

Fact sheet

Youth Initiative: Preventing young people leaving out of home care from becoming homeless

July 2024

Information for Caseworkers

This factsheet provides information about the Youth Initiative (YI) which aims to prevent young people who are leaving out-of-home care (OOHC) from becoming homeless. YI works alongside, and in addition to, the mandated care provided by OOHC agencies and the responsibilities held by OOHC agencies in relation to young people after exiting care.

About Youth Initiative (YI)

YI is a program that provides support to young people leaving statutory out-of-home care (OOHC), who are identified as being vulnerable to or at risk of experiencing homelessness on exit from care. The program aims to build the long-term capacity and resilience of young people to permanently divert them from the homelessness service system.

The program will assist young people to develop strong personal networks and skills to navigate multiple adult support service systems and increase their capacity to manage crises and change as they transition to independence. Support is also provided to engage or re-engage with education and/or employment and learn the daily living skills required to transition into independent living.

Eligible young people do not have to participate in the program if they do not wish to. If the young person declines to participate in YI, they will still receive usual aftercare services once they turn 18 years of age and transition out of care.

A young person who joins YI can choose to leave at any time. In such circumstances, their Personal Advisor will help them build an exit plan and link them with support services which they can access once they have left the program. If at the time of exiting YI the young person had secured tenancy at a subsidised rate, they may need to pay market rates if they remain in the property following exit from the program.

How does the program benefit young people?

All young people will have access to a combination of a Personal Advisor and Education and Employment Mentor, while some young people will also receive transitional support and head-leased accommodation.

1. Personal Advisor (PA)

Homes NSW brings together the housing and homelessness functions of the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), the NSW Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC), Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) and key worker housing functions from across government under one roof. A division within DCJ, Homes NSW leads work to provide safe and secure homes through social and affordable housing while delivering supports and services that minimise experiences of homelessness being repeated.

The PA acts as a central contact for all YI services and will be someone like a knowledgeable friend who provides helpful advice in a mentoring capacity on how to live independently. They will support the young person to identify and work toward their personal and leaving care plan goals, connect them to positive personal support networks and help them to access any support services needed (e.g. mental health).

The PA does not replace the caseworker who will continue to work with the young person while they are in care.¹ The PA works with the caseworker to develop the young person's independent living skills and self-reliance as they exit OOHC but they will not do things for the young person that they can do for themselves. The young person will not be forced to do things that they do not want to, but the PA will explain the risks or consequences of not following through with certain actions so that the young person can make an independent decision.

2. Education and Employment Mentor (EEM)

All young people must be willing to undertake education, training and/or employment so an EEM will work with them to understand their history, interests and aptitude to identify and find suitable education, training and/or employment options. The EEM will support the young person to develop their skills to apply for jobs, attend job interviews and gain long-term employment.

It is acknowledged that young people who have experienced trauma may need additional support to engage with education, training and/or employment and may need to undertake activities to address identified barriers to establish them on a pathway towards formal education, training and/or employment. Young people who are actively engaged in this pathway will remain eligible even if they are not initially engaged in formal education, training and/or employment.

3. Transitional Support Worker (TSW)

Some young people in the program will be offered transitional accommodation support. These young people will have a TSW who will assist them to develop their skills and knowledge to manage their own accommodation, both current and in the future. They will help the young person understand how a tenancy works, their legal responsibilities and help them sort out any problems or issues they are experiencing with their accommodation or tenancy.

4. Accommodation

Some young people in the program will be offered subsidised accommodation through YI. If a young person is offered accommodation, they will also have a Transitional Support Worker. Please note that YI is not an accommodation response and only a small portion of young people will have access to YI accommodation under this program. All other young people will have their housing needs assessed and those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will be assisted to find stable, long-term accommodation.

How do young people enter YI?

Eligible young people can enter YI in one of two ways:

Internal/DCJ referrals: Young people in statutory OOHC aged 16 - 21 years, who are assessed as likely to be homeless or at risk upon leaving care by using vulnerability indicators in ChildStory records are eligible for YI. All Aboriginal young people leaving OOHC are also eligible for the program.

Community referrals: These can be made by government facilities (hospitals, youth justice, education, DCJ OOHC, etc) as well as non-government services, including Specialist Homelessness Services, refuge workers, residential care workers, out of home care providers. Community referrals

¹ Please see Appendix 1 of the 'Caseworker and PYI Personal Advisor Roles' Fact Sheet for examples of the different responsibilities of caseworkers and personal advisors

allow vulnerable young people who have not been screened in via ChildStory records as eligible due to their age or specific circumstances to access YI services if they are aged between 16 years and 21 years AND satisfy all of the following selection criteria:

1. In statutory OOHC/ have a history of statutory OOHC; **AND**
2. Referred by medical professionals, educational institutions, and other service providers

NOTE: From 1 July 2024, OOHC Caseworkers and staff in Specialist Homelessness Services and institutions such as Youth Justice facilities and refuges can directly make referrals of young people who meet the eligibility criteria.

The role of caseworkers

DCJ generates eligibility lists using ChildStory data to identify all Community Services and NGO OOHC case-managed young people with these indicators for vulnerability to homelessness:

- leaving residential OOHC
- leaving OOHC with placement instability
- leaving a permanent OOHC placement
- leaving OOHC after being in care 12 months or longer.

Every 3 months new eligibility lists are generated by DCJ and sent securely via Kiteworks to DCJ Commissioning and Planning to ensure current caseworker details are included in the young person's ChildStory record. DCJ Commissioning and Planning then send the list to YI providers using Kiteworks. The list contains the young person's details, their caseworker's name and the agency responsible for their OOHC placement. If these details change but are not updated in ChildStory the young person might not be contactable and would therefore not be offered the opportunity to enter YI.

TIP: ensure your ChildStory records are kept up-to-date so no eligible young person misses the opportunity for additional support. Due to the time it takes to engage and build rapport with these young people, they appear on eligibility lists from the age of 15 years and 9 months.

It is expected that all young people participating in YI will have an approved Leaving Care Plan or that it is developed at the earliest time possible by the agency with case management responsibility. Where appropriate, the YI Personal Advisor should be invited to participate in the development or review of the young person's Leaving Care Plan.

If you are contacted by a YI provider it means you are in ChildStory as an eligible young person's caseworker. If you are no longer their caseworker please let the YI provider know and also advise who the current caseworker is if known.

Can caseworkers refer young people to YI?

Caseworkers can refer young people who meet the eligibility criteria. Please contact the YI provider in your District (see list below), or the Youth Homelessness Pathways Team at Youth.Homelessness@homes.nsw.gov.au who will direct you to the correct service provider.

Locations and providers

DCJ District	YI Provider
Hunter and Central Coast	Samaritans
Illawarra Shoalhaven and Southern NSW	Southern Youth and Family Services
Mid North Coast and Northern NSW	Uniting

DCJ District	YI Provider
Nepean Blue Mountains	Platform Youth Services
New England	Foundations Care
South Western Sydney	Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT
Western NSW	Veritas House

For more information

Please refer to the Youth Initiative: Personal Advisor fact sheet or contact the Youth Homelessness Pathway Team at Youth.Homelessness@homes.nsw.gov.au