

OUT OF
HOME CARE

- > Compassion
- > Integrity
- > Inclusiveness
- > Dignity

TRANSITION TO LEAVING CARE

RESEARCH REPORT

JULY
2016

Anglicare Business Development & Innovation Team

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Executive Summary

Young people who have left residential out-of-home care (OOHC) are statistically at a significant disadvantage and vulnerable to crises including homelessness, unemployment, poor physical and mental health, teenage pregnancy and parenthood, and involvement in the justice system (Smith & Eardley, 2008; Mendes et. al., 2011; Fallis, 2012; Fairhurst et. al., 2015).

St Saviours is a service within Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT providing Out of Home Care in Metro West and Metro South-West Sydney. St Saviours' pilot Transition to Leaving Care (TLC) project was started in response to the needs of young people exiting St Saviours' residential out-of-home care service, to provide them with a trusted adult support worker and mentor, and opportunities to transition from care into independent living in a more graduated and supported way. The TLC project provides a responsive and flexible service depending on needs identified by young people and by workers in collaboration with participants, and fills in gaps and maintains contact to enable an earlier intervention where required.

The Anglicare research team in consultation with St Saviours and an external research consultant developed an evaluation project to investigate whether TLC achieved its objectives of improving outcomes for young people who exit the service into independence.

The methodology included a Client Satisfaction survey and a semi-structured interview, asking about young people's experiences of transitioning to independence and the role TLC was playing in their lives.

Highlights

- The TLC project serves young people who have left residential out-of-home care in a way they perceive as valuable.
- Most of the outcomes (employment, education, housing) that TLC participants had were better than available comparative statistics about OOHC leavers generally.
- Young people in the TLC project had some positive outcomes including
 - engagement with work, study and training,
 - maintaining stable housing,
 - developing living skills and independence with the support they need, and
 - building supportive relationships and having a 'safety net' in place for when things were difficult.
- TLC assisted young people in practical ways and also provided a high level of personal support.
- The TLC Coordinator played a very important role in the majority of participants' lives as a trusted adult and mentoring figure.
- Overall, there was a high level of satisfaction with the TLC program.

Areas for improvement & refinement

- The TLC program could be improved by expanding its scope to better assist young people who live outside the South-West Sydney area, including those who have moved away after leaving St Saviours Out of Home Care and those who exit care in other regions
- As TLC matures, some young people will reach a level of independence where they no longer want the program's assistance; ensuring that young people develop supportive relationships with friends, family (where appropriate) and services outside the TLC program must be a key focus.

Key emerging themes

- Young people were engaging in work and study.
- Young people were supported by TLC to acquire and maintain stable housing arrangements, which underpinned their feelings of safety.
- Young people were developing living skills, budgeting skills, and learning to structure their days independently.
- Young people's financial and material needs were supported.
- Young people were developing their independence with the support of the TLC program as a 'safety net'.
- Young people were developing their social skills, confidence and building supportive relationships.

In light of these findings, this report recommends the following:

- Continue the TLC project to provide ongoing support for young people who currently access it and others as they leave OOHC.
- Increase capacity of TLC to be provided across all Anglicare NSW South and NSW West OOHC services, including capacity to visit young people based in regional areas, and integrate these services closely with existing Anglicare youth services in these locations.
- Increase capacity of TLC to provide financial assistance and brokerage, in order to provide a safety net for young people with fewer informal avenues for support.

Context

Supports generally available to young people leaving care

Young people who leave care at age 18 are generally eligible to receive some financial assistance from the federal and state government. This includes:

Youth Allowance

Young people who leave care because they turn 18 are generally eligible for the Independent rate of Youth Allowance provided they meet activity tests for study, training or job seeking. They may have already commenced receiving this payment from age 15 or 16, although the payment rate is determined by the amount of support provided by the care provider. Once they are living outside the service Youth Allowance entitles the person to \$433.20 per fortnight (as at March 2016), and they may also be eligible for Rent Assistance. Young people with disabilities may be eligible for the Disability Support Pension which is a higher payment than Youth Allowance.¹

Transition to Independent Living Allowance

Young people leaving OOHC are eligible for up to \$1500 in Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) which can be spent on authorized items, courses, services, bond or similar to support their transition to independence. Young people do not receive money themselves but their case worker makes purchases on their behalf.²

After Care Payment

FACS (NSW Department of Family &

Community Services) After Care Payment may be accessed to subsidise living expenses up to \$200 per fortnight based on demonstrated budget shortfall, as long as the young person is engaged in full time education or training and would be at risk of homelessness without this assistance. Other payments from FACS can occasionally be accessed in special circumstances.³

Other services

Young people may access mainstream youth services, housing services (including government housing, community housing or transitional/crisis accommodation), health and mental health services, and services supporting engagement into education or employment, some of which may be a requirement of accessing government financial assistance as above.

Issues young people face leaving care at age 18

Even with some financial supports available, many young people who leave out-of-home care at age 18 experience a difficult transition and poor outcomes.

The provision of care to children and young people through the out-of-home care system is a statutory and ethical obligation of the state and represents a significant investment in each individual person. For many young people leaving care at the end of this period of support, their transition to independence and subsequent young adulthood is a difficult time with some significantly higher risks in most key aspects of life. This relates to both the struggles they have already experienced prior to and during care, and the challenges of needing

¹ <http://guides.dss.gov.au/guide-social-security-law/3/2/3>

² https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2014/tila_program_guidelines_0.pdf

³ http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/322256/financial_support_cyp_oohc.pdf

to become totally independent at an age significantly younger than the norm. This often occurs without adequate supports and safety nets in place, in particular supportive relationships with trusted adults.

While some make a successful transition, the combination of traumatic pre-care experiences and an early and often minimally supported transition to independence leads to many experiencing significant difficulties. These include homelessness, unemployment, mental and physical health concerns, early pregnancy and parenthood, involvement with the justice system, and social isolation and exclusion (Mendes et al 2011).

The Transition to Leaving Care project was designed to address this by providing a coordinator to build relationships with care leavers and thereby provide needed support at key times to sustain tenancies, address problems as they arise and support engagement in work and study.

Homelessness

In the Australian context, CREATE Foundation's 2009 Report Card on young people leaving care surveyed 471 young people, 41% of whom were aged between 18-25. 35% of the young people they spoke to reported experiencing homelessness (defined as being without safe and adequate accommodation for more than five nights) during their first year of independence. On average this happened three times over that year for a total of just over a month. Young people up to age 25 in the survey who were housed had lived in an average of 4.9 places per year since they turned 18, indicating a high level of instability (CREATE 2009: 57).

A major study by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute on Pathways

from Care found that 73% of the study's 77 participants aged 18-25 had 'spent time living on the streets' during their adulthood. In the study cohort, 77% were considered to have a 'volatile' transition, characterized by significant difficulties in acquiring and maintaining suitable accommodation and a lack of support both formal and via social networks (Johnson 2010).

Unemployment

Young people in Australia face increasing difficulty in securing affordable housing and stable employment. Over the past ten years, median rents have increased faster than median wages⁴ and in Sydney the median rent for an apartment in Sydney was \$500/week, the most expensive city in Australia. Even lower cost areas like the South West region (where the TLC project is located) had a median rent of \$350/week for units⁵.

AHURI noted that one important factor which could assist young adults to rectify a difficult transition was finding work (Johnson 2010). For many young people in out-of-home care, disrupted education, limited skills and lack of contacts make it difficult to secure sustainable work. This is combined with a high youth unemployment rate meaning that young people with challenges around working have trouble competing with other jobseekers. Entry level jobs are increasingly casualised and many low-skilled employment options have been, or are being, replaced by technology and no longer exist (Foundation for Young Australians, 2015).

National youth unemployment has exceeded 12% since 2013 and underemployment

⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/business/grogonomics/2015/apr/30/crisis-rent-its-now-impossible-for-most-poor-families-to-find-a-home>, citing ABS 6401.0, 6416.0, 6345.0

⁵ <http://www.domain.com.au/news/sydney-rents-have-biggest-jump-in-four-years-domain-group-20151007-gk2516/>

impacts on many more (BSL 2015). People in their late teens faced even higher unemployment rates of over 19% in 2014 and 2015 (BSL 2015). The youth unemployment rate for Sydney South West (Liverpool and Fairfield) where the St Saviours office is based is 9.5%, below the NSW average of 12.2% and Greater Sydney average of 10.9%. However, surrounding areas, where several of the TLC participating young people live, have considerably higher rates of unemployment including Outer South West Sydney with unemployment at 14.4% and Inner South West Sydney at 15.5% (LMIP 2016).

Mental and physical health problems, early pregnancy and parenthood

Young people leaving care are at higher risk of experiencing mental and physical health difficulties, and young women who have been in out-of-home care have a higher incidence of early pregnancy and parenthood than the population average (Twedde, 2007). The absence of family or social supports for young people experiencing these issues increase the risk that they will have a severe detrimental impact on their lives, further isolate them and place children they may have at risk themselves, continuing a cycle of poor life outcomes (Rutman & Hibberstey, 2016; Fairhurst et. al., 2015).

Social capital

The impact for many young people of this economic environment is a low or unstable income and unaffordable housing expenses. This has meant that many who have the option to do so remain at their family home, or return to their family home, well into their 20s and even into their 30s. Around half of all Australian young people aged under 25 still live at their family home (ABS 2009). In Sydney, around 63% of 20-24 year olds lived

with their parents (ABS 2009).

This is usually not an option for young people in statutory care, who in most cases do not have family to live with after their statutory support ends at age 18. Young people in out-of-home care have generally had significant traumatic experiences or disrupted experiences of care, leading to extra health needs or struggles they may carry with them for some time. More social support is needed for this especially vulnerable group. Cashmore and Paxman (2006) found that 'felt' security (including feeling loved and emotionally valued, having somewhere to call home) was an even stronger predictor of positive outcomes in young people who leave care than stability of care placements. However, they note that placement stability may be a necessary but not sufficient condition for 'felt' emotional security.

Some young people may retain supportive relationships with their foster carers after they are no longer in statutory care, and may continue to live with them at least during the first few months after they turn 18 (Cashmore & Paxman 2006).⁶

There is less scope for this potential option for young people in residential care settings. An adult who is neither a young person in care nor a staff member would not be permitted to remain in a unit for very long.

Some young people return to their family of origin once they leave care. However, in many cases this option is fraught; the fact that they had been in care until the age of 18 indicates that formal reunification efforts had been unsuccessful and that their family may have limited capacity to be supportive.

⁶ Carers of young people aged up to 25 undertaking full-time study, to complete school or a Certificate II or above vocational course, can apply for extended carer payments to continue their support while the young person completes their education.

Advocacy for young people leaving care

In light of the issues described above, many out-of-home care providers are engaged in advocacy for more comprehensive service provision for young people as they transition to independence from care. This is also based on research demonstrating the importance of transition services. Providing a more gradual and flexible transition from care, and having more specialized after-care supports, are key reforms required to improve outcomes for young people leaving OOHC (Mendes et. al., 2011:61).

Relationships with trusted adults

As a major OOHC provider in NSW, Anglicare is advocating for increased support to include not only financial supports or assistance with particular issues, but highlighting the importance of general ongoing contact and relationship building with a trusted adult to address issues before they reach crisis point. As the Commission for Children and Young People found, "Strong relationships with one or both parents, other family members, friends, other members of the community – anyone who has the potential to act as a powerful advocate – can reduce the young person's vulnerability to harm. On the other hand, where they have no access to strong, protective relationships, either within or external to their family, they are likely to be highly vulnerable" (Commission for Children & Young People, 2002). Positive mentoring relationships through support programs can be helpful to young people without informal mentors, as long as certain success criteria are met (Jekielek, Moore & Hair, 2002; Wilczynski et. al., 2004).

Better transition planning

Create Foundation has campaigned about the transition process overall as well as the wellbeing of young people who exit into independence. They note that although all 15-17 year olds are supposed to have a Transition Plan, many do not or are not aware of one; in particular, a national survey in 2013 found that only one third of young people aged over 15 were aware of having a transition plan (CREATE 2013:13). The Leaving Care plan is a component of the current OOHC Standards (OCG 2015).

Extending age of leaving care

Aside from developing more comprehensive transition from care and leaving care supports, providers have suggested changes to out-of-home care policy such as an opt-in program of continuing care until age 21; for example, Anglicare Victoria's Home Stretch campaign. This policy suggestion acknowledges the significant discrepancy between the age most young people leave home and the age at which some of the most vulnerable young people's care supports cease.

International promising practice

Some international promising practice abandons notions of having an upper age limit on youth support programs targeted at this group. One program in Vancouver with this in place found that "youths accessed the Link program as needed, and the intensity of their usage ebbed and flowed over time, in keeping with ebb and flow of support that 'parented' youth receive from their families," this approach further promoting continuity in support and permanency in relationships, underpinning self-esteem, community connectedness and engagement (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016).

The TLC Project

The project model

TLC is an opt-in program aimed in particular at young people leaving the St Saviours residential care program, and was constructed with the needs of young people leaving residential care in mind. However, it has been open to all young people leaving Anglicare's and St Saviours' out-of-home care programs since it commenced in July 2014. In practice, since the coordinator is based with the St Saviours offices in Liverpool NSW, most clients have been based in South-West Sydney.

The program's intended outcomes include:

- young people remain in safe, stable housing after leaving care.
- young people develop the skills and confidence they need to live independently.
- young people engage in education, training and employment as appropriate.
- young people's health and wellbeing are supported.
- young people build networks of supportive relationships in their community.

The central components of the TLC project are:

- the TLC Coordinator who builds trusting relationships with young people in the program and adapts the program to their individual needs.
- a strong relationship with a community housing provider in the area, and a privately rented transitional housing unit to enable young people to have

some practical experience in living independently.

- brokerage (funds for necessary purchases at the discretion of the program including material assistance, study/training/employment related expenses, and housing) and the ability to continue paying rent on community housing properties to maintain the tenancy even if young people are unable to pay or leave the program for a period of time.

TLC's use of the transitional unit with young people as they prepare to leave care is a vital component. While living skills are a fundamental part of each young person's Leaving Care Plan and are gradually taught as appropriate, the experience of actually living independently, even alone, and making choices about which tasks to undertake without guidance is a crucial next step. Young people in residential care, in particular, have a quite different home environment; notwithstanding efforts to make residential units home-like, they are staffed by support workers 24 hours per day and are by necessity a more regulated environment to ensure the safety of residents. The transition from residential care to independent living for some young people is therefore quite major. For example the young person may not have had key experiences available to other young people in family home settings such as being home alone at night. Access to resources such as the transitional unit to help young people on a gradual process through this transition is very important.

The TLC Coordinator's role is quite general and encompasses a wide variety of duties; fundamentally it is to check in with independent young people in the program regularly, whether one-to-one or by

facilitating house dinners or group picnics, and to respond to needs by supporting young people to solve problems they face or providing assistance as necessary. Contact between young people and the Coordinator varies considerably. Some young people in share houses in south-west Sydney participate in weekly or fortnightly group events led by the Coordinator, and may meet with her at other times for assistance or mentoring as well. Young people who are not resident in one of the share houses linked with the program may have less regular face-to-face contact, particularly if they are not resident in the Liverpool or south-west Sydney area. However, phone contact is made regularly to 'check in' as needed with the young person and where necessary the Coordinator will travel to assist young people with their needs. Young people may exit the TLC program by requesting contact with the Coordinator end, but the flexible nature of the program allows them to return as required, providing a 'safety net' even if they are not interested in actively engaging in the program.

As the Coordinator is a trusted adult in these young people's lives, this person is well-placed to provide an early intervention response to an issue which could otherwise escalate: for example, supporting someone to negotiate calmly with Centrelink by accompanying them to the appointment, or assisting with cleaning of a house prior to an inspection. In some ways, the Coordinator role attempts to fill the gap where for many young Australians, a parent or mature adult relative might otherwise provide practical assistance and mentoring support.

The overarching TLC project objectives are to support young people as they transition to independence with practical assistance

and mentoring guidance. It smooths the transition to independence by enhancing living skills training to include more realistic practical experience in a step-by-step program. TLC works to ensure that alumni of St Saviours experience positive outcomes during this highly vulnerable period of their lives and continue on into productive and rewarding activities.

Evaluation

The TLC project was evaluated in line with the government funder requirements. The evaluation used qualitative and qualitative methods to give voice to young people regarding satisfaction, outcomes and needs. Anglicare took the opportunity to ask more generally about what was important to young people leaving residential care as they transitioned to independence.

Research questions were developed in collaboration with the TLC Coordinator, St Saviours, Anglicare research staff and an external research consultant. It was important to ask young people about several key factors:

- Essentials – whether they had and were sustaining stable accommodation, work and study, material necessities.
- Relationships – participants' relationship with the TLC service and relationships with other people and services.
- Independence – to identify own needs, seek help when needed, manage on their own and keep themselves safe.

In light of these factors, our evaluation intended to investigate:

- What is of value to young people leaving care?
- Specifically, what is the value of the TLC project in these young people's lives?

Methods

All young people who were part of the TLC project were invited to participate in its evaluation via a client satisfaction survey and in-depth interview. Both tools were developed in consultation with the service and the research consultant, and are attached.

The project was introduced to TLC participants at a barbecue that all young people in the program were invited to. The TLC Coordinator explained the purpose of the project to young people who attended and described what would be involved in participating, including explaining how to anonymously use the client satisfaction survey online, and introducing the proposed interviewer.

The interviewer was a trained youth support worker with whom young people were familiar from contact at the St Saviours office or as a previous support worker, but who was not currently in a role where she worked directly with any young people. This provided a positive balance: it enabled confidentiality and distance from the project to allow interviewees to be frank, while providing an environment of trust and rapport which was genuine and not temporary for the purpose of the interview only. This is particularly important for ethical engagement with young people who have experienced a pattern of disrupted trusted relationships.

The client satisfaction survey was delivered online via the Typeform platform and

most young people had the opportunity to complete the survey on a tablet during the TLC group meal at which the project was introduced. The tablet ensured that responses were confidential and simple to enter.

Young people who agreed to participate in interviews were contacted by the interviewer to schedule a time to meet. Interviews which took place in person were conducted in a private space at the St Saviours office and digitally recorded, and young people were encouraged to take breaks as required. Young people who were not able to meet at the St Saviours office were offered a phone interview, which was also digitally recorded. All interviews were then transcribed and analysed.

Ethics were a priority in engaging with vulnerable young people. Young people were provided with information about the nature of the project and what involvement in it entailed, and were asked to provide informed consent on commencement of participation in the project. This consent was confirmed again verbally at the beginning of each interview. Both the Client Satisfaction survey and the Interviews were recorded anonymously to protect young people's privacy. For the purpose of interviews, young people were offered the opportunity to provide a pseudonym to which their quoted comments would be attributed. However, since most young people did not provide one, these were not used.

Data analysis

The small number of participants meant that quantitative data from the Client Satisfaction survey was analysed using frequencies primarily. Comments from the survey were brief, but organized into thematic categories.

Interview recordings were transcribed and analysed using a process of thematic analysis.

Participants

Nine young people participated anonymously in the Client Satisfaction component of the project. Five young women and two young men took part in the interview component of the project. They had participated in the TLC project for varying amounts of time, ranging from when the project started about 18 months prior to interviews, to having left care within the past few months. Five of the participants lived in Sydney at the time of the interviews; four in two share houses with fellow St Saviours alumni, and one in private rental with her partner.

Two of the young women had left St Saviours some time prior to the TLC program commencing. They had been invited to join the TLC program since they had made contact with St Saviours since the TLC program commenced and workers had identified they could benefit from the extra support the program could provide. Both of these young women lived in regional NSW and generally made contact via telephone, although one had received occasional visits from workers.

Evaluation findings

Client satisfaction

Responses were collected between the 20th October 2015 and 4th November 2015.

Young people engaged in the TLC project were invited to respond to an online survey about their satisfaction with the program. Nine responses were received in total out of the 12 participants in the TLC program at the time. Questions covered key indicators of whether a program was respectful, inclusive, and helpful.



Overall, TLC received a highly positive response. While some neutral responses were recorded, most young people agreed with positive statements about TLC. Based on the data TLC appeared to engage with young adults respectfully and with integrity in order to maintain a long term relationship with them and provide a service perceived as helpful by young people.



The exception was that one young person indicated that they felt that they had not been sufficiently involved in decisions about what would happen next in their engagement with the service.



Summary of responses'




Feedback item	Response Rating				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
TLC staff listen to me (n=9)	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	0	0	0
TLC staff were people I could trust	5 (55.6%)	4 (44.4%)	0	0	0
TLC was respectful of my family and friends. (N=9)	5 (55.6%)	4 (44.4%)	0	0	0
I felt comfortable at St Saviours (N=9)	5 (55.6%)	4 (44.4%)	0	0	0
I was able to raise any concerns that I had. (N=9)	5 (55.6%)	2 (22.2%)	2 (22.2%)	0	0
Ways TLC helped young people					
I got help from TLC for the things I wanted to get help with (N=9)	5 (55.6%)	3 (33.3%)	1 (11.1%)	0	0
TLC staff were available when I needed them (N=9)	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.6%)	0	0	0
TLC helped me more independent. (N=9)	5 (55.6%)	2 (22.2%)	2 (22.2%)	0	0
TLC helped me deal more effectively with problems. (N=9)	4 (44.4%)	5 (55.6%)	0	0	0
TLC helped me to get involved in my community. (N=9)	3 (33.3%)	4 (44.4%)	2 (22.2%)	0	0
TLC helped me with my health and wellbeing. (N=9)	4 (44.4%)	4 (44.4%)	1 (11.1%)	0	0
TLC helped me with my learning and/or working goals. (N=9)	4 (44.4%)	4 (44.4%)	1 (11.1%)	0	0
Providing a safety net					
With TLC, I could tell someone if things were going wrong. (N=9)	5 (55.6%)	3 (33.3%)	1 (11.1%)	0	0
With TLC, someone would be there for me no matter how tough things got. (N=9)	6 (66.6%)	1 (11.1%)	2 (22.2%)	0	0
Satisfaction with TLC					
Overall, I was satisfied with the TLC service. (N=9)	7 (77.8%)	2 (22.2%)	0	0	0
	Too much	About right	Not enough		
When TLC checks in with you, is that often enough?	0	8 (88.9%)	1 (11.1%)		



An inclusive and respectful service

TLC staff listened to me (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	-
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-




I felt comfortable at St Saviours (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	-
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-



TLC staff were people I could trust. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	-
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-



I was able to raise any concerns that I had. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-




TLC was respectful of my family and friends. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	-
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-




Ways TLC helped young people




I got help from TLC for the things I wanted to get help with (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-




TLC helped me deal more effectively with problems. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	-
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-




TLC staff were available when I needed them (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	-
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-

TLC helped me to get involved in my community. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-



TLC helped me more independent. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-




TLC helped me with my health and wellbeing. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-

TLC helped me with my learning and/or working goals. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-

With TLC, someone would be there for me no matter how tough things got. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-

Providing a safety net

When TLC checks in with you, is that often enough?	
Too Much	-
About Right	
Not Enough	

With TLC, I could tell someone if things were going wrong. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-

Satisfaction with TLC

With TLC, someone would be there for me no matter how tough things got. (N=9)	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	-
Disagree	-
Strongly Disagree	-

Overall, young people indicated that they were highly satisfied with the TLC project and found it helpful. Comments were overall very positive. Further analysis was undertaken in conjunction with the interviews, and feeds into the conclusions of this report.

External indicators – engagement in education, employment, stability of housing

In summary, the data shows most young people were supported to sustain positive outcomes in terms of education, employment, and stable housing. Data was not recorded for young people who chose not to participate in the interview process as their responses to the client satisfaction survey were anonymous.

Education

Of the seven participants 4 (57.1%) had engaged in post-school education/training.

- One was studying at Bachelors degree level, and planning to undertake vocational training.
- One had some vocational training in two industries.
- Two had commenced vocational training.
- Two were intending to undertake training in the near future (interviews were conducted during the summer holidays).
- One was not engaging in training and did not intend to.

Employment

Of the seven participants 5 (71.4%) were at the time of evaluation in paid employment of some kind.

- One was employed full time as a Youth Worker.
- Three were employed casually (two at a convenience store, one at a health food store).

- One was employed casually in the hospitality industry but needed more hours so was also looking for work.
- One was looking for work and did not have a current job.
- One was not engaged in employment or looking for work.

Housing

- Two were renting in the private rental market, one in Sydney and one in a regional area of NSW.
- Four were in share houses with other ex-St Saviours young people in Sydney.
- One was in social housing in a regional area of NSW.

Themes and findings

The interviews covered a variety of topics ranging from objective activities to feelings of safety and maturity. In interviews, young people spoke about their work and study, housing issues, material needs, social connections and developing ability to manage their lives.

The resulting findings showed some themes which highlighted the very different experiences of young people who have spent time in out-of-home or specifically residential care. However, other themes were absolutely recognizable as normal experiences of growing up and becoming independent as for the broader general population of Australian young people.

Despite how ordinary the experience might be, however, the lack of family support

accessible by most participants draws a sharp contrast with the experiences of most young people in Australia.

Young people were engaging in work and study

Most young people in TLC were employed or looking for work, with some combining work and study.⁷ Most had an idea of whether they wanted to remain in their current field or if not, what they might need to do to pursue a study or career goal. Young people who were employed included one person who worked full time as a youth worker, two who worked casually at a convenience chain store and one who worked part time at a health food store.

Fully engaged with work and/or study

- The youth worker (Respondent 1) had a clear goal of further training in the short term, although she was unsure whether she would remain in the industry in the long term.
- Another young woman (Respondent 5) was working in a health food shop while also studying at university, at the time in Psychology but intending to transfer to Arts/Law.
- One of the young men who worked at a convenience chain store (Respondent 4) was also in the process of completing a Cert III in IT, with a goal of continuing on to Cert IV, although his real interest was to play basketball professionally.
- The other young man (Respondent 7) employed at a convenience store had a goal of completing the Army Foundations training program and subsequently joining the Army.

⁷ Interviews took place during December/January, which meant that most young people who were engaged in training were on a break from study and others were planning to commence in the new year.

Partly engaged or looking for work

Of those looking for work:

- One young woman (Respondent 2) had some casual work but was in the process of interviewing for a new job in the hospitality industry, although her career goal was to pursue a career in agriculture and farming. She had already attained a Cert III in Hospitality and undertaken training in farming skills. She had also very recently discovered she was pregnant, which was making it difficult for her to focus on work and study goals. Early pregnancy and parenthood is more prevalent in young people exiting out-of-home care (Fairhurst et al, 2015).
- The other young woman (Respondent 6) had a goal of working in an office and intended to undertake some study in the IT or Accountancy fields using TILA funds she had access to, but in the meantime was applying for as many jobs as she could find.

Disengaged

Only one young person (Respondent 3) out of the seven interviewed was having significant difficulty engaging with study, training or employment. This young woman was experiencing a number of barriers to employment and felt that attempts to 'cookie cut' her into a job that wasn't suitable were unhelpful and in fact, discouraging her from the idea of undertaking training.

"I don't want to have [training or experience], even if I do need it. I don't go to school or TAFE or do a stupid course, cos I'm already fighting Centrelink..." (Respondent 3)

This particular person's experience of accessing income support seemed to have exacerbated the difficulties she was already experiencing in her life.

"They're making everything harder. They're making just getting the money to support myself that I'm on at the moment harder. Centrelink and all the stupid job providers that they've tried to line me up with to try and cookie cut me into something that I don't want to do. ...[TLC] helped me get them off my back a little bit. But I still have to jump through hoops and I don't like it." (Respondent 3)

Not everyone had asked TLC to assist with work or study, but some identified ways that the program had helped them.

"I've asked to do certificates and [TLC] told me they can help me when I'm ready to do my certificate." (Respondent 1)

"[TLC] helped pay for my uni fees and also my books for uni because they are quite expensive. Provided support and guidance along the journey." (Respondent 5)

"[TLC] were going to help pay for [my Jamberoo course], so I didn't have to pay for the course..." (Respondent 2)

"[TLC has helped] heaps actually. We had some work skills and [TLC Coordinator] helps if we have questions about our resume and she provided a reference for my job." (Respondent 5)

Findings suggest that TLC was able to support, or offer support to, young people in key ways that ensured they had access to education and training they were interested in pursuing. The program was able to use its ongoing relationship with young people to continue encouraging them to think about current or future training opportunities, as well as providing financial or material support to enable it. For many young people a parent or family member might provide this kind of multi-dimensional support; TLC was able to provide it to young people who had less access to help of that kind.

Young people were supported by TLC to acquire and maintain stable housing arrangements, which underpinned their feelings of safety

Of the seven participants interviewed:

- One was renting privately in Sydney, two in a community housing property in Sydney, one in a Housing property in a regional centre of NSW, one in a private rental in a small town, and two in another share house in Sydney.
- Two young people had experienced homelessness prior to joining the TLC project.
 - One (Respondent 2) had experienced unstable accommodation and homelessness since leaving St Saviours but prior to joining TLC.

- o Another (Respondent 3) had experienced unstable accommodation and homelessness prior to coming to St Saviours while she was under the age of 18.

These two young people were the two who had returned to receive support from the TLC project rather than progressing straight from care into the project.

"[I've lived in] about ten [places since St Saviours]... [I had to move because] I don't know. Me – me not being mentally stable. My head just – my body just wants me to not stay in one place for too long – just always wants to move. Or I get into trouble." (Respondent 2)

- **Importantly, none of the respondents had experienced homelessness since taking part in the TLC project.**

Five out of the seven young people who participated in interviews for this research project have been in stable accommodation since leaving St Saviours.

Every respondent indicated some level of satisfaction with where they lived. For some this was more about the local community/ area than the house, but even those who saw plenty of room for improvement in their housing indicated basic satisfaction

"Happy enough I guess. I like the town. I don't love the house, obviously. ... it's not the greatest but I'm happy with the town. I'm happy with the area, sort of – I mean I like it there I just don't like the place. But I have to have a roof over my head, you know." (Respondent 3)

Some indicated hopes and plans to move somewhere better, including one planning to buy a house with her partner in the future. Another participant had a career goal of joining the Army which would mean moving to accommodation on base.

"I'm happy with where I live now, maybe until next year and I'll get a new house, a better one. Hopefully going to buy in a couple of years so that will be even more exciting." (Respondent 1)

"Hopefully [I won't live here] that long. Cos when I get in the Army, I wanna live with the Army. Cause it's like \$20 a week for everything, that's how much you pay." (Respondent 7)

Responses indicate TLC was important in assisting young people to move out and set up their place, which contributed to their current stable living arrangements. This included not only moving from St Saviours to their next accommodation (usually one of the share houses or via a transitional option) but in other instances. For example, when one young person moved on from the 'girls' house' to a private rental property with her partner, TLC "helped me a lot with getting my furniture and moving in... they came with a trailer and moved all my stuff in and got me settled into my new house which was actually really good." (Respondent 1)

Other young people were appreciative of TLC's assistance in liaising with social housing providers to access cheaper accommodation, and support to find housing.

“when we first moved out, helping us get into Argyle [community housing provider] was really good because it’s so expensive to rent and she was also giving us an extra six months on our lease so we have more time to save and get prepared for moving out.” (Respondent 5)

“I was homeless a few times. And I was too scared to actually go and tell them that I needed help, but I did it anyway and um yeah, they – they helped me out a lot. Found me somewhere to stay.” (Respondent 2)

“[Because of the leaving care program] I didn’t lose my place, that’s positive. I got Centrelink to chill their beans out for a long while, and I’m still kind of getting them to chill so that’s good.” (Respondent 3)

Housing and safety

Several participants spoke about housing when talking about things that made them feel safe or unsafe, suggesting that secure and stable housing was key. This could be about having the doors locked, housemates behaving safely, or simply ‘living in a house’ (Respondent 6).

“I don’t know, just having a stable home to live in [makes me feel safe]. That’s probably about it... like a place that I’m not going to get kicked out of, or that’s going to be short term and then I’m going to have to find somewhere else.” (Respondent 2)

Three young people spoke about how security at their house could affect their

feeling of safety. One compared their current accommodation to St Saviours, where the doors were locked and safe people were around, but now unsafe people could damage his house or enter the house. Another person had been unable to get an aspect of her Housing property fixed which, despite being it not considered a security fitting, was contributing to her not feeling safe. Threats to safety could include physical safety or the safety of their belongings; in talking about safety, two young people mentioned having property stolen.

“When I was in St Saviours ... if someone was going to kick my head in, no one could get in the house. The doors were pretty much always locked. Once I’m living by myself, if they can’t get in the house they will probably break my fence down and I’ll get the blame for it or have to pay for it ... I could call the cops but they won’t do anything unless they have evidence. I don’t feel safe unless I have mates around me.” (Respondent 4)

“Well the screen door [not being fixed] makes me feel unsafe cos I was the only one in the whole set of units without one... I don’t have much stuff but that’s the point, even if I did not have that much it can still be stolen and the stuff that I’ve worked so hard to get, I don’t want it going out the door because I’m so tired of people stealing from me.” (Respondent 3)

Share housing challenges

Some of the issues participant young people faced in their housing are common experiences of share housing. Getting along with housemates, organising the cleaning of

the house, and sharing household financial responsibilities fairly were some of the issues mentioned. While these types of difficulties are manageable at one level, they can threaten the tenancy or safety of the residents if not kept in check.

Housemates were both a source of social support and a source of frustration. Some young people listed their housemate as one of the important people in their lives (respondents 5 and 6), and one described providing support to their housemate (respondent 4). One in particular spoke about how different it was living with just their housemate compared to the residential unit, and how it could be lonely at times.

“Sometimes I feel a bit lonely because I’m so used to having all the workers and kids around. When it’s just me and my housemate, most of the time she’s in her room. So it’s a bit different... I’m not used to being home alone so it was a bit scary at first” (Respondent 5)

One person who had lived independently for some time had experienced a pattern of violence from a housemate in their previous housing arrangements.

“I was living with my housemate before I moved here about four weeks ago and he was being very aggressive and he attacked me a few times and I called the police, but they wouldn’t do anything so I called up [the TLC Coordinator] straight away and told her everything. I think she said she was going to call the police and have a go at them for not doing anything about it... she just encouraged me to move out and get away from him.” (Respondent 2)

Comments suggested that young people in the TLC project who were sharing houses were inclined to support one another in the event that one could not meet their responsibilities or provide for themselves. However the resulting frustration was also apparent in some comments.

“like when we moved out together, us three girls, we needed more support because one of us didn’t have a job, one of us didn’t have a license so it was like they were feeding off the ones that were doing good.” (Respondent 1)

Unfortunately, with limited access to the informal support of financially stable adults such as parents or relatives, young people needed to either rely on one another or follow more formal pathways to request assistance. The TLC Coordinator was able to assist at times with financial and material help and as a source of support when conflicts arose.

Challenges in living skills

Ensuring the house was kept clean was an issue for some young people, leading to conflict on occasion, and certainly requiring assistance as property inspections approached.

“trying to keep my house a bit cleaner, cos that’s a problem for me sometimes. I’m not lazy, it’s just sometimes when it gets overwhelming I don’t know what to do. ... then I get in trouble and I don’t want to lose my place” (Respondent 3)

TLC was a significant help to several young people with regard to cleaning, both those in share housing and one person who was

living alone. TLC also assisted on occasion with things like mowing the lawn. The 'reminders' and 'hassling' and assistance with sourcing a lawnmower are reminiscent of the types of things a parent or relative might do to support a young person in the early days of their housing independence.

"Yeah [TLC workers] come over and hassle us about keeping the house clean [which we need]." (Respondent 7)

"[it's important to have help with] Making sure the house is clean. Remind us to keep cleaning it."

Young people were developing living skills, budgeting skills, and learning to structure their days independently

Young people were increasing their independence through building life skills and personal development into emerging adulthood. TLC was able to assist with both of these aspects of transitioning to independence.

Life skills

Young people were asked general questions about what it was like to be independent and what types of things they had done since leaving which they associated with being independent and adult. A variety of things were spoken about. Topics fell into two categories, including budgeting and managing money, interacting with support agencies, and managing daily routine.

Budgeting and managing money

Budgeting skills and managing money was

a key skill that young people mentioned developing - or needing to further develop - in the time since they left care. This was particularly important since these young people were usually earning a low and unstable income, and sometimes even with the little they earned they still needed to support their peers. One young person (Respondent 1) identified that the TLC program had underestimated the level of support young people required with budgeting and financial support, and had adjusted to better support her and her peers to develop their skills and address barriers to adequate income.

"The TLC people have realized now that we need a lot more support with stuff like budgeting and life skills, which they didn't know at the beginning." (Respondent 1)

"[a leaving care plan should include] Budgeting. 100% budgeting. Learning how to save money. Getting stuff that you actually need, not what you want." (Respondent 4)

Most of the young people who were employed worked in casual positions, meaning a potentially unstable income in the event of changes in shifts, poor health or for those who were studying, needing to rearrange shifts to accommodate classes or assessments. Meanwhile, most lived in Sydney. Although most of those based in Sydney had subsidised rent and thankfully were not yet required to pay unaffordable Sydney prices (see Anglicare Sydney Rental Snapshot 2015), the cost of living in Sydney is ranked as one of the most expensive in the world (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015).

“When I was between jobs and I didn’t have much money. I was trying to find another job and that was tough. It was hard because I was broke and my car was really expensive for fuel.” (Respondent 5)

“I haven’t even paid my first bill yet, I have to pay that some time this week... I cook some of my meals but sometimes I don’t even eat because I’m poor, spend my money on stupid things.” (Respondent 7)

At the same time, those in group housing situations sometimes needed to cover household expenses for one another when household members were out of work or didn’t have money to contribute. This was a challenge for young people who were on a low income themselves.

“I have no idea [what the hardest thing was] to be honest. Like pretty much making sure the bills are paid on time, getting food for yourself, budgeting. Very hard for me to budget... when I’ve got a lot of stuff to get done and bills get paid for and get food for myself and the other kid. When they don’t chip in it’s hard for me to pay for it.” (Respondent 4)

Young people mentioned some personal development and learning in terms of budgeting priorities and using their money wisely. TLC was a key source of assistance in developing budgeting skills for some young people.

“Probably for me [the most important thing workers could help with] was budgeting. Because when I got my payslip, I would just go and buy stuff because I had money” (Respondent 1)

The actual method of paying bills was another thing one respondent indicated could be a new experience of independence.

“[I might get help with] Paying bills, if I needed help paying bills I’d go to [the TLC Coordinator] or Wayne and ask how I’d pay the bills. If they can’t help us I can go to the Post Office and ask how to do it.” (Respondent 4)

Some young people spoke about already having some budgeting skills or feeling competent with managing their money. The two older participants had lived independently for some time and felt confident to manage money. Another person, although she spoke mostly about the assistance she had needed in learning to manage her money more efficiently, was capably managing a private rental, paying off a new car and planning to purchase a house, indicating that her financial skills had seen significant improvement since the earlier difficulties she had experienced.

“[the main things about being independent are] Bills, a lot of bills. Responsibility, like you can’t just wake up and think ‘I’m not going to work today because I don’t want to’, because the bills have to be paid and you have to do it for yourself. Which is hard some mornings because you don’t want to get up.” (Respondent 1)

Interacting with support agencies and accessing services

Appointments and addressing health needs was mentioned by several young people as a challenging thing they had dealt with since leaving care.

“Making appointments, like if you’re sick you can’t just moan and groan in your room and someone will come bring you medicine, you actually have to do all that stuff for yourself.” (Respondent 1)

For some, TLC played an important role in helping with this. Keeping in mind that most people in the project are aged 18-20, it was not surprising that having the support of a trusted adult available to accompany the person to a doctor’s appointment if necessary was a valuable component.

“[another important thing workers help with is] medical stuff, that’s where I need a lot of help because I hate taking care of myself. Like I need someone to drive me to the doctors because I’m such a baby. I want that extra support with someone there to tell me it’s going to be ok.” (Respondent 1)

Interacting with agencies was another significant component of independence. Some young people mentioned having difficulty filling out forms and approaching agencies for support. These responsibilities were something that they had taken on as they transitioned to independence and so involved learning new skills and familiarising themselves with how to interact with government departments. The challenges involved are by no means limited to young

people with a background in out-of-home care; many relatively privileged adults would sympathise with the difficulties involved. However, for young people with limited support networks such as those leaving out of home care, there may be limited assistance available to fill in forms correctly or meet with government agencies in person. Meanwhile, they are likely to have reduced capacity to withstand the costs associated with filling in a form incorrectly or omitting to submit it at all – which may include delayed or denied requests for Centrelink payments, housing assistance or other essential services.

“I know [the TLC Coordinator] is good at helping people, it’s hard when you’re young and finding houses.” (Respondent 6)

One person in particular was experiencing some significant difficulties with the agency. In fact, she later stated that she had approached St Saviours and been referred to the TLC program as a result of needing some assistance with a Centrelink matter. ‘She was highly frustrated with the Centrelink requirements which seemed to change unpredictably and she found the job service provider to be of little help. Her comments suggested that she found it difficult to maintain her composure in some interactions with government agencies as a result of her frustration.

“I’m [saying my mind] with Centrelink and they’re trying to tell me, ‘You’re being rude’, no I’m not, cos you are to me so why not I do it to you? ... It’s all about respect.” (Respondent 3)

While this person indicated she felt very confident about interacting with the agency, the ongoing problems and increasing frustration involved in this person's interactions with Centrelink highlighted the importance of having a trusted other who can mediate or help to talk through some of the difficulties experienced.

"[TLC helped with] some of it... But most of the other stuff I... have to do probably myself. Which is fine because I'm not completely useless even though everyone tries to say I am, I know what I'm doing I've been dealing with Centrelink for a ... long, long time." (Respondent 3)

TLC was able to assist young people with difficult paperwork and interacting with other support agencies.

"The whole documentation thing, I suck at documentation. It just confuses me. Sometimes I can do it and then sometimes can have days where I don't understand anything on the page. I'd call someone and see if they were available to help, probably [the TLC Coordinator]... [the hardest thing I had to do this year was] I had to fill out lots of forms for housing that was really complex." (Respondent 6)

"[the TLC Coordinator] liaises with Argyle [community housing] all the time. She's been really helpful trying to find the new house... when we first moved out, helping us get into Argyle was really good" (Respondent 5)

"[a time when a worker really helped was] when I was sick, I was really really sick and I was vomiting everywhere and I had vertigo where you can't stand up. I called up Cass [the TLC Coordinator] and it was, I think she was supposed to go into work but instead she came early and took me to the doctors which was actually really good and I felt so much better. I needed that really bad." (Respondent 1)

Coaching in managing daily routines

One young man spoke about how knowing what to do next could be a challenge now that he had moved out of care. Structuring a day, identifying tasks that needed to be done and actually doing them were the types of overarching living skills which are difficult to teach in a theoretical or piecemeal context.

"[When you're independent] you got no one telling you what to do. It's pretty boring sometimes when you've got no one telling you what to do... When someone tells you what to do, you know what to do. But when you got no one telling you what to do, sometimes you don't know what you're meant to do." (Respondent 7)

While he was the only person who mentioned this explicitly, the difficulties young people mentioned with regard to cleaning and maintaining the house, and the difficulties the young men spoke about in terms of encouraging one another to go to work and appointments, suggest that this learning process was common to several participants. The difference between an independent living situation and young people's previous circumstances in 24-hour

staffed residential care is considerable and it is likely that this adjustment was reflected in some of the difficulties young people experienced.

Young people's financial and material needs were supported

Young people spoke frequently about their material needs in interviews with this issue being raised by all seven participants. TLC was a key source of assistance for them in meeting these needs. Young people spoke about getting assistance with material items, including furniture and items for their home.

Some also identified ongoing needs which had been a problem for them at times. Food insecurity was mentioned by the young men in particular in the context of low income and at least one preferring to get takeaway than cook.

"I cook some of my meals... but sometimes I don't even eat because I'm poor and spend my money on stupid things." (Respondent 7)

TLC assisted not only by supplying some food but involving them in preparing it.

"We asked for food... The [TLC Coordinator] didn't buy it for us but she made it for us at our house and froze it for us so it would last longer. It was easier and it lasted until we got money for proper food." (4)

TLC also assisted young people to incorporate TILA (federally funded Transition to Independent Living Allowance) funding into their Leaving Care plans or to access it once they had left care. Some young people chose to use this to purchase furniture and household items.

"Get all the furniture all in one go so you don't waste your time... TILA funding. Not an expensive bed but a decent bed, washing machine, fridge." (Respondent 4)"

Financial support was also part of some young people's study or training goals, which included getting a drivers licence.

"I'd like to get my licence cos the – not that it's hard to get around [town] it would just be great for if I wanted to take a trip somewhere else." (Respondent 3)

Many material wishes and needs were relatively practical; however, other wants characteristic of young people were articulated. While many TLC participants were clearly managing very low incomes and many spoke about the importance of budgeting skills, their lives as teenagers and young adults were nevertheless impacted by the wants and requirements of more materialistic social influences – as would most young people in Australia.

"[One thing I wished I had was] This is going to sound stupid, but a bigger TV... I want a bigger TV because it's cool." (Respondent 4)

Young people were developing their independence with the support of the TLC program as a 'safety net'

Independence was also about some more intrinsic characteristics of problem-solving and maturity. Personal confidence, self reliance and help-seeking behaviour, freedom and getting used to being alone were some of the topics that arose in this category.

“[if there was a problem I wanted to talk about] I’d call [the TLC Coordinator] from TLC [were positive aspects].” (Respondent 5)

Some young people had pre-care, adolescent or during-care experiences which led to them taking on a level of independence unsuitable to their age. This complicates the idea of ‘transitioning to independence’ at 18 years of age. One in particular, who had experiences of homelessness as a child and young person, had a different understanding of independence. She had spent time in a number of youth homelessness services prior to placement in St Saviours, and reflected on the difference between crisis services and the residential care setting.

“Nothing is different [from when I was younger]. I’ve never really been, um, a kid. Oh you know, I mean there was maybe some times really really really young though, I guess, but after maybe five I started doing most of the things for myself, so.” (Respondent 3)

However, although she felt strongly independent and found it very difficult to ask for help, it was clear that she was experiencing a number of complex issues in her life. Her highly disrupted experience of housing and care throughout adolescence meant she had been dealing with adult responsibilities much earlier than most young people are ready to manage them.

Meanwhile, others were finding the experience of independence overwhelming, even more than a year after leaving care.

“[Being independent is] difficult... There’s so much responsibilities that you have, like I’m only nineteen, I shouldn’t have all these responsibilities yet, that’s crazy.” (Respondent 6)

TLC had made an important contribution to young people’s personal development.

“The outcomes of how TLC helped us have been good. Like a year ago, I would have been swearing my head off trying to fight people, being an absolute dick. But now I have a full time job, \$20,000 car, I rent privately and have my head screwed on. Probably that’s a positive. The people and [the TLC Coordinator]” (Respondent 1)

Being alone at home, or mostly alone, was a very different experience from living in residential care and some young people spoke about this adjustment.

“Sometimes I feel a bit lonely because I’m so used to having all the workers and kids around. When it’s just me and my housemate, most of the time she’s in her room...[moving out has] been good but also scary at the same time because I’m not used to being home alone so it was a bit scary at first.” (Respondent 5)

TLC was supportive, but also mindful of opportunities to encourage young people to solve problems for themselves. This mimicked the type of support a parent or family member might provide an emerging adult to build independence and self-efficacy.

“Most of the time when I ask for help they

say, do it yourself.” (Respondent 4)

“They really try and help us out with the skills we need to do things on our own. Rather than just giving it to us.” (Respondent 5)

Young people felt they had a ‘safety net’ that they needed

St Saviours and TLC remaining in their lives as a ‘safety net’ was mentioned by several young people as an important thing which eased the transition to independence.

“[moving out has been] a bit of both [an adventure and scary]. Scary like knowing that I can’t just walk up to the office and saying “I need this” and they would get it for me. But it’s been good knowing that they are still there in the background. It’s been pretty good yeah.” (Respondent 1)

“Yeah I know heaps of people [who have left resi care recently]. I think they also find it really good having support from this program because there’s lots of challenges and it’s good for them to be able to call.” (Respondent 5)

“being able to know they were just a call away” (client satisfaction survey)

The familiarity of St Saviours and its workers was an important component of the safety net as it was valuable to be in contact and easier to communicate with someone who had known them for a long time. The TLC program made this more accessible

and enabled young people to feel it was appropriate to stay in touch with people who had played a huge role in their lives.

“Um I don’t know [how important it is to have the TLC worker]. Well ones that have known me most of my life so they know everything about me – they’re just easier to talk to cos they know me. [That’s] very important.” (Respondent 2)

With this safety net in the background, young people felt they had developed confidence through having to speak for themselves. This was helpful socially but also for managing their personal affairs and seeking assistance where necessary.

“Definitely [more confident in social situations than a year ago]. I don’t know, it’s not really a specific thing. It just kind of happened. I kind of have to talk to people and have to be good with people now because I can’t have anyone talk to people for me.” (Respondent 6)

“Yep [more confident] going to have to meet new people, going to appointments by myself.” (Respondent 7)

Two young people framed their increase in confidence as being related to a wider variety of settings they could participate in.

“Yeah [I’m more confident in social situations than a year ago]. I’m just interacting with new people whereas before I’d been talking to the same people I’d been talking to for a couple of years at school.” (Respondent 5)

Some young people described an increase in emotional maturity and empathy for others as well.

“Probably [more confident in social situations], I was pretty out there already. Probably because I have more understanding of what everyone else is going through. Probably thinking, you’re not the only one who is going through shit. Understanding more of people’s feelings and emotions have helped a lot.”
(Respondent 1)

Solving problems by oneself and being alone was one of the challenges of becoming independent. Some young people took pride in their ability to solve problems on their own.

“I’ve pretty much – [looked for farm work] on my own [rather than getting support from TLC.] That’s my choice... I just feel that I should be independent and do it myself. That’s how they taught me.”
(Respondent 2)

“I’m not the kind of person that asks for help.” (Respondent 3)

“I feel like I do a lot more now, I can do a lot more on my own. I learnt how to renew my vehicle rego and I can do things more independently now.” (Respondent 5)

Young people were asked about the most ‘grown up’ thing they had done that year, or since leaving care. Their answers were diverse and interesting.

The two young men identified things which are ‘rites of passage’ for young people; one spoke about activities which he could now participate in since turning 18, such as visiting clubs, and another identified getting his license as an important thing he had done.

Two others spoke about the transition to adult responsibilities and running their own lives; one felt that managing her appointments was the most grown up thing she had done, and another responded about moving out with her partner and taking a loan to purchase a car.

A further two young people identified particularly complex situations they had negotiated or were in the process of: one who was becoming her sister’s respite carer, and another who made a decision to leave a difficult relationship and undertake a course which aligned with her interests and passions.

The final young person didn’t feel that the question applied to her, noting that she had been independent for some time.

Young people were developing their social skills, confidence and building supportive relationships

TLC aimed to provide interpersonal support to young people but also to build up their skills to construct and develop their own supportive networks. Social support, whether from family or from peers, is crucial to facilitating positive outcomes (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2016). In fields such as mental health, it is well known that young people are much more likely to seek informal support from their personal networks before engaging with a professional service, not only with regard to mental health concerns but in housing and other needs (Duff et al 2011).

The difference between living in residential care and living independently was noted by some young people with regard to social networks.

"I feel like sometimes I have no one to talk to. Um yeah, sometimes I just find it hard." (Respondent 2)

"[the hardest thing i had to do was] Probably moving out from the girls. Knowing that now I'm on my own, I have to do it by myself – i don't have anyone there to support me." (Respondent 1)

It appeared that several of the young people who participated had strong peer networks, mostly with young people who had left St Saviours around the same time. Some were sharing houses with each other, and one had recently moved out of such a share house.

"[the important people in my life include] the girls, I can still count on the girls. Like the other day, my hair straightener broke right before Stereo and I called up [my friend] and she's down the road so she said she'll bring it to me which was amazing... [I spend most of my time with] my partner, the girls and [the TLC Coordinator]." (Respondent 1)

"[My female friend is one of the most important people in my life] – I used to live with her at St Saviours." (Respondent 6)

"With [my housemate], I usually tell him pretty much, not what to do, like get up and go to work, get up you gotta leave to do this. Cause he's a lazy arse. He

gets up but then he falls back asleep." (Respondent 4)

"[My friend from TLC] basically saved my life the other day. I had an allergic reaction to face wash and my face was red and puffy and my eyes were swollen and she came and said 'what happened to you' and I said 'allergic reaction' and she told me to call a doctor." (Respondent 6)

Some young people spoke explicitly about supporting their peers from St Saviours. While it was valuable for them to talk to one another, since their shared experience made it easier to understand, young people emphasized the importance of also seeking help from St Saviours/TLC or other services.

"I know most of them [who have turned 18 and left resi or foster care in the last few years]. Well I don't really talk to them, well the girls I know, they're going pretty well, except [name]... They have come to me for problems and I think they just need to talk more with St Saviours – get their advice, actually take their advice because they're being stubborn. They need to stop being so stubborn cos they think that cos they're on their own now they think they can handle it all by themselves but they just can't, trust me they can't. They need the help and support. That's what I keep telling them." (Respondent 2)

Several young people also had broader social networks and support. They spoke about friends they had made outside the St Saviours/TLC service, whether from school, work or other sources. Those with partners generally said that they would call their partner first in a crisis.

Most had some contact with family members, which they framed as generally supportive.

“My dad [paid for my course]... [Important people to me are] probably my mum and my boyfriend. That’s about it.”
(Respondent 2)

“[I would call] my sister. I tell her everything.” (Respondent 6)

Some had other trusted adults in their lives, such as the family of some friends from school, or in one case a previous foster family. Others listed families of partners as new friends they had made in the previous year.

Everyone except for one interviewee identified more than one person who they felt they could rely on in a crisis or if they needed to talk to someone.

Unfortunately not everyone had strong bonds with their peers from St Saviours or TLC. One young person noted that the best thing about being independent was ‘you don’t have to live with morons’, and had found her relatively brief stay in the service to be a difficult one.

“I was even doing [shopping and paying bills for myself] in St Saviours, cos you were lucky if you got anything with those people that I had to live with. I’m going to call them people cos that’s nice enough for them.” (Respondent 3)

This young person had some of the most challenges in terms of social supports and interpersonal relationships. She expressed some feelings of very deep isolation and unhappiness.

“I don’t have people, that’s what I am trying to say. I don’t have friends, I don’t have family, I don’t want them either because friends will stab you in the back and family doesn’t exist and people in general, usually, are horrible horrible horrible, that’s my experience anyways. So I usually rely on myself, and you know the first person I would actually talk to if something was really really wrong is my teddy bear because she actually cares and she’ll listen to me. Or maybe some dead relatives cos they can’t complain.”
(Respondent 3)

However, despite her assertions that she had no interest in other people or good wishes for them, at times she also expressed care for others and their wellbeing.

“I did eventually go back to Penrith that was just to make sure everything was still the same and give myself a bit of peace of mind and catch up with a few old friends and see that they’re happy and healthy and still having a good enough life for themselves. Which – that’s what I wanted to do and then, you know, find some place I could call home.” (Respondent 3)

Social contacts were also the key to feeling safe for some young people. The transition from living in a relatively secure residential unit with people around to a share house was quite a big one, and in one case had unfortunately been marked by a traumatic physical attack.

“I don’t feel safe unless I have mates around me... If I was unsafe, if someone was trying to kill me, I’d call the cops, make sure the doors are locked. I wouldn’t

tell the person that the cops are on the way cause that could make it worse. If the cops can't do anything, call your closest friend or family member and they can talk you through the situation." (Respondent 4)

On the other hand, some had needed to learn how to manage difficult relationships or extract themselves from a dangerous relationship.

"some situations I chose to leave- but, most of the partners because I've been influenced in a bad way...[One of the most 'grown up' things I've done was] I was having trouble with my ex boyfriend, he was being a bit aggressive, I was like 'fuck it.' Sorry for the language. And I really wanted to do [a course] for a very long time, and I'm like, fine I'm just going to leave you and go do it." (Respondent 2)

TLC acted as a strong social safety net for these young people. Most said that in an unsafe situation they would call the police first, followed by another person, usually a friend or the TLC Coordinator. One person said he would call On Call (the St Saviours after hours support number) who would pass on the information to his coordinator.

Two people spoke about a time they had actually called police in a situation where they felt unsafe. In one case it was a false alarm. In the other case, the young woman had been attacked by her housemate had not received a helpful response.

"I called the police, but they wouldn't do anything so I called up [the TLC Coordinator] straight away and told her everything. I think she said she was going

to call the police and have a go at them for not doing anything about it... she just encouraged me to move out and get away from him." (Respondent 2)

The importance of "exploring the existence of, and actively working with youth to strengthen, ties" with extended and immediate family members is highlighted in Rutman & Hubberstey (2016). Peer networks are also very important.

Importantly, however, both family contacts (with whom reunification was not previously possible) and peers from the out-of-home care system are likely to be vulnerable themselves in various ways. While relationships may be positive most of the time, for example, capacity to assist with material needs may be limited, or the challenges contacts are facing in their own lives may mean that they can not always provide emotional support or good advice. The continued involvement of support services is likely to be necessary for some time to a greater or lesser degree, and the ongoing relationship between a young person and trusted service improves the likelihood they will reengage when their needs increase and, ideally, before an issue escalates.

'Several young people consulted appeared to have a strong connection to the primary TLC Coordinator. They saw her as a trusted adult, a source of advice and support, and a person whom they could approach with almost any matter. This relationship seemed to be a positive constant in these young people's lives.

"[the TLC worker is] Very important, crucial. Because every time I'm not sure about what to do, I can call them up and

talk to them and they give me really good advice and I get support from them. It's really helpful." (Respondent 5)

"[if someone was making me unsafe] I usually ring [the TLC Coordinator] for everything. Absolutely everything." (Respondent 1)

"[if someone makes me feel unsafe I could] Call [the TLC Coordinator]. Just talk about the problem and try and fix it." (Respondent 6)

"Well if it's normally something really really – really bad that I can't handle by myself then yeah, I normally do call [the TLC Coordinator]." (Respondent 2)

Even for those who were not as attached as some of the young women, evidence of the TLC Coordinator's approachable nature is given by the young men.

"[the TLC Coordinator] comes and gives us a hand if we need help cleaning or if we need help paying the bills" (Respondent 7)

Complexity in helping young people with experiences of disrupted attachment and difficulty in trusting others

Only one person felt cynical about her relationship with St Saviours and TLC, since she had moved out of the service on difficult terms and alluded to feelings of anger and abandonment. However, she also clearly identified an important issue impacting

on any program supporting young people who lack their own social connections; attachments to workers are dependent on the worker remaining in that role and therefore very risky over the long term.

"Why should I [visit St Saviours]? If you don't visit me, I'm not going to visit you. If you don't call me, I'm not going to call you. I understand that you are workers first, I know that but if you're just saying that after the programs over you are my friends you're all liars." (Respondent 3)

"...you didn't [visit or call me] and that's understandable because I pretty much told you guys not to and you kept your end of the bargain... but people I did want to keep in contact with did not contact me." (Respondent 3)

This young person had experienced a number of disappointments from workers in the many services she had been involved with, and appeared to find it difficult to trust workers beyond the practical support they could provide.

“it’s not like [the TLC workers are] going to stay around. It’s not like they’re going to actually keep in touch with me after the job is done. They don’t understand – you have work and I am just the client... I know that is how you treat me like because everyone does it – you are a client until you are not a client and when you are not a client we don’t care so not important... While [TLC workers are] doing their job it’s semi-important but ... when the job is over they’re probably – fly away and then they won’t be important at all, cos obviously I need them to do the things that I need them to, but after that if I don’t need them to continue or do anything else and they don’t feel like they need to help me with anything else, they’ll go on their merry way and that will be it, and I understand that.” (Respondent 3)

It is important to recognise that this young person was dealing with some complex difficulties in her life and could express herself in particularly negative ways at times. However, the experiences of disrupted attachment and difficulty in trusting others are common to many young people who have been unable to live with their families and placed in OOHC. Services also recognise that they can not (and should not) totally replace genuine family or friendship relationships and as a result, young people without these relationships may quite fairly respond with distrust and cynicism. It is valuable that this young woman’s voice was captured in the research project to illustrate the complexity in engaging with young people who have experienced such complex childhoods and adolescence.

Discussion

Some of the experiences captured above are common to many Australian youth while others are unique to those from an out of home care (OOHC) background. While many young adults experience difficulties with finances, stable housing and sustainable employment, few have as little access to backup plans as many young people leaving out of home care. While a job loss or unexpected expense might for many mean having to ask for help or a loan from parents or moving home for a while, OOHC leavers are much less likely to have access to assistance of this kind.

While there are significant risks affecting young people leaving out of home care and many will experience difficulties as a result, others will make a successful transition and proceed to do well without major further challenges.

Comparing TLC outcomes to a benchmark

In Australia and around the world, statistics on poor outcomes for young people leaving out of home care are extremely concerning. This is likely because of a combination of their more difficult experience of childhood and adolescence, and the limited supports available to replace the parental support many young people rely on in an environment which is increasingly difficult for young people to access stable housing and employment.

Employment

Young care leavers in Australia have in general very poor employment outcomes. This relates to a number of issues they experience which makes it difficult for them to find and maintain work: their youth (young people typically have much higher unemployment⁸), their limited skills and experience having just completed school (or in some cases, not having completed school) and other issues such as health or mental health issues or social/developmental difficulties which may result from traumatic pre-care or disrupted care experiences. While there are few national figures on care leavers available for comparison, a national study of Transition to Independent Living Allowance found that 56% of care leavers receiving TILA assistance over a two-year period were unemployed or not in employment, education or training (Morgan Disney & Associates 2006, in Mendes 2009).

Data for TLC participants suggests a favourable comparison to the wider care leavers population with only two out of seven not currently employed or in study/training at all (one looking for work). However only one was employed full time. Three young people were employed casually while usually engaged in study/training as well, or intending to commence the following semester. One had some casual work which she enjoyed but was seeking another job as she was underemployed.

⁸ The unemployment rate for young people aged 15-19 in Australia is 17.3% (May 2016, ABS 6202.0). The unemployment rate for young people aged 15-24 in South-West Sydney, where St Saviours is based, is 9.6% (LMIP 2016) and in Outer South-West Sydney, where a number of participants live, 13.4% (LMIP 2016). 10.4% of 15-24 year olds in Australia were neither employed nor engaged in full-time education in May 2016 (ABS 6202.0).

Education

Closely linked are care leavers' experiences of educational engagement. Educational disadvantage often begins far before the leaving care process commences, where children's barriers to participating fully in education as a result of pre-care experiences or disrupted care experiences mean that fundamental literacy, numeracy and communication skills may not be properly developed (e.g. AIHW 2007, in McHugh 2013). Lacking basic skills leads to difficulty in engaging in either continued study or employment. There is very little data available on care leavers' engagement in education (Harvey et al 2015). Small studies find that engagement in education is very low, such as one which found only 25% of young people were in full-time employment, full-time education, or part time work and education when surveyed 4-5 years after leaving care (Mendes 2009).

Although the timing of the study meant that most young people were not currently attending their training or education courses, TLC participants appeared to have high rates of engagement in education and training. One was undertaking university study, one had completed vocational training, others were planning to continue or commence vocational training or on a pathway to employment in the Army when semester recommenced after the summer break. Only one was not engaged, and had no plans to engage, in training or study at all.

Housing

Housing is a particularly difficult area for many young people leaving the out-of-home care system. This is evidenced by studies showing that 35% of young people

experienced homelessness during the first year of independence (CREATE 2009) and many more may have experienced it in later years (Johnson et al, 2010).

AHURI found that young people who experienced a smooth transition to independent living “spoke favourably about transitional arrangements, identifying the quality of the accommodation and support as a critical factor”, “had important, reliable and consistent social attachments that provided resources that enabled them to access and maintain accommodation”, and “had someone to fall back on if problems emerged”. However, young people who experienced a volatile transition had a “poor experience of supported/transitional accommodation and specifically, being forced to share” (Johnson et al, 2010: 3)

TLC participants were in stable housing arrangements. Those who moved from St Saviours care into independent living while supported by TLC had experienced positive and stable housing outcomes, in contrast to those who had not.

Although the interview cohort and the TLC cohort overall are small groups, it would appear that most have had more positive outcomes than might be expected otherwise.

Clients’ reflections on TLC project

Some aspects of the TLC project were shown to be vital to young people’s wellbeing and support. In particular, the central TLC Coordinator role was identified six out of the seven young people as an important source of support. The availability of TLC-supported housing, which TLC could in at least one instance extend as required, was another fundamental component identified by the young people. This allowed young people the stability to move into a share house and experience some of the normal transitions from adolescence to young adulthood with the access to support and guidance that most Australian young people retain long after they move out of home. Both the interview responses and client satisfaction surveys indicated that young people valued the service and, if anything, wished more could be provided.

General reflections on TLC

When young people reflected on the program more broadly, six out of seven said it was a useful program.

“I think the whole program is really good, helping us with our skills and providing constant support. So I think the whole thing is really good... I can’t think of anything I’d do differently. I think they do everything pretty well.” (Respondent 5)

“Everything. There is always someone there to help you.” (Respondent 6)

For six out of seven young people, the more practical assistance TLC provided or facilitated was important or what came to mind when they were asked about it. However it was clear from interviews that four young people found the emotional support and availability of the coordinator as a trusted adult or mentor to be particularly valuable. These four, out of the five young women who participated indicated that they would feel comfortable contacting the TLC Coordinator if they needed to talk about something, and three in particular considered the Coordinator to be one of the first people they would contact in an emergency.

TLC understood young people's needs

Most young people surveyed felt TLC workers understood quite well what was needed in their lives. One in particular noted that the program adapted as the particular needs of the cohort became more apparent. Other interviews reflected this in the descriptions of interventions or lack of intervention in young people's lives determined by the need they experienced at the time.

"[TLC workers understand] a lot more than when it first started. When it first started they thought they knew what we needed but it turns out we needed a lot more support than what they thought. So they know a lot now." (Respondent 1)

"Well for me really nothing [much I need workers to help with] really. It's just you know, someone to talk to when I need someone to talk to... cos they were a

big part of my life before I moved out."
(Respondent 2)

One young person surveyed had a lower view of workers in general and didn't feel well understood. However, even this person felt that TLC workers made an effort to understand what she was going through, unlike others she knew.

"I don't know, I mean sometimes they get it. But it's not ... like they know all the time. Sometimes they don't always understand what you're going through, but they try, which is at least sort of good because most of the time people don't really try."
(Respondent 3)

Six out of the seven young people felt that workers assisting them usually understood well how best to help. One young person explained that workers listened to what young people said and then discussed or negotiated what to do about their concerns.

"they ask us what we need and we say it and they have their own idea but we come to a compromise. So it's not really like they just tell us how it is. We tell them how it is and they try and suit our needs best." (Respondent 1)

While most feedback about the TLC worker was positive, two young people provided examples of times when workers had encouraged them to take an action that they didn't think was helpful. In both of these instances, the worker's recommendation was towards a service aimed at a higher level of need than the client believed necessary or wanted to engage in. While the services

young people were referred to may have been appropriate in the worker's view, perhaps clients could have been better assisted to understand why the referral had been made. Young people may have been apprehensive or fearful about services targeted at a higher level of need and perhaps could have been given more support to attend or make contact.

In one case, concerns that a young person's stomach pains may have indicated appendicitis led the TLC Coordinator to encourage him to go to hospital, which he did not think was necessary. However, the situation he describes suggests it was wise for the Coordinator to help him seek medical assistance.

"... [the TLC Coordinator] told me to go to the hospital and, and she took me to the hospital. I didn't want to go to hospital... She thought my appendix was stuffing up, like I had appendicitis. I don't know what I had, I think I was just hungry. I don't know, like for 4 days in a row I couldn't do anything, I had this sharp pain in my stomach and all that... I just didn't want to go to the hospital, I said I was fine."
(Respondent 7)

Another young person had been referred to a program in her area which she felt was targeted at people with higher needs than hers. A number of factors would have contributed to this, including the availability of services in a regional area, difference between the program's understanding of the young person's needs and her own understanding and the stigma attached to programs servicing people with complex and high needs.

TLC contributed to young people staying part of the St Saviours community

Part of the TLC project involved encouraging young people to drop in at the St Saviours office when they wished, which many young people in St Saviours residential care do but often lost that connection after leaving care. Young people valued the opportunity to continue being part of the St Saviours community. This was more practical for Sydney-based participants than the others. For three young people, being able to visit the St Saviours office or drop in any time was helpful and an option they took up frequently when they needed or wanted to. For a fourth person, although it was not practical for her to visit often owing to her residence in a regional area, she expressed that it was important to her that she was still welcome to visit when she could. Most young people framed this as a way they might seek support or assistance, or perhaps just social contact with people they know well.

"[being able to drop into St Saviours is] pretty important actually, because the people are very supportive and give good advice and would help me out."
(Respondent 1)

"It's actually pretty good [being able to drop in at St Saviours] because if I'm unhappy or bored at the house, I can come by and say hey to the old workers and it's helpful." (Respondent 4)

"just having them, having them there for support [helps me feel safe]... They always tell me to come in [to St Saviours]

but I'm too far away to actually get – that would have to be a plane trip... it's very important, cos they still want me – it's sort of like they still want me involved, they're not just, they're not just chucking me out and I can't see them any more.” (Respondent 2)

One mentioned being able to borrow certain resources from the office was helpful.

“Pretty important [to be able to drop in at St Saviours office] because I don't have access to scanner and printers so I can just come in here and they'll help me out and if I don't know how to do something, like an important document like my Australian citizenship form they can help me out with that.” (Respondent 5)

The TLC project also aligns with the recommendations of CREATE Foundation. CREATE Foundation recommended that “caseworkers are best placed to develop significant relationships with young people to assist them in their transition to independence... [and recommended that] state and territory departments nominate dedicated staff (e.g. Transition-from-Care Officers)” (2011: x). The importance of the relational component of TLC is supported strongly by the findings of other studies (Cashmore & Paxman 2006, Fallis 2012).

Another recommendation in the literature is the use of peer mentors and facilitating groups of young people who can support one another (Rutman & Hubbersey, 2016, referencing Mann-Feder, 2011), which the TLC project does, and there is evidence in interview responses of young people providing support to one another, both to

other TLC participants and other young people who left care but were not part of TLC.

Young people identified some factors which they believed would improve the program. Brokerage, financial or material support was mentioned by all respondents as an important component of the TLC program and two respondents noted that more money or access to increased financial support would be a valuable addition to the program.

Suggestions for strengthening the program

Other feedback on how to improve TLC was along the lines of ‘more’ – more staff capacity, more housing, more funds.

“[If I was running TLC I would change] Having more money to get more stuff. Not just having the money you get from St Saviours. A decent amount of money so you can get a couch. If you don't have a bed, you can get a brand new bed. Get all the furniture all in one go so you don't waste your time... so you don't have to keep going backwards and forwards.” (Respondent 4)

“It would be good if there was more long term after care and also more long term places they could live. When you just turn 18, a year in Argyle is not long enough.” (Respondent 5)

“Probably make more people like [the TLC Coordinator] .” (Respondent 1)

One young person had difficulty with the questions about what might help young people leaving care, as she felt disinterested in assisting others when she felt like nobody had helped her. However she did identify that extra capacity to assist in regional areas outside Sydney would be of benefit to her and also other young people leaving care.

"More people for distance areas like myself, cos I know that youse have other Resi they didn't say where but they said they were quite a way away, like similar, a couple of hours away... four or more hours away from your place and it was hard to get to them and I said well maybe you should have a few more workers that are able to access that area more easily... just a few more remote workers that wouldn't mind travelling to places a bit further just so that there's a little bit more support not only for me for whoever else." (Respondent 3)

Budgeting skills a key component

The combination of unaffordable housing and youth underemployment/marginal/highly casual employment means that strong budgeting skills are vital, but just as important is the capacity of a leaving care program to assist young people materially and flexibly when required. Young people with a higher level of family support often have far more access to what amounts to in-kind assistance such as meals with family, hand-me-downs, and presents. One young person notes in their interview that the TLC project initially underestimated the amount of budgeting skills training required to assist young people into independence. Particularly in Sydney and in a context where there is minimal possibility of requesting financial assistance from family or moving 'back home' in a crisis, alternative

safety nets and strong budgeting skills are important.

Sensitive & collaborative provision of support

The TLC Coordinator being aware of the issues each household of young people may have faced (poor budgeting skills, unemployment/low income, teenage cooking skills) meant that TLC made a more sensitive and collaborative approach possible. For example, even with the assistance of the TLC project, young people living independently allude to running out of food. Young people mention instances when the TLC Coordinator has shown up at their house and cooked meals with them to freeze, or assisted them with the provision of some groceries. Some young people identified that their budgeting skills or particular choices led to them not having money for food. However, while many young people will experience some level of food insecurity during their early years of independence, people who have experienced a childhood living with their own family often have access to informal support systems such as family who they can rely on, perhaps without needing to explicitly request assistance. Young people without those support systems can access emergency relief services or youth services but the process of accessing these can be more difficult and can be associated with stigma and shame.

Different attachment styles were observable among the interviews, with some young people more difficult to engage than others. In residential care, workers "should recognise what is genuine independence and what is a pattern of over-reliance on self that a young person may have developed through years of early neglect.

“Well, I guess my teddy does [make me feel safe]... She’s the only thing I have left from that part of my life... she’s it – that’s the only one I have left.” (Respondent 3)

Young people who are too reliant on themselves may go on to have trouble forming mature, interdependent adult relationships because they are used to meeting all their own needs and have an ‘I don’t need anyone’ stance in the world” (Victorian Commission for Children & Young People, 2013:88). The challenge of supporting a young person with an avoidant attachment style to develop the socialization skills necessary to successful independent living was evident in interviews.

“Nothing is different [about being independent, from when I was younger]. I’ve never really been, um, a kid. Oh you know, I mean there was maybe some times really really really young though, I guess, but after maybe five I started doing most of the things for myself... That [question] just sounds like you’re making me... look like I haven’t been doing independent stuff up until now...”

I wasn’t even calling for help [when I reengaged with TLC]... I had cut myself off and I liked it... I was calling for a different reason and they suggested that stuff and I was like ‘Well really... want to help me and you want to actually bother to help? Find I’ll take it.’ May as well do as much as I can while I’ve got youse and then you can shove off again, not to put it horribly, it’s just I have my own life now... I’m not the kind of person who asks for help.” (Respondent 3)

On the other hand, the two young people with the most (apparently) positive outcomes both indicated feeling close to the TLC Coordinator.

“[if there was a problem I needed to talk about, would call] “Probably [the TLC Coordinator] . [Having her as someone to talk to is] very important. I call her about everything.” (Respondent 1)

“I rang [the TLC Coordinator] and she gave me advice on what to do. I always call her a lot” (Respondent 5)

The centrality of the TLC Coordinator also raises the importance of ensuring the right person is selected for the job. It is clear from the interviews and satisfaction surveys that TLC project participants are highly satisfied with the support they receive from the current Coordinator. This is also evidenced by their frequent references to the Coordinator throughout the interviews as a support person or someone they would turn to for advice.

Meanwhile there is a risk to young people who are strongly attached to a staff person, should that individual move on to other employment or for another reason. Many young people who have spent much of their childhood in out-of-home care experience disrupted attachments and have resulting difficulties in trusting others or forming stable relationships (Johnson 2010). It is crucial that a service of this nature takes pains to avoid continuing this pattern. The Coordinator’s responsibility to play varied roles of trusted adult, mentor, and at times ‘parent’ must be balanced with diverting tendencies towards dependence on them and encouraging

other supportive relationships with peers, other mentors, and family members where appropriate. Indeed, clear preparation for the end of a mentor/mentee relationship is an important success factor in mentoring programs which achieve positive outcomes (Wilczynski et. al., 2004).

Continuity of the Coordinator role to the extent possible, and consequently continuity of funding for the TLC program, is critical in maintaining the trusted supportive relationship with the potentially highly vulnerable young people who have left residential care. Meanwhile, evidence from current research on best practice in mentoring programs is highly relevant to the TLC project. The positive effects of a good mentoring program increase with the duration of the relationship, which ideally lasts over a year and involves contact on a weekly or similarly frequent basis (Jekielek, Moore & Hair, 2002). These characteristics are currently part of the TLC program model where young people are happy to participate in this level of contact.

It would be ideal, with more resources, to develop the program to better assist young people outside of the South-West Sydney area. St Saviours and Anglicare NSW South, West & ACT deliver residential care and home-based OOHHC across regional NSW as well as in south-west Sydney. Many young people who leave care at 18 would benefit from this program or at least the option of accessing it, including those in regional NSW. Two young people in the program who responded to the interview indicated that some components of TLC were not practical for them to access due to distance, and one person noted that it would be better if more support was available to people outside the Sydney area. Indeed, some young people

may choose to move out of Sydney owing to the prohibitive cost of rent (Byron et al 2015) in conjunction with other living expenses, and it would be important for them to have access to support should they choose to relocate and join a new community.

A significant strength of the program as it stands is the success of the existing TLC Coordinator in engaging with young people and developing trusting relationships with the. A priority for expansion of the program to include more staff would be to recruit workers with a high level of ability in engaging with vulnerable young people. The success of the program and the usefulness of the mentoring relationship relies heavily on the ability of the Coordinator to build rapport with young people in the program in order to maintain ongoing informal contact ('check ins') and regular social gatherings among the participants organized by the program. Literature suggests that ability to listen, a non-judgmental attitude, flexibility, respect for any ability to relate to young people, and reliability and consistency are key in a person in a mentoring role (Wilczynski et. al., 2004).

Transitioning to independence involves "the development of practical, emotional and interpersonal living skills that enable us to cope physically and emotionally and form effective social relationships" (Mendes et. al., 2011).

The findings of this report echo other studies which found that while young people felt well trained in practical and self-care skills such as cooking and shopping, they appeared less well prepared in budgeting, self-esteem and social relationships. Recommendations were that all young people should have access to planned through-care programs incorporating

practical, emotional and interpersonal skills, which took into account ethnic diversity and any disability. (Dixon & Stin 2005, in Mendes et. al. 2011). This emphasises the importance of the ongoing relationship component of any after care support program in addition to living skills training.

TLC is a flexible program and appears to play different roles in young people's lives depending on their particular needs and wishes. The value of the TLC project for the young people it has assisted so far is clear from the findings. Some young people have made significant achievements in terms of engaging in work and study and pursuing a sustainable career path aligned with their interests. Ongoing funding for the project is crucial to continue to support young people as they reach independence and leave residential or foster care.

Taking into account the findings of both the client satisfaction survey and the qualitative interviews, it would appear that young people value the support and would appreciate more, in either practical or interpersonal terms.

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Attachment 1

Info about TLC Research Project

The TLC project is a new thing; some of you have been part of TLC since it started. We want to know if it's been helpful to you, and if it has, what's been more helpful. And if it hasn't been helpful we want to know about that too. We have some ideas of what might help you, but we need to have some in-depth conversations with you about it to find out from you what really helps.

We want to find out what helps you best as you move into independence. It can be a tough time with a lot of changes and it's important to have some support. We're doing a research project to find out in detail about what's valuable to you as you've been becoming more and more independent.

As part of this research project, today we're asking you to do two things:

1. Do an online survey (client satisfaction survey) today
2. Make a time to talk later with one of our staff members to answer some questions about the service, what helps, what doesn't.

We may also need your permission to use information about you in a report, in a way that does not identify you.

Today, we'll be passing around a tablet for you to complete the survey online, it should just take 5-10 minutes. It's a client satisfaction survey about what you think about TLC at St Saviours.

The client satisfaction survey is anonymous so you can say what you want and we won't know it's you. Please tell us what you really think – we really value your thoughts, and we need to hear if there's a way we can make TLC more helpful to you.

The information from the client satisfaction survey will come back to St Saviours so we can see what you really like about the program and what you think needs to be different or better. We might also use it when we talk to the government about what our programs are doing.

It's your choice whether to participate, you don't have to do it if you don't want to. Because it takes up some of your time we do have a small gift voucher for each person who completes the survey. Tell a member of staff when you've completed the survey to get your voucher.

The next part of the project is an interview. We'd really like to talk to everyone who's been part of TLC in more depth about your experiences being part of TLC and what's important to you at this time.

If you agree to participate, we'll be asking you to have a conversation with [interviewer's name], who most of you would already know from St Saviours. [Interviewer] will have some questions and conversation points to talk about with you. We're asking you to chat about what it's been like for you over the past several months as you've dealt with the challenges of becoming an adult and being independent. This might take a couple of conversations – but [interviewer] is friendly and easy to talk to, so we're hoping that will be OK!

You'll receive a gift voucher to thank you for your time. We also know that there have been some big challenges for some of you while you've been transitioning to independence, so if you find that it's hard to talk about, we will put supports in place for you.

Again, we would really appreciate if you would join in this project. Your voice, your experience and your opinion is exactly what we need to hear right now as we're trying to make services more helpful to you and to other young people who we support.

Once we complete the interviews, it will get written up into a report which will be published and sent to the government. No real names or anything that shows who you are will be in the report. You can pick a Code Name if you like. At the moment a lot of people are talking about how there should be more support for young people who leave resi care or foster care at 18. With your help we can show the government what's important, and how important it is, for young people like yourselves.

Attachment 2

Agreement to join in the Transition to Leaving Care Research Project

The research project has been explained to me. I have had my questions answered so I understand what joining the project means for me.

I agree to be in this project.

I understand that I can stop being in this project at any time I want.

I understand that my choice to join in or not will not affect my relationship with TLC or any other service I use.

I understand that my answers will be treated confidentially.

I know my answers will be put together with others in a report that will not use real names or anything to show who I am.

I understand the report may be given to other people and may be published.

Name:.....

Signed:..... Date:.....

Attachment 3

Client satisfaction survey

1 | Think about the last 3 months with TLC... please say how much you agree or disagree with these:

a. I got help from TLC for the things I wanted to get help with.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

b. TLC staff were available when I needed them.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

c. I felt comfortable at St Saviours.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

d. TLC staff listened to me.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

e. TLC staff involved me in decisions about what would happen next.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

f. My thoughts and feelings were taken seriously.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

g. I was able to raise any concerns that I had.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Attachment 3

2 | Think about the last 3 months with TLC... please say how much you agree or disagree with these:

a. TLC helped me be more independent.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

b. TLC helped me deal more effectively with problems.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

c. TLC helped me to get involved in my community.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

d. TLC helped me with my health and wellbeing.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

e. TLC helped me with my learning and/or working goals

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

f. TLC staff were people I could trust.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

g. TLC was respectful of my family and friends.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Attachment 3

h. With TLC, I could tell someone if things were going wrong.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

i. With TLC, someone would be there for me no matter how tough things got.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

j. Overall, I was satisfied with the TLC service.

Please say how much you agree with this statement.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

3 | When TLC checks in with you, is that often enough?

- Not enough
- About right
- Too much

4 | What has been the most helpful thing about TLC?

5 | What has been the least helpful thing about TLC?

6 | What could we do differently to make TLC more helpful?

7 | Is there anything else you want to tell us about TLC?

Attachment 4

Interview questions

1. Are you studying/training at the moment?

(if yes..) What are you studying? How is it going? What would you like to do when you finish? What (if anything) has TLC done to help you with that?

(if no..) Are you thinking about studying/training? If yes what study/training would interest you? Is there anything in particular that makes it harder for you to study/train just now? What (if anything) has TLC done to help you with that?

2. Are you working at the moment?

(if yes..) What is your job? How happy are you with it? Do you have ideas for where you're going to work in the future? Do you think you'll stay in that area of work or do you want to do something else? What (if anything) has TLC done to help you with that?

(if no..) Are you looking for a job? What kind of job are you looking for? Do you think there is something else you need (like training or experience) before you will be able to get the job you want? Is there other stuff making it harder for you to work at the moment? What is that? What (if anything) has TLC done to help you with that?

3. Where do you live now? What's it like?

How long have you lived there? How many places have you lived in since you moved out of St Saviours or foster care? (If more than one), How come you had to move those times?

Are you happy with where you live now? How long do you think you'll be there? What (if anything) has TLC done to help you keep your place?

4. What do you reckon are the big things about being independent (being out on your own), that's different from when you're a kid?

Attachment 4

5. **What's the most grown-up thing you've had to do this year? Can you describe how that was for you?**
6. **What's the hardest thing you've had to do this year? Can you describe how that was for you?**
7. **What (if anything) has TLC done to help you with these things?**
8. **How well do TLC workers really understand what you need, now you're out on your own?**
9. **What are the most important things you need workers to do or help with now you're out on your own?**
10. **Can you tell me about a time when your worker did the right thing for what you needed... A time it really really helped?**
11. **Do you ever feel like support workers have one idea of how they can help you, but it's not quite what you actually need? if so - can you tell me about a time that happened?**
12. **What kinds of things make you feel safe now you're out on your own?**
13. **What kinds of things make you feel unsafe now you're out on your own?**
14. **Becoming independent and moving out can be an adventure but it can also be quite scary. How has it been for you?**

Attachment 4

- 15. Sometimes people we know, and maybe care about, do things that are not safe to be around, things that hurt or harm you or others. If someone is doing something that makes you feel unsafe or harms you, what could you do? Who could you talk to, to help you be safe?**

It can sometimes be hard to talk about it at the time but it's important to remember it's NEVER too late to talk to someone you trust about feeling unsafe.

- 16. It can be a good idea to think about what you could do in tricky situations now you're out on your own. If you'd been out and woke up in an unfamiliar place and didn't know how you got there... what could you do?**

If someone was pressuring you to let them come back to your place and you didn't feel quite right about it, what could you do?

- 17. Who are the important people in your life now? Who are they?**

(clarify for each person if they are workers, friends their age group, adult friends, friends from outside St Saviours/TLC, adult family member, young person family member) Are any of these, people you would be comfortable to rely on to help you for stuff like if you got really sick?

Person
 worker/friend/family TLC?
 Count on in crisis
 etc

- 18. If something's wrong and you need help that day or night, who would you call first? If that person isn't answering, who would you call next?**

- 19. If there's a problem or worry and you just need to talk about it, who would you call?**

- 20. How important is the TLC worker for you as a person to turn to?**

Attachment 4

21. How about St Saviours - how important is it to be able to drop in there if you want?
22. These days who do you spend your spare time with mostly?
23. Have you gotten to know any new people (like neighbours or work mates) or made any new friends this year?
24. Do you think you're more confident in social situations than you were a year ago? (if yes) What do you think helped with that?
25. Now you're out on your own, it's up to you whether you ask for help or use support services. What kinds of things might you go and get some help with?
26. How would you go about getting help with those things?
27. Do you think the way you look for help when you need something these days is different than how you did a year ago?
28. What do you think contributed to/played a part in that change?
29. Have you faced any problems this year, where you think they might have worked out differently if you had been able to get help with the problem earlier? Can you tell me about what happened?
30. When things have been hard this year what's one thing you couldn't have done without?

Attachment 4

31. What's one thing you didn't have but wished you had?

32. Do you know anyone else who has turned 18 and left resi care or foster care in the last couple of years? e.g. other TLC participants, or others who aren't involved in TLC?
What do you think has been important for them when they have faced problems?

33. If you were designing a program for young people leaving care, what would be important to include in it?

34. Finally, just specifically about TLC, what do you think has been positive about it?

35. What would you do differently if you were running it?



**TRANSITION TO
LEAVING CARE**
RESEARCH REPORT

JULY
2016

Anglicare Business Development & Innovation Team