BETTER FUTURES DISABILITY PRACTICE GUIDE

2024

Libby Carr with Joe Howie and Emma Cull

Brotherhood of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

VICTORIA
State Government

This edition published in April 2024

Brotherhood of St Laurence
T +61 3 9483 1183
F +61 3 9417 2691
W www.bsl.org.au

Contact
Joe Howie, Leaving Care Manager, BSL: joe.howie@bsl.org.au
Libby Carr, Service Development Coordinator, BSL: libby.carr@bsl.org.au

W www.bsl.org.au/services/youth/better-futures

Authors	Libby Carr with Joe Howie and Emma Cull
Editing	Jane Yule @ Brevity Comms
Design	Studio Elevenses

For citation
Carr, L. with Howie, J. & Cull, E. 2024, *Better Futures Disability Practice Guide*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

Acknowledgements
The Better Futures team at BSL would like to thank sincerely the Better Futures practitioners and providers who gave their time and expertise to the development of this Disability Practice Guide.

A special thanks also to members of the Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group for their contributions. Your involvement and input in the working groups, consultations, and Better Futures Community of Practice have played a significant role in shaping a suite of comprehensive and practical resources for Better Futures practitioners in their support of care-experienced young people.

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Brotherhood of St Laurence acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this guide was written, and their connections to land, sea and community.

The Better Futures Disability Practice Guide is supported by the Victorian Government.

IN THIS GUIDE

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

5 Offers	The planning and support presented to young people to achieve their goals in 5 key life areas – Education, Employment, Health and Wellbeing, Connections and Housing and Living Skills
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
Better Futures practitioners	Development Coaches and Community Connectors
BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
Care services	Formerly Out-of-Home Care
Care team	Group of people who jointly care for a young person during their in care phase
Care team meetings	Meeting between relevant professionals and the young person to discuss their day-to-day care in accordance with the overall case, transition and cultural plans
Case manager	Refers to Child Protection practitioners and contracted case managers
Community Connector	Better Futures practitioners focused on building supportive networks, pathways and connections for young people in their communities
CRIS	Client Relationship Information System
CRISSP	Client Relationship Information System for Service Providers
Development Coach	Better Futures practitioners focused on working directly with young people
DES	Disability Employment Services
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Victorian Government)
DSP	Disability Support Pension
First Nations	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
Flexible funding	Sometimes known as brokerage; funding available to the young person to support their goals for transition and independence
Further education	Post-secondary school study at TAFE or university
ILO	Refers to Individual Living Options, a NDIS housing funding option
In care	Phase referring to Better Futures service when a young person is in care services and subject to a Child Protection statutory order
LAC	Local Area Coordinators under the NDIS
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NDIS provider	An individual or organisation that delivers supports or products to NDIS participants
Mainstream	Opportunities beyond the service system that are readily available to family-connected young people, but which are often inaccessible to care-experienced young people
Post care	Phase referring to Better Futures service after a young person has transitioned from in care
SDA	Refers to Supported Disability Accommodation, a NDIS housing funding option
SIL	Refers to Supported Independent Living, a NDIS housing funding option
SLES	Refers to School Leaver Employment Supports, funding to bridge the gap between school and employment
Support Coordinator	A NDIS contact that works directly with the participant to plan and coordinate supports
STA	Refers to Short Term Accommodation, a NDIS housing funding option
Statutory order	A protection order made by the Children's Court of Victoria
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
YDAS	Youth Disability Advocacy Service

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Better Futures recognises that young people with disability require the same supports as others who have transitioned from care services and that additional support may be required to navigate disability service systems.

The disability sector has a wide range of different support agencies and there can be some confusion around role responsibilities and which agencies are responsible for funding certain services. This can make navigating the system tricky at times.

Our goal for young people with disability in Better Futures is to promote inclusivity where they have equal access to services and activities that support them to thrive.

This Guide is designed to equip Better Futures practitioners with the skills and knowledge they need to work in an Advantaged Thinking way with young people with disability, as well as to understand the resources, services and supports available to young people with disability.

Its primary audience is Better Futures practitioners delivering the program to young people with disability across Victoria, but the Guide also supports the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Better Futures disability training.

In addition, Practice Guides have been developed for each of the 5 Offers:

- Education
- Employment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Connections
- Housing and Living Skills.

They form part of the **Better Futures Advantaged Thinking Practice Framework** suite of tools and resources.

A note about language

The language we use to describe disability can shape our values, assumptions and beliefs about people with disability. It affects the way they are treated and how they view themselves and their place within society. Adopting the Advantaged Thinking principles in our language can help create a more inclusive environment for people with disability.

Person-first language (people with disability) and identity-first language (disabled people) are both used in Australia. This guide uses person-first language like 'young people with disability'.

Even when using person-first language, you should only refer to a person's impairment when relevant and appropriate. Some communities prefer to use identity-first language, particularly the autistic and Deaf communities.

If you need to refer to someone's disability and are in doubt, ask the person if it is ok to share information about their disability, and how they would like you to make reference to it, then use that language.

People with Disability Australia has a language guide that can can assist us in finding the right words.

Helpful hint

It's important to ask the young person how they identify and what words they want to use with regard to their disability. Do they prefer identity-first or person-first language when they speak about themselves, i.e., autistic person, Deaf person vs person with disability?

How do they describe their disability? What information regarding their disability are they comfortable in sharing and with whom? Do they want other people to speak on their behalf and, if so, in what contexts?

Are you upholding the words that individual young people want you to use when discussing their situation with others?

ABOUT BETTER FUTURES AND DISABILITY

Better Futures

Better Futures is a practice model that aims to improve outcomes for young people transitioning from care to supported independence, from 15 years and 9 months to 21 years. Support is tailored to meet a young person's individual needs and they have access to flexible funding to support their transition goals.

Better Futures assists young people transitioning from care:

- to become independent yet connected adults
- to discover who they want to be and what they want to do in the future
- to establish a connected, sustainable livelihood
- to develop the capacity to thrive

The support provided to young people by Better Futures practitioners is guided by the Better Futures Advantaged Thinking Practice Framework.

Advantaged Thinking focuses on an individual's strengths, not their weaknesses or what they need to overcome. It doesn't define people by their problems but instead focuses on their dreams, talents and aspirations and invests in their potential.

Care-experienced young people with disability

Many young people in the care system have one or more disabilities.

Young people in Better Futures present with disabilities such as intellectual disabilities, neurodevelopmental disorders, learning disabilities, chronic health conditions, mental ill health and psychosocial disabilities. Some may also have experienced trauma, which can significantly impact their immediate and/or long-term development and functioning.

Trauma-informed practice helps Better Futures practitioners understand the impact of trauma on young people and provides them with strategies to support and empower young people to heal and recover. Trauma-informed practitioners can create a safe, supportive and empowering environment in which young people can build positive relationships, develop coping skills and improve their wellbeing.

While trauma-informed practice is a crucial part of care for young people with experiences of trauma, some of them will also require additional supports.

Why building capacity is important

It is the responsibility of all service systems to work with and support young people with disability.

The *Keep Caring* report found that there is a 'high incidence of disability among care leavers in Victoria'. A review of a random sample of 166 files of young people, either in care or who had recently left care, identified that 36 per cent had a disability.[1] Anecdotal reports from Better Futures providers also support this figure. Young people in the Beyond 18 Wave 3 study reported high levels of psychological distress and low levels of perceived control over their lives.[2]

Research into young people leaving care shows that care-experienced young people with disability often face additional barriers to their peers and are at higher risk of poor outcomes. Care-experienced young people with disability are less likely to develop independent living skills, access further education or employment opportunities and form supportive social networks. They are also more likely to experience homelessness.[3]

Research into the experience of supporting young people with intellectual disability exiting state care services reports that care-experienced young people with an intellectual disability are also 'likely to have experienced multiple care services placements and school changes'.

1 Commission for Children and Young People 2020, *Keep Caring: Systemic inquiry into services for young people transitioning from out-of-home care*, Commission for Children and Young People, Melbourne, p. 39.

2 Muir, S., Purtell, J., Hand, K., & Carroll, M. 2019, *Beyond 18: The Longitudinal Study on Leaving Care Wave 3 Research Report: Outcomes for young people leaving care in Victoria*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

3 Snow, P., Mendes, P., & O'Donohue, D. 2014, *Young people with a disability leaving state care: Phase two report*, Monash University, Melbourne; Mendes, P., Saunders, B., & Baidawi, S. 2016, 'Indigenous young people transitioning from out-of-home care (OOHC) in Victoria, Australia: The perspectives of workers in Indigenous-specific and non-Indigenous non-government services', *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, vol. 7, no. 3, p. 242.

The research also discusses the impact on the young person's ability to thrive due to a lack of specialised skills in and knowledge about intellectual disability from carers and care professionals.[4]

Better Futures practitioners have highlighted the need for support to develop and strengthen their skills, knowledge and resources in working with both disability systems and people with disability. This is particularly important given the high numbers of young people with disability in the care system, and the need to understand and navigate these systems, such as the NDIS. Regular training and support is required for Better Futures practitioners:

- to better understand and meet the needs of young people with disability
- to navigate the systems that can support them
- to secure appropriate and sustainable long-term supports
- to establish the protective factors that will enable young people to have a good life when they leave Better Futures.

Snap that Stigma

Care-experienced young people are smart, determined and passionate.

The Advantaged Thinking approach asks us to consider how we promote these young people in relation:

- to how we recognise and promote their skills to the wider community
- to whether we invest the same time and resources into coaching young people to build thriving livelihoods as we do to supporting them to survive or cope with challenges.

CREATE Foundation has developed a series of videos that promote positive outcomes for young people. These videos are designed to challenge the way the public understands young people with a care experience. The 'Just like us' video, for example, showcases the experiences of young people with disability, and the daily challenges they face. By telling their stories, young people like Wade hope to change the preconceived views that many have about those with a care experience.

> ***All too often, family members, service providers and academics speak on our behalf or over us. 'Inspiration porn', emotive triumph-over-the-odds stories whose purpose is to inspire viewers to be grateful for their non-disabled lives, is rife in mainstream society. We want to tell our own stories in language we identify with. When people talk about us, we want them to be respectful.***
>
> — People with Disability Australia Language Guide

The Youth Disability Advocacy Service works with young Victorians on how to speak up for themselves and make sure they are being treated fairly. They talk with young people about what matters to them, and record these stories on their blog: see, for example, Rose's experience.

Growing Up Disabled in Australia is an Australian documentary series that interviews people with disability from diverse backgrounds and age groups, who share their experiences of living with disability. The series covers a range of topics – including education, employment and relationships – and the challenges of navigating a world that is often inaccessible or inhospitable. Through personal stories and insights, the series aims to increase understanding and awareness of the experiences of people with disability in Australia.

4 Ellem, K., Wilson, J., O'Connor, M., & Macdonald, S. 2012, 'Supporting young people with mild/borderline intellectual disability exiting state out-of-home care: directions for practice', *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, no. 32, pp. 53, 56.

COLLABORATION TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

The role of Better Futures in working with young people with disability is to help them identify their own goals, develop their skills, capabilities and assets, and build networks within their community that can help them to thrive. To do this, the Development Coach will collaborate with the Community Connector, transitioning from care supports, disability stakeholders and community-based and mainstream supports.

Building supportive and informed teams

Better Futures practitioners have anecdotally reported feeling unsure about working with young people with disability, because of a lack of knowledge about disability systems and supports, confusion about the boundaries of their role and/or uncertainty about the most effective practice when working with this cohort. Gaining confidence in this space comes from knowing where to find the information needed and someone who can help practitioners to understand it.

Better Futures teams can create a safe and supportive environment where team members can ask questions and share information. This can involve discussing practice challenges during team meetings, mapping and sharing resources and directing workers to relevant sources of advice and support.

Better Futures practitioners have an important role in advocating for young people with disability to receive appropriate assessments and supports, particularly as they approach adulthood and prepare to transition to independent living. There are a range of disability advocacy services and organisations to support young people with disability to navigate and communicate with complex health systems.

By working collaboratively and building their knowledge and understanding of disability systems and supports, Better Futures practitioners can better support their practice and the needs of young people with disability.

Development Coaches

Development Coaches do not need to be experts on disability. Their role is to inspire and motivate, be reflective, support young people's transition planning, and act as an advocate.

They play a critical role in coaching young people to set meaningful goals across the 5 Offers, and providing them with the resources, opportunities, networks and support they need to succeed.

When supporting a young person with disability, the Development Coach's role will be negotiated with professionals from the young person's networks of support. Development Coaches will contribute differently, depending on the other supports available to the young person, which can include:

- supporting them to advocate for their choices and goals
- gathering evidence for them, their carer and care team, if applicable, to inform requests for support through NDIS and other services
- providing expertise through secondary consultation to care teams about youth-centred practices and an Advantaged Thinking approach
- providing context and information to disability services and supports about the transition from care journey, and what the young person is experiencing.

Better Futures teams – Development Coaches, Managers/ Team Leaders and Community Connectors – need to make connections within the disability sector and the broader community. These connections can provide specialist disability advice about what needs to be put in place to support the young person's individual goals and transition planning.

With the young person's permission, Development Coaches can share information about their interests, goals and skills with key support people, such as their care team, carers or guardians, Disability Support Workers and/or the Community Connector. Key support professionals can use this information to tailor their way of working and interacting with the young person. For example, the Community Connector can research and find appropriate local opportunities in which the young person can participate.

Community Connectors

Community Connectors can connect young people to opportunities across the 5 Offers. They support the work of Development Coaches by bridging the gap between a young person's goals and the opportunities and connections that the young person can engage with to realise those goals.

Community Connectors use their networking and coordination abilities to establish partnerships and networks within and across local communities. When working with young people with disability who are not funded by the NDIS, this role specifically focuses on the community-based disability supports that this group will rely on. By establishing a working relationship with the NDIS Local Area Coordinator (LAC), the Community Connector can promote awareness and understanding of the range of local community-based disability support options for young people and how to access them.

Community Connectors have partnerships, networks and resources in their local areas with:

- Disability advocacy services and organisations
- local government
- ACCOs and First Nations programs and support services
- youth and multicultural organisations
- LBGTQIA+ support services
- education and training providers and their disability/equity/accessibility departments
- employment opportunities, pre-employment workshops and work experience
- housing services and real estate agents
- living skills programs
- health and wellbeing professionals
- social connections and mentoring.

Community Connectors can support young people to engage in activities that provide active interactions and participation in the community, as well as with community-based services and resources. They can also support capability-building activities across the 5 Offers to help young people build social and independent living skills so they can participate in the community and build their independence.

These activities include:

- building social and communication skills that will improve young people's ability to make friends and develop relationships
- learning life skills for independent living, such as managing money, applying for jobs, cooking and cleaning, and accessing transport.

Consistent, regular and open communication between the Development Coach and Community Connector is necessary to bridge the two roles. Community Connectors can link Development Coaches into opportunities, activities and information available to young people. The Development Coach can coordinate with different support people to prepare young people for greater community participation and to overcome any barriers to their engagement.

There are several specific activities that improve young people's participation in paid employment and/or study, and help them to develop friendships, spend time in the community and feel a sense of belonging. These include:

- **Enrolling in educational or vocational programs**
  Pursuing educational or paid vocational opportunities, like casual after-school jobs or a school-based apprenticeship, equips young people with knowledge and skills, enhances their self-esteem and increases their chances of engaging with peers and the wider community.
- **Work experience**
  Engaging in work experience gives young people an opportunity to try out jobs that interest them, to gain new skills and experience, and to learn about the world of work and how different workplaces operate.
- **Joining community groups or clubs**
  Participating in clubs or groups centred around shared interests or hobbies can provide opportunities to meet new people, make friends and build social connections.
- **Volunteering**
  Getting involved in volunteer work allows young people to contribute to their community, meet like-minded people and develop a sense of purpose and accomplishment.
- **Participating in recreational programs**
  Engaging in recreational activities tailored to young people with disability, such as sports, art classes or music groups, fosters social interaction, skill development and a sense of belonging.
- **Attending community events**
  Taking part in community events, festivals or local gatherings provides opportunities to interact with diverse community members, build relationships and feel connected to the broader community.
- **Participating in support groups**
  Joining support groups specific to their disability or shared experiences can offer a supportive environment where young people can connect with others facing similar challenges, share stories and learn from one another.

The Community Connector role will look different in each area depending on young people's needs, the provider's capacity and local area arrangements. The Development Coach still directly coaches and supports young people to engage with these opportunities, unless negotiated otherwise with the Community Connector.

Go to *Referral to Community Connector*

Go to *Referral to Community Connections Practice Guide*

Collaborative practice

Collaboration between Community Connectors and Better Futures teams at both the service and individual levels is vital. At the service level, collaboration can determine the priority areas for Community Connections based on the needs, goals, talents and aspirations of young people. At the individual level, collaboration can facilitate referrals and connect young people with mentors or various activities.

Strategies for collaboration with Better Futures include:

- **Co-location**
  Co-locating Community Connectors within Better Futures teams promotes effective collaboration. If delivered by a different organisation, consider part-time co-location or attending operational meetings to ensure collaboration and promotion of Community Connections.
- **Provider and operational meetings**
  Collaborating with key Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) staff and managers overseeing data on young people transitioning to adulthood to better understand the local service system, networks, opportunities and gaps. Regular meetings between Better Futures and Community Connections providers enables Community Connectors to embed themselves in local planning and practice.
- **Attendance at intake meetings**
  Attending intake meetings enables Community Connectors to explore opportunities, promote activities and develop collaborative responses. Strategic attendance at some meetings is particularly beneficial for assisting young people with limited connections.
- **Regular team meetings**
  Attending Better Futures team meetings and allocation meetings fosters collaborations and allows Community Connectors to provide secondary consultation or direct support in facilitating Community Connections.

Disability supports and stakeholders

There are a range of additional supports that can help empower young people with disability to plan for their future and achieve their goals across the 5 Offers.

> *We want parity to live in a society where people with disabilities are involved and have the same opportunities – jobs, education, friends, social mobility, housing and so on.*
>
> — Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

The Development Coach's role in supporting care-experienced young people with disability is to be aware of the available resources, and to coordinate the right supports at the right times with the help and guidance of disability specialists.

Online information

Disability Gateway

The Disability Gateway is a website and phone line for people with disability and the people who support them. It has information about nationally and state-funded programs, services and other helpful information about disability.

Peak bodies and other disability associations

A range of peak bodies and associations exist to support disability organisations and individuals around Australia.

Support for non-NDIS participants

There are supports and services provided by government and the community sector for people with disability across Australia who are not eligible for NDIS funding. This page provides a list of organisations who can help with support for young people with disability. Local Area Coordinators can assist to link in with these services.

Further information about LACs is provided on the next page.

Local information

DFFH Disability Practice Advice teams

The Disability Practice Advice teams provide advice and support:

- to the Child Protection workforce in relation to disability
- to the NDIS in relation to children in the care space
- to those in charge of leaving care processes for young people with disability.

They can particularly assist with understanding how the transition planning process interfaces with NDIS processes.

There are four Principal Disability Practice Advice Advisors and teams across Victoria. Child Protection should request a consultation with one of the following Disability Practice Advice teams as part of the transition from care planning process:

South	south.disabilitypracticeadvice@dffh.vic.gov.au
North	northdisabilitypracticeadvice@dffh.vic.gov.au
East	east.disabilitypracticeadvice@dffh.vic.gov.au
West	westdisabilitypracticeadvice@dffh.vic.gov.au

Local Area Coordinator

The LAC role provides support and guidance to NDIS participants and their families or carers. The primary responsibility of a LAC is to assist individuals in navigating the NDIS, and accessing the supports and services they need.

People who are not funded by the NDIS can still seek assistance from a LAC, as they are able to provide information and support to all those with disability regardless of their NDIS funding status. Their role extends beyond NDIS-specific matters and encompasses broader community connections, resources and support. LACs often have a deep knowledge of local service providers, community organisations and initiatives that can benefit young people with disability.

As such, LACs can offer guidance, information or assistance related to disability services and supports, and to navigating the available resources in a local area. In particular, they can provide advice on community-based programs, services and supports that are relevant to a young person's needs.

To engage with a LAC, visit this website to find NDIS providers in Victoria.

People who are not funded by the NDIS can still seek assistance from a LAC, as they are able to provide information and support to all those with disability regardless of their NDIS funding status.

Advocacy organisations

Better Futures practitioners can link young people in with a range of disability advocacy and support organisations across Victoria, so they are aware of the available services, information resources and advocacy initiatives for people with disability. These organisations can also support Better Futures practitioners with guidance and professional development to build their capacity to support young people with disability.

Visit this website for a list of disability advocacy organisations. Some of the most relevant organisations are provided in more detail here.

Youth Disability Advocacy Service

YDAS provides individual advocacy for young people with disability aged 12–25 years of age. It works to ensure that the interests of young people with disability are heard by government and other key decision makers. It does this through:

- Advocacy support — YDAS's free advocacy service is there to ensure that young people with disability can speak up and are being treated fairly. The YDAS advocacy team works directly with young people to provide advice around issues such as education, housing or the NDIS, to support them at important meetings and to assist with referrals to other supports.
- Map Your Future — a free online program for young people with disability to help them set goals and get the right support to achieve them.

Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability

VALID is an organisation that advocates for people with disability, with particular expertise in intellectual disability. VALID uses a whole-of-community approach to empower people with disability to have control and influence over the decisions and choices that affect their lives. It does this through:

- Individual advocacy — one-on-one assistance for a person with disability to help solve a problem. VALID can support young people to speak up about what they want, get the information they need to make decisions and explore the choices they want to make.
- Self-advocacy networks — supports young people to have power and control over their own lives by helping them to make decisions about their disability services.
- Community development and engagement — Peer Action Groups and mentoring opportunities to amplify the voices of young people and to build their capacity in individual, group and community settings across a range of activities.

SANE Australia

SANE is a free service for people with recurring, persistent or complex mental health issues and trauma and for the people that support them:

- Drop-in call/chat services — connection and community to support people with complex mental health issues, including information and resources, community forums, counselling, peer support and groups.
- Guided service — free digital and telehealth services and ongoing tailored support to people over 18 years of age with complex mental health needs and their families and carers.

Amaze

Amaze is an advocacy organisation for autism and provides support and information to autistic people, families and carers and professionals.

Development Coaches can share information about Amaze with young people who identify as autistic and support them to connect with relevant services, such as:

- Autism Connect helpline — a free phone, email and web chat service providing information, support and referrals.
- Support groups — spaces for autistic people and their family or carers to share challenges and achievements and source information about local services and supports.
- Amaze newsletters — fortnightly newsletters provide information for the autism community, including upcoming events, news, advocacy updates, research and opportunities to get involved.
- Online resources — access to information and learning.

Health and wellbeing

The following section contains information about accessing disability support through the NDIS. It also has information for young people who are not eligible for the NDIS. More details on supporting all young people with their health and wellbeing can be found in the Better Futures Health and Wellbeing Offer Practice Guide.

National Disability Insurance Agency

The NDIA is the independent government organisation that runs the NDIS. It makes decisions about whether someone is eligible to become a NDIS participant and how much funding they will receive.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

The NDIS supports the independence, and social and economic participation, of people with disability. This may involve more community engagement, education, employment and wellbeing activities.

Where the young person has a diagnosed disability that meets NDIS eligibility criteria, an application for NDIS supports can be made using a NDIS Access Support Request form. When access has been approved, a NDIS plan is developed with individualised funding to assist the person with a disability work towards their goals and aspirations.

The NDIS plan includes disability-specific supports that can be used to build the capacity of young people with disability within the care system, especially during the transition from care period, to support their independence in later adult life. This is particularly critical as the young person prepares to transition from care, as a NDIS plan may be needed to provide adequate support for them to manage their functional capacity into adulthood.

Navigating the NDIS using an Advantaged Thinking approach

The NDIS asks participants what their goals are, and what support they need to achieve these. Sometimes, getting good NDIS support relies on the participant and NDIS practitioners focusing on the difficulties, rather than the strengths. This process can be challenging for a someone who is being coached to focus on their strengths and what they can do, rather than what they can't.

Accessing the NDIS is complicated. If a young person requires access to the NDIS, the Better Futures practitioner can link in with the DFFH Disability Practice Advisor in their region for guidance and information.

A note about planning for young people who are not NDIS participants

Not all people with disability will be eligible for NDIS funding. To meet the access criteria to become a participant in the NDIS, the young person must have a permanent and significant disability that affects their ability to take part in everyday activities.

The NDIS can provide some support to people with disability who do not have NDIS individualised funded support. For example, the NDIS has introduced a Community Connections plan service response that can be organised by the NDIS provider.

This service generally takes one or two meetings between a Local Area Coordinator and the young person to learn more about their current situation, supports and goals. (This service is separate, and unrelated, to the Better Futures Community Connections, which is aimed at finding supports in the local community.)

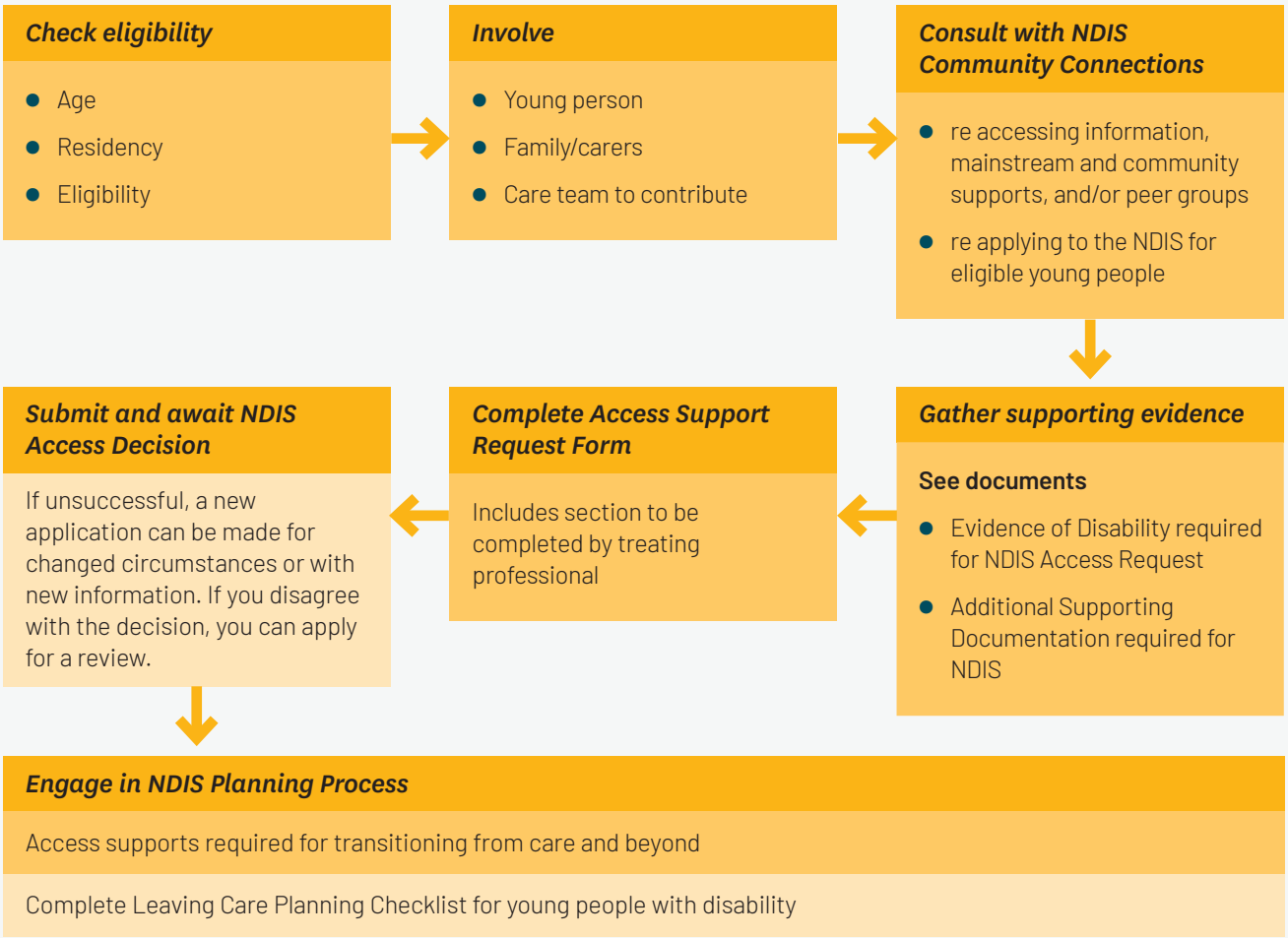
The Community Connections plan is NOT a funded NDIS plan. If a person who has a Community Connections plan becomes a NDIS participant, they will then receive a funded NDIS plan in its place.

Better Futures post care planning for young people who do not meet the eligibility criteria of the NDIS generally follows the same pathway as for NDIS participants. However, Better Futures practitioners also need to look for other ways to support the young person's needs, such as exploring the use of community-based support services, allied health supports and mental health services.

All people with disability can visit a NDIS office for information about supports available in the community and receive guidance from a Local Area Coordinator.

Starting early will help young NDIS participants plan and implement their goals. By 15 years and 9 months, NDIS participants can be working on other capacity-building activities that will assist them in getting a job when they are older. These might include developing their skills and independence by doing chores at home or catching public transport.

Figure 1: Supporting young people with disability to access NDIS



*NDIS Community Connections refers to a new (2024) service by the NDIS, which is not related to Better Futures Community Connections.

Go to *See Appendix: NDIS Factsheets for Better Futures practitioners for these documents*

> *It is essential for Better Futures practitioners to address internalised bias, discomfort and language when supporting disabled young people. Better Futures practitioners should support young people to deal with their own internalised stigma of being a young person with a disability, and the attitudes of other people as to what their capabilities are.*
>
> — YDAS Facilitator

> *A lot of the time failure can be really hard, but we also need to accept it. We can be supported so strongly that it gets overwhelming. I get that workers are supporting me but when I still can't do it, makes me feel even worse. Like, how can I still not do this with all the support in the world.*
>
> *It is important to work with young people where they are at, not where we think they should be or even where we know they could be. It is important to support that and acknowledge the obstacles.*
>
> — Care-experienced young person

Development Coaches are encouraged to use an Advantaged Thinking approach to support young people to look at their strengths as well as their their needs, and to acknowledge that sometimes it is hard to have a disability. This includes having an unconditional belief in young people while also meeting them where they are at: which may be that they are frustrated by their disability or frustrated by a world that is not easily accessible to them.

An Advantaged Thinking approach can reframe their engagement with the NDIS as funding to support them:

- to learn new skills
- to be independent
- to get information on the services in their area
- to access services like sports clubs and art groups
- to live in a community where people with disability are present and independent.

Care-experienced young people with disability say that it is important to them to have people who believe in them, who can identify their capacity and who support their needs.

Support for Better Futures in navigating the NDIS

YDAS has developed a guide for all professionals supporting young people wanting to join the NDIS so they can access the supports they need.

Working with the NDIS

The two key NDIS roles that Better Futures Development Coaches will work with are the **Local Area Coordinator** and the **Support Coordinator**.

Local Area Coordinator

LACs help people understand and access the NDIS. They then work with NDIS participants to develop and implement their NDIS plan. LACs are a valuable resource to assist with all NDIS-related enquiries.

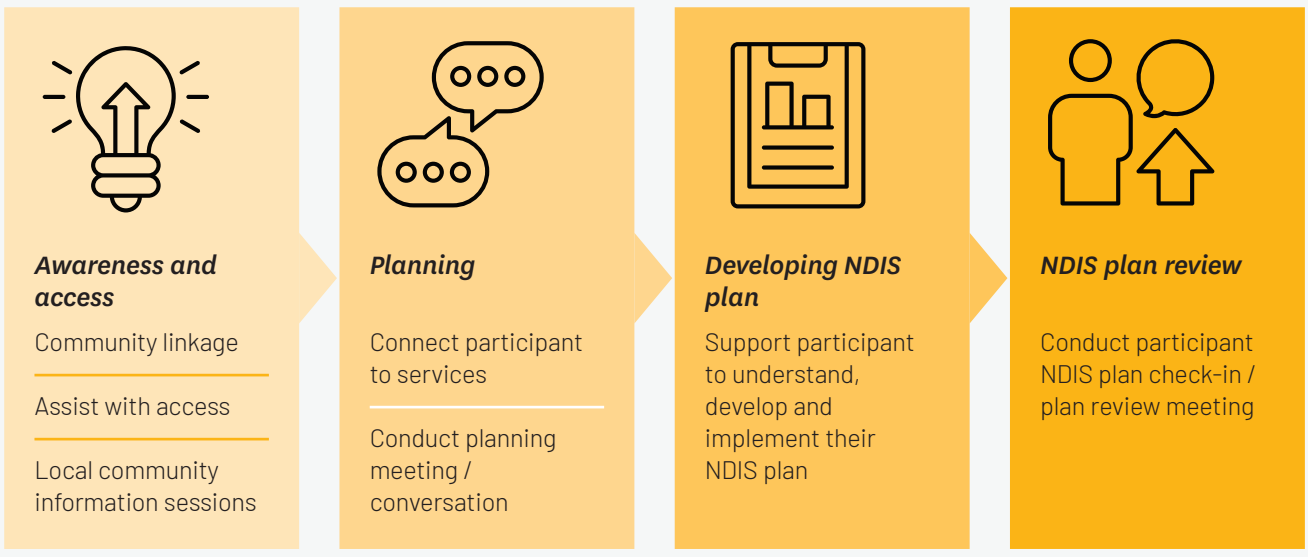
A person does not have to be a NDIS participant to receive support from LACs, as their role is to connect all people with disability to supports, services and activities in their community and to other government services.

For most people, a LAC will be their main point of contact for the NDIS. They will work together on developing their first plan, and on identifying support needs and goals. LACs will also be able to provide information regarding reasonable and necessary supports that the NDIS might fund to achieve these goals.

Once the plan is approved, a LAC or a Support Coordinator will work with the participant to implement the plan, which is generally reviewed after 24 months. However, if the current plan does not meet the person's needs, or there are significant changes in circumstances as they prepare to transition from care, an earlier plan review can be requested.

To find a local LAC go to: http://www.ndis.gov.au.

Figure 2: Local Area Coordinator planning pathway



Support Coordinator

Support coordination helps young people who are NDIS participants:

- to connect with the NDIS and other supports
- to broker supports and services in line with their wishes and within their plan budget
- to monitor their plan budget and support its effectiveness
- to build capacity and capability in understanding their plan, navigating the NDIS and makine their own decisions.

Support Coordinators will help participants with different things depending on:

- the participant's goals, needs and circumstances
- what is funded in the participant's NDIS plan.

There are three levels of support coordination that can be included in a participant's NDIS plan. For more information, go to: **https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/using-your-plan/who-can-help-start-your-plan/support-coordination**.

Working with health professionals to provide evidence of disability

Assessments are often required to coordinate community-based and NDIS disability supports. Assessments can:

- identify individual support needs and ensure they are tailored to the person's individual requirements
- match appropriate supports
- facilitate service coordination
- enable ongoing monitoring and review
- inform decision-making

Assessments for evidence are typically required for the Support Needs Assessment process within the NDIS. This assessment helps determine the level of support needed by an individual to participate in daily activities and achieve their goals.

Evidence will focus on the person's 'primary disability' – the disability that has the greatest impact on their life – and must:

- be recent and confirm the young person's primary disability
- be completed by a treating health professional with relevance to this disability
- confirm the impacts of the disability on the young person's functioning over the different areas of their life
- describe previous treatments and outcomes
- outline future treatment options and expected outcomes of those treatments.

Better Futures practitioners can work with a young person's treating health professionals to **provide evidence of disability**. They include:

- General Practitioners
- Paediatricians
- Orthopaedic Surgeons
- Occupational Therapists
- Speech Pathologists/Therapists
- Neurologists
- Psychologists
- Psychiatrists
- Physiotherapists.

The treating health professional who provides the evidence of the young person's disability should:

- be the most appropriate person to provide this evidence
- have treated the young person for a significant period of time, at least six months.

To decide on the most appropriate treating health professional for the young person's primary disability, use the information provided by the NDIS on its **Types of disability evidence webpage.** Local Area Coordinators can also help to gather the evidence needed.

NDIS planning and the role of Better Futures

The NDIS does not replace the transition planning required for any young person transitioning from care. When a young person with a disability is eligible for NDIS, it can fund eligible long-term supports. NDIS supports are funded to address the young person's needs due to the impact of their disability.

The role of Better Futures is to ensure that young people connected to the NDIS receive the assessments and plans they need, so that when they are 17–19 years of age they will have, or are building towards, appropriate NDIS supports.

Development Coaches can also advocate for the young person's planning to reflect their individual needs, interests and aspirations. They should also ensure that the young person is able to have their say in deciding on the level of service involvement, particularly in extensive plans. For young people with significant support needs, larger support teams or substantial NDIS packages, there is a risk that their voice will be overshadowed. Better Futures' role here is to ensure the young person's voice is being heard and that they feel ownership and agency over their own plans.

NDIS access and planning relies heavily on evidence about a person's functional impairment. As such, gathering evidence is a major part of the work the care team will need to undertake, and that the Development Coach may have to pick up once they start working with the young person more intensively.

Evidence may include:

- housing or placement history for the past five years and housing pathways options already explored
- interventions to support skills development for post care living
- relevant reports and assessments that can inform evidence for Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) or Supported Independent Living (SIL), functional behavioural assessments, carer impact statements, participant letters, incident reports, sleep charts, medical or mental health and behaviour support plans, educational needs assessments, etc.
- current informal, cultural, community and mainstream support networks and connections.

Education

National Disability Coordination Officer program

This program helps people with disability to access and succeed in higher education and employment. National Disability Coordination Officers are employed at universities, TAFEs and community groups. They collaborate with local stakeholders to reduce systemic barriers, build links and coordinate services for people with disability between the education, training and employment sectors.

Better Futures practitioners can contact their regional Coordination Officer for support and guidance on a young person's education and employment plans, and for advice as to which funded supports they may be entitled.

There are seven regional National Disability Coordination Officers in Victoria, with details on the program's website.

School Leaver Employment Supports

School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) are available to NDIS participants transitioning from school to further education or employment. The NDIS can fund tailored school leaver employment supports for up to two years, depending on the young person's circumstances. Young people who are eligible for the NDIS can access SLES through their LAC or Support Coordinator.

Each school leaver's employment supports will be different. Providers work individually with young people to help them plan, prepare, look for and gain and sustain employment. They provide individualised skills-based activities that build young people's capacity to achieve their employment goals.

To engage with SLES, Development Coaches can:

- ask the young person directly if their goal is to work and, if so, advocate for them to access SLES funding
- support the young person to request a plan review to include SLES funding
- ensure the young person is being supported by their SLES provider by asking questions of the provider to determine the quality of their planning: for example, what supports can they provide, how will the supports work and what will they look like?
- work with the provider around building the young person's readiness to try things out
- support the young person to change providers if they feel it is not working.

Employment

Job Access

Job Access is the national hub for workplace and employment information for people with disability, employers and service providers.

Under Job Access is the Employment Assistance Fund, a free government service for people with disability to help them with workplace modifications. It is also available to people with disability who need assistance, or special work equipment, to seek and prepare for a job.

Disability Support Pension

Young people with disability may be eligible for the Disability Support Pension (DSP) or other financial supports through Services Australia, and can apply for the DSP from the age of 16.

Key eligibility requirements include:

- a disability that will persist for more than two years
- a medical condition that must be diagnosed, reasonably treated and stabilised.

DSP Manifest is also available for people with significant disabilities. Check the DSP manifest medical rules for eligibility information.

Medical evidence will need to be submitted when claiming the Disability Support Pension. Services Australia website may be helpful in this:

- types of medical evidence required by Services Australia for the DSP and DSP Manifest
- Disability Support Pension medical evidence checklist.

The DSP may also have participation requirements such as in education or training activities.

Disability Employment Services

Disability Employment Services (DES) help people with disability find work and keep a job. DES is available to young people with disability from the age of 14, if they are not already engaged in school or work. There are two disability employment assistance programs that offer different levels of support depending on the person's disability.

Generally, young people will access DES during their final year of school. To facilitate this, the Development Coach can:

- link young people in with a provider, advocate for them and ensure they are being supported by their provider
- support them to navigate the system, including activity and reporting requirements
- ensure they are given the option between a mainstream Job Service Agency and DES provider, and that the provider can accommodate any additional needs.

Ticket to Work

Ticket to Work is a program that aims to improve education and employment outcomes for secondary students with disability by promoting a successful transition from school to work. It is a collaborative model involving schools, vocational education providers, employers and community organisations.

The program offers a range of services and supports tailored to the needs of individual students. These may include career planning, vocational training, work experience opportunities, job placements and ongoing support in the workplace. The program aims to equip young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to pursue meaningful employment and achieve long-term independence.

Development Coaches can advocate in Student Support Group meetings at the young person's school to link into Ticket to Work. This can be further supported and managed by the LOOKOUT Education Centre representative at the school.

For more information about LOOKOUT Education Centres, see the Better Futures Education Offer Practice Guide.

Housing

Targeted Care Package

The TCP provides flexible and person-centred care that is better suited to the young person's needs than residential care. The service is also intended to prevent entry into residential care and to support successful transitions from residential care to an alternative living arrangement. The TCP provides funding for one or more supports, including home, independent living, kinship, foster care and semi-independent living/lead tenant.

Young people with disability are a priority group for TCP. Those eligible young people who have been approved for a TCP extension, post child protection order, may apply for Home Stretch. However, if approved, Home Stretch funding and support will not commence until after the TCP funding arrangement has ended.

During this period eligible young people residing in these arrangements can continue to access the Better Futures service.

NDIS Housing Options

NDIS provides opportunities to explore creative ways in which a person with disability can live independently in the community. If a young person has a goal related to housing, and their disability requires supports beyond those needed by other young people, a Home and Living Request may be appropriate. For the NDIS to assist with any additional home and living supports, participants must have an accommodation-related goal in their NDIS plan.

In relation to home and living supports, Development Coaches can:

- check that the young person has explored mainstream housing options during in care
- ascertain whether mainstream options are appropriate and, if not, gather evidence linked to the young person's disability support needs as to why they are not
- check with the case manager or care team if an application for housing and living supports funding has been submitted and, if so, where it is at in the system
- work with the young person and their Support Coordinator to find a suitable provider
- collaborate with key NDIS-funded supports and other stakeholders to develop accommodation options that meet the individual needs and preferences of the young person.

The NDIS website provides more information and the full list of home and living support options under the NDIS.

Those NDIS home and living supports that are commonly utilised by young people are outlined in more detail here:

Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) is designed for people with disability who have high support needs and require specialised housing options. SDA aims to provide accessible and tailored accommodation that meets the specific requirements of people with disability, including those with physical or sensory impairment, complex needs or challenging behaviours.

SDA funding covers the costs associated with the design, construction or modification of a home to accommodate the individual's disability-related needs. The goal is to enable people with disability to live as independently as possible, while receiving the necessary support and care in a safe and suitable environment. SDA funding can be requested through a Home and Living supports request. Evidence of the need for this specialised housing option, usually including an occupational therapy report, will be required.

Supported Independent Living (SIL) assists people with disability to live independently in their own home. SIL is for people with higher support needs, who need some level of help at home all the time. The support is tailored to meet the individual needs of each person and can be provided in a shared living arrangement or in a separate residence.

SIL is provided through a disability support provider after it is funded in a participant's NDIS plan. To have SIL funding included in a NDIS plan, a Home and Living Request showing evidence of the need for SIL needs to be submitted.

Individualised Living Options (ILO) provide funding to help a person live in their chosen home environment in a way that best suits them. It does not fund the actual home, but allows choice as to who the person shares their home with, and how the living supports are structured. ILO will include a mix of both formal and informal supports such as family, friends and other networks.

Funding for ILO needs to be requested through the Home and Living Request process. If approved, funding is provided in two stages: the first is to explore and design the Individualised Living Option the person wants and needs; the second is to ascertain the funding needed to implement their ILO.

Short-Term Accommodation (STA), including respite, is funding is for support and accommodation when a person is away from their usual home for a short time. While in STA the participant is supported with personal care tasks and able to engage in their chosen activities.

WHEN ACTIVITIES SHOULD HAPPEN ACROSS THE PHASES OF CARE

To support Better Futures practitioners in navigating the complexities of disability systems across all phases of care, this section will focus on how they can collaborate with case managers and care teams to support early planning for young people with disability and ensure a smooth transition from care.

The typical activities undertaken by Development Coaches and Community Connectors when working with young people across the 5 Offers – in early engagement, outreach and connection, and direct support work – can be found in the Better Futures 5 Offers Practice Guides.

The Better Futures model is separated into two phases:

- in care
- post care.

> *The planning involved for a young person with a disability transitioning from care follows a similar path to other young people in care. Transition from care planning needs to start early and the young person should be supported to self-direct and shape their planning.*
>
> *The planning process is based on understanding their individual needs, strengths, aspirations and current situation, while also creating links to the long-term supports they require. It is completed at the same time as actively developing the skills the young person needs to thrive outside the care system.*

Young people with disability transitioning from care are entitled to the same level of state-funded supports as those without disability including access to brokerage, packaging and Home Stretch.

Figure 4 on the next page shows the timeline in which young people can access various supports between the ages of 15 to 25 years.

Figure 3: Better Futures 2 phases of care

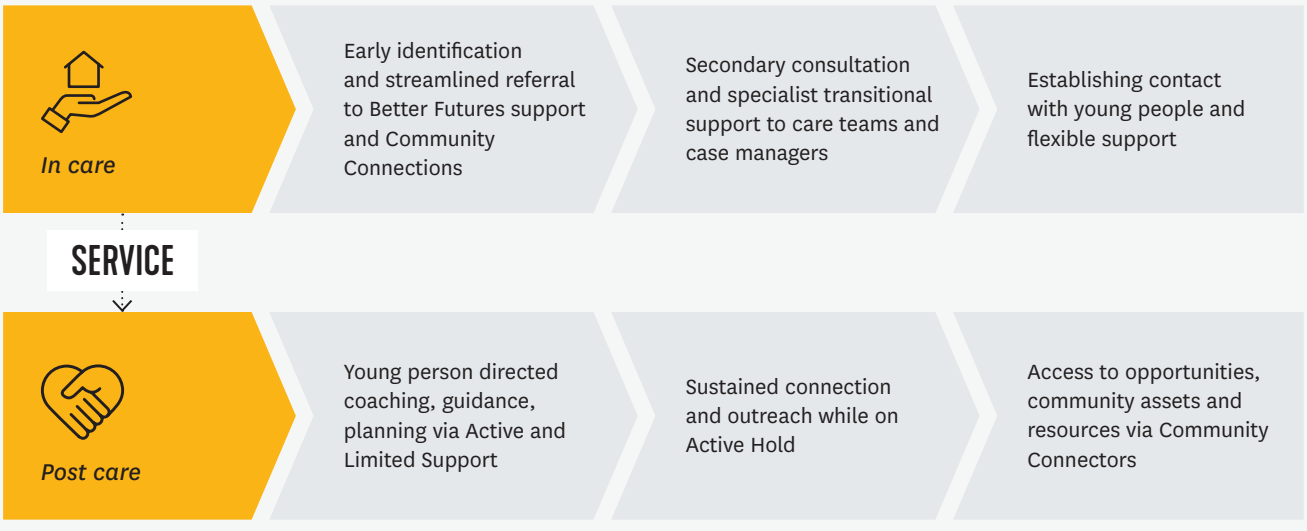


Figure 4: Disability and service supports timeline

NB. The ages mentioned are subject to eligibility criteria set by program providers. Please check with the young person's provider for guidance and further information. The **National Disability Coordination Officer Program** can advise on education and employment programs.

Home Stretch support can start at 16 for young people transitioning from care. Home Stretch support starts at 18 for young people on permanent care orders.

In care

During in care, case managers and care teams support the young person's access to appropriate disability supports. For some young people this can include accessing the NDIS and ensuring their NDIS plan is reviewed or renewed to maintain the necessary level of support after transitioning from care.

Case managers also assist with planning for suitable supported accommodation and coordinate various assessments. They work towards increased support coordination and can work with NDIA Planners, NDIS Support Coordinators or LACs to help young people strengthen their independent living skills and engage in community activities. Case managers are supported in this process by the DFFH Disability Practice Advice teams.

There are some barriers that can hinder effective planning by case managers for young people who are also NDIS participants, including:

- complex NDIS assessment processes
- delays in planning for post care disability accommodation
- poor collaboration between Child Protection, funded agencies and the NDIA
- delays in identifying young people with disability in a timely manner.

Development Coaches may sometimes feel they have a limited contribution to make in care team meetings or secondary consultations. These meetings support both early planning and keeping across where the young person's planning is at before they transition to post care. However, Development Coaches can support carers, case managers and other professionals in preparing for the young person's transition from care and add value to discussions by contextualising supports across the 5 Offers with the young person's 15+ Care and Transition Plan. They can also remind Child Protection of the support available through the DFFH Disability Practice Advice teams.

Development Coaches can support carers, case managers and other professionals in preparing for the young person's transition from care and add value to discussions by contextualising supports across the 5 Offers with the young person's 15+ Care and Transition Plan. They can also remind Child Protection of the support available through the DFFH Disability Practice Advice teams.

Care team meeting disability checklist

Development Coaches can use this checklist as a guiding tool when joining care team meetings. Being aware of the following planning elements can keep Development Coaches across the in care work of Child Protection, case managers and care teams.

- [ ] Is the young person participating in care team discussions? Ensure opportunities are provided for their input into discussions and decisions.
- [ ] Have the young person's needs, strengths, goals and aspirations across the 5 Offers been discussed in an Advantaged Thinking way and recorded on their 15+ Care and Transition Plan?
- [ ] If the young person is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, do they have a Cultural Plan? If not, ensure that such a plan is actioned as soon as possible.
- [ ] Does the young person have proof of identity? If not, has the NDIA been contacted for an Exceptional Circumstances form?
- [ ] Does the young person have an established relationship with an ongoing treating professional (General Practitioner, Mental Health Clinician)?
- [ ] Has an access request been made for the young person?
- [ ] If the young person is not eligible for NDIS have available supports been explored? For example:
  - consultation with a LAC
  - community-based services (health, mental health)
  - disability advocacy and support organisations
  - education and employment services
  - Commonwealth and Victorian supports for carers (if residing with a carer).
- [ ] If the young person has a cognitive disability requiring a guardian or administrator on turning 18, has a consultation with the Office of the Public Advocate been planned for and recorded on the 15+ Care and Transition plan?
- [ ] Are the details of relevant support contacts (including NDIS contacts for participants) of those involved with the young person recorded and up to date on CRIS (e.g. community-based services, NDIA Planner, NDIS Support Coordinator, Plan Manager, LAC)?
- [ ] Are relevant support contacts actively engaged in the young person's care team?
- [ ] Is the young person's current planning (including NDIS plans for participants) adequate to address identified needs and support their transition from care? Has evidence been gathered to support their NDIS plan, and does it include goals around accommodation and support?
- [ ] If the young person is NDIS connected:
  - is there a copy of the most recent NDIS plan saved on CRIS?
  - has the NDIS Support Coordinator been provided with relevant evidence to inform the NDIS plan review process?
- [ ] If the young person's disability limits their capacity to complete everyday tasks or participate in their community, to what extent have their future needs been considered in preparation for exiting care?
- [ ] Have relevant reports or assessments that may inform leaving care planning been saved on CRIS (LAC assessment and progress records, functional capacity assessment, medical or other specialised assessments/reports)?
- [ ] Are activities being actioned within agreed timelines? If not, need to determine what might flow into the post care space.
- [ ] Has the DFFH Disability Practice Advice advisor been engaged to assist in the planning process for a child with disability?

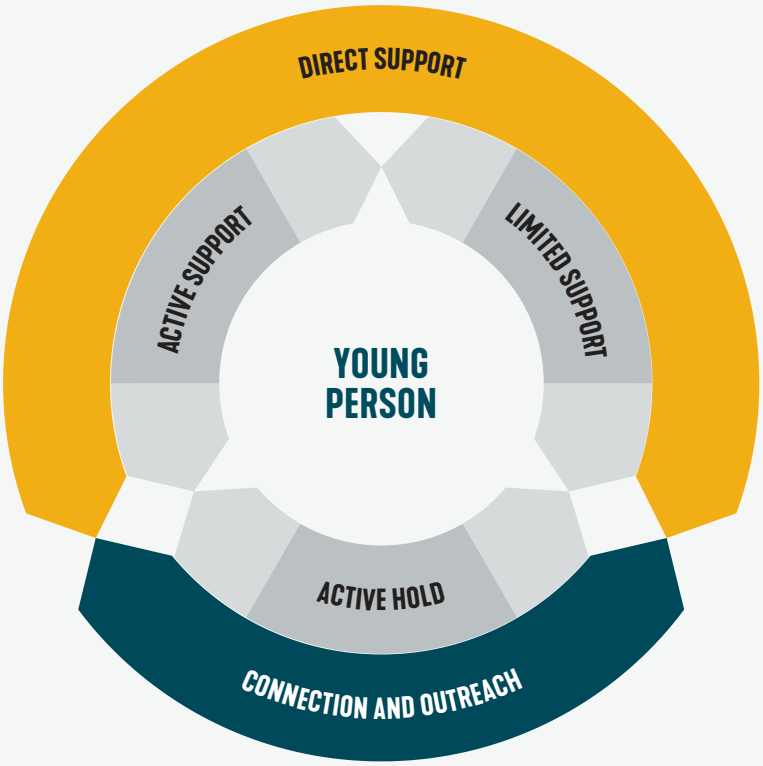
Post care

The post care phase has two parts and three different levels of support.

Young people will move between the different levels of support as their circumstances and needs change.

Practical detail about post care activities is provided in the next section.

Figure 5: Better Futures levels of support



Direct support

Active Support

Sustained and ongoing support to explore, develop and engage with education goals, pathways and opportunities.

Limited Support

Regular assertive outreach and connection, referrals, information and advice, access to flexible funding.

Connection and outreach

Active Hold

Episodic and targeted support as requested by the young person to develop or engage with something specific.

Transition to post care disability checklist

When doing handover with Child Protection, case managers and care teams, Development Coaches can ask about the following elements to support the young person's transition to post care.

- [ ] Have all activities been actioned within the required timelines? If no, have regular meetings been organised with the young person and the care team to follow up and address outstanding actions before the young person leaves care?
- [ ] Has the 15+ Care and Transition plan been reviewed? Are there any adjustments required to support the young person's transition from care?
- [ ] Have required support referrals been organised in consultation with the young person and their carer? Ask if the young person and their carer/s have been appropriately and adequately linked to support networks and services. Determine if more funded supports will be required in post care
- [ ] Has the young person's eligibility for Home Stretch been confirmed? If so, has the Home Stretch application been submitted to CRIS at least 6 months before the young person's order expires?
- [ ] Have income support payments from Centrelink been organised?
- [ ] Does the young person have access to personal documentation and identification?
- [ ] Have the following CRIS/CRSSP requirements been actioned?
  - Home Stretch Application and Allowance approvals finalised in CRIS (either via HBC Form C or Independent Living proposal)
  - Leaving Care Goals, Actions and LAC Self-Care Skills records updated
  - Placement/accommodation exit record updated
  - All active referrals closed in CRIS
  - Location at end of Placement/Accommodation recorded
  - Closure advice and report completed
- [ ] Have the NDIS Support Coordinator or NDIA Planner been contacted to request a review of the young person's NDIS plan to support leaving care planning and possible options?

To access NDIS home and living support, an accommodation goal must be included in the planning. A NDIS Home and Living Support Request can be made for time-limited assistance to explore different accommodation options.

See *Disability supports and stakeholders* (p.7) for more information.

- [ ] If the young person is a NDIS participant, and there are changes to their support needs, has a request been made to review their NDIS plan? Has the required evidence to inform the NDIS plan review been provided?

HOW TO WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

Working with young people with disability follows the same Advantaged Thinking coaching practice and planning across the 5 Offers as described in the Better Futures 5 Offers Practice Guides. As when working with any young person, Better Futures practitioners will need to recognise the individual in front of them and adapt their practice to suit the needs of the young person.

The role of Better Futures in supporting the young person with their disability needs will depend on the young person's circumstances and the level of involvement from their other supports.

It is particularly important to involve the young person in planning conversations with their other supports like carers or relevant health professionals and to value and amplify the young person's voice in their planning.

Care-experienced young people with disability often face additional barriers to their peers and are at higher risk of poor outcomes. They are less likely to develop independent living skills, access further education or employment opportunities and form supportive social networks, and more likely to experience homelessness.

Better Futures practitioners can seek to alleviate some of these potential challenges for young people with disability by working with the young person across the 5 Offers.

sortli

The Sortli app is designed by young people, for young people. It is a great place for them to start to take charge of their transition to adulthood. Sortli includes Victorian-specific information and step-by-step guides for navigating life's big challenges, such as:

- finding a place to live
- looking after your health
- managing your money
- finding a job
- doing some training
- understanding your legal rights

Sortlii supports the Advantaged Thinking approach by equipping young people with the necessary tools and information to make advantageous choices for their transition planning.

The 5 Offers

The 5 Offers are:

Education
Creating a bridge to mainstream education for young people

Employment
Providing young people with access to real-world work experience and job opportunities

Health and Wellbeing
Focusing on developing young people's capacity to thrive

Connections
Encouraging thriving and local connections that support young people to achieve their goals

Housing and Living Skills
Assisting young people to access and sustain housing

The 5 Offers are designed to give young people access to new opportunities, and to identify their aspirations and goals as they plan their transition to adulthood. They also provide structure for Development Coaches and Community Connectors in their work of harnessing opportunities for young people that will enable them:

- to build their personal agency and make positive decisions
- to access the right supports, connections and resources at the right time
- to make helpful contacts and access networks that build their social capital
- to develop the skills and qualifications they need to follow their goals
- to set themselves up for a sustainable, thriving livelihood.

Exploring new opportunities, and encouraging participation in them, can uncover interests and spark motivation for young people. However, it is also okay if they are not motivated to take up all 5 Offers at the start, particularly as engaging with one Offer will often lead to opportunities in the other areas.

Effective communication is key. When working with a young person, be sure to address:

- their goals
- what makes a good life for them
- what they want and how you can provide support that helps them access this
- what works for them
- what doesn't work for them
- how they would like to be supported
- which of their key support people they want involved in their transition planning.

Development Coaches should continually assess whether the young person's needs are being met by existing service systems and explore mainstream supports. Secondary consultation and advocacy to the care team during the in care phase may be necessary to ensure the right supports are provided at the right time.

Fundamental practices

Communication

Communication with people with disability is mostly the same as communicating with people without a disability. However, sometimes a young person will communicate differently, so if you encounter difficulties communicating with them, you may consider:

- asking the young person (or their carer) for advice on how best to communicate
- asking the care team for any speech and language assessments that are available.

If do need to adjust your communication style, then there are some general principles which you should consider:

- be polite
- speak clearly using your usual tone of voice
- be aware of your body language and your non-verbal cues
- don't expect eye contact
- ensure you communicate directly with the person with disability by addressing them instead of speaking to their third-party support person (e.g. carer or Auslan interpreter)
- use literal language
- give them permission to to let you know what makes things easier
- check if they understand what you are saying by asking them to explain it back to you. Some young people will not tell you that they didn't understand. Ask if and what, assistance may be required
- ensure you avoid making assumptions about a person's disability
- respect personal boundaries, confidentiality and privacy
- provide up-to-date information about accessibility services where relevant.

It is essential to give young people with disability all the information they need to be able to make their own decisions and engage with others in their own way. People with disability often don't know what to expect when entering new relationships with support workers. Clear and transparent communication encourages trust and allows the person to be vulnerable.

See the *Practice approaches for different presentations of disability* section for guidance in working with specific disability needs.

The 5 Offers are designed to give young people access to new opportunities, and to identify their aspirations and goals as they plan their transition to adulthood.

Enabling access and fostering inclusion

Access keys are a way to provide young people with information about an environment or a place, including what is and isn't accessible so they can make informed decisions.

Social scripts deconstruct the unspoken social rules of a new experience or environment through simple language and images and give young people with disability the information they need to engage in these systems.

Developing an access key or social script for young people with disability enables Better Futures practitioners to identify potential accessibility or social challenges and how they might adapt their practice or the environment to be more inclusive.

We all have a role to play in ensuring our communities are accessible and inclusive of people with disability. There are some simple measures to help achieve this, including:

- becoming knowledgeable on disability-related issues
- getting involved in disability awareness and advocacy activities
- confronting disability stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes
- treating all people as equal
- not being afraid to talk about disability.

See Amaze and YDAS websites for examples and practical guidance to develop social scripts and access keys.

Supporting independence and self-esteem

Many people with disability experience internalised stigma that can lead to negative beliefs and feelings of shame, inadequacy or self-doubt. It can affect their self-esteem, mental health and overall wellbeing.

> *As a young person with a care experience, it's important that practitioners are believing in you and identifying capacity and supporting what your needs are.*
>
> *We want to focus on what our young people can do. Tell young people, 'I respect that, that's understandable. What's a different way around this that is within your capabilities?'*
>
> *Advantaged Thinking is unconditional belief in young people and holding high expectations. But it's also about starting where young people are at and working with where they're at.*
>
> — Care-experienced young person

Better Futures practitioners can work with young people with disability to promote self-acceptance and empower them by meeting them where they are at and working in a way that meets their needs.

Experiences of disability

It is important to note that a person's experience of having a disability can change day-to-day and throughout their lifetime.

> *A lot of young people who leave care have complex trauma, complex needs and they do change a lot. One day could be that they're happy and content, then next day they're in the wars. It's important to understand that disability isn't a clear-cut thing, like this person has this disability and that's all. You have to focus on it all together as much as possible. And know that it does change. Capabilities, capacities, the ability to get to the site to meet you can change, even overnight, especially when it comes to chronic pain and chronic illness.*
>
> — Care-experienced young person

It's important to keep checking in with young people. Don't make them feel obligated that they have to do something. Be flexible, make phone calls, texts or go out to visit them where they feel most confident and supported.

Practice approaches for different presentations of disability

The following table highlights presentations that can be observed across a broad range of disabilities. Alongside each description, you will find practical and inclusive approaches to working effectively with young people who have these presentations. These approaches are not exhaustive or exclusive but are intended to present some ideas for working with a range of needs.

As noted previously, your practice should always start with asking the person how they would like to be supported.

Table of presentations and practice approaches

Presentations	Practice approaches
Difficulty with communication	Use alternative communication methods, such as visual aids (picture schedules, communication boards) or assistive technology (texting, communication apps). This can help people express their needs, preferences and ideas effectively.
	Be patient and allow ample time for communication. Give people opportunities to respond and avoid rushing or interrupting them.
	Use clear and simple language and provide visual cues to support understanding.
	Respect individual communication preferences and choices, such as using sign language or alternative/assistive communication technologies.
Sensory sensitivities (noise, light)	Create a sensory-friendly environment by minimising or eliminating sensory triggers. This may involve reducing background noise, using soft lighting or providing a designated quiet space.
	Allow people to self-regulate by offering options such as wearing noise-cancelling headphones, using fidget tools or adjusting environmental stimuli to their comfort level.
	Respect and accommodate individual sensory preferences, as some people may seek or avoid specific sensory input.
Behaviours of concern	Implement positive behaviour support strategies to address challenging behaviour. This includes identifying and addressing underlying triggers or unmet needs, teaching alternative coping skills and reinforcing positive behaviour.
	Use visual supports, such as visual schedules or social stories, to promote predictability and understanding of expectations.
	Create a structured and consistent environment with clear routines and boundaries.
	Foster a positive and supportive relationship based on transparent information, trust and understanding.
Social difficulties and challenges with social interaction	Encourage and facilitate social participation by creating structured and inclusive social opportunities. This may involve group activities and peer mentoring programs.
	Teach and model social skills, such as turn-taking, active listening and positive assertiveness.
	Promote acceptance and understanding in group work settings by fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.
	Provide social cues and supports, such as visual prompts or social scripts, to facilitate social interactions.

Presentations	Practice approaches
Executive functioning difficulties (organisation, planning)	Provide visual supports, such as visual schedules, checklists or color-coded systems, to support organisation and planning.
	Break down tasks into smaller manageable steps and provide clear instructions.
	Offer support and guidance in starting and finishing tasks, like providing prompts or breaking tasks into smaller time segments.
	Use tools or apps that assist with time management, reminders and prioritising tasks.
Motor coordination and mobility challenges	Provide access keys to facilitate access to new places and environments.
	Modify the physical environment to accommodate accessibility needs, such as installing ramps, handrails.
	Offer patience and support, allowing individuals to work at their own pace and providing assistance when needed.
	Foster a positive body image and self-esteem by focusing on individual strengths and abilities.

Practice challenges

Amplifying the voice of young people with disability

It can be easy for the voices of young people with disability to be commandeered. Better Futures practitioners need to be aware of whose voice and opinions they are listening to.

Supporters and carers should be involved alongside or behind the young person with disability. However, your primary focus should be working directly with the young person – it's their voice we want to hear.

In some circumstances, the carer or support person might need to speak on behalf of the young person. Make sure you check in with them about their preferred communication strategy and, where possible, facilitate as much information as you can from the young person to ensure that their voice and wishes are being heard.

Non-verbal communication

When working with a young person who is non-verbal, ask them how they want to communicate and then follow through on that. You can also seek advice from relevant professionals as to how best to communicate. The term non-verbal implies that the person doesn't use language, but this isn't always the case. Many non-verbal people understand both speech and writing but communicate in other ways. The young person's supporters and carers may also be able to provide insight and guidance on the best communication methods.

The young person may have verbal communication that you are not aware of, or it may be different to how you perceive communication to be. It's important to respect the way they want to communicate even though it may be very different to how others do so.

For example, if the young person wants to have a Zoom meeting in which they can type to chat, or they want to use communication cards when you meet, then it is important to be proactive in setting up the infrastructure to enable this. Don't readjust just before the meeting every time; simply provide them with what they have identified they need to engage and participate.

How to support autonomy while balancing risk

The role of Better Futures practitioners is to support young people with disability to do as much as they can for themselves. They need to work with young people to find the balance between enabling them to do what they can unassisted, while being supportive and understanding as to the things they cannot do without help.

Young people with disability, especially those in care, are often so protected that they are unable to take risks. The concept of dignity of risk recognises that people with disability should have the right to take risks and make choices in their lives despite the possibility of failure or harm. It emphasises the importance of autonomy, self-determination and treating people with disability as capable individuals who have the right to make decisions about their own lives like any other person.

Here, people with disability reflect on what autonomy means to them.

> *I went to the city by myself in my wheelchair, but I put myself into a two-week long pain flare from how much I had to use my chair. My response isn't next time we'll get someone to move you. It was a bit awful to realise I couldn't be fully independent. It doesn't mean I go to the city with a support person. It means I stay home more often.*
>
> — Facilitator, YDAS

> *You have to be listening to young people. If they do something then realise they didn't like it or it didn't work, ask them what their solution is to that. I can't make phone calls, we could sit and work through that but maybe it's not the solution. I can email like a pro, I had to teach myself those skills. That's my solution. You don't have to make phone calls. Consider what is society's problem and what is the young person's problem.*
>
> — Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

> *Include young people with disability in as many decisions as possible. Dignity of risk is awesome – being able to take risk in a way where you have empowerment and the option to learn from that, in every decision. That's where we get to participate in positive risk taking. That's where we need to look closely to see where we can incorporate that into practice.*
>
> — Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Coaching conversations provide a space to strategically bring up and step through conversations about anticipated risks and concerns to young people and/or carers before they occur. Consider workshopping the following questions to open up the conversation and find solutions, as necessary:

- What is the level of risk?
- What is the likelihood of the risk occurring?
- What are the potential benefits?
- What supports and elements could be put in place to reduce the risk or concern?

By giving power and autonomy to young people with disability, you can give them the opportunity to take risks, to fail and to succeed. When things don't work out, respond afterwards and provide a caring autonomous space that doesn't diminish their autonomy.

Disability diagnosis and disclosure

There may be times where a young person does not identify as having a disability, yet Better Futures practitioners may wish to seek formal diagnosis. This is because the young person's disclosure of their disability will facilitate the coordination of services and supports that will be to their benefit. However, this must be done with the willingness and consent of the young person themselves. There will be some young people who will not see the benefit of the supports offered, or not want them and be antagonised by the suggestion of taking them up.

Disability diagnosis or disclosure is a personal choice and can be influenced by factors such as the young person's need to access supports or adjustments, the visibility of their disability, and the attitudes and perceptions of others. Some young people will choose not to disclose or seek formal diagnosis. This is because many people with disability have a genuine fear of discrimination leading to a denial of opportunity based on their disability.

The reasons for non-disclosure are myriad, but include:

- a fear of being denied access to entitlements
- concern that people will only focus on their disability not their ability
- being treated differently, negatively or considered a liability
- facing negative attitudes by their peers, workers or community.

In addition, many people with disability do not:

- identify with the label of 'disability'
- believe that their disability will impact on their performance and thus disclosure is not necessary
- require any support adjustment so prefer not to disclose.

Better Futures practitioners can create safe and supportive spaces for young people to start a dialogue about disability. By opening up the discussion we can create an opportunity for the young person to discuss their thoughts and feelings, to think through their choices and to make decisions in a supportive environment.

It is also important to consider what lies beyond the care system for young people once support drops away when they turn 21. This is an opportunity to discuss with the young person:

- what they think needs to be in place for them to succeed
- any potential barriers to achieving their goals
- what supports they think they will need beyond the care system.

If the young person is receptive, a natural progression to assessments and formal supports can follow.

A young persons' diagnosis is not the be all and end all of working with them. Everyone experiences their disability differently, and it is important not to make assumptions as to what people are capable or not capable of based on a diagnosis or disability.

When working with a young person with disability who is not receptive to discussing their diagnosis, Better Futures practitioners should instead focus on the aspirations and goals they hold and work with them to establish a strong sense of self-belief. Focus questions around their strengths, talents and capabilities. Work in ways that meet the young person where they are at, acknowledge their learning style, and provide opportunities for them to explore and engage with full participation.

Better Futures practitioners can use these approaches to step through how the young person is going to participate and achieve their goals, and the kinds of resources and supports that will enable success. This may well lead to the young person deciding to explore how some disability services could play a role in supporting their aspirations.

A useful resource for these conversations is **Disclosure: It's a personal decision**, which gives options and pathways that people with disability can use when disclosing their disability in post-secondary education and employment environments.

Working with carers

It is important to involve the carers of the young people with whom you are working in all future planning and decision making during the transition from care. Carers may not even be aware of the Better Futures service, how it works and what support is available. As such, Better Futures practitioners will need to explain their role and capacity to carers early on to establish clear expectations and boundaries.

When young people with disability stay on with a carer, they will likely need information and support to understand and navigate their options, legal status, rights and responsibilities, and any changes to their current carer payments. Carers of young people with disability who are ineligible for NDIS funding or have small packages may also need help to navigate and access the right community-based supports.

For some young people with significant intellectual disability, carers may need to be present to support them to participate in their coaching conversations or mentor relationships. This is different to the approach we would traditionally take with young people, and there are challenges associated with minimising the influence of carers' perspectives and ensuring, as far as possible, that the young person's voice is captured.

It is important to listen carefully to the perspectives and priorities of the young person to ensure that their voice is driving the planning, as their views can differ significantly from those of their carers. It is also good to encourage open discussion between the two of them so as to work through conflicting views if and when they occur.

Carers may also look to the Better Futures Development Coach for information about supporting the young person and their disability needs. The Development Coach should encourage and facilitate the carer to establish a relationship with the appropriate NDIS LAC or Support Coordinator who can provide disability-specific knowledge and expertise.

In cases where the carer wants support to better understand and participate in care team meetings, Development Coaches should call on the DFFH Disability Principal Practice Advice advisors for guidance as to who the carer can connect with from the care team.

OPERATIONAL INFORMATION

Quick links to operations information:

- Better Futures Advantaged Thinking Practice Framework
- Home Stretch fact sheet
- Eligibility and referral
- Allocation and prioritisation
- Roles and responsibilities

Client Relationship Information System for Service Providers

The Client Relationship Information System for Service Providers (CRISSP) is a client information and case management system. CRISSP provides a range of functions to record information, such as a young person's:

- personal details
- goals and activities they have undertaken across the 5 Offers
- strengths and aspirations as linked to a goal
- relationship with the Community Connector
- number of hours spent working with Better Futures practitioners
- flexible funding and other funding sources balance.

CRISSP also enabled electronic reporting of data required by the DFFH. Funded Better Futures providers can extract the following reports from CRISSP:

- Better Futures Monthly Report CP504R
- Client Expenditure Report CP506R

For more information on using CRISSP and reporting, see Better Futures performance and reporting practice advice.

Outcomes Tracking System

The Outcomes Tracking System is a data collection tool used to collect responses to Better Futures and Home Stretch outcomes questions, which cover topics across the 5 Offers.

Outcomes questions are voluntary, with responses to come from the young person's perspective. They are completed once in care, then annually at the start of post care, and again at a young person's transition from care services.

The outcomes questions are to be completed as part of planning discussion between the young person and their Development Coach. There are a couple of reports which the Development Coach can share with the young person to track change over time.

Better Futures flexible funding

Better Futures flexible funding is available to young people, including those accessing Home Stretch (which has its own flexible funding allocation). Funding is used to assist with young people's expenses for education, employment, health (where not covered by Medicare), and activities that support the achievement of their goals and assist their transition to sustainable independent living. There are many things flexible funding can be used for, and Development Coaches are encouraged to think creatively to ensure the services, activities and items funded meet the young person's needs.

Better Futures practitioners' support, and associated flexible funding, may gradually reduce over time, if appropriate. For example, a young person may be receiving flexible funding as a contribution towards payment of their utility bills, and this contribution may gradually decrease as the young person's capacity to cover these costs increases. It is important that consideration be given to the sustainability of arrangements beyond a young person's 21st birthday when Better Futures support ends.

The amount of flexible funding a young person can access is based on their support needs.

Flexible funding should only be utilised once all other appropriate funding options have been exhausted, including: Child Protection/ACAC funding; Caregiver payments; TILA; Total Care Package, etc.

For more information on items funded and administrative processes, see:

- Better Futures flexible funding practice advice
- Better Futures flexible funding request form

Home Stretch procedure

Note: Homestretch Proposals and Applications can only be completed by contracted case managers and Child Protection, not Better Futures practitioners.

The Home Stretch application form (CRIS/CRISSP) must be submitted by the Child Protection case manager, contracted case manager, or the ACAC case manager. The Better Futures practitioner must support applications, as they will be rejected if they or a Better Futures provider have not been involved in the decision to apply for Home Stretch.

For more information:

- Home Stretch advice
- Home Stretch website for eligibility criteria details
- Home Stretch CRIS guide for details about the CRIS Home Stretch application process – accessible in CRIS via the 4 Help! Ask CRIS icon.

Transition to Independent Living Allowance

TILA is a one-off payment from the Australian Government to help young people who are leaving formal care arrangements. It provides a contribution of up to $1,500 towards the costs involved in moving to independent living.

Young people aged between 15 and 25 years are able to access this allowance for a range of support services as well as training and educational materials and other items such as furniture and white goods.

The payment is available either as a lump sum or in up to six installments as agreed between the young person and their case worker. It is paid by the Australian Government's Department of Human Services.

For more information see:

- TILA – Guide for caseworkers
- TILA website.

Transitional Housing Management

This program provides accommodation for up to 12 months (18 months for young people) to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Funded by the National Affordable Housing Agreement, it provides property and tenancy management, initial assessment and planning, housing information, referral to other homelessness and allied services, housing advocacy and financial assistance.

There are 19 Transitional Housing Management program-funded organisations based in homelessness support services throughout Victoria.

Leaving Care Housing and Support Initiative

This initiative provides support to young people still on a care order when they are preparing to leave care, and identified as being at risk of homelessness. Service support provides them with limited access to Transitional Housing Management properties, assists with living skills, and facilitates connections to move towards independent living. Referrals are made through Better Futures providers.

Referral to Community Connector

When a young person and the Better Futures practitioner identify that Community Connections support would be useful, a referral is made. The Community Connector then matches a young person to a mentor or facilitates a connection to a community service, resource or opportunity.

Community Connections referrals can be made when:

- a young person would like to be matched with a mentor (either one-to-one or group mentoring)
- a young person would like to be connected to a community service or resource and the Community Connector is needed to facilitate this connection.

All referrals, both for young people in care and post care, must come from the Better Futures practitioner. Referrals can be made when a young person is between 15 years 9 months and 21 years of age.

The Better Futures practitioner takes the following steps in the referral process:

- discusses a Community Connections referral with the young person, and obtains their consent to the referral
- sends a CRIS/SP referral to the relevant Community Connections provider, and attaches all relevant documentation (for example, the 15+ Care and Transition Plan and Cultural Plan)
- shares any other relevant information with the Community Connections provider including security alerts or safety risks.

For more information see:

- Information on the Better Futures CRISSP referral and allocation process
- Community Connections practice advice
- Better Futures Connections Offer Practice Guide

OTHER RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

Better Futures practitioners don't need to be experts in every area, but do need to be well connected, and know where to go, and what actions need to be put in place, to support young people.

A range of these supports are stepped out in the following table.

Disability supports, services, programs and funding sources matrix

	Individual support	Build readiness	Explore options	Opportunities and connections	For young people	For Better Futures practitioners	For carers	Funding information
NDIS								
Find your Local Area Coordinator			●			●	●	●
NDIS homepage			●			●	●	●
NDIS Guide for Professionals (Youth Disability Advocacy Service)						●	●	
Evidence of disability factsheet						●	●	
Types of disability evidence						●	●	
NDIS factsheets						●	●	●
Home and living support options			●			●	●	●
Specialist Disability Accommodation						●		●
Supported Independent Living						●		●
Individualised Living Options						●		●
Short-Term Accommodation						●		●
Online information								
The Disability Gateway			●		●	●	●	
Peak disability associations					●	●	●	
Support for young people not funded by NDIS			●		●	●	●	
Commonwealth and Victorian supports for carers			●			●	●	●
Guardianship and administration – Office of the Public Advocate						●	●	
Disclosure: It's A Personal Decision					●	●		
YDAS resources and training						●		

	Individual support	Build readiness	Explore options	Opportunities and connections	For young people	For Better Futures practitioners	For carers	Funding information
Information about different disabilities								
Acquired brain injury						●	●	
Foetal alcohol spectrum disorders						●	●	
Intellectual disability						●	●	
Mental health conditions						●	●	
Neurodiversity						●	●	
Education								
National Disability Coordination Officer program						●	●	
Program for Students with Disabilities						●	●	
Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education & Training						●		
Supporting Students in Out-of-Home Care resources (Department of Education)						●	●	
Employment								
School Leaver Employment Supports	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ticket to Work	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Job Access	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Disability Support Pension	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
DSP manifest medical rules					●	●	●	●
Types of medical evidence to support DSP application					●	●	●	●
DSP medical evidence checklist					●	●	●	●
Disability advocacy organisations								
YDAS (advocacy and guidance)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability (VALID)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
SANE (mental health)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Amaze (autism)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
People with Disability Australia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Connections								
CREATE Foundation		●		●	●			

	Individual support	Build readiness	Explore options	Opportunities and connections	For young people	For Better Futures practitioners	For carers	Funding information
Mental and emotional health								
Headspace	●		●	●	●	●		
Orygen Youth Health	●				●	●		
ReachOut	●	●	●		●			
Lifeline	●	●	●		●	●		
Kids Helpline	●	●	●		●	●		
Kids Beyond Blue	●	●	●		●	●		
13YARN	●	●	●		●	●		
SANE	●	●	●		●	●		
Suicide Call Back Service	●				●			
SuicideLine Victoria	●				●			
Young Carers Network	●			●	●			●
The Butterfly Foundation (Eating Disorders)	●			●	●	●		
Emerging Minds resource library						●	●	
Funding information								
Transition to Independent Living Allowance	●			●		●		●
Better Futures flexible funding	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Home Stretch flexible funding					●	●		●
Out-of-Home Care information								
Community Connections practice advice						●		●
ACCO Better Futures Our Way practice advice						●		●
Better Futures Advantaged Thinking Practice Framework						●		●
Better Futures My Voice planning resources						●		
Leaving Care Services website						●		●
Child Protection Manual						●		●
Looking After Children						●		
DFFH								
Better Futures						●		●
Home Stretch						●		●
Leaving Care website						●		●
Melbourne City Mission Leaving Care Hotline	●		●	●	●			●

APPENDIX 1
ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED FOR NDIS ACCESS AND PLANNING

Additional supporting evidence

NDIS supports are funded to address a young person's needs due to the impact of their disability. Evidence regarding the current impact that the disability has on their functioning, and the interventions required, needs to be provided to determine the type and level of NDIS supports to be funded. Parental responsibilities (based on what parents would provide for a typical young person at the same age) and trauma-based needs are not eligible for NDIS funding.

The required documentation needs to be reflective of the young person's recent presentation (no more than two years ago) and related to the following areas:

- **Mobility/motor skills** – the physical capacity to move around the home and community undertaking the ordinary activities of daily living
- **Communication** – being understood, understanding others, expressing needs, communicating appropriately
- **Social interaction** – making and keeping friends, interacting with the community, behaving within limits accepted by others, coping with feelings and emotions in a social context. *Also important to capture if the young person engages in self-injury, aggression to others, absconding, tantrums or meltdowns, or other risky/challenging behaviours*
- **Learning** – understanding and remembering information, learning new things, practising and using new skills
- **Self-care** – personal hygiene, grooming, feeding oneself, care for own health
- **Self-management** – completing daily tasks, planning and making decisions, problem solving, managing finances and tenancy, and taking responsibility for oneself.

Note: Further supporting documentation may not be required but can be extremely useful. Similarly, support for NDIS access from families is not required when a young person is on a substantive order, but can also be useful.

For more information go to:

- https://www.ndis.gov.au/applying-access-ndis/how-apply/information-support-your-request/types-disability-evidence
- https://www.cfecfw.asn.au/applying-for-access-to-the-ndis/

When is evidence required by NDIS

- Requesting access for a permanent condition for which the capacity is variable
- Developing a NDIS plan
- Reviewing a NDIS plan

Reviewing a NDIS plan

Near the end of an existing NDIS plan, a NDIA Planner will check in with the participant and decide if a review is required.

Alternatively, a full review may be requested for participants who have a NDIS plan but have had a significant change of circumstances, such as having their disability affect them to a greater or lesser extent or starting a new life stage.

APPENDIX 2
EVIDENCE OF DISABILITY REQUIRED BY NDIS FOR AN ACCESS REQUEST

When requesting access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the type of evidence required is dependent on whether the disability is classified as either:

a) A condition which is likely to meet the disability requirements in section 24 of the NDIS Act

These conditions only require evidence of the diagnosis by the relevant health professional, and include severe intellectual disability, autism, cerebral palsy, genetic conditions, spinal cord injury, brain injury, permanent blindness or bilateral hearing loss, and deafblindness.

These disabilities and the diagnosed requirements are detailed in the NDIS List A.

b) A permanent condition for which the capacity is variable and further assessment of functional capacity is generally required

In these instances, the diagnosis of the condition alone is not sufficient and evidence of functional capacity is required.

These conditions are listed in the NDIS List B.

Disability evidence

The primary disability refers to the impairment that impacts most on a young person's daily functioning and it is this condition that requires evidence.

Primary disability	Treating health professional	Disability evidence*
Acquired brain injury	▶ Aquired Brain Injury Health Professional	▶ Care and needs scale ▶ World Health Organization disability assessment schedule 2.0 (17 years and over) or PEDI-CAT (16 years and under)
Autism	▶ Psychologist ▶ Occupational Therapist ▶ Speech Therapist	▶ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition* ▶ Vineland adaptive behaviour scale ▶ World Health Organization disability assessment schedule 2.0 (17 years and over) or PEDI-CAT (16 years and under)
Cerebral palsy	▶ Occupational Therapist ▶ Physical Therapist ▶ Paediatrician ▶ Physiotherapist	▶ Gross motor functional classification scale ▶ Other: Manual ability classification scale ▶ Other: Communication function classification system
Hearing impairment	▶ Audiologist	▶ Hearing impairment responses and groupings guide (17 years and over) or PEDI-CAT (16 years and under) ▶ Other: Hearing acuity score
Intellectual disability, Down syndrome	▶ Psychologist ▶ Occupational Therapist ▶ Speech Therapist	▶ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition* ▶ Vineland adaptive behaviour scale ▶ World Health Organization disability assessment schedule 2.0 (17 years and over) or PEDI-CAT (16 years and under)

Primary disability	Treating health professional	Disability evidence*
Multiple sclerosis	▶ Neurologist ▶ Disease Steps Trained Nurse Examiner	▶ Disease Steps ▶ Patient determined Disease Steps ▶ Other: Expanded disability status scale
Psychosocial disability	▶ Psychiatrist ▶ General Practitioner ▶ Psychologist (in limited circumstances)	▶ Clinical Psychiatric staff (e.g. Mental Health/Psychiatric Nurses, Occupational Therapists, Social Workers) ▶ Mental Health Allied Health Professionals ▶ Australian Mental Health Outcomes and Classification Network-trained Mental Health staff (including Mental Health Peer Workers)
Spinal cord injury	Any member of a multidisciplinary team: Neurologist, Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, Recreational Therapist, Psychologist or Psychiatrist	▶ Level of lesion, or American Spinal Injury Association impairment scale ▶ World Health Organization disability assessment schedule 2.0 (17 years and over) or PEDI-CAT (16 years and under)
Stroke	▶ Neurologist	▶ Modified Rankin Scale 9
Vision impairment	▶ Ophthalmologist	▶ Vision impairment questionnaire (17 years and over) ▶ PEDI-CAT (16 years and under) ▶ Other: Visual acuity rating
Other	▶ Occupational Therapist ▶ Speech Therapist ▶ Physiotherapist ▶ Social Worker	▶ World Health Organization disability assessment schedule 2.0 (17 years and over) ▶ PEDI-CAT (16 years and under)

*The treating health professional will determine the most appropriate standardised assessment to provide as evidence.

Good evidence is determined by:

- how recent the assessment or supporting documentation is
- whether it has been completed by a treating health professional (for at least 6 months) who is the best person to provide evidence based on their consultations and treatment
- if it confirms the young person's primary disability, and outlines its impacts on the various areas of their life
- whether it describes previous treatments and outcomes, and describes future treatment options and expected outcomes of those treatments.

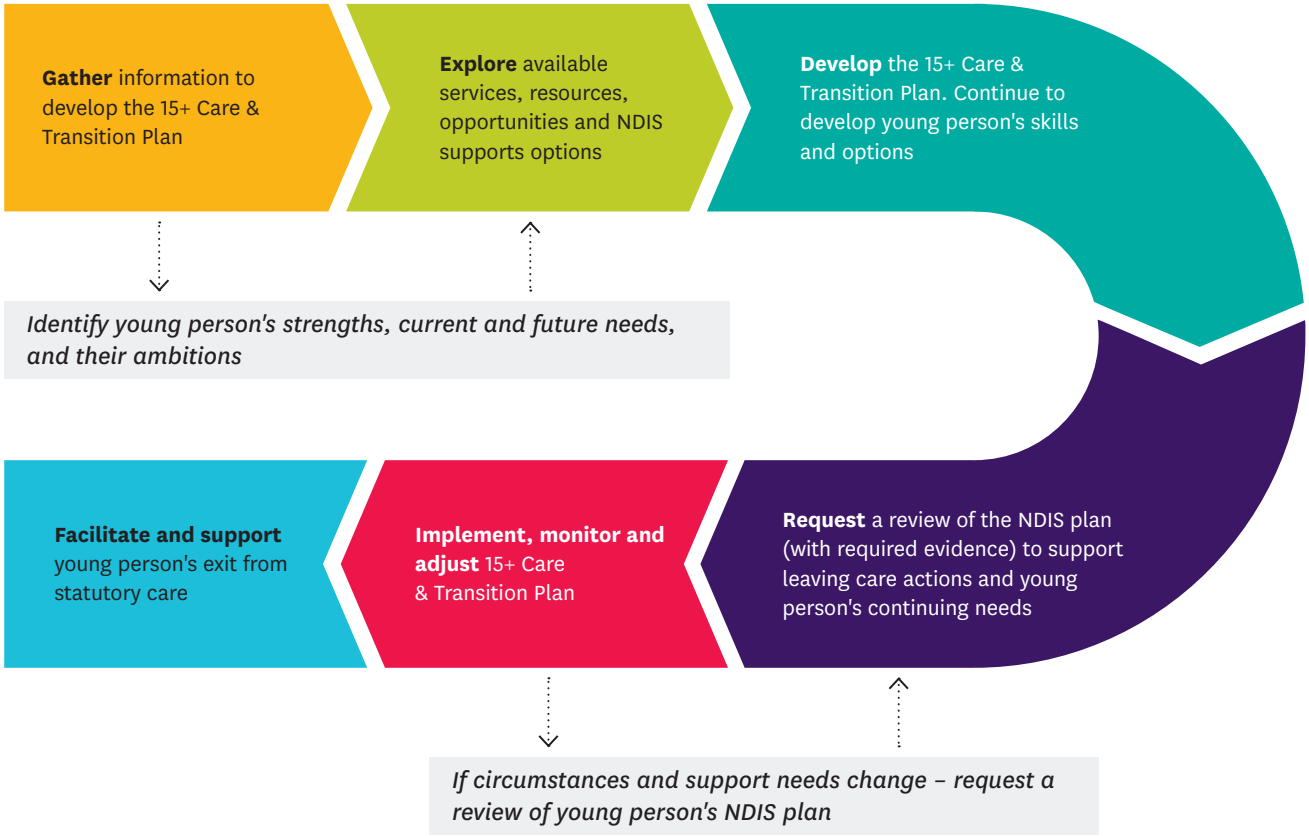
The assessment outcome report/documentation should outline:

- the type of disability
- the date when the disability was diagnosed (if available)
- how long the disability will last
- impact on the young person's everyday life
- available treatments and expected outcomes of those treatments/supports (i.e., medications, therapies or surgeries).

Note: Consider the long-term needs of the young person when organising assessments. Although documentation of secondary diagnosis is not required for the NDIS, it can be useful to establish the complexity and intensity of long-term needs and may be easier to achieve while the young person is still in care. For example, an alcohol and other drugs dual diagnosis in not needed for NDIS, but would support a NDIS request and be of value for the young person to access the support they need as an adult.

APPENDIX 3
TRANSITION FROM IN CARE PLANNING CHECKLISTS

Supporting young people with disability (already linked to NDIS) transitioning from statutory care



Leaving care planning resources

- https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/specialist-resources/national-disability-insurance-scheme-ndis/leaving-care
- https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/protocols/mou-public-advocate

NDIS resources

- https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/publications/booklets-and-factsheets
- https://www.cfecfw.asn.au/ndis-resources/

Divisional Disability Practice Advice emails

- south.disabilitypracticeadvice@dffh.vic.gov.au
- northdisabilitypracticeadvice@dffh.vic.gov.au
- east.disabilitypracticeadvice@dffh.vic.gov.au
- westdisabilitypracticeadvice@dffh.vic.gov.au

Note:

- Consider all NDIS areas of need (refer to next page) when examining accommodation needs.
- If there are no current assessments or reports, ensure these are accessed as soon as practical to produce the required supporting evidence.

When developing or revising the Leaving Care 15+ Care and Transition Plan consider areas of need outlined by NDIS

NDIS areas of need	Impacts of the primary disability on daily life	Support needs	Assessment/report to support identified impact
Mobility skills	Moving around the home and community undertaking the ordinary activities of daily living	Special equipment, transport, vehicle modifications, wheelchair, technology, home modifications/supported accommodation, personal trainers/physiotherapy to strengthen motor skills, coordination and fitness, supports from other person/ professionals to build capacity and enable greater independence	▶ Functional capacity assessments ▶ Psychosocial functional capacity assessments ▶ Supported disability accommodation assessments ▶ Supported independent living assessments ▶ Other documents to evidence: statements from carer/s, family, other relevant services
Communication	Being understood, understanding others, expressing needs, communicating appropriately	Speech therapy, assistive technology, access to other specialist services to strengthen communication skills	▶ Assessment and report from Speech Therapist and Occupational Therapist
Social interaction	Making and keeping friends, interacting with the community, behaving within limits accepted by others, coping with feelings and emotions in a social context	Assistance with social and community participation, access to specialised mentoring programs, clinical therapy, counselling, behaviour supports	▶ Functional capacity assessment ▶ Report from Mental Health Practitioner/ Counsellor/ other ▶ Supporting evidence: statement from carer/s, family, other relevant services
Learning	Understanding and remembering information, learning new things, practising and using new skills	Learning equipment/tools/ devices, supports (including tutoring), therapies for educational purposes	▶ Education needs analysis; Individual education plan; Vocational assessment reports ▶ Supporting evidence: letters from school, tutors, reports prepared by student support services and/or other related services

NDIS areas of need	Impacts of the primary disability on daily life	Support needs	Assessment/report to support identified impact
Self-care	Personal hygiene, grooming, feeding oneself, care for own health	Personal care supports at home and for day-today activities, access to aids and appliances, hearing and communication devices	▶ Functional capacity assessments ▶ Psychosocial functional capacity assessments ▶ Supported disability accommodation assessments ▶ Supported independent living assessments ▶ Supporting evidence: Carer impact statement; Participant statement; Progress report from support providers
Self-management	Completing daily tasks, planning and making decisions, problem solving, managing finances and tenancy, and taking responsibility for oneself.	Are there community treatment orders / guardianships / financial administrations in place	▶ As above

Checklist: Gathering information and understanding the young person

Checklist		Checkbox		
Purpose: To gather information to support the development of the 15+Care & Transition Plan	**When?**	**N/A**	**Yes**	**No**
1 Has the young person been referred to NDIS for supports? If **No**, refer to Accessing NDIS Checklist	Age 15		☐	☐
2 Has the NDIA been sent a copy of the young person's order?			☐	☐
3 Do you know who the young person's registered nominee with the NDIS is? This is the person/s who acts or make decisions on behalf of the young person. Generally, the young person's representative will be the person/s who has parental responsibility for them. Where DFFH holds parental responsibility, Child Protection should be appointed as the representative. Check to make sure DFFH is listed with the NDIS as holding parental responsibility or guardianship. In preparation for the young person's transition from care ensure that they and their care team members are aware of NDIA's policies and procedures regarding accessing and sharing information.			☐	☐
4 Do you have a list of relevant NDIS and other support contacts involved with the young person (NDIA Planners, NDIS Support Coordinators and Plan Managers)? Ensure all contact details are recorded and updated on CRIS.			☐	☐
5 Do you have a copy of the most recent NDIS plan saved in CRIS? Use the following naming convention "NDIS plan (insert first name and date)".			☐	☐
6 Have you invited relevant contacts (including NDIS Support Coordinator) to be part of the young person's care team?			☐	☐
7 Have you identified the young person's strengths and their current and future needs in consultation with them, their carer/s, the care team and other relevant professionals? • the young person • carers • care team • other relevant professionals Consider the young person's hopes and ambitions, strengths and needs across all LAC domains: Health, Emotional and Behavioural Development, Education, Family and Social Relationships, Identity, Social Presentation, Self-care Skills (including income support), and Housing (including identifying accommodation options post order)			☐	☐
8 Does the young person have a disability or special needs that limit their capacity to complete everyday tasks or participate in their community? Consider future needs in preparation for exiting care.			☐	☐
9 If the young person is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander do they have Cultural Plan? If **No**, ensure this is actioned as soon as possible.		☐	☐	☐
10 Is the current NDIS plan adequate to address identified needs and support their transition from care? If **No**, examine what else is required and gather evidence to support this.			☐	☐
11 Are there relevant reports or assessments that might inform planning for leaving care? If so, ensure they are saved in CRIS. For example, LAC assessment and progress records, functional capacity assessment, medical/other specialised assessments/reports			☐	☐
12 Have you consulted the DFFH Principal Disability Advisor?	Age 15.3		☐	☐

Checklist: Developing the 15+ Care & Transition Plan

Checklist		Checkbox		
Purpose: To develop a plan that captures agreed goals and tasks that support the young person's transition from care to adulthood	**When?**	**N/A**	**Yes**	**No**
1 Based on information gathered so far, have you discussed the findings with the young person and care team so as: • to establish goals across the LAC domains (including housing and living option post care) • to continue fostering the young person's skills and abilities • to specify activities/tasks required to achieve their goals • to clarify roles and responsibilities to action agreed activities/tasks and timelines • to identify funding and resources required to action the 15+ Care & Transition Plan • to establish an agreed review process to monitor and document progress and respond to changes in circumstances.	Age 15.4		☐	☐
2 Review what supports and actions are needed, such as: • if NDIS supports are required ensure there is sufficient evidence (refer to Leaving Care Supporting Documentation Document) • Consider LAC domains (including housing and living option post order).		☐	☐	☐
3 Does the young person have a cognitive disability requiring them to have a guardian or administrator upon turning 18 years? Ensure consultation with the Office of the Public Advocate is captured in the 15+ Care & Transition Plan, and that this is undertaken as soon as possible after the young person turns 17 years.		☐	☐	☐
4 Are the agreed goals and strategies documented in the CRIS 15+ Care & Transition Plan and CRIS Actions Table?			☐	☐
5 Have you provided a copy of the 15+ Care & Transition Plan to the young person and care team members? Ensure the young person's communication needs are considered when sharing the 15+ Care & Transition Plan.			☐	☐
6 Have you provided the NDIS Support Coordinator or NDIA Planner with the relevant evidence needed to inform the NDIS plan review process? Evidence may include: • housing/placement history for the past five years and housing pathways options already explored • interventions to support skills development for post care living • relevant reports and assessments (e.g. functional capacity assessment by an Occupational Therapist) that can inform evidence for a SDA or SIL; functional behavioural assessments; carer impact statement; participant letters; incident reports; sleep charts; medical/mental health and behaviour support plans; educational needs assessment • current informal, cultural, community and mainstream support networks/connections.			☐	☐
7 Plan for full-time educational engagement (if this is not already in place). NDIS planning is very likely to request information about the young person's education/vocational activity. Education is a seen as basic right to assist young people to reach their full potential. The NDIS does not fund educational supports but does expect the young person to be engaged in full-time education or vocational activity. If they are not, then a plan to achieve this would be expected.			☐	☐
8 Have you requested required funding and resources to action the 15+ Care and Transition plan? If **No**, review 15+ Care and Transition Plan and consider other options.	Age 15.8		☐	☐

Checklist: Implementing the 15+ Care & Transition Plan

Checklist		Checkbox		
Purpose: To action the 15+ Care & Transition Plan and proactively monitor and review progress	**When?**	**N/A**	**Yes**	**No**
1 If eligible, has the young person been referred to Better Futures (via CRIS)? Referrals should be made as soon as the young person turns 15 years and 9 months.	Age 15.9		☐	☐
2 Are all care team members and the young person aware of agreed goals, actions, roles and responsibilities, and timelines as outlined in the 15+ Care and Transition? If **No**, ensure all parties are aware, and revise if required (to reflect changes and the young person's needs).			☐	☐
3 Have you contacted the NDIS Support Coordinator or NDIA Planner to request a review of the young person's NDIS plan to support leaving care planning and possible options? An accommodation goal will need to be on the plan if NDIS support is required in this area of need. A NDIS Home and Living Support Request can be made for time-limited assistance to explore living options. Going forward, NDIS usually funds the supports needed to live in a location but not the brick and mortar. NDIS Supported Disability Accommodation is only available for a very small number of individuals, but there is also the Individualised Living Option or Supported Independent Living. More information can be found at: https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/home-and-living.			☐	☐
4 Have you organised regular follow-up contact (care team meetings) with the young person and the care team to identify and address emerging issues before they escalate? This allows for proactive planning and time to accommodate changes to support new activities to be actioned before exiting statutory care.			☐	☐
5 Are the agreed activities/tasks being actioned within the agreed timelines? If **No**, ascertain and document reasons why and jointly manage the identified challenges with the young person and care team.			☐	☐
6 Is progress formally discussed at care team meetings and documented in CRIS? Ensure those with assigned responsibilities report back on progress achieved. Discussion and progress are documented in care team minutes and saved in CRIS.			☐	☐
7 Have you recorded all approved client expenditures in CRIS?			☐	☐
8 Is the young person participating in care team discussions? If no, provide opportunities for the young person to attend and participate. If this is not possible, or they do not wish to attend, ensure other opportunities are provided for their input towards discussions and decisions.			☐	☐
9 Review and adjust the 15+ Care & Transition Plan as required to capture changes in circumstances and reflect young person's current and future needs. Ensure progress/achievement records are captured in the LAC Self-care and CRIS Actions Table.			☐	☐
10 If there are changes to the young person's support needs have you contacted the NDIS Support Coordinator or NDIA Planner to request a review of their NDIS plan? Provide required evidence to inform NDIS plan review.	Age 16.11	☐	☐	☐

Checklist: Supporting the young person's exit from statutory care

Checklist		Checkbox		
Purpose: To secure a smooth transition from care to adulthood	**When?**	**N/A**	**Yes**	**No**
1 Have all activities/tasks been actioned within the required timelines? If **No**, have you organised regular meetings with the young person and the care team to follow up and address on any outstanding actions before young person exits statutory care?	Age 17		☐	☐
2 Have you reviewed and adjusted the 15+ Care & Transition Plan as required to support the young person's smooth transition from care? Capture new goals/actions to address support needs.			☐	☐
3 Have you organised required support referrals (post order) in consultation with the young person and their carer/s? Ensure young person and carer/s are appropriately linked to support networks and services and ascertain whether more funded supports are required post order.			☐	☐
4 Have you contacted the NDIS Support Coordinator or NDIA Planner to request a review of the young person's NDIS plan to consider changes to their support needs post care? Provide required evidence to inform the NDIS plan review. Request support to be included. Coordination for continuing care arrangements.			☐	☐
5 If appropriate, have you consulted the Office of the Public Advocate? This must be done as soon as young person turns 17 years of age. For more information go to: https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/protocols/mou-public-advocate		☐	☐	☐
6 Have you confirmed the young person's eligibility for Home Stretch? If **Yes**, proceed with CRIS Home Stretch application at least six months before their order is due to expire.		☐	☐	☐
7 If eligible, and already referred to Better Futures, have you invited Better Futures to care team meetings? To facilitate a smooth transition, the role of Better Futures intensifies six months before the young person exits statutory care.		☐	☐	☐
8 If applicable, have you organised access to income support (Centrelink payments)?		☐	☐	☐
9 Does the young person have access to required personal documentation? Refer to identification checklist on next page for specific details.		☐	☐	☐
10 Have you communicated to the young person and care team (including NDIS contacts) the case closure process, and confirmed the role of key worker/s and services continuing to support the young person post order?			☐	☐
11 Have you organised the hand-over arrangements with services who will continue to be engaged with the young person and/or carer/s post order? In preparation for the young person's exit from care ensure that services are continuing to provide supports post order. Sign NDIA consent forms for continued capacity to share and exchange information with NDIS.			☐	☐
12 Have the following CRIS/CRSSP requirements been actioned? • Home Stretch Application and Allowance approvals finalised in CRIS (either via HBC Form C or Independent Living proposal) • Leaving Care Goals, Actions and LAC Self-Care Skills records updated • placement/accommodation exit record updated • all active referrals closed in CRIS • location at end of placement/accommodation recorded • closure advice and report completed.	Age 17.11		☐	☐

Checklist: Supporting the young person to gather, and safely store, their identification and personal documentation

Checklist	Checkbox	
Purpose: To ensure young person has access to key personal information and documentation before exiting care	**Yes**	**No**
1 Birth Certificate https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/births/get-a-birth-certificate	☐	☐
2 Photo Identification	☐	☐
3 Confirmation of Aboriginality https://aiatsis.gov.au/family-history/you-start/proof-aboriginality	☐	☐
4 Academic Records and Certificates	☐	☐
5 Student Card	☐	☐
6 My Health Record Young people 14 years or older in out-of-home care have the option to take control of the MHR.	☐	☐
7 Health Care Card https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/health-care-card	☐	☐
8 Medicare Card https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/medicare-card	☐	☐
9 Immunisation records https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/getting-vaccinated/check-immunisation-history	☐	☐
10 myGov Account https://my.gov.au/LoginServices/main/login?execution=e2s1	☐	☐
11 Bank Account	☐	☐
12 Passport https://www.passports.gov.au/	☐	☐
13 Tax File Number https://www.ato.gov.au/individuals/tax-file-number/	☐	☐
14 Life Story and Personal Photos	☐	☐
15 Contact List (family, friends, emergency contacts and relevant services)	☐	☐
16 Enrolled to Vote (ensure enrolment details reflect correct address post order)	☐	☐
17 Are all documents safely stored and accessible by young person post order?	☐	☐

www.bsl.org.au/services/youth/better-futures