BETTER FUTURES
HEALTH AND WELLBEING OFFER 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

© Copyright is held by the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

This edition published in April 2024.

This work is copyright. It may be reproduced in whole or in part for study or training purposes, or by community organisations subject to an acknowledgment of the source and no commercial use or sale. Reproduction for other purposes or by other organisations requires the written permission of the copyright holder(s).

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 Health and Wellbeing Offer Practice Guide 2024*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

Acknowledgements
The Better Futures team at BSL would like to sincerely thank the Better Futures providers and practitioners from Ballarat Group Training (BGT), Quantum, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), Whitelion, Brophy and Meli who gave their time and expertise to the development of the *Better Futures Health and Wellbeing Offer Practice Guide*.

A special thanks also to the Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group, LOOKOUT Education Centre and Raising Expectations 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 Health and Wellbeing Offer 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	Gathering of relevant professionals who meet to discuss with the young person 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
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Victorian Government)
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 Technical and Further Education (TAFE) or university
In care	Phase referring to Better Futures service when a young person is in care services and subject to a child protection statutory order
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
Mainstream	Opportunities beyond the service system that are readily available to family-connected young people, but which are often inaccessible to care-experience young people
Post care	Phase referring to Better Futures service after a young person has transitioned from in care
Social capital	The resources provided to an individual through the social networks they hold e.g. financial assets, social networks and access to information and resources
Statutory order	A protection order made by the Children's Court of Victoria
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The *Better Futures Health and Wellbeing Offer Practice Guide* provides guidance to support the delivery of health and wellbeing-specific opportunities for young people as part of their transition to adulthood.

The primary audience for this Guide is Better Futures practitioners who are delivering the program across Victoria.

The Guide shares good practice tips and ideas to help Better Futures practitioners think creatively about how they plan and deliver the Health and Wellbeing Offer with young people. It also outlines how practitioners can use youth coaching strategies and resources with an Advantaged Thinking approach.

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.

First Nations young people

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) play an important role in delivering Better Futures by ensuring that First Nations young people have every opportunity to access culturally safe spaces, people and practice.

Better Futures Our Way: A Practice Guide for Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations has been designed by ACCOs to provide practice wisdom and guidance about how the program can best be delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. It also describes the procedures, tools and templates that guide and resource the work of ACCO-based Better Futures practitioners.

The *Health and Wellbeing Offer Practice Guide* contains references to Better Futures Our Way as well as links to specific education offerings available to First Nations young people.

Young people with disability

Better Futures recognises that young people with disability may require additional supports during their transition to adulthood.

The **Better Futures Disability Practice Guide** equips service providers with the skills and knowledge to work in an Advantaged Thinking way with young people with disability, and how best to access the resources, services and help available.

This Guide contains references to the disability Practice Guide.

ABOUT BETTER FUTURES AND THE 5 OFFERS

Better Futures

Better Futures is a practice model that aims to improve outcomes for young people transitioning from care to adulthood, 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 these young people:

- 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 a 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.

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 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.

WHAT THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OFFER IS

Healthy young people are more likely to achieve higher educational outcomes, successfully transition into the workforce, have fewer issues starting and raising their own families, and become more actively engaged in their communities.

> ***Wellbeing is being sound of body and not having to be concerned about where your next meal's coming from. It's having a solid foundation from which you can join the community. It's being sound of mind, or even if you're not. It's being happy with who you are, and having a group that you feel you're a part of something. That's an important part of wellbeing because nobody survives by themselves.***
>
> — Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

The Health and Wellbeing Offer seeks to build and promote positive health for young people, beyond just managing health problems. Where a young person requires a specialist response to a health challenge, clear referral pathways will be established with allied health services to allow for a smooth transition to the necessary supports.

The focus of the Health and Wellbeing Offer is on enabling young people to recognise their individual skills and talents, strengths and capabilities, and to use these as resources in progressing through challenging situations. By building this resilience, the Offer is designed to support young people to access, engage in and develop the skills needed to build positive physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing.

Better Futures practitioners deliver on the Health and Wellbeing Offer by providing young people with the resources, opportunities and support they need:

- to recognise their existing knowledge, skills and habits so they can maintain a healthy lifestyle, learn and embed healthy practices, and adopt lifestyles they can sustain beyond Better Futures
- to develop meaningful health and wellbeing goals and aspirations and plans to achieve them
- to explore a range of opportunities to facilitate good health and wellbeing outcomes and develop their social capital
- to promote access to the appropriate and relevant people and networks who can assist them with developing their social capital and achieving their health and wellbeing goals
- to reflect on practices, activities and relationships that create balance in their life and promote a sense of wellbeing
- to provide ongoing coaching to support health and wellbeing goal setting, planning and reflection, and to recognise and celebrate progress and achievement.

Enabling young people to develop a personal vision and life goals gives them agency and self-direction about their future. They are then better equipped to access, engage in develop and sustain the skills they need to build positive physical, mental and emotional health.

WHY THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OFFER IS IMPORTANT

The Health and Wellbeing Offer holds an important position across the other Offers. At its core, it is equipping people with the skills to thrive rather than simply to cope or survive. The Offer does this by encouraging and facilitating young people to engage in:

- cooking and grocery shopping to support a healthy diet
- sports and physically active practices
- positive relationships and social experiences
- mindful, creative or therapeutic activities
- developing knowledge and avenues to respond proactively to physical and mental health challenges.

Care-experienced young people don't always have the same opportunities as their peers, and so can face personal, social and systemic barriers to achieving good health and wellbeing. Many have life experiences, such as precarious housing issues and the lack of supportive and positive environments during adolescence, that put them at increased risk of poorer mental and physical health outcomes than those from more stable backgrounds.

> ***I just moved around so much. It made it really hard and complicated to keep seeing the one GP or hospital for consistent care. So, I could never keep up with my neurology or any sort of specialists.***
>
> — Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Poor mental health can make it difficult for young people to manage other parts of their life. Mental illness and behavioural issues can stem from past trauma but also from current life challenges, such as precarious housing, financial insecurity, unemployment, difficulties with independent living, insecure social relationships and contact with the justice system.

Care-experienced young people often feel anxious, stressed and distressed when discussing their health and wellbeing, particularly when they are exiting post care and/or accessing services.

> ***Before I left care, I was stressing out every single day. It's a really big impact because since I was 12 years old, I've been relying on having all these workers in my life.***
>
> — Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Young people need to be thriving if they are to achieve their goals in education, employment, social connectedness, and housing and living skills. The Health and Wellbeing Offer provides Better Futures practitioners with a myriad of ways to support young people in developing the skills, capabilities and resources they need to thrive. When young people are doing well, they will be much better placed to achieve the goals identified through the other Offers.

Health and wellbeing looks different to everyone, although there are commonalities. For some, it could be getting their nails or hair done, playing sport regularly with a few friends, going to the movies or spending some quiet time alone. While for others, it could be finally getting the mental health support they need. It is important to look at this Offer holistically and creatively to ensure what we are offering meets each young person's needs.

Figure 1: Anxiety, stress and distress factors for care-experienced young people during the post care phase

Transition to adulthood

Young people fear:

- being alone
- living with strangers
- financial stress/ pressures
- lack of self-sufficiency
- homelessness
- losing important relationships with key workers during their transition to adulthood

Accessing services

Young people experience:

- feelings of stress and anxiety caused by complex bureaucracy and encounters with services
- difficulties when contacting workers for support, which further exacerbates this stress and anxiety

These factors can intensify existing emotional and mental health issues and deter young people from seeking the necessary help.

COLLABORATE: HEALTH AND WELLBEING OFFER

The role of Better Futures in delivering the Health and Wellbeing Offer is to help young people to identify their own goals, develop skills and capabilities, and build networks within their community that will enable them to thrive. To do this, the Development Coach will collaborate with the Community Connector, medical services and professionals, and other allied health and community stakeholders to meet young people's needs across the various aspects of health and wellbeing.

Development Coaches

Development Coaches do not need to be specialist health or mental health experts. Their role is to inspire and motivate, be reflective, supportive and an advocate for the young person.

They play a critical role in coaching young people to set meaningful goals and providing them with the resources, opportunities, networks and support they need to sustain healthy lifestyles and build their social capital.

Development Coaches should know where to go for specialist advice and what must be put in place to support the young person in their health and wellbeing goals.

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 how different support people can work with the young person to prepare them to participate and to overcome any barriers to engagement.

Development Coaches then share with Community Connectors the information they have about the young person's interests, goals and skills. Community Connectors use this information to tailor their research and support in finding appropriate local opportunities in which the young person can participate.

Development Coaches and Community Connectors will work together to understand local needs, consistent themes, gaps and opportunities. This enables them to create or seek out opportunities and activities across the service area not just at an individual level, but at a service level as well.

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 how different support people can work with the young person to prepare them to participate and to overcome any barriers to engagement.

Community Connectors

Community Connectors can connect young people to opportunities that enable them to progress and achieve their health and wellbeing goals. 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 can use their skills in networking and coordination to create partnerships and networks within and across local communities. This helps to increase local support for young people and strengthen their social capital and community connectedness.

Community Connectors have health and wellbeing-specific partnerships, networks and resources in their local area, including:

- mental health services
- specialist physical, psychological, sexual health and dentistry services
- community health centres
- disability advocacy and support organisations
- LGBTQIA+ support services
- allied health services
- women's health organisations
- sexual health information and services
- family violence services
- drug and alcohol services and programs
- therapeutic services
- local councils
- ACCOs and First Nations programs and services
- youth and multicultural programs and services
- housing services
- local sporting groups, clubs and gyms
- mentoring
- social group activities run through local council, Local Education and Employment Networks, neighbourhood houses and other community agencies
- place-based connections programs and initiatives to engage with people in their community, participate and try things out
- local events and recreational activities (games nights, ceramics, performing arts, art classes, swimming lessons, dance groups)
- community groups (arts, theatre, sport, recreation, rotary)
- philanthropic organisations
- neighbourhood houses and Men's Sheds
- other organisations and agencies where a connection can benefit the young person.

It is anticipated that the people who young people will meet, and the external services they will access through the Health and Wellbeing Offer, will inspire them to sustain a healthy lifestyle and enhance their wellbeing.

Community Connectors can support health and wellbeing activities that help young people to work on specific goals, to broaden their knowledge and to build and apply their skills to thrive, such as:

- linking them in with mentors, volunteers and peers with whom they can build trusting and lasting relationships
- warm referrals to medical and allied health services that are known to be youth friendly
- access to health, nutrition and cooking programs
- support to join community-based groups, activities or projects like sports teams, university or TAFE clubs, fundraising events or gender identity groups
- advocating for the young person's goals in care team meetings or a secondary consult
- engagement in mental and emotional health training and activities
- making sure they are aware of opportunities where they can build social capital and engage with their community
- directing them to supportive group work where they can practise their social and emotional skills and develop a sense of belonging
- coordinating with workers or carers to ensure they have transport to attend opportunities
- exploring different experiences to understand how their skills can make a genuine difference in their own lives and the lives of others
- introducing other experiences that are not directly related to health and wellbeing but which build both readiness to participate and social capital (e.g. developing mentor relationships).

The Community Connector's role will be different in each area, as it is dependent upon on the provider's capacity, young people's interests and motivations, and local area arrangements. The Development Coach still directly coaches and supports the young person 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.

Key considerations when planning health and wellbeing opportunities

Engaging young people in the Health and Wellbeing Offer can support them to develop the skills and access the support they need to maximise and sustain healthy lifestyles and build their social capital.

Better Futures practitioners must provide young people with access to information, resources, opportunities, networks, advice and emotional and financial support to engage them in managing their health and wellbeing. Planning health and wellbeing goals needs to focus on encouraging, informing and resourcing their goals and aspirations for feeling good and doing good.

Go to *Other health and wellbeing resources*

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.

Young people who leave school early can miss out on mandated school curriculum-based initiatives such as:

- healthy eating
- personal hygiene
- oral health
- mental health awareness
- sex education
- respectful relationships
- alcohol and other drug education
- physical education
- social and emotional learning.

Thriving means to be feeling good and doing good. It is the sense that life is going well, even in the face of difficult emotions, circumstances or experiences. Better Futures young people may be thriving when they are happy, have strong social relationships, can identify and reach their goals, are confident and valued by others, and can give something back to their community and others.

Better Futures practitioners play a crucial role in inspiring, motivating, and engaging young people to achieve their health and wellbeing goals. They must consider how to spark the young person's interest in their health and wellbeing and frame opportunities accordingly. By understanding the young person's aspirations, the Better Futures practitioner can tailor the approach to ignite their inspiration and keep them motivated throughout the process.

Practical approaches

By understanding a young person's aspirations, Better Futures practitioners can tailor their approach to ignite inspiration and sustain motivation throughout the process. Some practical approaches to consider include:

- identifying patterns of similar interests or needs among the young people with whom you work
- creating social groups and running activities that bring young people together, thereby enabling them to connect with others who share similar experiences
- embracing creativity by introducing a diverse range of fun wellbeing activities that allow for young people's self-expression
- offering bite-sized opportunities that encourage young people to step out of their comfort zone, try new experiences and potentially discover untried passions and possibilities.

The following sections cover some of the key elements that are embedded in young people's capacity to develop the skills needed to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

Young people can thrive when they are resourced and empowered to be part of the solution.

When accessing health care, young people must be able to influence any decisions about the types of supports offered to them and how they are delivered, as this encourages their independence, autonomy and agency.

They also need a supportive environment and positive experiences to develop the necessary skills to successfully take responsibility for their own safety, health and wellbeing.

Accessing health services and health information

The internet has become an important source of health information for young people, as online environments provide them with a space in which many feel more comfortable and able to be themselves.

Care-experienced young people are often regular users of counselling and other medical or health services, all of which provide an important source of support. Most would acknowledge GPs as being essential for them in managing their health and referring them to other services, as well as a sympathetic professional with their best interests at heart.

The quality of relationships is a key factor in how young people experience health care. They value counsellors, psychologists or other medical and health professionals who appear to understand and can listen to them and their issues. A lack of such understanding, and perceptions of being judged, can discourage young people to seek further help and worsen their perceptions of shame or stigma.

Care-experienced young people have high levels of use of both hospital emergency departments and outpatient services. This is because of:

- a lack of awareness of other services
- cost and service availability barriers
- a real need for urgent medical assistance or medical needs that are not being met elsewhere.

A previous lack of appropriate service access can have lasting consequences for young people's ability to manage their health. Placement instability and the disruption it brings can prevent some young people from receiving systematic health care. This can lead to a lack of appropriate attention on health issues and a lack of skills or connections for managing their health issues after they have left care.

It is important for Development Coaches to know who their local youth-friendly GPs are so they can refer young people to them. They also need to support them in seeking early intervention and timely health care access, and promote preventive measures.

> ***I went to a psychologist but for some reason I just wasn't connecting with any of them. I went to about 10 different psychologists for a few different sessions and it completely turned me off seeing anybody. But I think it's harder because it's not so much a choice. Like when you go through some of the stuff that we went through as children, you get forced into seeing somebody, whether you want to or not. So, the choice is actually taken away from you, so when you're older that puts you off seeing somebody.***
>
> — Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Better Futures practitioners can facilitate open, non-judgmental spaces in which young people can safely disclose their health concerns or need for health information. They can also support them to access:

- flexible funding to accelerate access to services and improve choice and flexibility in the types of health services, providers and professionals
- services that provide online counselling and advice
- information and resources, tools and apps for promoting health and wellbeing
- access to culturally safe services and agencies.

High rates of emergency department use are often associated with mental health issues, chronic health conditions and substance misuse, and can result in fragmented or uncoordinated health care.

Disability

It is the responsibility of all service systems to work with and support young people with disability. Those accessing Better Futures present with a range of physical, intellectual, learning and psychosocial disabilities, mental ill health, neurodevelopmental disorders, and disabilities related to chronic health conditions. Some young people may also have experienced trauma, which can significantly impact their development and functioning.

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

The role of Better Futures in supporting a young person with their disability needs will depend on individual circumstances and the level of involvement from their other supports. In the Advantaged Thinking approach, we do not consider any person to be a 'complex case', rather it's the level of service or intervention required to ensure they can access the services and resources they need that is complex. Better Futures practitioners hold the complexity for them by putting together the activities the young person needs to achieve their aspirations. This can look like accessing disability-specific and additional supports, or making adjustments to access mainstream activities and services.

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.

Better Futures practitioners need to be supported in developing and strengthening their skills, knowledge and resources in working with both disability systems and people with disability. They will then be able to better understand and meet the needs of young people with disability, navigate the systems that can support them, secure appropriate and sustainable long-term supports, and establish the protective factors that will enable the young person to have a good life when they leave the care system at 21.

Go to *Better Futures Disability Practice Guide*

Physical health

Good physical health is about movement and exercise, diet and nutrition, self-care and healthy habits.

Care-experienced young people experience relatively high rates of physical disability or chronic health conditions, and do not always get the support they need to manage their health issues. Disruptions caused by placement instability, for example, can result in a lack of systematic health care and attention to their health needs. This can have lasting consequences on their ability to effectively manage their health.

Young people may also need support to access regular preventive health care services, such as routine check-ups, vaccinations and screenings. Encouraging them to prioritise preventive care can help them to identify potential health concerns early on, and promote their overall wellbeing. Building resilience and providing young people with the necessary skills and connections for self-care are key to promoting their physical health and wellbeing.

Food security and nutrition can be another challenge for care-experienced young people, as limited access to fresh and nutritious food can have detrimental effects on their physical health and overall wellbeing. Using food vouchers or brokerage can help to alleviate food insecurity and ensure care-experienced young people have access to essential nutrition. Collaborative efforts between local councils, schools and community groups can be helpful in providing such food security support.

Care-experienced young people may self-identify as wanting help to manage their substance use or addiction. They might have had traumatic or stressful experiences that have contributed to these issues, and support in overcoming addiction can be integral to their physical health. Better Futures practitioners can link young people into relevant programs and peer groups to address substance use, and also provide guidance and resources about how to develop healthy lifestyle habits. Encouraging young people to engage in fitness and promoting the importance of a balanced diet can positively contribute to their overall physical health.

Sexual health

Sexual health is an important aspect of physical wellbeing within the Health and Wellbeing Offer. Access to comprehensive sexual health information, resources and workshops foster healthy decision-making. It is important to provide young people with opportunities to address potential knowledge gaps, so they can make informed choices regarding their sexual health.

The Health and Wellbeing Offer provides support to access specialist sexual health services, resources, workshops and information. In this way, young people are with opportunities to promote their autonomy and informed decision-making about their relationships, bodies and sexuality.

Practice example – Stoked Surf Therapy, Brophy

Brophy Family and Youth Services delivers the Stoked Surf Therapy program, which uses the physical activity of surfing to help build connections with young people to improve their mental health.

It's a support group for the younger generation, for people who are looking to get outdoors and have a mental support group as well. To have a fun group activity that's educating kids on how our minds work is really beneficial.

— Community volunteer, Stoked Surf Therapy

Each week the group of young people and community volunteers get together to yarn, surf and eat.

Each session starts with a pre-surf yarn about mental health and wellbeing-related themes. That's followed by an all-abilities surf session where our young people get to experience the therapeutic benefits of the ocean through surfing. After this, the group comes together to connect over some hot dinner.

— Community Connector, Brophy

Brophy has found the program to be a successful health and wellbeing offering for young people in the area. It has become both a meaningful and authentic social activity for young people and a means of connecting them to supportive community members with whom they may not have had access otherwise. It is also a strategic way of assisting young people to learn coping strategies for managing their mental health while exercising for their physical health.

Pregnancy and parenting

Better Futures can play a supportive role in helping pregnant young people to navigate the decisions they need to make regarding their pregnancy. To help them feel safe and supported, Better Futures practitioners can proactively:

- create a non-judgemental space for open discussion to explore options
- provide accurate and reliable information about the options available, including abortion services and young parenting supports
- provide emotional support
- connect the young person with appropriate young parenting or abortion resources and services.

Recent data show that there are many wanted pregnancies among care-experienced young people.

> ***I was eager to create my own family, one that would be built on love and care, not a toxic environment full of abuse, neglect and fear.***
>
> —Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Care-experienced young pregnant people and young parents often find the routine practices of the service system challenging, as services frequently approach young pregnancies through a deficit-based lens.

> ***People don't believe in you before you've even been given a chance to make a decision. It makes me angry. You see other people setting up nurseries and it's meant to be a beautiful, happy experience. No one said congratulations.***
>
> —Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Services often have a preconception that young parents will have no skills or experience in caring for children. However, care-experienced young people frequently grow up looking after their younger siblings and other family members due to the unavailability of supportive adults.

> ***It was frustrating, I'm one of 11 siblings. Growing up I knew how to change nappies and look after kids but when I had a baby everyone assumed I didn't know how to do that.***
>
> —Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Young people report feeling scrutinised without positive support. Even when there are no concerns, the young parent can feel fearful, anxious and distressed when interacting with services.

> ***Providers sit there, they'll make sure they're watching everything you're doing but they're not helping you be a better parent or understand what's going on with your baby.***
>
> —Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

This sense of surveillance and distrust of services, and the potential interventions they bring, can lead young people to disengage early from transition planning and become service avoidant, thereby foregoing access to mainstream community supports like the Maternal Child Health Nurse service.

> ***You don't use those services because you don't know what's going to happen. The times I didn't know how to do something, there was no way I was going to reach out. They'd say I wasn't capable. I can't get help because my kid is going to get taken off me. I didn't see the point.***
>
> —Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Positively, there is great motivation in young parents to 'turn their lives around' for their child. This can be supported with holistic, wrap-around and trauma-informed support.

> ***I'm grateful for my workers. They advocated for me, put me in lead tenant and kept me in the same org even though I moved further away, I had same workers supporting me throughout.***
>
> —Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Better Futures practitioners can support young pregnant people and young parents by working with specialist organisations to build positivity, break trauma bonds, and develop self-reliance and self-determination by:

- providing supported access to therapy for young people to work through their possible trauma and negative childhood experiences
- learning young people's triggers and what will be understood as supportive
- instigating early interventions to build their capacity for seeking and receiving support
- promoting health and wellbeing as a pathway to being a good parent
- working through assumptions and perceived judgments to ensure that accessing services feels safe
- celebrating and moving towards happiness by shopping for the nursery and holding baby showers with friends and family, not just workers.

Practice example – BRAVE Foundation

BRAVE Foundation supports pregnant and parenting young people with resources, referral and education opportunities to facilitate happy, healthy and skilled families. BRAVE's Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens provides ongoing monthly mentorship for the parent, from pregnancy to the child's first birthday.

A BRAVE Foundation mentor explains:

Our mentors are there to work and walk with young people on their parenting journey. Together, we develop a pathway plan that will connect them to child and maternal health services, education and grow the village of support around them and their children.

One participant said the mentoring encouraged and supported her to continue on her education path. She was determined to finish her education and tried to go back to full-time school when her daughter was six weeks old.

She reflects on her challenges as a parenting young person:

I was still breast feeding at the time and as a 16-year-old that was really difficult for me to juggle. You are also looked down on because of your age. People assume that you are not going to be a good mother, or that you are never going to finish your education or complete the goals that you set yourself.

I think only one person congratulated me when I fell pregnant, and looking back that is quite shocking because I was going to become a mum too, and I have just as much right as anyone else to really enjoy being a mum.

The participant said the mentoring program encouraged and supported her to continue on her education path. She finished her schooling and is now studying at university. She has a second child and a third on the way.

Mental health and positive behaviour

Good mental health is being able to work and study to your full potential, cope with day-to-day life stresses, be involved in your community, and live your life in a free and satisfying way.

A significant number of young people who transition from care experience mental health issues. These may have predated their transition but can be made worse by experiences of insecure housing, financial insecurity, unemployment and limited social supports.

Mental health challenges can affect how a person's brain works (cognitive functioning). This can present as:

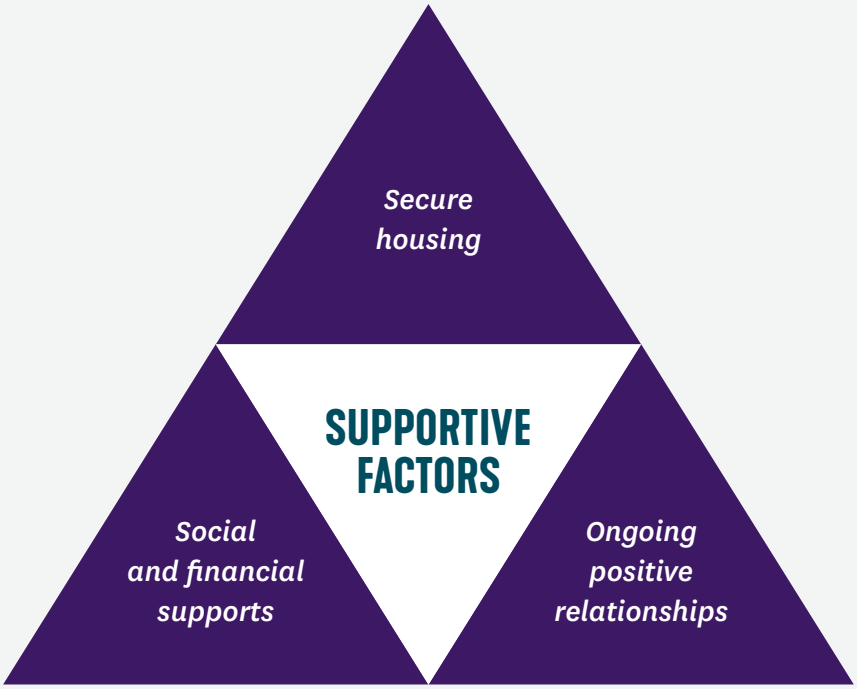
- emotional dysregulation
- lack of impulse control
- difficulty learning, thinking, reasoning, remembering, paying attention and making decisions.

These factors can also lead to challenging behaviour that may be perceived as negative or problematic. For example, people with conditions such as depression, anxiety, bipolar or substance use issues may exhibit behaviours such as social withdrawal, irritability, aggression, self-harm or difficulty concentrating. These behaviours can be symptoms or coping mechanisms related to their underlying mental health issues.

The over-representation of care-experienced young people in the Youth Justice system is frequently attributed to behavioural issues. Young people living in residential care also demonstrate and experience a range of challenging behaviours and incidents that can make life in care feel difficult, unsafe and unsettled. Such behaviour can emerge from trauma, pain and distress.

Care-experienced young people, particularly those in residential care, describe feelings of isolation, loneliness, abandonment and fear of 'bad behaviour', such as violence.

Figure 2: Supportive factors to mitigate mental ill health



> *One of the worst things I witnessed was the yearning of every single young person in residential care. Every single one of these young people dreams about having their parents. They hope that everything will change and that they'll be taken care of, loved and protected.*
>
> *That's all they want – to actually feel loved, accepted and protected. They want someone to come in and save them. They don't want to go do these awful things; it's for attention, to fit in with the group, to get some validation on the fact that they're human. They're doing it because they're hurting.*
>
> —Care experienced young person

It's important to approach challenging behaviour with empathy and understanding, and to understand that it can arise from a young person's mental health challenges.

The role of Better Futures in this space is the promotion of positive health. This is actioned through coaching conversations and setting mental health and positive behaviour goals. Development Coaches can also work with young people to create safety plans, which will reassure them that there will always be a safe adult who they can access to answer questions and to provide support.

Better Futures practitioners can focus on developing robust partnerships with specialist services and community-based agencies to link young people into the supports they require. These can include:

- mental health services and programs
- peer-led mental health support groups
- allied health services, e.g. psychologists, behaviour support practitioners
- primary and secondary health services and medical professionals, e.g. GP, psychiatrist, assertive outreach teams
- alcohol and other drugs programs
- personal safety and family violence interventions
- physical and sexual assault and abuse support
- financial support
- housing and accommodation support
- legal assistance.

They turn to violence because it makes them feel better. It made me feel better. When I was younger and I was violent, taking it out on someone else, the pain you felt inside was like a breath of fresh air. You could finally breathe when you made someone feel the same way you did. Because then you weren't the only one feeling it.

—Care experienced young person

Practice example – Headspace Discovery College

Headspace Discovery College supports young people as an early intervention for those who need mental health support. There are a range of services and courses available, as well as developmental programs designed to get young people back on their feet.

A lot of young people we see have been in care, and while they've been in care they have not accepted and received the care they need to manage that trauma. So, when they come into our program, they are a bit older and we can frame it up better as to what supports we can put in place.

What works is having the right options, like play therapy or art therapy, and that takes the fear away. That they are not going to be sitting around and talking about their fears, but rather it's about building their strengths to go forward.

— Senior Mental Health Clinician, Discovery College

The college offers a range of courses that are co-designed by members of the community with lived experience.

Emotional health and wellbeing

Emotional health is being able to regulate your feelings and emotions, as well as understanding the feelings of others, and using this information to guide your thinking and actions. Emotions can be used to guide logical thinking and goal-oriented actions. Emotional health is life enhancing and enables young people to thrive. By promoting emotional health, the Better Futures program aims to prevent the development of ill health.

> ***I know how to live independent like surviving, but I don't know how to live in a thriving way.***
>
> —Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Learning some skills to regulate emotion can be really helpful for young people to understand their own behaviour. Emotional regulation is about feeling like you can manage your emotions rather than being managed by emotions. It is not about trying to push away or stop experiencing uncomfortable emotions but rather managing our response to an emotion when it shows up.

All emotions can be useful and instrumental to one's personal development and self-growth. Better Futures practitioners can support young people to adopt a mindset of working with, rather than against their emotions. With the appropriate professional support, young people can be encouraged to sort through their emotions as a way for them to take an inventory of all the cognitive processes that are driving their behaviours, and decide whether or not they are in their best interests.

Care-experienced young people often emphasise the importance of relationships and how closely they are linked to their mental wellbeing. For some, a lack of supportive relationships is a major source of distress. For others, close relationships can be hugely important in providing support and mitigating mental health issues. Family support can also play a significant role in ensuring the prevention of, or early intervention in, any number of health issues that could turn into chronic or long-term conditions.

Figure 3: Key features care-experienced young people associate with positive wellbeing

My worker helped me with flexible funds so I could buy Christmas presents for my nieces and nephews. It felt good to be able to spoil them.

—Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

The role of Better Futures in this space is to support young people's understanding of how their emotions impact on their thoughts and behaviours, and how they interact with others and the world around them. Development Coaches have the opportunity to role model social and emotion skills, such as:

- calm and consistent behaviour
- not engaging with or escalating extreme emotional reactions
- giving lots of space when needed but being diligent about following up and reflecting on behaviour
- providing unconditional belief and support.

Every young person's healthy practices will look different. Development Coaches need to tune in to young people and understand how emotional health and wellbeing looks and works for them. They also need to think creatively about how they can support wellbeing practices through flexible funds.

> ***Getting my nails and hair was powerful. It gave me a sense of freedom and control over my own life after having to get Child Protection's approval for everything for so long. It made me feel so good***
>
> —Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Development Coaches have the ability to utilise flexible funding creatively to support wellbeing and emotional health through everyday social participation and engagement in community events where young people have fun.

> ***Not having enough money stops me from having fun. I'd like to go to concerts as I've never been. Or birthday parties for friends but I can't afford to go as the cost of present, something to wear and my meal, it all costs too much.***
>
> —Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Practice example – Community Connections, Whitelion

A Community Connector from Whitelion describes a nature connection opportunity the organisation offered to young people.

At the end of September, we offered this nature therapy workshop in the Warrandyte National Park. It included a bushwalk and sensory experiences. It was very accessible and a gentle approach to wellness and mental health.

I see organising this sort of activity as the role of Community Connectors so they can reach more people. It would be ideal to hold the nature walk quarterly so that more participants from our service could attend. We need to think about ways to attract young people and get the right people to attend from the broader Better Futures service.

Covid has shown that less people are motivated to attend events. Having contact with nature is an important benefit for those with mental ill health and a good respite experience for those leaving care.

Some young people suffer from anxiety. It is important for support workers to encourage them to attend, and also attend with them so they feel more comfortable.

We're looking into creating a brochure to showcase activities like this and the benefits of attending that would give future attendees more information on this type of event.

Better Futures practitioners can further support all these elements of health and wellbeing by coordinating a range of activities, such as those listed here, with young people and stakeholders. They include:

- enabling young people to develop the skills and habits for daily living and to maintain a healthy lifestyle
- connecting them to the right people to achieve their health and wellbeing goals
- identifying what are the most important aspects of a young person's life
- supporting them to self-identify what is needed, e.g. cultural connections, a good friend
- discovering what makes life good for the young person, e.g. feeling safe and a sense of belonging
- encouraging self-care activities that nurture mental health, e.g. a haircut, playing sport, being out in nature
- finding opportunities for the young person to feel connected, e.g. attending social events like the CREATE Christmas party
- identifying opportunities for self-expression, stress relief, and encouraging healthy habits, e.g. redirecting use of alcohol and other drugs
- ensuring that services are guided by what the young person says is important, and using this knowledge to inform individual plans, local offers and service development
- holding belief and aspiration in the young person to do well
- promoting young people's recovery, resilience and wellbeing
- using flexible funding creatively to give young people access to the same opportunities as their peers by supporting them emotionally, practically and financially to pursue their wellbeing and self-care goals, e.g. getting their nails done, shopping for non-essential items, going to a concert or festival
- providing information and education about the importance of nutrition and diet, sexual health, healthy and respectful relationships, and other relevant areas of health
- ensuring early engagement so the transition to adulthood is gradual and proceeds at the young person's pace and developmental stage.

WHEN ACTIVITIES SHOULD HAPPEN ACROSS THE PHASES OF CARE

The Better Futures model is separated into two phases:

- in care
- post care.

Information sharing

Sharing information about the young person's talents, interests and goals is key to supporting them in their independence planning.

With consent, information should be shared with key people in the young person's life, such as their care team, Community Connectors and mentor.

Information sharing encourages collaboration and assists other connected support workers to plan relevant and appropriate opportunities for engaging the young person with the Health and Wellbeing Offer.

Better Futures practitioners may also review the young person's 15+ Care and Transition Plans for ideas about their health and wellbeing goals. Keep in mind that plans and interests change, so it is important to regularly check in with the young person about whether they are still interested in these goals.

In care

Development Coaches can do foundational work with young people through early engagement with them and secondary consultation with their case managers, care teams, carers and other professionals and key people in the young person's life. They can support young people to have a say in their transitional planning and promote future planning that is relevant to the young people's interests, goals and aspirations.

Community Connectors can provide secondary consultation to Development Coaches, or be invited to attend care team meetings for this purpose. Community Connectors may also meet with the young person to offer connection and outreach during the in care phase.

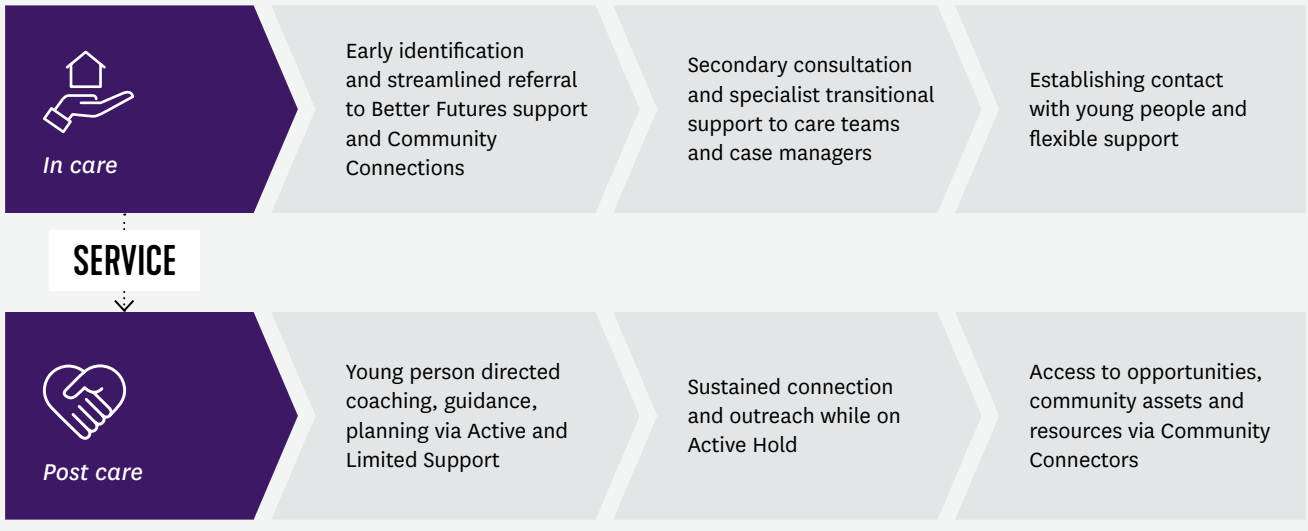
These early activities build trust in the service and establish a Better Futures warm contact for the young person.

All planning and activities as part of Better Futures are done with the consent and engagement of the young person. Better Futures is a voluntary service, and one with which young people are more likely to engage when it:

- is person-centred
- responsive to their needs
- provides consistent contact and transparent follow-up
- is curious about their interests, skills and goals
- strives to inspire and motivate them.

The information in the following table gives Better Futures practitioners an understanding of what connections engagement activities they can provide to young people during the in care phase.

Figure 4: Better Futures 2 phases of care



Development Coach action	Key people
Early engagement – secondary consultation	
Attend a care team meeting and identify health and wellbeing opportunities relevant to the young person's 15+ care and transition plans and their support needs, goals and aspirations.	Young person, Development Coach and/or Community Connector, Child Protection and/or case contracted workers, care team
Introduce the My Voice planning resources in the care team setting to assist planning and encourage involvement by the young person in voicing their health and wellbeing goals and aspirations.	
Provide advice about a variety of health and wellbeing opportunities – e.g., links to community sports programs, joining the gym, peer-support groups, introduction to CREATE – that might interest the young person.	
Support access to Community Connections and mentoring if available, including access to specific communities such as LGBTQI+, First Nations, disability, ethnic and cultural communities.	Community Connector
Provide information and advice about other health and wellbeing support services and any funding for which the young person may be eligible, e.g. Better Futures flexible funding, Home Stretch.	Young person, Child Protection, case contracted workers, care team, relevant contacts from community and government outreach programs
Provide advice about opportunities to connect First Nations young people to their culture and community and advocate for cultural plans to be central to transition planning. Discuss whether cultural connections to kin or a visit to Country could support their wellbeing and understanding of self and identity.	Local ACCO
Provide advice about specialised support for young people with disability and, if appropriate, advocate for the care team to start applications to disability services while the young person is still in care.	NDIS Local Area Coordinator or Disability Support Coordinator, DFFH Disability Practice Advice Team
Early engagement – flexible support	
Get to know the young person and build trust and rapport to develop a relationship.	Young person, Development Coach and/or Community Connector, local ACCO, Disability Support Coordinator
Send out a monthly newsletter advising what opportunities are available, e.g. simple recipes, positive health and wellbeing practices etc	
Consult with the young person about where they are at with their health and wellbeing and what they are interested in. Share relevant networks, contacts and expertise that can form strong foundations for young people as they transition to adulthood.	
Consult and contribute towards the development of plans, such as: • 15+ Care and Transition Plan • Cultural Plan (for First Nations young people) • NDIS plan (for young people with disability)	
Facilitate access to flexible funding to support and prepare young people as they transition to adulthood.	

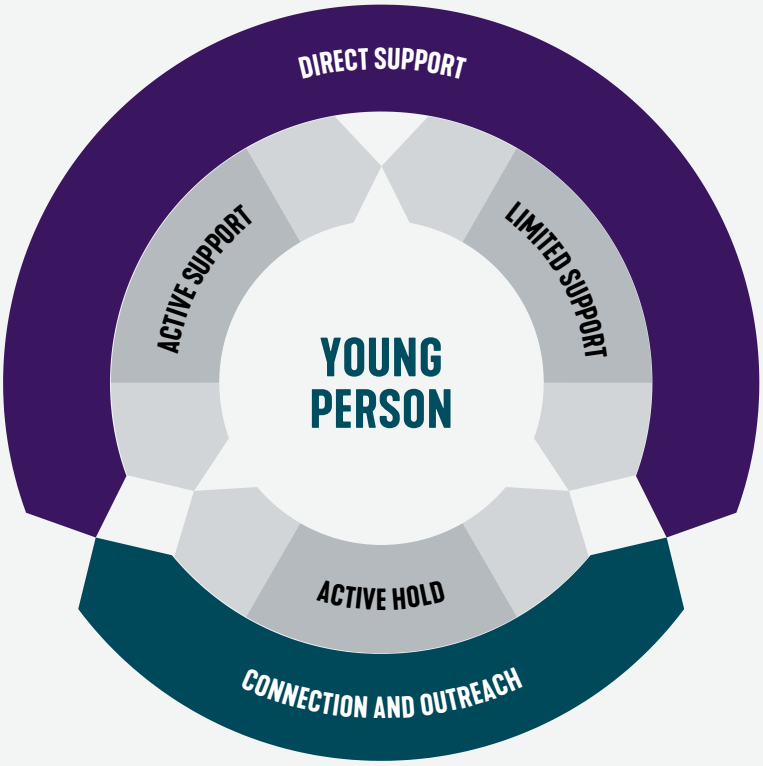
Post care

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.

The information in the table on the next page gives Better Futures practitioners an understanding of what health and wellbeing engagement activities they can provide to young people during the post care phase.

Figure 5: Better Futures levels of support



Direct support

Active Support

Sustained and ongoing support to explore, develop and engage with health and wellbeing 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.

Development Coach action	Key people
Connection and outreach	
Gather enough information to establish a good understanding of the young person's situation, strengths, aspirations, support needs, and level of engagement with health and wellbeing.	Young person, Development Coach and/or Community Connector
Ensure the young person understands the types of support available, has the contact details of their worker and knows to get in touch with them if their circumstances change.	
Contact the young person quarterly (at a minimum). Ask about their vision and how their health and wellbeing goals and aspirations are going and reflect on progress. Check in on flexible funding request and any referrals since the last contact.	
Keep the door open, check in on their circumstances and offer support.	
Involve the Community Connector and include them in The Deal. Face to face interactions enable the young person to make a connection with the Community Connector and the service.	
Liaise with the Community Connector to understand what opportunities are available to the young person.	
Supporting young people	
Identify and provide information about supports, entitlements, opportunities and external funding options to achieve health and wellbeing goals.	Young person, Development Coach, Community Connector
Inspire and motivate the young person to talk about their vision, and where health and wellbeing fit into their aspirations.	Young person, Development Coach, Community Connector
Give information about and support access to flexible funding including one-off funding requests.	
Offer practical support to develop social and emotional skills.	
Link a young person to mentoring, community and/or cultural connections to build their social networks.	
Co-develop and document plans and activities to support the young person to engage with health services, social connections and their community. Review and reflect frequently.	
Assist the young person to develop networks, relationships and community connections.	
Provide assertive outreach for young people with whom you have infrequent contact.	
Support the young person to attend appointments and meetings, including with specialist services.	Disability Support Coordinator, other specialists
Support First Nations young people with cultural connections and return to Country.	Local ACCO

HOW TO DELIVER THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OFFER

Coaching practice

Coaching conversations between a Development Coach and a young person create a safe and supported space for the young person:

- to identify their hopes and dreams for the future
- to navigate their current reality
- to set aspirational goals to work towards.

Development Coaches should be aspirational about their own coaching. They need to be reflexive and examine their own beliefs, judgments and practices during coaching conversations and consider how these can influence what is offered to the young person.

Young people report that they find it easier to build trust and rapport when their coach:

- is approachable, positive and happy to see them
- has clear and consistent communication
- works with them in a way that suits them
- focuses on investing in them rather than 'fixing problems'
- follows through on actions in a timely way.

Better Futures practitioners must ensure that young people understand the types of support available and that they have the contact details of their worker and know to get in touch if their circumstances change.

> ***To open those first doors for yourself, you need to come from a foundation of support.***
>
> — Transitions from Care Youth Expert Advisory Group member

Young people in care often face a lot of additional challenges over which they have no control. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the effort they put into making things happen and the motivation, input and action it requires from them.

As the experts of their own lives, young people have the agency and choice to decide when and how they engage with what is being offered, and their capacity to do so.

Go to *Better Futures Our Way, 4.3 The Aboriginal Way – Practices and approaches that work*

The coaching cycle

Coaching relationships develop over time and generally follow a cycle of similar steps:

- Mutual contribution: The Deal
- Readiness
- Developing a vision
- Building connections and opportunities
- Reflection.

These steps demonstrate the young person's journey towards independence as they further develop goals and aspirations, take up opportunities and reflect on their next steps.

My Voice planning resources are designed to support this practice by capturing information about the young person's aspirations, goals, interests, skills and achievements. They can be used as inspiration for ways to explore options around the Offer.

As always, acknowledge the person in front of you and adjust the coaching resources as needed. Ask the young person if they have any accessibility requirements and be clear about what you can accommodate.

In the case of young people with disability or challenging behaviours, consideration should be given to what specialist input may be required.

Go to *Better Futures Disability Practice Guide, How to work with young people with disability*

Practice example

Sophie (she/her) is 18 years old and in a stable placement living with her foster family. Rob (he/him), her Development Coach, spent a bit of time with Sophie before she turned 18 to discuss Better Futures and her Home Stretch plan. He has also kept in contact with her quarterly via texts and the odd phone call.

In a recent communication, Sophie informed Rob that she is pregnant to her boyfriend, and they want to have the baby. However, her foster parents are urging her to think otherwise. Rob arranges to meet up to discuss how Better Futures can support Sophie, and asks her permission to bring one of his colleagues along.

Mutual contribution: The Deal

Better Futures aims to find or create a spark in young people that inspires and motivates them to pursue their aspirations and drive their planning work and outcomes. This is bolstered by the Development Coach's investment in discovering the young person's skills and talents and supporting them to overcome any barriers to further developing these.

What this looks like is negotiated via The Deal.

The Deal is an agreement that highlights the commitment and investment in the young person and their future. It is designed to prepare young people for the real world and the responsibilities that come with sustaining an independent livelihood.

The Deal agreement nurtures an Advantaged Thinking approach. It outlines the roles and expectations of both the Development Coach and the young person and how they will work together. It also outlines the services offered by Better Futures, such as financial assistance and individual planning and support across all of the 5 Offers.

It is the role of the Development Coach to work with the young person and:

- recognise and improve their skills, abilities and/or knowledge
- inspire and motivate them
- hold expectations and make demands of them
- facilitate further opportunities for developing their skills
- celebrate their successes and progress.

It is the role of the young person to be:

- an active participant and drive their coaching sessions and independence planning
- in charge of determining their own goals and aspirations
- actively engaged in research, communication, networking and other activities associated with goal setting.

The Deal gives young people more control by encouraging them to decide on which goals they want to pursue, the level of autonomy they require, and the type and level of support they need. This way of working builds the foundations of a reciprocal relationship, where the young person and the Development Coach are accountable for their actions. Holding high expectations of young people instils in them a sense that they are valued members of society with something to contribute.

Practice example

Not a father himself and relatively new to Better Futures, Rob seeks advice from his Team Leader who arranges for another team member, Alice (she/her), to join the meeting with Sophie. Alice is a mother and has also worked with many young parents during her time.

Rob and Alice meet Sophie to better understand her plans, discuss what Better Futures can offer and explore who else can offer her support. Sophie has a lot of questions for Alice about her pregnancy and the birth, as she has not felt comfortable talking about this with her foster parents.

After the meeting, Rob and Alice meet with the Team Leader to discuss transitioning Sophie over to Alice as the more appropriate practitioner. This is then presented to Sophie and she agrees. In Rob's handover, he steps Alice through The Deal and the other plans and resources he has completed with Sophie to date. Sophie has now moved from Active Hold to Limited Support.

Developing a vision

To develop their vision and identify goals, young people need to explore:

- what is important to them and why
- what they would ideally like to do
- who they want to be without limitations.

Creating a big-picture vision of the young person's life gives them some goals to reach for in the present. Development Coaches invest in building a relationship with the young person and being curious about their aspirations and goals. This enables them to recognise a young person's strengths, talents, potential and motivations.

Young people will determine the level of guidance and support needed from the Development Coach to explore options linked to the Health and Wellbeing Offer. The role of the Development Coach is to hold unconditional belief in young people's aspirations. Focus on working with them to establish the necessary pathways for these to be achieved, and have faith that good things will come of the process regardless of the outcome.

A young person's vision holds valuable information about their interests and aspirations. With the young person's consent, Development Coaches can share this information with Community Connectors who can reference it when considering relevant opportunities and connections.

Exploring and accessing mainstream services and resources, community connections and building their personal and professional networks is an important part of developing young people's supported independence.

Practice example

Alice arranges a time to meet with Sophie again in the food court near her house.

Sophie is confident in her and her boyfriend's choice to have the baby. She identifies that she'd like support engaging with the Western General Hospital and getting her head around what she needs to know about pregnancy and the lead-up to the birth.

Sophie says she is keen to keep working as long as she can and wants to continue her studies at TAFE. Alice is supportive and they also talk about what the future might look like down the track after Sophie has her baby. Sophie asks about deferring her course and says that she and her boyfriend have been talking about finding a place of their own.

They review the last Vision Sophie had done with Rob and update it. They add deferring her course and moving out as priorities to work towards.

Readiness

To establish a better understanding of sequencing and types of social and community connections, opportunities, resources and pathways, young people need:

- to be clear about their education goals, motivations and challenges
- to shape the kind of opportunities they want and self-determine their readiness to engage
- to self-identify the level and type of support that will help them engage and participate.

Young people may not have thought about how to make it easier and more comfortable for themselves. Offer examples that have worked for others and talk about what it could look like for them. Bring strategies to the young person so they feel empowered to make choices about how they interact, engage and participate while they're still exploring options. Reinforce your high belief in them by telling them, I know you can pick up your prescription from the chemist by yourself, but what support can we put around you to help you get there and feel good about it?'

Development Coaches should also assess their own readiness to support the young person in where they are at. Be reflective. Determine what the role is and which is the best intervention to close the gap between where the young person is at now and where they want to be. This means asking them what their boundaries are and what they need from you, and giving them different examples of the type of support that's available.

As the Development Coach may not always have the capacity to do this preparatory work with the young person, make sure you involve the Community Connector early on. They can then build a relationship with the young person, track and support their readiness, and gradually build their capacity to participate.

In the following practice example, a Development Coach could prepare a young person for an art class by asking if they want:

- to get picked up and dropped home after the session
- to come with their Development Coach, Community Connector or friend
- to come to class for 10 minutes and just observe
- to attend the whole session but not participate
- to give you a signal when they want to participate.

Readiness is not a 'set and forget' but requires consistent attention as the Development Coach and young person work together to decide what's next and where to start.

Practice example

When they next meet, Sophie reports that her boyfriend is unable to get out of work to take her to their first meeting at the hospital, and asks Alice if she can drive her and come along to support her.

Alice agrees but also discusses with Sophie how many other appointments and tests are on the horizon. They explore who else other than her boyfriend could help out, and Sophie is hopeful that her foster family will be supportive in the future.

Building connections and opportunities

To build connections and opportunities, young people need:

- to recognise their own capabilities
- to have the confidence and motivation to pursue their interests
- to take up opportunities related to their interests
- to be inspired to develop other interests and aspirations.

The Development Coach's role at this stage is to hold high aspirations of the young person and work with them to broker relevant opportunities, support their engagement in their health and wellbeing, and fund out-of-pocket expenses for social and community activities and resources. Collaboration with the Community Connector to make these connections is a necessity.

Wherever possible and appropriate, try to engage the young person in those mainstream opportunities and connections that are also accessed by family-connected young people. Often these can be well utilised by care-experienced young people with some additional supports to facilitate access, such as a prior meeting with event organisers or being allowed to bring along a support person.

The young person will have identified the type and level of support they want from the Development Coach, so they can plan opportunities and support strategies together that will build their confidence to turn up and give things a go. This planning can also involve external people associated with the opportunities or activities who can clarify what the young person can expect and what is expected of them when they attend.

The onus to make connections and opportunities a reality lies with the Development Coach. Consider the young person's readiness and take steps to build confidence and safety. Success is largely due to good preparation such as:

- mapping their interests accurately so that they see the benefit in attending
- working with the Community Connector to link into opportunities
- ensuring networks and connections are suitable and youth friendly
- identifying and addressing underlying barriers to participation
- being deliberate in how you offer opportunities
- motivating young people to attend opportunities and celebrate when they make it
- checking in with the young person about attending the opportunity a few days before, the night before and the morning of
- checking in afterwards to see how they went and what else they might need for next time.

Practice example

Before picking up Sophie to go to the hospital, Alice researches public transport options and finds that it is a relatively simple bus trip. As they drive, Alice points out the stop and bus number in case Sophie needs to get there by public transport in the future.

While talking, Alice finds out that Sophie is nervous about visiting the hospital due to a bad experience there in the past. Alice listens to Sophie talk about her previous experience and how she feels vulnerable in health care settings.

On arrival they scan the hospital map to locate the Maternity Unit, where a midwife conducts the initial meeting.

On the drive home, Alice raises with Sophie the upcoming appointments and tests that the midwife stepped them through and asks who else could support her. Sophie agrees to speak with both her boyfriend and her foster parents, and come up with a schedule before the next appointment.

They decide to talk next week over the phone.

Reflection

At this stage, the young person can be actively using and building community connections and networks, with the Development Coach encouraging inquiry, reflection and sustainable progress of their goals.

> ***Community Connections can support with reflection and celebrating achievements. At intake we take a photo of their goals. Then at the end of their time with us, we give them their 'Book of Wins', which is a visual record of what they have done and achieved.***
>
> — Community Connector

Here the Development Coach will act as a supportive adult and sometimes as a sounding board for frustrations or difficulties, and at other times provide insights or advice. Together, the Development Coach and young person can review and reflect on how far the young person has come and what they would like to do next.

> ***It's always good to find out why a young person drops off, and what is going on for them. We need open communication with the Development Coach so we can change and adapt for what the young person needs.***
>
> — Community Connector

We want the young person to feel seen and heard and to walk away knowing they can rely on accessing the service when they need it.

Practice example

Over the phone, Sophie takes the opportunity to reflect on the meeting with the midwife as well as things that had been happening in other areas of her life.

Alice celebrates Sophie's effort to stay engaged with TAFE and to keep picking up shifts at work even with so much going on. Sophie has also been proactive in asking staff at the TAFE about the possibilities of deferring her course, and is happy with the information and support they have provided.

However, she was disappointed that during the hospital appointment the midwife only talked about dates, schedules and tests in the lead up to the birth. She was hoping for more information and support.

Alice talks about her experience of using a private midwife organisation when she had her second child. It offered a lot of one-on-one coaching and group educational workshops that she attended with her husband. Sophie seems interested and Alice agrees to look for a similar organisation in the western suburbs.

Sophie has spoken to her boyfriend about the upcoming dates and appointments but not to her foster parents. She agreed that it would be best to do this before their next meeting. Alice shows Sophie the Relationships Victoria website, and they look at some tip sheets around how to have safe and productive discussions.

Practice challenges

Where to start with the Health and Wellbeing Offer

Key to engaging young people in the Health and Wellbeing Offer is changing their mindset to help them thrive and not just to survive. Many will be coping ok with their physical and mental health, but may struggle when other things go wrong.

The role of Better Futures is to build young people's capability to manage their own health and wellbeing. This can be achieved by getting them involved in opportunities and activities they want to do, and supporting them to reflect on any challenges or barriers to them participating. Coaching conversations offer a space to work through these issues and come up with pathways and solutions.

Some Development Coaches find it difficult to engage in the Health and Wellbeing Offer when young people are in crisis. The catch is that we can't start working effectively with them until we understand what sits beyond a current crisis. We must consider how we can support them in the immediate short term by unpacking what will happen once this crisis is resolved. What goals are they working towards? How we can start building towards the plan they are articulating about where they want to be?

Focus on supporting the areas that are going well in the young person's life, and the solutions and actions they come up with to drive change for better health and wellbeing.

Ideas of health and wellbeing will vary greatly among the young people with whom you work. Some Better Futures practitioners report that sport and other activities that include a social element are easy wins, such as:

- games nights
- art classes
- performing arts
- mentoring programs.

To match the young person to appropriate health and wellbeing opportunities, the Development Coach should work with them to identify what:

- makes them thrive
- they're dealing with, what's on their plate
- are their coping strategies and other emotional skills and how could they be enhanced
- information, service access or assistance they need to manage their health
- agency they have in making decisions about their lives.

Keep in mind that when young people are thriving they can be pushed into thinking that they need less support. However, it's important to continue to connect with them as they may still need support of some kind even though they are thriving.

Trauma-informed practice

Many young people coming through care services have been exposed to threatening events or situations that cause emotional or physical damage. These experiences sometimes overwhelm their ability to cope. The ongoing and wide-ranging symptoms that result from these experiences are called trauma.

Trauma-informed care is a framework that focuses on the strengths of individuals and is based on an understanding of the impact of trauma. It prioritises the physical, psychological and emotional safety of both the service providers and the survivors. It also creates opportunities for survivors to regain a sense of control and empowerment.

This approach values the safety, dignity and wellbeing, both of those receiving and providing services. It is supported by policies, principles and practices that emphasise empathy, reflection and understanding. It recognises that people are the experts in their own lives and emphasises working with them rather than for them.

Many Better Futures practitioners have training in trauma-informed practice. This training helps them recognise signs of behaviour, habits and practices that are related to trauma. They are then able to work in emotionally safe ways with young people and better assist in their recovery. In addition, the Advantaged Thinking approach, coaching techniques and person-centred resources all support the recovery goals of trauma-informed practice.

Trauma-informed practices should be implemented holistically and tailored to the individual needs of each young person.

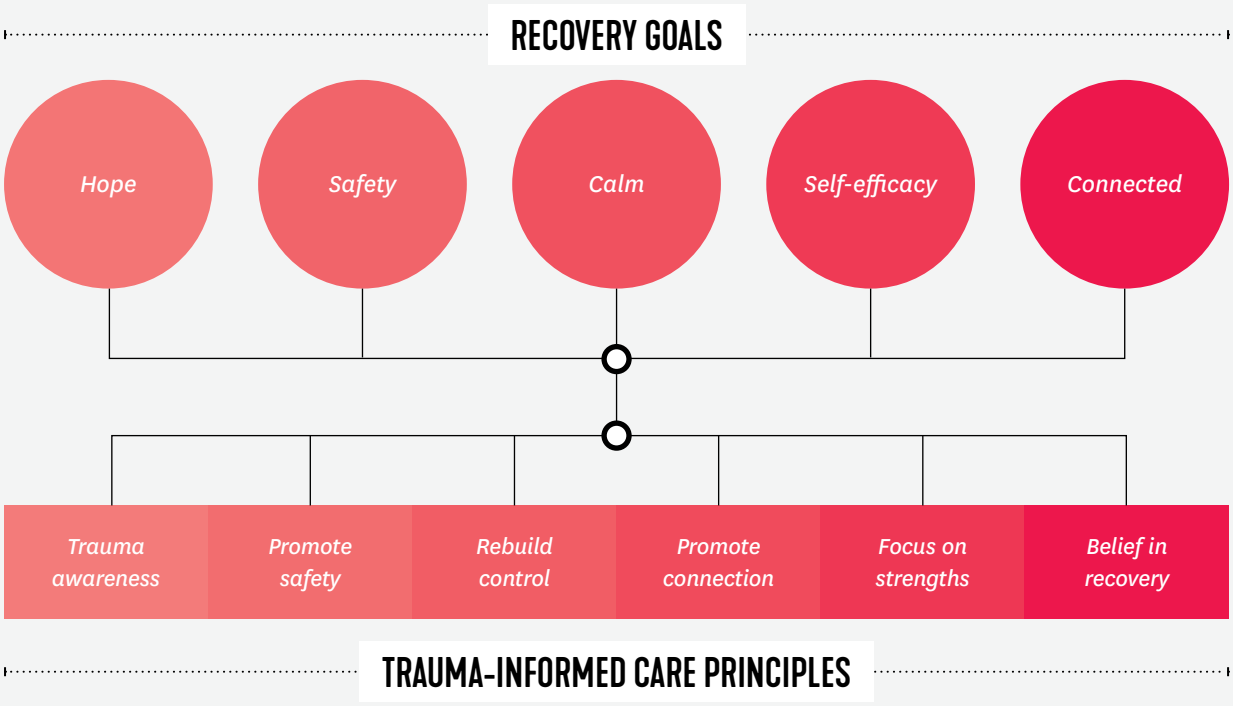
There is emerging practice around what are termed 'glimmers'. These are seen as the opposite of 'triggers', which are a cue that danger lurks and your fight or flight response needs to be activated. Glimmers, however, are those tiny moments of peace and joy in everyday life that bring us back to safety and connection, and regulate our nervous systems in the process.

Glimmers are micro-moments that signal to our system that we are safe. Examples of glimmers could be:

- patting a pet
- hearing a favourite song on the radio
- eating something yum
- feeling the sun on your skin
- sharing a laugh with someone.

Glimmers can enhance a young person's capacity to manage their triggers, and make them feel more positive, grounded and that they can cope.

Figure 6: A model for trauma-informed care



NB. Figure adapted from training materials by Phoenix Australia and The University of Melbourne

Traditional	*Trauma informed*
Doing for	Doing with
What's wrong with you?	What's happened to you?
Service as expert	Person as expert on own life
Symptoms and pathologies	Coping mechanisms
Treatment and cure	Healing and recovery
Non-compliant / disengaged	How can we better support you
These are the service options	What might you need to live well?

How can I encourage the young person to direct their planning?

Consider giving the young person a checklist of key activities that they can take inspiration from and work towards.

CREATE's Go Your Own Way guide has created this checklist of things that young people can consider when planning across the Health and Wellbeing Offer:

- [ ] Have I applied for a Medicare card?
- [ ] Have I applied for a Health Care card?
- [ ] Do I have a copy of my vaccination and medical records?
- [ ] Do I have a regular doctor (GP) that I can see?
- [ ] Do I know how to get help for...
  - ▶ My physical health and wellbeing?
  - ▶ My emotional wellbeing?
  - ▶ Sexual health and contraception?
  - ▶ Healthy relationships?
  - ▶ The effects of drugs and alcohol (both short term and long term)?
  - ▶ Healthy eating?
- [ ] Do I know what a healthy relationship is?
- [ ] Do I know some places to go where I can make new friends?
- [ ] Do I know how to get in touch with family members and old friends?
- [ ] Do I know where to go for help if I found myself in a violent relationship?
- [ ] Do I know how to connect to my community?

Health and wellbeing skills and capacity-building for young people

The Health and Wellbeing Offer provides access to social and community opportunities that are relevant to a young person's goals and aspirations. The Offer also provides young people with the necessary resources and skills to allow them to unlock their potential and transition towards adulthood.

These opportunities can focus on providing access to educational resources and supports that meet the needs identified by young people. Access to the right people, information, activities and resources enables them to develop the skills they require to engage in education and sustain that engagement.

Examples of activities include:

- understanding one's purpose in life, identifying and exploring talents and interests
- learning and applying mindfulness by using tools such as breathing exercises and meditation
- building resilience through creating a stable sense of self, and actively developing capabilities that foster agency, including setting positive goals, exploring positive risk and engaging with others
- life and living skills, including nutrition, budgeting, self-care, stress management
- developing good habits around sleep and exercise
- exploring spirituality and religion
- developing social and emotional skills, including emotion regulation, understanding how emotions influence decision making and recognising how others feel
- self-compassion, forgiveness and kindness and how these support personal growth
- exploring and recognising healthy and unhealthy relationships.

These skills can be developed, enhanced and supported through a broad range of methods tailored to the young person's situation, needs and goals. Development Coaches can facilitate:

- one-on-one sessions with the young person
- group work sessions with other young people
- experiential and practical learning
- peer-led initiatives
- connecting with mentors
- incursions or excursions coordinated by the Community Connector that leverage specialists from other services or the broader community.

OPERATIONAL INFORMATION

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 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.

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

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

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

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 Connection 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 a 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 CRISSP 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:

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

OTHER HEALTH AND WELLBEING 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.

Health and wellbeing supports, programs and funding matrix

	Individual support	Build readiness	Explore options	Opportunities and connections	For young people	For Better Futures practitioners	Funding information	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people	Young people with disability
Sortli app		●	●	●	●		●	●	●
Connections									
CREATE Foundation		●		●	●				
Victoria Police – Youth programs and initiatives						●			
Neighbourhood houses		●	●	●	●				
Kinship Finding program (VACCA)	●			●	●			●	
Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria					●	●			
Mental and emotional health									
Headspace	●		●	●	●	●			
Orygen Youth Health	●				●	●			
ReachOut	●	●	●		●				
Lifeline	●	●	●		●	●			
Kids Helpline	●	●	●		●	●			
Kids Beyond Blue	●	●	●		●	●			
13YARN	●	●	●		●	●		●	
SANE	●	●	●		●	●			
Suicide call back service	●				●				
Suicide line	●				●				
Young Carers Network	●			●	●		●		
The Butterfly Foundation	●			●	●	●			
Emotional regulation – OOHC toolbox						●			
Emotional Regulation and Impulse Control						●			

	Individual support	Build readiness	Explore options	Opportunities and connections	For young people	For Better Futures practitioners	Funding information	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people	Young people with disability
Alcohol and other drugs									
Youth Drugs and Alcohol Service		●	●	●	●	●			
Youth Support and Advocacy Service: drugs and alcohol	●	●	●	●	●	●			
Drug Facts					●	●			
Drinkwise					●	●			
Victorian Department of Health: drug and alcohol services for young people			●		●	●			
Physical health									
Young People's Health Service	●		●		●				
Dental Health Services	●				●				
Immunisation register					●				
Sexual health									
Family Planning Victoria	●	●	●	●	●	●			
Reach Out: Sexuality					●				
Pregnancy and parenting									
BRAVE Foundation	●	●	●	●	●				
Raising children – the Australian parenting website					●				
1800 My Options (abortion information and support)									
Raise Foundation Bump program	●	●	●	●	●				
Youth Support and Advocacy Service support for young parents	●	●	●	●	●				
Young Pregnant and Parenting Network					●	●			
Cradle to Kinder program	●	●	●	●	●				
Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder program	●	●	●	●	●			●	
Women's Hospital pregnancy fact sheets					●				
Women's Health Victoria					●				
Parentline counselling service					●	●			
Pregnancy Counselling Australia					●				
Relationships									
Family Relationship Centres	●	●	●	●	●	●			
Relationships Victoria	●	●	●	●	●	●			
Our Watch: The Line					●				
ReachOut: Relationships					●				

	Individual support	Build readiness	Explore options	Opportunities and connections	For young people	For Better Futures practitioners	Funding information	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people	Young people with disability
Disability									
NDIS factsheets						●			●
NDIS eligibility check					●	●			●
Find a Local Area Coordinator	●				●	●			●
Navigating the NDIS						●			●
People with Disability Australia					●	●			●
The Disability Gateway					●	●			●
Peak disability bodies and associations					●	●			●
Community-based disability support organisations	●				●	●			●
Youth Disability Advocacy Service	●	●	●	●	●	●			●
Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability – VALID	●	●	●	●	●	●			●
SANE (mental health and psychosocial disabilities)	●	●	●	●	●	●			●
Amaze (autism)	●	●	●	●	●	●			●
Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education & Training						●			●
Online health information									
Better Health Channel					●	●			
Ask Izzy					●				
ReachOut					●	●			
Health Direct service finder					●				
The Royal Children's Hospital fact sheets					●				
Family violence, sexual abuse and assault									
The National Redress Scheme for those who were sexually abused in out of home care					●				
Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre	●				●	●			
The Orange Door	●				●	●			
No to Violence	●				●	●			
Sexual Assault Services Victoria	●				●	●			
Safe + Equal	●				●	●			
Centres Against Sexual Assault	●				●	●			

	Individual support	Build readiness	Explore options	Opportunities and connections	For young people	For Better Futures practitioners	Funding information	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people	Young people with disability
Intersectionality									
Proof of Aboriginality					●	●			
myan					●				
Centre for Multicultural Youth		●	●	●	●				
Youth Disability Advocacy Service	●			●	●	●			
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria	●			●	●	●			
Victorian Pride Centre					●	●			
Switchboard (LGBTIQA+)					●	●			
Rainbow Network					●	●			
Minus18					●	●			
Transcend Australia					●	●			
Funding information									
Transition to Independent Living Allowance	●			●		●	●		
Better Futures Flexible funding	●	●	●	●		●	●		
Funding information									
Better Futures						●	●		
Home Stretch						●	●		
Leaving Care website						●			
Melbourne City Mission Leaving Care Hotline	●		●	●	●		●	●	●

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