

Learn or Earn

Discussion Paper

Implications for
young people
in-care and
post-care
November 2010

Written by
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CREATE Foundation

SUBMISSIONS

The Learn or Earn Discussion Paper has been developed to encourage and inform discussion and debate about improving educational and employment outcomes for young people in-care and post-care.

Stakeholders are asked to consider the paper and the key questions within their groups or organisations in terms of how they and the broader system can contribute to improving educational and employment outcomes.

At this stage, CREATE Foundation is seeking submissions about how to collaboratively progress discussions and address the issues at a national and state or territory level within and across key sectors - out of home care, education, employment and health. Consideration should be given to relevant national and state or territory policy contexts and identifying existing processes or, where exiting processes are not in place or suitable, new processes for collaboratively progressing discussions and addressing the issues.

How to provide feedback

Feedback is sought by **25 February 2011**.

The paper is available electronically from www.create.org.au

Where to send your feedback

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Next step

CREATE will consider the feedback received and will re-contact key stakeholders in **March 2011** seeking to work collaboratively in progressing the discussions at both national and state or territory levels.

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INTRODUCTION

'As with all children and young people, education makes a significant contribution to the development and well-being of those in-care and their future access to employment and life opportunities. For children and young people in-care, education is identified as a significant gateway through which they can pass from care to adulthood, to employment and to effectively participating in community life' (CREATE, 2006).

The importance of education and employment opportunities to young people realising their potential and the need to address factors leading to their disengagement and exclusion from such opportunities is receiving increasing attention across Australia. In January 2010, the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments introduced a new initiative, the *National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions* aimed at increasing the educational engagement, attainment and transitions of young people aged 15-24 years. This Agreement is commonly referred to as the '*Learn or Earn*' policy. This policy has significant implications for young people in terms of requirements to participate in education, training or employment and provisions for making access to Youth Allowance and Family Tax Benefit conditional on participation in education, training or employment.

Young people aged 15-24 years who are in-care or post-care face many challenges in accessing educational, employment and transitional opportunities. In Australia, as of 30 June 2009, there were over 34,000 children and young people living in out of home care. 4,973 of these children and young people were aged 15-17 years, whilst 2,406 young people aged 15-17 years had left care between 2008 and 2009 (AIHW, 2010). It is therefore critical that the application of the Learn or Earn policy to, and the implications for, young people in-care and post-care be fully explored, considered and addressed.


In August 2010, CREATE Foundation (CREATE) commissioned the preparation of a discussion paper:

- To promote awareness of the Learn or Earn policy in relation to young people in-care and post-care
- To improve young people's access to education, employment and transitional opportunities
- To ensure that young people are not disadvantaged in accessing youth allowance.

This paper continues and builds on CREATE's previous work in promoting awareness of the educational needs, participation and performance of children and young people in-care through the Education Report Cards (2004, 2006) and, current work in examining the issues impacting young people transitioning from care and government actions through the Transitioning from Care Report Cards (McDowall, 2008 and 2009).

Structure of the paper

Section 2 details the approach taken to developing the paper.



Section 3 provides an overview of the *Learn or Earn policy* and identifies the broader national policy context relating to young people in-care and leaving care. This section also reports on young people's awareness of, and views about, the policy.

Section 4 examines whether young people are learning or earning.

Section 5 examines the factors impacting education and employment outcomes drawing on the views of young people and available literature and research. Issues in young people accessing Youth Allowance are also examined.

Section 6 identifies strategies for improving education and employment outcomes drawing on the views of young people and available literature and research.

Section 7 provides concluding comments and encourages continuing discussion and about the *Learn or Earn policy* and how it can benefit young people in-care and post-care.

APPROACH

The development of this discussion paper has been informed by:

- a review of the *National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions*
- a review of the literature relating to the education and employment of young people in-care and post-care, and
- small group discussions with 35 young people who are involved in CREATE's State and Territory Youth Advisory Groups in Tasmania, Northern Territory, South Australian, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

A one page summary was developed to brief the young people about the policy and key questions were used to guide discussions. The key questions were:

1. What has been your experience so far around education, training and employment?
2. What do you think about these changes (regarding the Learn or Earn policy)?
3. What are the barriers for young people in-care and post-care to stay at school, get a job, and receive youth allowance?
4. What could be done to better assist young people in-care and post-care to stay at school, get a job, and receive youth allowance?
5. Are you aware of the Youth Connections Program?

OVERVIEW OF LEARN OR EARN POLICY

This section provides an overview of the Learn or Earn policy and reports on young people's awareness of, and views about, the policy.

A review of the *Learn or Earn policy* indicates it was established to:

- achieve a national Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate of 90 per cent by 2015
- provide an education or training entitlement to young people aged 15-24 years
- better engage young people in education and training
- assist young people aged 15-24 years make a successful transition from schooling into further education, training or employment, and
- better align Commonwealth, State and Territory programs and services related to youth, careers and transitions.

The outcomes sought from the initiative are:

- increased participation of young people in education and training
- young people make a successful transition from school to further education, training or full time employment, and
- increased attainment of young people aged 15-24 years.

Youth Participation Requirement

The *National Youth Participation Requirement* includes mandatory requirements for

- all young people to participate in schooling until they complete Year 10, and
- all young people who have completed year 10 to participate in full time education, training or employment, or a combination of these activities, until age 17 years.

Education or training is considered full time if it includes 25 hours per week of formal course requirements.

Exemptions from these requirements continue in line with existing State and Territory practice.

Changes to Youth Allowance

In order to receive Youth Allowance, young people aged under 21, who have not finished Year 12 (or equivalent qualifications - either the final year of secondary school or Certificate II or above) must be studying or training (25 hours or more per week). Those in part-time education or training will be

required to undertake additional activities to meet the 25 hours per week required - e.g. voluntary work or paid employment.

There are exemptions from the requirement to study. These include:

- no study or training is reasonably available
- illness or disability that means a young person does not have the capacity to undertake the study or training available, and
- special circumstances that make it difficult for a young person to study or attend training - for example, homelessness, problems with drugs or alcohol, family breakdown, or other problems in their life.

Similar changes have been made to eligibility requirements for Family Tax Benefit Part A.

Supporting Successful Transitions

To provide efficient and effective career and transition services to young people, the policy states that States and Territories will progressively assume primary responsibility for the provision of youth career and transition programs, whilst the Commonwealth will retain responsibility for national career development.

The current suite of Commonwealth youth, career and transition arrangements have been consolidated and streamlined into four new elements under this policy.

Maximising Engagement, Attainment and Successful Transitions

Establishing project payments to States and Territories to assist with implementation of strategies to address multiple learning pathways, career development, and mentoring.

School Business Community Partnership Brokers (Community and Education Engagement)

Brokers will be established to improve community and business engagement with schools and registered training organisations to extend learning beyond the classroom, increase student engagement, deepen learning experiences, lift attainment and improve educational outcomes.

Youth Connections

The Youth Connections program will be put in place to provide a safety net for youth at risk through the provision of tailored case management and support to help young people to reconnect with education and training and build resilience, and develop skills and attributes that promote positive choice and well being.

National Career Development

The Commonwealth will maintain responsibility for National Career Development, providing funding for a range of national projects and resources, such as the Job Guide, for the benefit of all States and Territories.

State and Territory Implementation Plans

Each State and Territory has developed an Implementation Plan to support implementation of the Agreement. Implementation plans include strategies for:

- strengthening participation requirements
- lifting qualifications, and
- supporting successful transitions.

Broader National Policy Context

Child protection is primarily the responsibility of state statutory departments. However, there is a growing appreciation that the issues impacting young people in-care and post-care involve a range of state and national departments. Two policy frameworks are specifically relevant:

- *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*
- *National Affordable Housing Agreement*.

Under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, draft National Standards for Out of Home Care have been developed.

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments on 30th April 2009. The framework is primarily focused on:

- prevention and early intervention, and
- the need to better integrate the delivery of government and non-government services.

In terms of improving support for young people leaving care, the initial three year actions include:

- increase support through non-government organisations for young people leaving care to establish their independence
- continue and improve state and territory initiatives targeting young people leaving care, and
- implement policy of 'no exits into homelessness' from statutory care.

National Affordable Housing Agreement

The strategy of 'no exits into homelessness' from statutory care is delivered through the *National Affordable Housing Agreement* and the *National Partnership on Homelessness*. Children and young people including those subject to or exiting care and protection are included as a target group for reducing homelessness. In terms of young people leaving care, the Agreement includes early intervention and prevention services for up to an additional 9000 young people aged 12-18 years at risk of homelessness to remain connected with families (where appropriate), and to support their continued participation or re-engagement in education, training and employment.

In addition, the *Transition to Independent Living Allowance* available to young people transitioning from care and post-care was increased from \$1,000 to \$1,500 from 1 July 2009.

National OOHC Standards

Draft *National Standards for Out of Home Care* have been developed under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* to support enhanced national consistency and continuous improvement in child protection services. In terms of young people's education and employment, and leaving care, the standards include:

- Children and young people between 15 and 18 years are supported to be engaged in appropriate education, training and/or employment (Standard 8)
- Young people have a transition from care plan commencing at 15 years old which is reviewed at least annually, details support to be provided after leaving care and involves children and young people in its preparation (Standard 14).

It is understood that Ministers will consider the final national standards, measures and implementation plans in December 2010.

In addition to the national policy context, all states and territories have policies and standards relevant to education and employment, child protection, and housing.

Awareness of Learn or Earn Policy

The views of 35 young people involved in CREATE's Youth Advisory Groups were sought about the *Learn or Earn policy*.

Young people participating were not aware of the Learn or Earn Policy or the related requirements to participate in education, training or employment and making access to Youth Allowance conditional on this participation.

Following a discussion of the policy, young people were generally supportive of the aims of the policy. In terms of improving school retention and supporting successful transitions to further education, training or work. Comments included:

'The changes are good. It's good for young people to stay in school until Year 10. This deters young people from going down the wrong track, e.g. drugs, alcohol.'

'Young people can sometimes not realise the impact that education/employment has on their lives, Learn or Earn may have long term positive outcomes given the good foundation of study or work.'

Young people's views about linking access to youth allowance to participating in education or training were mixed. On the one hand young people understood that this could 'ensure young people stay engaged in learning and earning and provide the skills to progress in life'. However, on the other hand, they were concerned that young people not be 'punished by another system' due to the issues affecting their engagement in education and employment. They stressed the need for decision makers to understand and consider these issues in determining exemptions and access to Youth Allowance or other forms of financial and income support. Young people highlighted that decisions about further education, training or employment were often being made at times when young people are simultaneously leaving school and leaving care

In terms of exemptions, young people highlighted the need to identify supports available to young people in-care to address the issues leading to an exemption being granted so that they can access education, training and employment opportunities over time. Some young people thought that leaving care should be identified as grounds for considering exemption. There was also concern that exemptions can be limited to strict time periods, e.g. 2 weeks, which fails to recognise the nature of the issues this group of young people face.

Whilst young people were supportive of the intent of the policy, they were concerned about the application of the policy and that this not further disadvantage young people in-care and post-care who are already disadvantaged in accessing education and employment opportunities.

Most young people were not aware of the Youth Connections Program. Some young people thought they may have heard of it or something similar, whilst one young person was aware of it through a CREATE event attended by Mission Australia.

From an explanation that a CREATE staff member offered about the program, young people felt that it was worthwhile as it could provide the extra support that young people in-care are currently lacking, resulting in better outcomes. The young people did however feel that there needs to be increased community awareness surrounding the Program and questioned the consistency of the Program across various locations as they feel that quite often programs vary distinctly when operating on a large scale out of numerous locations. One young person researched it and thought it sounded similar to the Job Placement, Employment and Training program and therefore could be helpful to young people in-care and should be better advertised.

There was some concern that the program would be just another government agency or Job Network and not really have anything to offer.

ARE YOUNG PEOPLE LEARNING AND EARNING?

This section examines whether young people in the general population and those in-care or post-care are learning or earning.

An examination of national data on young people learning and earning undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) found that in 2009, the majority (81%) of young people aged 15-24 years were fully engaged in either education or work. Almost a half (49%) were studying full time for a qualification, while almost a third (31%) were in full-time employment. 19% were not fully engaged. These were made up of 8% of young people who worked part time (without being enrolled in study), 5% who were unemployed, and another 6% were not in the labour force. Around 1% of young people were enrolled in part-time study only.

Overall, 16% of 15–19 year olds (224,000 people) were not fully engaged in 2009. Just over half of them were not working or studying at all, being either unemployed or not in the labour force, while part-time workers made up most of the balance.

There is no standard national data collected on the educational attainment and employment of young people in-care/post-care. However, there is some national and state data available from small-scale studies that provide a snapshot. Whilst some young people in-care and post-care do better in education and employment than others, as a group, they do not fare as well as the general population.

A national survey of young people in-care and post-care undertaken by CREATE (McDowall, 2009) found that 'Of the 246 (young people) who gave an indication of how they were occupied at present, the largest proportion (28.5%) reported being unemployed and looking for work. However, a similar proportion in total was in full-time (15.4%), and part-time or casual (12.6%) employment. 11% reported studying at TAFE and 2.8% were undertaking university degrees.' Only 35.3% of those over 18 years had completed Year 12 education, which did not compare favourably with the 74% of 19 years olds achieving that benchmark in the general population.

A national study of 1,234 care leavers who had received assistance from the *Transition to Independent Living Allowance scheme* between June 2003 and March 2005 found that 56% were either registered as unemployed, or not in employment, education or training (Morgan Disney and Associates 2006).

In Queensland, analysis of Year 12 completion rates for young people in out of home care compared to school completers generally in 2008 found that 'young people who spent time in out of home care were less likely to undertake further education and were four times more likely than all Year 12 graduates to be neither learning or learning six months after leaving school. 39.7% of young people in out of home care were learning compared to 60.6% of Queensland young people, and where 29.3% of young people in out of home care were earning compared to 32.1% of Queensland young people. 31.0% of young people in out of home care were neither learning nor earning compared to

7.3% of Queensland young people' (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2009).

A study of educational pathways in New South Wales (Townsend, 2010) found that of 268 young people eligible for their School Certificate (Year 10), 56.6% obtained a School Certificate, whilst 17.2% obtained a Life Skills Award, 4.9% had a record of achievement but no award, and 21.6% left school early. Of 54 young people eligible for their Higher School Certificate (Year 12), 40.7% obtained a Higher School Certificate, 24.1% obtained a Life Skills Award, 13% had a record of achievement but no award, and 22.2% left school early.


A review by the New South Wales Ombudsman (2010) of the planning and support provided by Community Services to a group of 51 young people leaving statutory care in 2009 found that 'Around two-thirds (35; 69%) of the young people had a history of educational problems, such as truancy, learning difficulties, suspension/expulsion and moving between schools. Frequently, these young people experienced a number of educational problems concurrently.'

'At the time of review, 18 of the 51 young people (35%) were still at school and working towards completing the Higher School Certificate in either 2009 or 2010. Fifteen of the 33 young people who were not at school had left school in year 8 or 9, when they were aged 15 or younger. Only one of the 33 school leavers had completed year 12. This young person was undertaking an engineering degree at university. One third of the school leavers (11 of the 33) were not engaged in employment or training at the time of review. Eight of the young people who had left school were in paid employment and six were undertaking further study at TAFE in fields such as nursing, technology, business and hospitality.'

In a longitudinal study of young people leaving care Cashmore and Paxman (2007) found that 'twelve months after leaving care, when most were 18-19 years old, just over a third (35.6%) had completed Year 12, whilst one in five had not completed Year 10.' '4-5 years after leaving care, quarter had no recognised qualifications, have left school without completing their Year 12 studies and done no further study. They were much less likely than their 20-24 year old peers in the general population to have completed Year 12 (42% of care leavers compared with 80% of young people their age'. Of those who completed Year 12, all except one had gone on to do some further study.

'Most care leavers (33 out of 41 or 82%) said they were interested in further education or training. Four-to-five years after leaving care, 25% of care leavers were either in full-time work, full-time study or combined part-time work and study. This compares to 77% of their age-mates. Care leavers were more likely than their age-mates in the general population to be unemployed and receive government income support.'

In Victoria, a survey of 60 young people who had left care (Raman, Inder and Forbes, 2005) found that less than a third had completed formal schooling leaving them vulnerable to unemployment in an increasingly competitive employment market. Around three quarters (71%) were unemployed and depend on the Government for income support.



A study of 20 care leavers aged 18-25 years in Victoria (Moslehuddin, 2009) found that only five of the young people were engaged in paid employment or apprenticeships, two were working on a casual basis, and 13 of the 20 were unemployed and reliant on Centrelink payments.

In a study of the pathways from out of home care of 77 young people from Victoria and Western Australia who had left care and who were receiving support from homeless or post-care services, 81% were receiving government benefits, whilst 16% were working either full time or part time and 3% had no income (Johnson, G., Natalier, K., Mendes, P., Liddiard, M., Thoresen, S., Hollows, A. and Bailey, N, 2010).

There is an urgent need to collect and analyse standard data on young people's educational participation and attainment and employment. This would support more effective needs analysis and monitoring of outcomes to inform policy, program and practice developments.

FACTORS IMPACTING EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

This section examines the factors impacting education and employment outcomes drawing on the views of young people and available literature and research. Issues in young people accessing Youth Allowance are also examined.

Young people

Young people identified a range of factors impacting education outcomes including

- Young person input to decisions about their further education, training or employment
- Behavioural and emotional issues including learning difficulties and mental health
- Encouragement and support from carers, workers and school personnel
- School personnel understanding of issues affecting young people's participation and attainment in school
- Safety and stability of care arrangements
- Transitory lifestyle and homelessness
- Bullying and harassment -sometimes resulting from stigma of being in-care
- Continuity of school due to changes in placement and school zoning
- Cost of education fees, uniforms, books and transport - financial support does not move with young person from one school to another
- Limited choices of schools and schools have discretion about whether they will accept a young person or not
- Lack of alternative education models and schools for young people
- TAFE - costs and limited choices
- Youth Allowance does not cover all education costs
- Statutory department and Education department are not working together to support individual young people who need assistance with education plans.

Young people were concerned that upon turning 18 their carers had their foster payments cut off or they experienced housing instability/placement or service breakdown during this time which prevented them from being able to continue in education at this stage.

Some of these factors also were identified as contributing to employment outcomes. Other factors identified included:

- Education level
- Skills and experience
- Support in writing resumes, applying for jobs and preparation for interviews
- Transport to interviews - costs
- Support and resources to prepare young people for employment
- Assistance in managing money - emotional spending

- Support is often lacking from parents or significant adults – inclusive of transport, encouragement, success celebration and acknowledgement
- Employers looking for people with a drivers license - hard for young people in-care to get a license
- Choosing a good employment service
- Young people are often discriminated against for employment or are offered low paying, poor benefit jobs - employees can further stigmatise young people with a care experience
- Young people often have to focus on their safety, security and stability with housing and food. This additional responsibility is a pressure which their peers do not tend to face. Without support, the focus on obtaining housing and food can remove the focus from education and employment.

Issues identified by young people in accessing Youth Allowance or other forms of income support included:

- Not knowing what you are entitled to
- Lack of support in negotiating the system
- Difficulty in getting ID and related paperwork
- Not having a permanent address
- Low literacy
- Difficulty navigating internal computer system and e-services
- Privacy concerns relating to the amount of information which is required and the environment/public space in which this information is expected to be shared
- There is a possible discrepancy between the expectation that young people in-care access payments from 15 years on but Centrelink states this happens from 16 years on
- Carers can be unsupportive of young people accessing payments for a couple for reasons - carers are worried about the independence this may provide the young people and carers may be concerned their carer payments will be cut off
- Centrelink expectations and lack of understanding of issues impacting young people in-care and barriers to study and work.

Literature

The education and employment outcomes for young people in-care and post-care can be attributed to a range of pre-care, in-care and post-care experiences.

Young people in-care and post-care experience multiple transitions, which impact on their capacity to engage in education and employment. These include:

- leaving their family and being placed in-care, which may involve a change of school
- moving from one placement to another, which may involve a change of school
- leaving home to finding accommodation alone or with others
- leaving school to further education, training or finding work

- being financially dependent to being financially independent
- leaving care to being independent, and
- being a young person to being an adult

Some young people in-care or leaving care are also becoming parents.

In particular, at the same time as young people are being asked to make decisions about further education, training and employment, they are in the process of leaving care (McDowall, 2009; Mendes, 2009).

In a study of the education of children and young people in-care, Townsend (2010) reports on the commonalities and contrasts in matters related to children's educational progress identified by children in-care and adult stakeholders:

Children	Adults
Care has a positive effect educationally	Care has a negligible or negative effect educationally
The need to belong at home and school	Children's need for identity and belonging
The need to have a say and be heard	Children have unmet educational needs
School and placement change positive if better environments	The need for additional resources in both the education and care sectors
The importance of friendships and continuity in these	Children's need for stability in placement, school and adult relationships
The need for positive expectations, understanding and assistance from adults	Children's need for positive expectations, understanding and assistance from adults

A study of care system impacts on academic outcomes for young people in-care undertaken by Anglicare Victoria and Wesley Mission Victoria (Wise, S., Pollock, S., Mitchell, G., Argus, C., & Farquhar, P., 2010) identified the following key factors.

Profound effect of trauma

36.7% of children surveyed had a functional limitation due to a long-term health, medical or behavioural condition (thought to be linked to traumatic experiences and stressful events while in the homes of the children's family of origin.' A strong relationship was found between 'cognitive deficits and education outcomes including repeating a grade at school (intellectual disability), overall

achievement (learning disability), temporary suspension (ADD/HD), working hard at school (intellectual disability) and behaviour at school (learning disability/disorder).'

Difficulties conforming to the structure of mainstream schools

Many of the children were either enrolled in an alternative school setting or were not currently attending school. 'Mainstream schools were a complex and alienating place for young people who had experienced significant trauma, even when teachers made intensive efforts to support them to stay at school and to engage in learning.'

Role of carers in children's education

The study found that 'carer capacity to support education was positively related to overall achievement, and carer help with homework was also positively linked to working hard at school. The survey results also showed that carers had considerable positive input into children's learning, as indicated by the importance they place on good grades, help with homework and the structure of the home learning environment.'

Individualised assessment and intervention within a care team approach

The study shows the diversity in education need and outcomes among children in-care. 'Where schools were able to provide a more flexible curriculum, put less pressure on students with complex emotional problems and provide skilled and sensitive discipline. However, they also highlighted significant professional development needs in relation to the identification of, and response to, education needs.'

'Teachers and caseworkers also appeared stretched in terms of their time and skill to develop individual education plans, address trauma-based behaviours in a school setting and support and engage carers. This seemed to relate to pressures such as lack of availability of appropriate placements to meet the needs of particular children, high case loads, frequent staff turnover, large class sizes and lack of specialised training. Poor access to specialised education resources, programs and settings also appeared to inhibit efforts to respond to children's education needs.'

Importance of a relationship approach

The study 'indicated that positive carer-child and child-teacher relationships lie at the heart of effective education initiatives for children who have experienced significant trauma.'

Education and employment outcomes are clearly linked. Cashmore and Paxman's longitudinal study of young people leaving care (2007) found that 'Those who had completed Year 12, however, were more likely to be employed or studying, and to be faring well across a number of areas compared with those who did not complete Year 12. The more stable and secure they had been in-care, the more years of schooling they completed, and the better they were faring 4–5 years after leaving care.'

Cashmore, Paxman and Townsend (2007) identified the following factors associated with educational success:

- Importance of placement stability and school continuity in providing a solid foundation for educational success
- Importance of a significant adult in fostering educational success and the opportunities for children and young people to engage in activities outside of the classroom to develop their talents and interests
- Collaboration of stakeholders and a whole of government approach
- Planning and involvement of young people in the developing the plan.

The CREATE Transition from Care Report Card (McDowall, 2009) highlights the importance of planning for young people leaving care. In a survey of young people, only 36.4% of participants indicated that they had a plan or that one was being developed (34% of the in-care group and 40.3% of the post-care group). Education and Employment were not covered in 55.7% and 67.1% of transition plans for the in-care group and 22.0 and 39.2% for the post-care group.

In a study of the career development of young people in-care, Buys, N., Tilbury, C., Creed, P., and Crawford, M. (2010) identified factors that impede the school-to-work transition of youth in-care from their perspective and that of the key stakeholders in their lives.

Factors impacting transition

The study identified that youth in-care face multiple internal and external barriers that impact their schooling and transition to work, including placement instability, negative pre-care, in-care and school experiences, poor educational planning, stigma, lack of vocational guidance, and inadequate educational and vocational resources. Of particular concern was the impact of pre-care and in-care experiences on their mental health. Many youth in-care had emotional and behavioural issues that were not being adequately addressed, thereby impacting their attitude toward, and capacity to benefit from education. This in turn, adversely affected their career planning and development, and ultimately their ability to obtain and sustain employment.

Factors impacting career choice

It was found that the school and child protection systems had little influence on vocational planning and career choice; instead it was carers, relatives, peers and friends that provided the role models, encouragement and advice about jobs. Of concern was the finding that 20% of participants were self-reliant in making these decisions because of their social isolation.

None of the stakeholders provided the level of career planning and intervention required to assist youth in-care to successfully make the transition from school to work. Lack of coordination between statutory child protection services, schools and families meant that youth in-care fall through the cracks in terms of vocational guidance. For the large proportion of youth in-care with mental health issues the situation was compounded by the lack of services designed to assist them to deal with the vocational implications of their conditions.

Impact on career transition

Given the range of barriers and lack of vocational services, it was not surprising that youth in care report a less positive career future for themselves and lower career self-efficacy than their not in-care peers, and also aspire to lower level occupations. The study highlights that lower career aspirations may result in youth in-care disproportionately entering jobs in the secondary or disposable labour market. Young people were also found to disproportionately identify social occupations such as nursing, childcare and teaching as their preferred career choice.

Financial support and how this impacts educational and employment outcomes has not been subject to specific study. Young people in-care are financially supported through direct payments to foster or kinship carers or services providing residential care. They may also receive Youth Allowance subject to eligibility requirements as detailed in the overview of the *Learn or Earn policy*. Young people post-care may receive financial support through Youth Allowance or be receiving income through employment. Access to one off payments or allowances to support transition from care or assist young people vary across states and territories and raises issues of equity (McDowall, 2009).

The Commonwealth Government provides the *Transition to Independent Living Allowance* (\$1,500) nationally to young people leaving care or post-care subject to eligibility guidelines. The allowance is also available to young people who are transitioning to independence from a range of formal and informal care arrangements. However, some young people continue to report that they are not aware of the allowance and how to access it (McDowall, 2009). Furthermore, it is understood that funds are only available to assist a maximum of 2,500 young people each financial year. There is therefore concern that there will be insufficient funds to meet the need. Further, young people must access TILA within 24 months of having left care.

In a review of planning and support provided to young people in-care, the New South Wales Ombudsman (2010) identified inequities and inconsistencies in the way Community Services provides financial assistance to support young people, who turn 18, prior to completing their secondary education.

In addition to issues of placement stability, homelessness in-care and post-care is also a significant factor for young people in terms of engaging in education and employment. McDowall (2009) found that a significant proportion of young people in-care did not know where they would be living when they left care, whilst a significant proportion of young people who had left care had experienced homelessness. Johnson et al (2010) found that access to housing and the presence of reliable, sustainable social relationships are critical dimensions in responding to young people's needs post-care.

Finally, it is important to note that young people in-care are a diverse group. Some young people face additional challenges that can also affect educational and employment outcomes including young women who are pregnant, young parents, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, young people with disabilities and young people who are lesbian, bisexual, gay or transgender.

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

This section identifies strategies for improving education and employment outcomes drawing on the views of young people and available literature and research.

Young people

Young people identified a range of strategies for improving educational outcomes including:

- Support workers at school for young people in-care
- Mentors and peer support within school and community
- Department to reconnect young people in-care back into education
- Financial assistance for fees, uniforms, school supplies, excursions
- Access to computers
- Transport to and from school
- A supportive school environment
- Carers or significant adults showing an interest in young people's educational attainment and milestones
- Finding placements in the area a young person is attending school
- Stable placements so that young people do not have to change schools so often
- Access to Centrelink benefits
- Tuition if it's necessary
- Understanding school staff to help with social problems especially for 'new' kids / foster kids who're different from others
- Better communication between education and child safety.
- Education Support Plans
- Allowing foster carers and residential workers to provide permission and sign for day trips and excursions
- Alternative education options
- Flexible Learning Programs that can be modified or responsive to individual needs

One young person suggested 'Allowing any young person who is turning 18 in either their last year of school or commencing their first year, first semester of university, to remain in the care of the department until January of the following year. The last year of High School is a very stressful period and having to do Higher School Certificate and transition from care would be extremely stressful for the most stable young person. Also university is such a different educational institute compared to school and every bit of support counts within that first year, first semester.'

Young people identified a range of strategies to improve employment outcomes including:

- Having qualifications for well paying jobs/careers
- Recognising that not all young people benefit from school and employment is another option

- Training in school to get a job
- More and better choices for training courses at TAFE are needed
- Show the steps needed
- Young people at the age of 17/18 should be automatically put on the job seekers list
- Career counsellors
- Access to support services like job network
- Life skills
- People skills
- Assistance with getting their drivers licence
- Support, inclusive of significant adults having belief in the young person
- Better access to Job Services Australia
- Support to write resumes, job applications and personal presentations skills for interviews
- Travel costs to be covered for young people going to interviews and getting started at a new job
- Funds for equipment, clothing and other resources
- Mentors around employment - specific advice, as well as role models to help young people get used to this culture / path
- Encourage and support volunteering opportunities in areas where young people would like to work
- Traineeships and practical training, whilst young people are still in school. Young people need confidence but also, need motivation and encouragement of good employers.

Literature

Townsend (2010) reports on the policy and practice implications of children's and adult stakeholder's perspectives on improving educational outcomes for children in-care.

Policy and practice implications: Children

What schools and teachers should do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positively encourage children and emphatically understand their situation
What carers should do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help children with their homework and learning to read • Provide the home environment and resources children require for their education
What caseworkers should do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find children a good home and support children's participation in all aspects of their lives
What all adults should do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help children in-care understand the value of education for their futures

Policy and practice implications: Adults

Systemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding and services for education and well-being • Stability in placement and schooling • Educational assessment and monitoring • Improved training, communication and collaboration between stakeholders
Community Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund tutoring • Ensure access to holistic support services • Support and advocacy of a significant adult - carer or mentor or other • Children supported to attend the best school for their needs
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic catch up programs • Alternative learning environments • Department of Education out of home care program support • Teachers aide support

Cashmore, Paxman and Townsend (2007) highlight the need for education plans, the participation of young people in-care in identifying, planning and reviewing their educational needs, and the need for a 'champion' who will take specific responsibility for the young person's educational needs. Further, they highlight the need for a focus to be placed on the education and training needs of young people who have left care without an adequate education and useful qualifications.

Wise et al (2010) identifies a range of recommendations to support education and learning among children and young people in-care, which target out of home care provision, education provision and cross-sectoral linkages. The recommendations are designed to:

- 'Promote placements that are likely to make a positive future impact on educational outcomes
- Extend the provision of placement and support until young people in out-of-home care complete Year 12 or an equivalent accredited qualification
- Improve support for children who exhibit or are at risk of developing severe emotional and behavioural disturbance
- Increase the capacity of mainstream schools to respond to trauma-related behaviour
- Improve the scale and reach of evidence-based alternative education programs and settings
- Introduce co-ordinated education assessment and planning across the out-of-home care (mental health) and education systems, and
- Introduce a co-ordinated system, owned by out-of-home care and education, to monitor the education progress of children and young people in out-of-home care.'

In terms of career development and employment, Buys et al (2010) state 'Given the pervasive impact of the barriers faced by youth in-care on their vocational futures, including the high prevalence of

mental health issues, it is logical that vocational rehabilitation services fill the gap in service delivery.' They highlight the importance of rehabilitation counsellors:

- understanding the specific needs of youth in-care and recognising the system constraints that have prevented the profession from becoming involved to date
- ensuring that career planning services for youth in-care are integrated with their educational experiences and built into their Education Support Plans and providing vocational training opportunities for youth in-care whilst still at school
- addressing the multiple internal and external barriers that hinder the career development of youth in-care including the emotional impact of placement instability and behavioural issues which affect schooling and job retention, and
- tailoring services and coordinating the resources necessary to raise both occupational and educational aspirations of young people in-care.

Buys et al also highlight the need to commence preparation for the school-to-work transition as early as possible in high school and provide access to mental health services to assist young people in-care to manage issues such as depression, emotional and behavioural problems and psychological distress associated with their pre-care and in-care experiences. They conclude 'Increasing the capacity to deliver vocational rehabilitation services to this population is one option for governments to deliver targeted and effective services in this area and provide youth in-care with employment support they need to enter the labour market.'


Purposeful, scaffolded career development strategies identified from the same study (Tilbury, 2010) include:

- encouragement and guidance
- part-time and casual jobs, work experience
- access to careers counselling and advice
- rewards for completing year 10 and year 12
- scholarships for higher education
- job readiness course that encompass job skills, organisational and socialisation skills, and
- employment programs and traineeships.

Mendes (2009) also stresses the need for young people in-care to have access to a structured supported employment and work placement program in order to successfully pursue their career goals, and access the labour market. He highlights the need for:

- greater emphasis on providing career advice within the leaving care planning and review process in order to facilitate an early assessment of strengths and aspirations, and enable skill deficits to be addressed earlier
- access to intensive targeted support for young people with specific behavioural problems or learning difficulties
- ongoing vocational assistance to explore career options, and
- employment support to be seen as one part of a holistic leaving care framework so that potential personal and social barriers to employment are addressed.

In view of the importance of stable housing to young people engaging in education and employment, the recommendations arising from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute's study of pathways from out of home care (Johnson, 2010) are also relevant here. The report of the study



recommends the development of a national leaving care framework including principles and standards and improving access to and maintaining housing. A range of strategies for improving access to and maintaining housing are identified.

Finally, and in line with calls for an integrated approach to leaving care, CREATE Foundation (McDowall, 2009) has called for states and territories to ensure that all young people have a leaving care plan, which they are actively involved in developing, and which should:

- clearly articulate the needs of the young people (based on an assessment in key areas including housing, education, employment, health and self care)
- identify the type and extent of support required
- specify how young people can access support services
- be flexible and responsive to the on-going needs of the young person, and
- be reviewed and monitored as the needs of the young person change.

CONCLUSION

CREATE Foundation supports the Council of Australian Government's commitment to improving educational and employment outcomes for Australia's young people. However, special attention is required in applying the *Learn or Earn policy* to young people in-care and post-care to ensure that they can access the opportunities afforded by the policy, whilst not being disadvantaged by the policy.

It is clear that further work is required at both national and state and territory levels of government to consider the educational and employment needs of young people in-care and post-care and how the strategies envisaged under the policy to improve educational and employment outcomes can be best applied to meet their needs. Of particular importance is how young people in-care and post-care can be encouraged and supported to access educational and employment opportunities whilst not being disadvantaged by the conditions placed on accessing Youth Allowance. Further work is also required to clarify the provisions for exemption from participating in education, training or employment to ensure that they reflect an awareness and understanding of the issues facing young people who are in-care and transitioning from care or those who have left care.

This paper has provided an overview of the *Learn or Earn policy* and, drawing on the views of 35 young people and a review of the literature and research, examined the educational and employment outcomes for young people in-care and factors impacting those outcomes, and identified strategies to improve outcomes.

CREATE Foundation hopes that this paper will inform further discussion and debate about how best to improve educational and employment outcomes for young people in-care and post-care. It is important that this discussion and debate engage key stakeholders in out of home care, education and employment who all share responsibility for improving the lives of young people in-care and post-care and ensuring they are able to achieve their potential.

Key questions for discussion

The following questions are designed to promote further discussion about how education and employment engagement and attainment can be improved for young people in-care and post-care. This should involve consideration of:

- what strategies or approaches are in place now
- what is working or not working, and
- what is required.

How can young people in-care and post-care be made aware of the *Learn and Earn policy* and the requirement to be participating in education, training or employment?

What steps can be taken to collect and analyse standard national data on the participation and attainment of young people in-care and post-care in education, training and employment, to better inform policy, program and practice developments?

How can education, training, employment and income support stakeholders be made more aware of the circumstances and needs of young people in-care and post-care?

What steps can be taken to improve the engagement and attainment of young people in care in school in ways that are appropriate to their age, circumstances and needs?

What steps can be taken to support and resource, according to their needs, the effective transition of young people from school to further education, training or employment and to maximise their skills development and access to employment opportunities?

What specialist supports and resources are required for young people in-care and post-care who are experiencing significant emotional and behavioural issues, to enable their engagement and attainment in education and employment?

What steps can be taken to monitor access to Youth Allowance by young people in-care and post-care, including the application of exemptions to learn or earn requirements?

How can the efforts of the out of home care, education, employment and related sectors be better coordinated?

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