Other more recent studies offer alternative findings. Data generated by the National Social Housing Survey reports that over 90 per cent of the survey respondents reported adequate access to shops, banking and public transport (AIHW 2006 c.f. Phibbs and Young 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> Mortgage Interest Relief Scheme -<http://hnb.dhs.vic.gov.au/OOH/ne5ninte.nsf/LinkView/38A6892BA374C0174A2567AE000548CC6DF6046DC29A4D2CCA25711B001AB577>

Public housing is not an easily accessible option for care leavers. The lack of stock for single persons is a particular problem for care leavers, many of whom are single. The demand for limited places is now managed through strict eligibility criteria and prioritising the needs of particular groups. Depending on the jurisdiction, care leavers may not be acknowledged as a separate, high priority group, even if they are included as a sub-set of a more general category such as young people 'at risk' of homelessness. These long waiting lists mean that public housing is rarely a relevant option for young people who may be experiencing immediate housing crisis and have limited skills and resources to maintain their tenancy. Regardless of legislative and policy frameworks, plans to assist young people's transitions to independent living are often not implemented until their ageing out of care looms close and large (National Youth Commission 2008: 134). Thus, public housing as it currently stands is, at best, a long-term solution for the housing needs of young care leavers.

While there is little information on the incidence of early tenancy termination among care leavers, the general pattern among young people who secure accommodation in social housing is a lack of long-term tenancies. Data from the Office of Housing (Vic) in 2003 show the average length of all public housing tenancies to be 7.2 years, but the average length of tenancies held by people under the age of 25 was 1.7 years (Office of Housing 2004). These shorter tenancies are associated with the following patterns:

- high mobility among young people in public housing: 3.4 per cent moved interstate and just under one quarter (24.3 per cent) moved into private rental
- households with a head aged under 24 are more likely to have their leases terminated due to the non-payment of rent (12.9 per cent of tenancies compared to 4.9 per cent of all tenancies). They are also more likely to vacate without giving a reason (12.1 per cent of tenancies compared to 7.6 per cent of all tenancies).

Public housing is not always a good fit for the needs of young people, particularly when they are housed without any additional support to manage their tenancies, gain life skills, and engage with employment, education and training opportunities.

### *2.3.5 Housing and homelessness services*

In the past, transitional and crisis housing and associated supports were jointly funded by the state and Federal Governments through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (SAAP) and Crisis Accommodation Programs (CAP). SAAP is a dedicated homelessness policy and service delivery platform, first established in 1985. Under SAAP, homelessness became the basis of service delivery for people who had previously been supported by a range of service sectors. Its implementation was important because it acknowledged that homelessness was not simply a challenge faced by single men, but that other groups, including young people, could also find themselves temporarily or permanently without shelter. SAAP service provision prioritised particular populations: women (with and without accompanying children) escaping domestic violence, young people, single adults, and families (Mallett and Nyblom 2008).

Initially, SAAP focused on crisis accommodation, reflecting a conceptualisation of homelessness as primarily episodic and limited to rooflessness. But through the four iterations of SAAP from 1990 to 2005, the definitions of, and responses to, homelessness have changed. Increasingly, the development of self-reliance and independence was emphasised and the importance of transitional accommodation and pathways out of homelessness were acknowledged within SAAP guidelines. Thus, the conceptualisation of homelessness within SAAP moved from episodic to a

process that impacted upon every dimension of a person's life. However, as Mallett and Nyblom (2008:4) note, this acknowledgement has not been funded consistently at a national level.

As noted earlier, these arrangements are in the process of changing as both SAAP and the CSHA have been subsumed into the new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA). It is too early to say what the new arrangements will look like, although the recent Rudd Government announcement that it will commit \$800 million over five years to combat homelessness, suggests that there will be significant changes. A key element in the Rudd Government's strategy is to prevent young people who are being released from statutory or custodial care from exiting into homelessness (FaCHSIA 2008). Figures on the number of care leavers using SAAP are hard to find, but there is widespread concern that many care leavers rely on SAAP for both support and accommodation. This signals an awareness among government and policy-makers that care leavers, as a group, are often acutely at risk of homelessness.

SAAP and CAP focused on providing short-term accommodation for people in housing crisis. SAAP and CAP funded two broad types of accommodation: 'transitional housing' and 'crisis accommodation'. Crisis accommodation is generally limited to a period of time of six weeks during which people may or may not receive intensive support to assist them in finding alternative accommodation. Young people can also find their crisis accommodation options limited by services' targeting of particular client groups. The Victorian Office of Housing notes that young men over the age of 18 and young families are two groups that are marginalised in this way (Office of Housing 2004:23). More generally, the costs of supporting young people with complex needs have led to service providers decreasing their bed capacity (Office of Housing 2004:23). There is also an identified need to better integrate crisis accommodation and transitional support and housing in order to create pathways out of homelessness.

Transitional housing is typically a self contained property with a short-term lease (in the order of three to nine months) designed for the general homeless population and women experiencing domestic violence. It is a temporary solution with a view to moving people into either long-term public housing or other mainstream housing options like private rental. Placing young people leaving care in transitional accommodation can lead to a sense of 'rolling crisis': the young person's ability to find shelter, seek integrated support and create themselves a home can be compromised by the pressure to move and the anxiety of having a time-limit on their accommodation. Further, the model of shared or group housing that characterises many transitional accommodation placements can lead to debt and tenancy breakdowns as young people may lack the life skills to manage the sometimes difficult group dynamics that often arise in shared accommodation (Office of Housing 2004). This is particularly the case when young people with complex needs are living together, difficulties that can be further heightened by limits to support offered by case workers (Office of Housing 2004).

The emerging focus on the complexity and multi-dimensionality of homelessness has highlighted the importance of flexible accommodation and support models. However, many of the elements of homelessness remain un- or under-funded within SAAP. The importance of social networks, mental and primary health, drug and alcohol counselling and employment, education and training services, are not systematically addressed in policy and funding decisions (Mallett and Nyblom 2008:5). Mainstream services also fail to offer adequate and appropriate supports for homeless people (Mallett and Nyblom 2008:5). While programs such as the Commonwealth funded Job

Placement, Employment and Training program (JPET) are aimed at developing sustainable futures for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, through a focus on education, training and employment, a pro-active joined-up approach to homelessness remains largely unfunded and unsupported.

There is some acknowledgement of the importance of early intervention for those at risk of homelessness, although this is not well addressed within SAAP services, which typically prioritise people already in housing crisis. Other programs now address the importance of early intervention, particularly for young people. For example, Reconnect, funded originally by the Department of Family and Community Services, is designed around community-based early intervention services that aim to reconcile young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with their families, and help these young people improve their engagement with work, education, community and family (Department of Family and Community Services 2003). This service works on the basis that young people's homelessness is not occasioned by a dramatic break, but rather proceeds in stages as a young person gradually withdraws from both the family home and family relationships. In Reconnect, service providers work with the whole family and can 'buy in' services targeted to the particular needs of clients. A 2003 evaluation noted some success in increasing the stability of young people's housing, with additional success in conflict management and improved communication within families. The program also focuses on young people's engagement in other social spheres: a longitudinal study found that over the long term, young people's experiences of school were increasingly positive, whereas previously many clients had struggled and not enjoyed school. Nonetheless, education participation and unemployment rates remained unchanged. Similarly, engagement with the community had not improved, save for some self-report measures (Department of Family and Community Services 2003:12). There is a need to recognise, however, the specific circumstances of care leavers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and differentiate them from the general youth homeless population who may have a very different set of needs.

### *2.3.6 Existing joined-up approaches*

Some jurisdictions have developed formal and/or working connections between child protection services and organisations that address housing needs, but the extent and formality of connections varies according to the jurisdiction (McDowall 2008:27-29). For instance, in the ACT, NT and Tasmania, there are no formal arrangements between Child Protection and Housing authorities. In NSW, there is an agreement between Housing and Human Services to provide housing and related support to care leavers aged less than 20 years old, and who have no family assistance. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Community Services and the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, provides for planned supported, which includes housing support. South Australia has developed a Rapid Response system that brings together relevant government sectors. This includes Housing SA, which has developed guidelines for providing housing assistance for young people leaving care up to age 25.

### *2.3.7 Victoria*

The establishment of Victoria's Youth Homelessness Action Plan (YHAP) (Stages 1 and 2), run out of the Office of Housing, acknowledged the needs of young people as a group and makes particular mention of young people leaving care. The YHAP1 included the Leaving Care Initiative, a program funded to improve the independent living skills of young people leaving care who are at risk of homelessness (Office of Housing 2004). Under YHAP1, 14 Leaving Care Pilot Programs were funded. The

Young People Leaving Care Housing and Support Initiative (YPLCH & SI) is designed to assist young people aged 16-21 years who are subject to a Custody or Guardianship order and where the young people have been assessed as 'at risk' of homelessness. This program provides:

- case managed support for young people up to two years including assisting young people to develop life skills, access housing and accommodation options, and link into community support and employment, education and training options
- access to transitional properties specially allocated to the leaving care initiative; care leavers also have access to general transitional stock.

Funding for leaving care programs in Victoria also recognises the particular vulnerabilities of Indigenous care leavers. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children represent just over a quarter of young people in care, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children in care is over seven times higher than the rate of other children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008a:Table 4.8. p.57). In Victoria, 42.1 Indigenous children out of every 1000 aged between 0-17 were in care and three specific projects for Indigenous care leavers are currently funded in Victoria as part of the YPLCH & SI.

An evaluation of the YPLCH & SI found that program clients had a high level of need, compared to all Victorian SAAP clients (Thomson Goodall Associates 2008). The services required to meet these needs include access to employment, training, education, development of life skills, re-establishment or enhancement of family connections, and referral to services and accommodation (Thomson Goodall Associates 2008).

Although data on the housing outcomes of the YPLCH & SI program indicate that around 55 per cent of clients maintained housing stability to a great or very great extent, the study does not specify the length of time clients were stably housed. And, significantly, many still reported poor housing outcomes. On exit from the program most clients (21 per cent) entered private rental accommodation, with extended family and extended Adolescent Community Placement (ACP) or foster care the next most common destinations (at 14 per cent and 12 per cent respectively). Feedback from leaving care agencies suggest that good outcomes tended to be associated with positive relationships with a range of people and the appropriateness and timeliness of agency and worker support (Thomson Goodall Associates 2008). The factors that most commonly prevented good outcomes were associated with the individual characteristics of clients, although the lack of housing options during and upon leaving the support period, and a lack of brokerage funds were also barriers to success. A key recommendation from this evaluation was the need for more planning around the range and availability of accommodation for clients, ideally acknowledging the particular needs of young people leaving care rather than borrowing from existing stock and relying on traditional approaches to accommodation (Thomson Goodall Associates 2008).

The early outcomes of the leaving care program and other service responses trialled under the first YHAP led to the establishment of Creating Connections in 2006, funded to the tune of \$28.7 million from 2006-2010. It continues the initiatives undertaken in the YHAP1 and also includes:

- creation of youth transition hubs, with linked accommodation
- helping young people access the private rental market
- intensive case management for young people with complex needs

- youth-focused housing assistance at the point young people enter the homelessness system
- strengthening the 24-hour response capacity of youth refuges
- better coordination and development of homelessness services
- the introduction of new models of practice (National Youth Commission 2008).

The Victorian YHAP has also noted the importance of integrating youth homelessness services within the broader homelessness service system, and has identified the need to address the following issues:

- clear and consistent entry points
- reducing the number of assessments
- dedicated pathways between service components, such as referral points and crisis accommodation, and between crisis and transitional accommodation.

### **2.3.8 Western Australia**

Western Australia, the other state in which data will be collected for this study, implemented a State Homelessness Strategy from 2001-2006, which included the establishment of youth specific crisis accommodation services, short-term accommodation for young people, and the funding of three services to support care leavers. It also allocated increased funding to youth specific SAAP services, support for young people in private rental, and the building of new social housing in configurations that meet the needs of young people. Under the strategy, health, legal and financial counselling services have also been funded. The Department for Child Protection, which manages SAAP, also identified accommodation and leaving care services as a key focus in its strategic plan for 2008-2010.

While services for care leavers have been established in Western Australia there is no explicit funding for accommodation other than SAAP. Nor is it clear how much stock is currently allocated to care leavers. The lack of dedicated funding for care leavers accommodation is worrying given that in Western Australia there is a shortage of private rental properties, high rental and housing costs and insufficient social housing. While this makes it difficult for people on low incomes to access and maintain affordable accommodation, given the circumstances of many care leavers, access to accommodation is likely to remain a significant problem (CRiB 2008).

Additional discussion of policies and programs currently implemented in the states and territories not the focus of this project can be found in the National Youth Commission's (2008) *Australia's Homeless Youth* and also in McDowall's (2008) *Report Card: Transitioning from care*.

## **2.4 Conclusions**

Policy and practice addressing the needs of young people leaving care are currently in flux. An explicit recognition of the state's responsibility to care leavers beyond the age of 18 has emerged in Australian jurisdictions, but the form of that recognition and its implementation varies across states and cases. It is clear, however, that managing transitions out of care need to be contextualised by a closer consideration of the current housing market and other housing and related policy initiatives. What emerges from this contextualisation is a common failure to address the specific vulnerabilities and particular needs of care leavers.

The current policy framework does not coherently address the social exclusion experienced by young people leaving care, and in so failing, it further entrenches the disadvantage experienced by those young people. Mainstream supports for those living in the private rental market are focused on increasing households' income in order to meet housing need, but this strategy fails to account for the structure of the market and the sometimes complex needs of those care leavers accommodated within it. Public housing, while more affordable for those on low incomes, is not configured or managed in ways that necessarily supports care leavers. Home ownership is not an option for most care leavers. The homelessness service system offers examples of a joined-up approach to care leavers' housing needs, but attempts to support young people in finding sustainable accommodation occurs within a market and policy context that systematically creates barriers to that success.

There is a greater need to systematically consider the role of housing assistance in post-care support. To date, there has been no systematic investigation into what 'best practice' might look like. Similarly, there has been little consideration of the minimum standards that should underpin post-care support, what current post-care support entails, or who qualifies for post-care support. Finally, it is unclear what housing outcomes are achieved. If governments are to invest in post-care services, it is critical to provide policy-makers with information that can 'confirm what outcomes are being achieved and what works' (Morgan Disney & Associates & Applied Economics 2006:28). To this end, research examining different forms of post-care services, the role of housing assistance in these services, the nature of the housing provided, who requires post-care services, their effectiveness and their costs, is necessary. This research will address this gap in knowledge.

In the next chapter we examine the literature on what happens when young people leave care, looking first at their non-housing outcomes and then at their housing outcomes. We then turn our attention to local and international literature that examines the effectiveness of leaving care programs.

### **3 OUTCOMES AND EVIDENCE: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVE CARE AND HOW EFFECTIVE ARE LEAVING CARE PROGRAMS**

#### **3.1 Non-housing outcomes of leaving care**

It is well documented locally and internationally that care leavers are 'particularly disadvantaged' and have 'significantly reduced life chances' (Stein 2006:276) in comparison to children who have not been in care.

Research has found that care leavers are over represented in the criminal justice system (Biehal & Wade 1999; Tweddle 2007; Maunders et al. 1999). Mendes and Moslehuddin (2007:8) argue that factors contributing to the high rate of crime among care leavers include inadequate accommodation. Young people who are engaged with the justice system, such as those released from custodial sentences, are particularly vulnerable. This arises from the general disadvantages young people experience such as the lack of affordable accommodation options, and the specific disadvantage of those exiting juvenile justice such as the increased difficulty in obtaining employment, disrupted education and a lack of skills training.

Many care leavers also experience disruptions to their education, which has implications for their employment opportunities. A lack of stability and educational continuity combined with low expectations 'from social workers, teachers and carers' (Mendes & Moslehuddin 2007:7) means that young people in care are 'less likely to continue their education beyond the minimum school leaving age' (Bromfield & Osborn 2007:8). Education is a powerful determinant of 'future life success' (McDowall 2008:14) and poor educational outcomes often create problems when searching for and securing employment. It is hardly surprising then that studies have found higher rates of unemployment among care leavers resulting in a reliance on social security and experiences of acute and chronic poverty (Cashmore & Mendes 2008; Courtney 2008; Gilligan 2008). A study of sixty young people who had experienced at least two years in care confirmed the 'magnitude of disadvantages' experienced by young people leaving care (Forbes et al. 2006). They found that only five per cent were in full-time work, with almost half (53 per cent) neither working nor studying, 90 per cent were living on a low weekly income (less than \$300 per week), and 53 per cent reported difficulties with debt.

Research also documents a strong link between care leavers and poor physical and emotional health (Courtney 2008). The long term effects of physical, emotional and sexual abuse are profound and they increase the likelihood young people will experience psychological problems including depression and suicide (Cashmore & Paxman 2006b; Stein 2006). Similarly, local and international research documents high rates of problematic drug and alcohol abuse among care leavers (Flynn & Vincent 2008; Forbes et al. 2006; Mendes & Moslehuddin 2007).

A small number of studies have found a linkage between state care and prostitution (Child Wise 2004; Roman & Wolfe 1997). A 2004 study of 30 street sex workers found that 53 per cent had been in state care and in each case 'they were introduced to sex work and other harmful high risk activities while in the care system' (Child Wise 2004:6). Many young care leavers who engage in sex work view it as 'a legitimate choice in view of the minimal education and lack of employment-related skills' (Mendes 2007:74).

Compared to their peers, a higher proportion of young women leaving care have teenage pregnancies. In their longitudinal study of care leavers (Cashmore & Paxman



1996:13) found that just under one third (31.5 per cent) were mothers or had been pregnant. This compares with two per cent of under 19-year-olds in the general community. In Britain, the National Foster Care Association has estimated that young women leaving care are four times more likely than other adolescents to be pregnant or have a child (Owen et al. 2000:22). Stein (1997) suggests this is because of inadequate sex education, although others view it differently. Green and Jones (1999:65) suggest that having a child is linked to improved feelings of maturity and status, and 'a powerful and urgent need to be part of a family'. What is important to note is that for care leavers the desire to start a family is often motivated by their own negative experiences of family during childhood and 'the loneliness and isolation they experience after leaving care' (p.65).

Some vulnerabilities are specific to care leavers due to the experiences of being separated from their family. Research exploring transitions of young people with experience in state care found that a feeling of profound isolation was a significant issue (Eardley et al. 2008:5). In fact the issue of emotional security, or what Cashmore and Paxman (2006b) term 'felt security' is one of the most significant indicators of post-care outcomes. They found that, while stability and the number of placements were significant, 'felt security in care was a more significant predictor of long-term outcomes' (p.21). Young people who felt they had a family member, a foster carer or even a worker to talk to, developed an important sense of security and well being. Having someone there for them is critical. When there is no one to support them emotionally or financially, young people leaving care often fare poorly.

## **3.2 Housing outcomes of young people leaving care**

### *3.2.1 Unstable housing*

Housing is a critical aspect in assisting young people leaving care to make a smooth transition to independent living. Studies show that there is a strong link between housing stability and a range of positive outcomes. Cashmore and Paxman found that young people who have stable living arrangements have more opportunity to 'focus on work, training and relationships than those who are more occupied with finding somewhere to live' (Cashmore & Paxman 2006b:22). However, care leavers report considerable anxiety and apprehension about 'what faces them in life after care' (Gilligan,2000:51) and accommodation and finance are often the biggest issues. For young people leaving care access is a major issue and help finding a place to live, assistance to move into it and furnish it 'were rated by ex-wards who were not in independent living as being the most important forms of assistance' (Cashmore & Paxman 1996:113).

Access to housing is a major issue for young people leaving care, a point emphasised by the fact that most move to independent living at an early age. Biehal and Wade (1999) found that 89 per cent of care leavers in their study had moved into independent accommodation by the age of 18. The accelerated transition care leavers' experience, in combination with their often complex needs, can make it difficult to manage their own accommodation. While research shows that better employment, education and relationship outcomes are linked to stable housing, research also shows that the period of transition (the first 12 months after discharge) is a crucial period. Cashmore and Paxman (1996; 2006a;2006b) found that 4-5 years after leaving care many young people were faring better than after 12 months. The initial transition period is often a time of considerable change and disruption (Cashmore & Paxman 2006b).

While many care leavers experience a high level of mobility in their early housing careers, some mobility is normal for young people and, in many cases, it may be positive. For instance Biehal and Wade (1999) found that some of the moves made by care leavers were linked to the availability of better accommodation or when young people moved from intermediate or transitional accommodation into independent tenancies. They also found that those who managed their own independent accommodation did particularly well if 'they received professional support (Biehal & Wade 1999:85). However, research also shows that many care leavers make repeated moves for negative reasons. Biehal and Wade (1999) found that within two years of leaving care half of their sample had made two or more moves and a small minority (about one sixth) had made more than five moves. They found that young people often struggled to maintain their accommodation because of financial and budgeting difficulties, their inability to cope with 'their newfound autonomy and isolation and lack of structure and day to day support' (p.85). They also noted that many people had left their accommodation because of 'violence and harassment'.

In a similar vein, Cashmore and Paxman found that many care leavers experience acute housing instability. They found that three-quarters of their sample (n=47) had moved from their pre-discharge place within a year and during this time they lived, on average, in three different places. They found a strong link between the number of placements in care and the number of moves after discharge. Significantly, there were lower rates of housing instability among those who remained in their in-care placement (2006b:22).

Other studies interested in the housing circumstances of care leavers place considerable emphasis on the issues of access and affordability. These two dimensions are often interlinked – care leavers often have insufficient money for rent in advance, the bond, or to connect key services and utilities (Cashmore & Paxman 1996:112). Affordability problems also influence the housing choices that are available when young people leave care. Due to a shortage of affordable accommodation, many care leavers are forced to accept short-term accommodation or poor quality permanent accommodation, both of which have been linked to housing instability (Biehal & Wade 1999; Walker, Hill, & Triseliotis 2002).

Furthermore, poor quality accommodation is linked to a range of negative outcomes including poor health, lower self-esteem, and diminished social networks. Care leavers are also often forced to accept accommodation in areas where they have few connections, and that are often far removed from transport, shopping and employment opportunities. While Walker, Hill and Triseliotis (2002) found that moving to a new area provided some young people with a 'fresh start' (p.182), it generally presented difficulties in 'building up support which could be sustained' and more often than not young people were at greater risk of housing instability when they were 'dislocated from their home area' (p.182).

While access, affordability, location and the quality of accommodation are major issues confronting care leavers, housing stability has also been linked to young people's experiences in care and preceding care (Green & Jones 1999). The way these experiences mediate housing outcomes draws attention to the fact that there are other dimensions to housing that are crucial to ongoing housing stability and the successful transition to adulthood. What is missing in most accounts of care leavers' housing circumstances is a broader conceptualisation of housing, particularly the ways in which care leavers interpret and respond to the symbolic dimensions of home and its importance in contributing to improved outcomes in other areas.

Housing researchers who have noted the psycho-social benefits of housing have focused on the concept of ontological security (Adkins et al. 2001; Padgett 2007). In

its broadest sense, ontological security refers to 'the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self identity and in the constancy of their social and material environments. According to Giddens (1991:167) the 'development of relatively secure environments of day-today life is of central importance to the maintenance of feelings of ontological security'. While most people have stable relationships with other people, for many care leavers their lives are characterised by the exact opposite – little, if any, continuity and stability, frequent movements, limited social networks, and few people to rely on. As Stein (2005:22) notes, care leavers often feel abandoned and it is 'important to these young people that someone is there for them'. Without on-going, reliable relationships, care leavers often end up isolated and disconnected from their local community. A consequence is that many struggle to maintain their accommodation. In this context, Cashmore and Paxman (1996) note a sense of belonging and a network of social supports, or what they term 'felt security' was the most important predictor of housing stability. 'Felt security' denotes the importance of caring relationships and, by extension, a sense of belonging. It shares some of the features of ontological security and points to the need for more than 'adequate sustenance and shelter to live happy and fulfilled lives' (Hiscock et al. 2001:50). On its own, housing is no guarantee of ontological security and 'the importance of felt security' to care leavers highlights the crucial intersection between adequate income, appropriate housing and support. From a policy perspective, this emphasises the need for joined-up responses across a range of government departments.

The importance of social relationships reinforces the point that home is more than just shelter; it has symbolic dimensions that serves many purposes. Studies have revealed the importance of the symbolic dimension of home – home as a 'setting through which basic forms of social relations and social institutions are constituted and reproduced' (Saunders & Williams 1988:82); as a 'nexus of social relations' (Blasi 1990); and a site of constancy in which 'day-to-day routines are performed and a secure base around which identities are constructed' (Dupuis & Thorns 1998). Creating home as a site of constancy and where positive social relationships are constituted and reproduced is often difficult for care leavers who are often forced to share. Frequently, they have no choice who they share with. Cashmore and Paxman (1996) found that the most common arrangement care leavers 'exited' to was shared accommodation followed by living with siblings or friends on a temporary basis. They also found that the largest single reason for instability (accounting for nearly half of all housing breakdowns) occurred as a result of conflict between tenants. Sometimes it is their own behaviour that causes problems, sometimes it is the behaviour of others. When there is conflict between tenants the risk of losing their accommodation increases. If a flat mate vacates because of conflict and they do not fill the vacancy quickly, arrears accumulate and can jeopardise the tenancy. In this context, Cashmore and Paxman (1996) found that privacy and freedom were two of the most important factors care leavers identified when they were considering their housing needs. Having a place to call your own was highly valued by care leavers.

If housing instability among care leavers is to be addressed, it is important that they feel like their accommodation is their home, rather than a place to stay. This approach is supported by recent research in the US that demonstrates the importance of not just housing 'high needs' populations but enabling them to create a feeling of home (Padgett, Gulcur & Tsemberis 2006; Tsemberis 1999; Tsemberis, Gulcur & Nakae 2004). This approach, often referred to as the 'housing first' approach, is linked to significant improvements in people's health, social connectedness and self-esteem. The shift towards housing people first and addressing their issues second bears out this theory of home as a critical source of ontological security. For example, the

Western Australian Homelessness Taskforce (State Homelessness Taskforce 2002) concluded with the need to develop a service culture that sees housing stability as a fundamental precursor to the resolution of social issues such as child protection, substance abuse, or family violence. While access, affordability and location are crucial aspects that underpin housing stability, subjective elements such as privacy and a sense of autonomy and freedom, are also critical elements that need to be addressed if care leavers are to create a home. Having the privacy to do your own thing and the autonomy to create your own space has significant implications in terms of creating relevant housing options for care leavers.

When young people are unprepared for independent living or when their accommodation is unsuitable and their housing breaks down, they are at acute risk of homelessness. For some, their pathway into homelessness results from eviction or fleeing problematic shared arrangements. For those who return to the family home or share with siblings, a breakdown in their relationships may be a precursor to homelessness. Others exit care directly into homelessness.

### *3.2.2 Homelessness*

In Australia, the United Kingdom and the USA studies have found a high correlation between state care and homelessness. In Australia, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report on Homeless Children (also known as the Burdekin report) found a large number of homeless young people came from state care backgrounds (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989; O'Connor 1989). Similarly, a Salvation Army survey of 200 young homeless people aged 12 to 25 in inner city Melbourne discovered a high number of current or former state wards among the homeless population (Hirst 1989). A follow-up report by the Brotherhood of St Laurence found that care leavers continued to be prone to homelessness (Taylor 1990). The Commonwealth House of Representatives Report into Homelessness (1995) also confirmed the link between state care and later homelessness. Cashmore and Paxman (2007:23) found that 39 per cent of those interviewed in the fourth stage of their NSW longitudinal study had been homeless at some stage. In their administrative study of 4,291 homeless people in inner city Melbourne, Johnson and Chamberlain (2008) found that 1,689 people (or 39 per cent of the sample) had experienced homelessness before the age of 18. Of this group, 42 per cent had previously been in the state care and protection system.

Evidence from overseas presents a similar picture. In the UK, a 1991 study by the British Department of Health estimated that 40 per cent of homeless young people in London and other major cities were graduates of state care. A 1996 British inquiry into preventing youth homelessness estimated that two thirds of young people leaving care experienced homelessness (Parsons, Broad & Fry 2002:105). The London charity Centrepoin found that 30 per cent of the 758 young people admitted to their housing projects between April 2000 and March 2001 had a care history. Research has also found that those who leave care at the age of 16 or 17 are particularly prone to homelessness (Biehal & Wade 1999; Centrepoin 2001).

In the United States, researchers have also found an over-representation of people with a foster care history in the homeless population. For example, in their study of homelessness among female-headed families Bassuk et al. (1997:244) found that 19.6 per cent had been in foster care. Likewise, Herman, Susser, Struening and Link (1997:253) found that the rate of out-of-home care 'was twice as prevalent among the homeless as among the non-homeless'. In their study of the newly homeless, Caton et al. (2005:1755) reported that, in a sample of 322 newly homeless people, 22 per cent reported an out-of-home placement during their childhood. Similarly, in their 'Course of Homelessness' study, Koegel, Melamid and Burnam (1995:1644) found

that among a sample of 1,563 homeless people one quarter 'experienced placement in either foster care, institutional settings or both'. In their study of administrative data gathered from 21 organisations, Roman and Wolfe (1997:9) found that 36 per cent of the 1,134 people who participated in the study had a foster care history.

Studies from the US have also found a gendered dimension to the care/homelessness nexus. Winkleby, Rockhill, Jatulis and Fortmann (1992) suggest that homeless women are more likely to have experienced foster care than men. Other studies have identified an intergenerational cycle of foster care among homeless families (Roman & Wolfe 1997:8). They found that over a quarter (27 per cent) of homeless parents with a history of foster care had children in foster care. In comparison, 15 per cent of parents with no such history had children in foster care.

Once homeless, the circumstances of young people who have been in care often get worse and more complex to resolve (Johnson & Chamberlain 2008) and they are at acute risk of longer term social exclusion. As Manicaros and Lanyon (1999) note:

Once marginalised and socially excluded, the disenfranchised can be homeless for many years and suffer material deprivation, relational and personal difficulties, an inability to integrate with the mainstream, and social detachment.

### *3.2.3 Differences in leaving care outcomes*

Reflecting on the factors that produce different outcomes among care leavers, three general points stand out. First, biography matters. Young people who have experienced physical or sexual abuse or neglect typically fare the worst. Second and closely related, this group often has great difficulty forming stable relationships and this often results in difficulties with foster carers and workers. Many young people who have experienced physical and sexual abuse have unresolved feelings of anger towards family members, have great difficulties 'trusting' older people and this often spills over into frustration and resentment towards carers, workers and the 'system'. These problems often result in placement breakdown leading to multiple placements, further compounding existing difficulties establishing and maintaining significant relationships. Those who do well typically have few placements, often only one, and consequently are more willing to seek emotional and financial assistance from their careers. Third, negative outcomes for care leavers tend to be heavily concentrated among those who experience little stability in their lives prior to or while they are in care. This group has little if any direct family support or other community networks to call on to ease their transition to independent living. Research shows that without stability in their placements 'employment, education and training outcomes are likely to be poor' (McDowall 2008).

Clearly, young people's pre-care and in-care experiences are important and while many studies highlight the link between these experiences and subsequent housing and non-housing outcomes, few studies attempt to translate this information into the different housing needs and options required by different groups of care leavers. This is important because if policy solutions designed to address housing instability and homelessness treat care leavers as a homogeneous group, they may have little impact on reducing the overall rate of homelessness among people who have been in care.

### **3.3 Economic costs**

The problems care leavers experience also have implications for the community as a whole. While there is minimal Australian research analysing the costs of failing to provide support or transitional care programs for people leaving care, two studies suggest that the costs are significant.

A recent study for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs suggested that just over half of all care leavers go on to be heavy service users throughout their lives (Morgan Disney & Associates & Applied Economics 2006). They estimate the additional life-time costs to the community of a cohort of 1150 people who have left care to be around \$2 billion dollars or \$46 million dollars per annum (p.8). In contrast, the equivalent costs for the same number of people in the general community are estimated to be \$3.3 million per annum.

It is also the case that a disproportionate number of care leavers' children end up in care themselves. The failure to break the cycle of negative outcomes that occur prior to care has significant implications for the children of care leavers as well as significant financial implications for the community. Forbes et al (2006) report that 28 per cent of respondents interviewed for their study had taken on a parenting role relatively young and, of these, more than half of those with children had come under some form of child protection order for their own children at the time of interview (within two years of leaving state care). These figures compare with less than one half of one per cent for the general population (p.28). The estimated average cost for the leaving care population arising from this cycle of care is \$98,812 across the lifetime of a care leaver, compared with an average cost for the wider population of \$540 per person. Taking into account costs of a range of health, housing, police, judicial, drug and alcohol, child protection and employment-related costs, they estimate that the total lifetime cost per person from the leaving care population is \$738,741 greater than for the general population. This amount provides an indication of potential cost savings if care leaver life outcomes could be made to match the typical outcomes of young people in the general population.

### **3.4 Leaving care programs: the evidence**

Governments around the world now explicitly acknowledge their role as corporate parents extends beyond the age of 18. One strategy that has been developed in response to the evidence that shows care leavers often lack the social and economic resources to live independently has been to implement programs to support care leavers in their transition to independence. The basic premise of these programs is that care leavers who receive post-care support will experience a smoother transition to self-sufficiency (Montgomery et al. 2006:1437).

Leaving care programs aim to address care leavers' wide range of needs. Research has consistently identified a number of critical areas where care leavers' needs are not being met, and that need to be met if they are to make a successful transition to adult life. Reid (2007) neatly summarises these under the title of 'seven pillars and the foundation'. The seven pillars are: relationships, education, life skills, identity, youth engagement, emotional healing and housing. The foundation is financial support for young people. These categories provide a useful framework 'against which the performance of responsible authorities can be measured' (McDowall 2008:13). Leaving care programs have been operating in many western countries for over 15 years and given that there is an emerging consensus on what are appropriate

outcome measures, surprisingly few studies have evaluated the effectiveness of leaving care programs.

For instance, in Canada, France, Sweden and Ireland, post-care support programs have been operating for some time, but there are no published papers to gauge what is, and what is not, working in leaving care programs in any of these countries. Similarly, in Australia, there are no published evaluations on the effectiveness of post-care support programs. This, in all likelihood reflects the relatively short history of post-care programs in Australia, but claims that post-care support programs work are, therefore being made without any empirical evidence. The paucity of the evidence base is reinforced by the fact that, even in the UK, where a strong legislative framework (the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000) underpins a considerable financial commitment to post-care support services, there is only one published study that assesses the effectiveness of initiatives designed to assist care leavers (Biehal, Clayden, Stein & Wade 1995). This study, which is now over a decade old, used a quasi-experimental design to compare the outcomes of young people who used specialist support schemes (N=30) and those who did not (n=23), 18-24 months after they left care. They found positive improvements in the accommodation and life skill outcomes of those who received post-care support. However, post-care programs had a limited impact in other areas. For instance, successful educational outcomes were linked to the level of placement stability that young people experienced while in care, rather than the type or intensity of the post-care support services they received.

In the US, a number of studies have evaluated the effectiveness of post-care support programs. These programs are referred to as independent living programs (ILP) and there is a wide range of approaches to the way services are delivered, what they focus on, and the settings in which they are delivered (Montgomery et al. 2006:1437). Along with the fact that the US has different policy, legislative and cultural arrangements, means that some caution needs to be exercised when interpreting the findings in terms of their potential relevance to Australia.

US studies use a range of methods, including quasi-experimental, longitudinal or single group designs. Although they have been criticised for their 'weak evaluation methodologies', they still provide 'informative data' that policy-makers can use to design and fine tune ILPs guidelines and improve service delivery practices (Montgomery et al. 2006:1437). Quasi-experimental studies (or comparison studies) show that participants in ILP generally do better than non-participants in terms of their education, employment, housing, health and life skills outcomes. Harding and Luft (1993) compared the outcomes of 30 people participating in ILP and 29 non-ILP participants. They found that those who received ILP services had more stable housing and had better job training completion rates. Lindsey and Ahmed (1999) compared the outcomes of 44 ILP participants and 32 non-ILP participants one to three years after their discharge. The results favoured ILP participants. They found that 68 per cent of those in ILPs were living in independent accommodation (against 41 per cent of non-ILP participants), a decline in homelessness among ILP participants, one quarter of ILP participants were paying for all of their living expenses (against 0 per cent of non-ILP participants), ILP participants had fewer problems paying their bills (5 per cent against 25 per cent of non-ILP participants) and more ILP participants were employed (59 per cent against 44 per cent).

Scannapieco, Schagrin and Scannapieco (1995) case record analysis of 44 ILP participants and 46 non-ILP participants found that ILP participants did better, with over half completing high school (against 13 per cent of non-ILP participants), 52 per cent were employed (against 26 per cent), just under half were supporting themselves (against 17 per cent) and 36 per cent were living on their own (against 4 per cent).

However, no information is provided on how much time had elapsed between discharge and follow up.

In contrast, Lemon, Hines and Merdinger (2005) used survey data to compare the outcomes of 81 ILP participants with 113 non-ILP participants. They found little difference between the two groups in terms of their experiences of homelessness, problems with the law, and access to health services. They did, however, find that there was a significant difference on the level of hopefulness about the future, with those receiving ILP service more positive about the future than non-ILP participants.

Single group studies also report favourable outcomes for care leavers who participate in ILPs. Nebraska's (1994) survey of young people one year after they had been discharged from care and who were still receiving ILP services found that two-thirds (67 per cent) were employed, over half were living independently, and two-thirds received some assistance in preparation for independent living. Similarly, Moore's (1988) study of 61 young people receiving ILP services reported that 80 per cent indicated that their quality of life had improved after receiving services. They found that housing and health care were the most beneficial services, while employment services were the least. Moore's study provides no indication of whether these short term impacts had a subsequent or lasting effect.

Although these evaluation studies suffer from a number of problems such as small sample sizes, different outcome measures, and a failure to elaborate on the reasons why some care leavers manage to maintain their accommodation while others experience ongoing instability and, in some cases, homelessness, the most significant shortcoming is the lack of clarity regarding the length of time between discharge and follow up. In some cases, people were still receiving ILP services (e.g. Moore 1998), in others, the time elapsed is simply not specified (e.g. Scannapieco, Schagrin and Scannapieco 1995), while in others it is unclear (e.g. Harding and Luft 1993; Lemon, Hines and Merdinger 2005). Either way, without this sort of information, it is difficult to establish the long-term effectiveness of ILPs.

As noted earlier (chapter 2), housing options for care leavers are limited both in terms of their availability and also in terms of the way they are configured – most of the housing that has been set aside for care leavers is transitional in nature and often it is shared with someone else. While these arrangements may work well for some, for others they may well be inappropriate. This emphasises the point made by Kroner that 'no one living arrangement works for all youth' (2007:68). While this point is widely accepted, there has been little research into the effectiveness of different accommodation models for different care leavers. We found four studies, one from Australia, one from the US, and two from the UK, that attempt a more fine grained analysis of the housing needs of care leavers. Cashmore and Paxman (1996:146) argue that policy needs to acknowledge that finding long-term accommodation is one of the main problems facing care leavers. They argue that Australia should look to the US and the UK where a range of housing options, backed by strong legislative arrangements, have been established. More specifically, they suggest that much can be learnt from overseas where local authorities (the equivalent of state governments in Australia) have 'negotiated with public housing authorities to guarantee access to public housing for homelessness wards' (p.146). In the UK, 'ring fenced' or 'dedicated funding' for housing exclusively for care leavers underpins their broad policy commitment that no child leaving care will exit into homelessness. In this context, the recent announcement of a significant injection of funding for public and community housing provides Australian policy-makers with the opportunity to allocate new stock for care leavers. The value of guaranteed access has the potential to reduce some of these anxieties and concerns many young people experience prior to leaving care, as



well as reducing the number of young people who leave care with no accommodation and subsequently end up homeless.

Similarly, Biehal and Wade (1999:88-90) argue that the 'availability of a range of accommodation options to meet the differing needs can also contribute to good transitions' (p.88) Some young people will benefit from supported accommodation while for others a 'supply of good quality permanent tenancies is required' (p.88). They also point out that while different accommodation options are important, the expectation that young people are ready to move at such a young age is often unrealistic and any program needs to be flexible enough to allow young people to return to more supported accommodation 'when necessary' (p.90, see also Kroner 2007:57,66). The 'housing plus support' approach recognises that many care leavers have few positive relationships and rely on professional support to deal with any crisis they encounter. Importantly, they found housing providers were more willing to take on care leavers if they had this sort of support in place. They also note that while an appropriate range of options is required, developing an appropriate range of options is a 'special function' that requires 'formal partnerships with housing providers' (p.89).

While Cashmore and Paxman (1996) and Beihal and Wade's (1999) work emphasises the importance of linking different accommodation options to the different levels of support required by care leavers, Stein (1997) and Kroner's (2007) work offers a far more detailed list of accommodation options. Stein (1997:47) suggests the following accommodation options should be available to care leavers.

1. Supported lodgings that may be short, medium or long term with support tailored to meet their needs.
2. Models which allow young people to remain with foster carers when settled and redesignating placements as supported accommodation.
3. Accommodation and support models involving partnerships between leaving care services and housing associations.
4. Converting transitional accommodation to a standard tenancy agreement once the person becomes independent.
5. Foyers (a hostel type accommodation) which encourage young people to achieve employment. These may be less relevant for young people with complex or special needs.

In the US, Kroner (2007) identified a number of accommodation models. In all of these models young people receive subsidies which can be for rent, food and personal items. The models are:

1. Scattered site apartments where a young person lives on their own and rents from a landlord. Over time there is a reduction in the level of supervision and support.
2. Supervised apartments located in an apartment building which may be owned by the support agency. Live in staff provide supervision and counselling and support if required.
3. Shared homes where several young people live.
4. An independent apartment shared with an adult mentor. The young person lives relatively independently with mentor support. This model combines mentoring and independent living – the agency or mentor pays the rent, although the young person makes a contribution.
5. Host homes – a young person rents a room in the home of a host family.

6. Other options include boarding houses, transitional group homes, shelters, subsidised housing and residential treatment centre.

While the appropriateness of shelters and other forms of accommodation designed for the homeless is questionable, the most serious limitation with these studies is that none actually examines how the varying needs of care leavers relate to different housing requirements in terms of location, cost and style (shared or group living, subsidised housing, semi-supported; a continuum of living arrangements, semi-supported, etc). This sort of information is crucial if post-care programs are to achieve their aim of assisting young people to make the transition to independent living. This study is the first in Australia to look specifically at the different housing needs of care leavers as part of their overall transition experience. To this end, this research will interrogate the ways in which both the hard (access, type, affordability, location) and symbolic dimensions of home might inform policy responses that reflect the different housing needs of different care leavers.

### **3.5 Summary**

Much of the work on care leavers indicates that they are at risk of a range of negative outcomes. In these studies, insecure housing and homelessness are negative outcomes in themselves, and are associated with the further limiting of life chances in education, employment and emotional and physical wellbeing. These findings are important for four key reasons.

First, they are reminders of the importance of conceptualising the challenges facing care leavers as a set of 'joined-up' issues which are most effectively addressed through a set of inter-related programs. The strong link between the reasons why young people need care, their experiences in care, and their outcomes when they leave care presents many difficult challenges for policy-makers. However, research consistently indicates that stable housing is a key determinate of attaining ongoing wellbeing (Cashmore & Paxman 2006b; Wade & Dixon 2006).

Second, the evidence suggests that leaving care programs do make a difference at least in the short term, but there is little known about the effectiveness of leaving care programs in Australia. Further, the limited range of housing options linked to leaving care programs is problematic. And, while internationally a range of alternative housing options for care leavers have been developed, it is unclear how the different needs of care leavers relate to different housing models.

Third, research highlights the heterogeneity of care leavers. This offers some indication of the way forward in identifying supports and experiences that facilitate positive housing and associated outcomes.

Finally, they indicate the importance of acknowledging both individual and structural factors in shaping housing and homelessness. Some young people leaving state care may struggle with the psychological and physical effects of abuse and insecurity, for example, but the implications of these individual characteristics are shaped by the social, economic, cultural and policy context in which they are living.

## 4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research draws on young people's experiences and needs in order to explore how policy initiatives can more effectively support positive and sustainable housing outcomes. This focus is best served by a qualitative methodology that seeks to develop a detailed and nuanced account of the circumstances and experiences of young people. The data will be collected with the aim of exploring how young people explain the relationship between their experiences, the resources and barriers they faced, and their housing and other life outcomes – information that is difficult to generate in quantitative studies. It also encourages a recursive approach to the research question, allowing us to incorporate issues important to participants but so far unidentified in existing approaches.

### 4.1 Interviews

Interviews will be conducted with a sample of 100 care leavers recruited from agencies that work with young homeless people and agencies that provide post care support. We intend to target people currently aged between 18 and 25 years. There are two reasons for the choice of this age group. First, transitional support has only recently become available. For individuals over the age of 25, transitional services would not have been available when they left care. Second, interviewing people under 18 who are in or who have left care raises many complex ethical issues.

It is critical nonetheless, to understand and compare the experiences of those who leave care before the age of 18 and those who age out, given that the evidence shows that those who leave care later tend to do better. To do this we will include people who were under 18 when they left care and those who 'age out' of the care system. Further, to examine 'what works' and 'what does not work' we will prospectively target two groups of care leavers – those who are securely housed and/or have support, and those who are currently homeless. The sampling matrix below identifies the number of people we aim to interview in each group.

**Table 2: Sampling matrix**

	<i>Victoria</i>		<i>Western Australia</i>	
	<i>Housed/support</i>	<i>Homeless</i>	<i>Housed/support</i>	<i>Homeless</i>
Left care before 18	12	13	12	13
Left care at 18	13	12	13	12
<b><i>TOTAL</i></b>	25	25	25	25

As indicated in Table 2, the research will be undertaken in two states – Western Australia and Victoria. The choice of Western Australia and Victoria was partly a matter of convenience, but given that both states have implemented leaving care programs relatively recently (in the last five years) and these programs are guided by different leaving care policies, we will be able to compare and contrast the experiences of care leavers in both states in order to better understand the impact of specific leaving care and related housing policies that shape the experiences of young people once they leave care.

The sample will be drawn from care and homeless agencies in both states. The recruitment strategy will be bolstered with snowball sampling (where appropriate). Participants will be offered \$30 as reimbursement for their time and expenses.

This project is principally a qualitative study, although it will augment qualitative data with a small amount of quantitative data. The project will focus on care leavers perceptions of care and their perception of the leaving care process.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the care leavers. The interview schedule will explore the relationship between experiences in care and at the point of leaving care and post care housing. First, it will elicit information of their experiences while in care and at the point of leaving of care. It will examine how well the state performs this role and what implications this has for the wellbeing of care leavers. Second, it will gather information on the different needs of care leavers. Finally, it will consider what has happened to care leavers (their outcomes) since leaving care. The research tool is designed to elicit information on how housing (access, type, location, stability, cost) has shaped the lives of people as they leave care (i.e. educational, employment, health, relationships). The interview schedule will be piloted in Victoria. Qualitative data will be taped and transcribed. It will then be analysed using thematic analysis.

As with all qualitative studies, some care must be taken in generalising the findings, but the size of the sample, and its distribution across different jurisdictions, means that the findings will be indicative of the processes, barriers and opportunities care leavers have been subject to. Ultimately, the aim of qualitative research is to identify and describe the processes involved in a particular issue (in this case, how care leavers have experienced their transition from care and their housing circumstances), rather than their distribution in a population. Through detailed interview schedules and analysis, a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the housing problems care leavers encounter will be generated.

## **4.2 Engaging other discourses**

It is clear from existing research that the needs of care leavers cannot be met by a single government department or non-government organisation. In this respect, there is a need to understand the extent to which post-care programs are integrated with housing assistance programs and how effectively these programs meet the housing needs of different groups of care leavers. To do this, we will first undertake an additional review of existing literature in relation to care leavers and housing assistance, with an emphasis on documenting existing program and service delivery models to guide improvements in the delivery of services to care leavers.

Second, we will conduct two 'roundtable conversations' (one in each state) with key stakeholders to identify minimum standards, a best practice framework, and effective outcome measures. The roundtables will include a mix of service providers and policy makers.

## **4.3 Summary**

Previous research has traced the relationship between leaving care and a range of negative outcomes, including housing outcomes. However, to date there is limited information that focuses on housing in the Australian context, and limited information on how experiences and outcomes may alter according to the age at which young people left care. A qualitative study, with its ability to identify previously un-recorded

experiences and relationships, is an appropriate methodology for research exploring a new policy area.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The problems facing care leavers are well recognised. For over two decades now researchers have identified the profound economic, social and personal costs of failing to assist young people leaving care in their transition to independent living. While research has clearly articulated the many ways in which young people leaving care are disadvantaged relative to other young people, what is lacking in Australia is a clear understanding of the appropriate housing and support programs that can assist care leavers with different needs make the transition to independent living. With increasing pressure on both state housing and welfare authorities, this research is timely as it will address this gap.

As we have noted previously, legislative frameworks and program responses have started to change in most jurisdictions as policy-makers recognise the importance of assisting care leavers. The policy environment is dynamic and new initiatives continue to be rolled out. At a federal level various policy initiatives are currently being developed that may have implications for care leavers. The Federal Government's White paper on homelessness, with its commitment to stopping young people leaving care exiting into homelessness, and its Rental Affordability Scheme are two such policy initiatives, while the National Child Protection Framework offers the promise of creating much needed consistency between jurisdictions. In Victoria and Western Australia leaving care programs have recently been established, but there is little evidence to indicate what sort of outcomes they are achieving. The research will consider these policies and programs and the role they play in improving the social opportunities of young people who 'age out' of the state out-of-home care system.

It is clear from the literature we have reviewed that assisting young people leaving care to make the smooth transition to independent living is a long-term process. And, it is equally clear that there needs to be continuity and flexibility in the support and assistance offered by leaving care programs. Furthermore, for leaving care programs to be effective, there is a need for these programs to be well integrated with other program areas such as health, education, employment and housing.

Central to this research is a focus on housing. Care leavers are a heterogeneous group. Young people's pre-care and in-care experiences differ significantly and while many studies highlight the link between these experiences and subsequent housing and non-housing outcomes, few studies attempt to translate this information into the different housing needs and options required by different groups of care leavers. If the housing outcomes of care leavers are to be improved, it is essential to understand what types of housing assistance different care leavers require. Improving housing outcomes is critical as the evidence indicates that improvements in the housing circumstances of care leavers is linked to better outcomes in employment, education, health and social relationships. But it is not about housing alone. As Spence (1994:40) notes:

It is the provision of quality, affordable housing in the community *combined with a close supportive* agency role that is the key to helping young people successfully make the transitions. [italics added]

While access to and maintaining housing is often care leavers' biggest concern, it is important to think about housing in a broader way than just access and affordability. Issues of autonomy, identity and social relationships are both shaped by and themselves shape the housing and non-housing outcomes of care leavers. There is also a need to recognise the specific circumstances of care leavers who are homeless

or at risk of homelessness, and differentiate them from the general youth homeless population who may have a very different set of needs.

While the evidence from the US and to a lesser extent the UK suggests that young people who are assisted by leaving care programs do better, there is a greater need to systematically consider the role of housing assistance in post-care support. In Australia, there has also been no systematic investigation into what 'best practice' might look like. Similarly, there has been little consideration of the minimum standards that should underpin post-care support, what current post-care support entails, or who qualifies for post-care support.

Most importantly, the research will focus directly on the experiences of those who have left care. It is only through their voices that we can understand what housing assistance care leavers require, and highlight the role that improved access to housing may play in leading to improvements in other areas of their lives. Our aim is to provide policy-makers with evidence to assist them to develop housing programs that can assist care leavers to overcome the many barriers they face on their journey to independent living.

This positioning paper will be followed by a final report and a research policy bulletin that will be available in September 2009.

## APPENDIX A: AUSTRALIAN CHILD PROTECTION LEGISLATION

Table 3: Legislation relevant to child protection in each Australian jurisdiction

<i>Jurisdiction</i>	<i>Legislation</i>
<p><b>Australian Capital Territory</b> (Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services) <a href="http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/">http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/</a></p>	<p><b>Principal Act/s:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Children and Young People Act 1999 (ACT)</li> </ul> <p><b>Other relevant Act/s:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Adoption Act 1993 (ACT)</li> <li>→ Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT)</li> <li>→ Human Rights Commission Act 2005 (ACT)</li> <li>→ Public Advocate Act 2005 (ACT)</li> <li>→ Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</li> </ul>
<p><b>New South Wales</b> (Department of Community Services) <a href="http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/">http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/</a></p>	<p><b>Principal Act/s:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)</li> </ul> <p><b>Other relevant Act/s:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment (Parental Responsibility Contracts) Act 2006 (NSW)</li> <li>→ Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000 (NSW)</li> <li>→ Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)</li> <li>→ Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998 (NSW)</li> <li>→ The Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW)</li> <li>→ Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Northern Territory</b> (Family and Children's Services, Department of Health and Community Services) <a href="http://www.nt.gov.au/lant/hansard/hansard.shtml">http://www.nt.gov.au/lant/hansard/hansard.shtml</a></p>	<p><b>Principal Act/s:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Community Welfare Act 1983 (NT)</li> <li>→ Care and Protection of Children Draft Act (NT) (currently before Cabinet)</li> </ul> <p><b>Other relevant Act/s:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Information Act 2006 (NT)</li> <li>→ Disability Services Act 2004 (NT)</li> <li>→ Criminal Code Act 2006 (NT)</li> <li>→ Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</li> </ul>



<p><b>Queensland</b> (Department of Child Safety) <a href="http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/OQPChome.htm">http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/OQPChome.htm</a></p>	<p><b>Principal Act/s:</b> → Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)</p> <p><b>Other relevant Act/s:</b> → Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000 (Qld) → Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (Qld) → Public Health Act 2005 (Qld) → Adoption of Children Act 1964 (Qld) → Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</p>
<p><b>South Australia</b> (Families SA; Department for Families and Communities) <a href="http://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/index.aspx">http://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/index.aspx</a></p>	<p><b>Principal Act/s:</b> → Children's Protection Act 1993 (SA)</p> <p><b>Other relevant Acts/legislation:</b> → Young Offenders Act 1994 (SA) → Adoption Act 1988 (SA) → Children's Protection Regulations 2006 (SA) → Family Law Act 1975 (Cth) → Family and Community Services Act 1972 (SA)</p>
<p><b>Tasmania</b> (Department of Health and Human Services) <a href="http://www.thelaw.tas.gov.au/index.w3p">http://www.thelaw.tas.gov.au/index.w3p</a></p>	<p><b>Principal Act/s:</b> → <i>Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997 (TAS)</i></p> <p><b>Other relevant Act/s:</b> → <i>The Family Violence Act 2004 (TAS)</i> → Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</p>
<p><b>Victoria</b> (Children Protection and Juvenile Justice Branch; Department of Human Services) <a href="http://www.dms.dpc.vic.gov.au/">http://www.dms.dpc.vic.gov.au/</a></p>	<p><b>Principal Act/s:</b> → Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)</p> <p><b>Other relevant Act/s:</b> → Working with Children Act (Vic) → Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) → The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act → 2006 (Vic) → Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</p>

<p><b>Western Australia</b>          (Department for Community Development, now the Department for Child Protection)  <a href="http://www.slp.wa.gov.au/statutes/swans.nsf">http://www.slp.wa.gov.au/statutes/swans.nsf</a></p>	<p><b>Principal Act/s:</b>          → Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA)</p> <p><b>Other relevant Act/s:</b>          → Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004 (WA)          → Family Court Act 1997 (WA)          → Adoption Act 1994 (WA)          → Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</p>
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Source: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/resources/legislation/legislation.pdf>

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Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute  
Level 1 114 Flinders Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000  
Phone +61 3 9660 2300 Fax +61 3 9663 5488  
Email [information@ahuri.edu.au](mailto:information@ahuri.edu.au) Web [www.ahuri.edu.au](http://www.ahuri.edu.au)