

BETTER FUTURES **ADVANTAGED THINKING** **PRACTICE FRAMEWORK**

Joe Howie with Emma Cull, Sally James and Shelley Mallett



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The Framework draws on the Education First Youth Foyer Practice Framework, which was inspired by the work of Colin Falconer, who first developed Advantaged Thinking during his time as Director of Innovation and Strategy at the United Kingdom (UK) Foyer Federation.

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ABBREVIATIONS, DEFINITIONS AND GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACCO	Aboriginal community controlled organisation
BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
care services	formerly Out-of-Home Care
care team	Group of people who jointly care for a young person while they are In Care
care team meetings	Gathering of the care team to discuss the day-to-day care and best interests of the young person in accordance with the overall case plan
Child Protection Case Manager	Child Protection staff member assigned to manage the case plan of a young person on a protection order
Contracted Case Manager	Service organisation staff member who has been assigned case management duties under formal arrangement with Child Protection
CoP	Community of Practice
CRIS	Client Relationship Information System
CRISSP	Client Relationship Information System for Service Providers
Development Coach	Better Futures' practitioners
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services (Victorian Government)
In Care	Phase referring to Better Futures service when a young person is in care services and subject to a Child Protection statutory order
Leaving Care	Terminology previously used for services supporting young people to transition from care services
Post Care	Phase referring to Better Futures service after a young person has transitioned from care services
statutory order	A protection order made by the Children's Court of Victoria
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UK	United Kingdom

Where the term 'Aboriginal' is used it refers both to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous is retained when it refers to non-Indigenous people or is part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

ABOUT THIS FRAMEWORK

The Victorian Government's Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS) has worked in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) and partner organisations to develop Better Futures, a new practice model for working with young people transitioning from care in Victoria.

To meet this responsibility, the Victorian Government has funded a range of Leaving Care and Post Care services, all of which have historically experienced high demand and have been difficult to navigate due to different referral and access points. As a result, many young people transitioning from care were unable to establish or sustain independence.

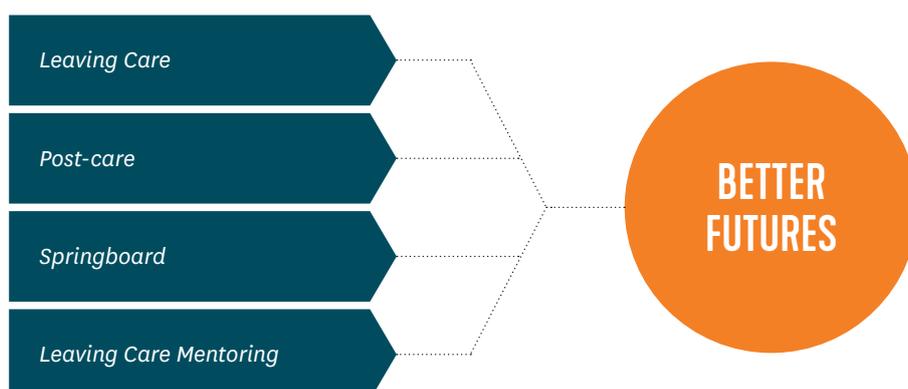
Better Futures draws together a number of pre-existing programs to strengthen and streamline support for these young people (see figure 1 below). It has a particular focus on improving access to Post Care supports and, in doing so, ensures that more young people engage in meaningful activities that will support them in establishing livelihoods within the broader community. This Framework has been developed as a guide to support the workforce to deliver Better Futures.

The Better Futures practice model is based on the Advantaged Thinking approach (see Section 4), which was developed by Colin Falconer of the UK Foyer Federation and adapted by the BSL. At the heart of Advantaged Thinking lies an understanding of people's rights to develop a good life, one which they have reason to value, and a focus on developing strengths and assets, rather than problems and needs. This approach recognises that people's capability to choose different pathways in life must be matched with actual opportunities and the resources to realise them. Advantaged Thinking is the fulfilment of this philosophy in practice. By using processes and planning resources designed to develop young people's aspirations, skills and capabilities it supports them to build the foundations for a sustainable livelihood.

Better Futures uses this approach to equip young people with the appropriate supports, networks, skills, experience and vision they need to transition from Victoria's care services to independent living. It also provides them with assertive, flexible and tailored support to ensure their active involvement in setting goals for the future.

This Framework is intended to support the delivery of Better Futures. Along with the DHSS Better Futures Practice Advice, which set out policies, procedures and requirements for Better Futures providers, the Framework will be regularly reviewed throughout the first 12 months of implementation. To facilitate this, the Better Futures Community of Practice (CoP) has been established as a forum to share learnings, best practice and to make recommendations regarding any adaptations required to the practice model.

Figure 1: Strengthen and streamline support



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USING THIS FRAMEWORK

This Framework has been developed to support practitioners, mentors, educators, employers and others working with young people in care services, including government and non-government agencies. It consists of 4 Parts and Appendices.

Part I: Introduction – introduces the Better Futures reform context, the Better Futures practice model and the origins of the Advantaged Thinking approach:

- + Section 1: Background and context
- + Section 2: Better Futures explained

Part II: Overview of the Better Futures Practice Model – explains the theory behind the Better Futures practice model and the rationale for using Advantaged Thinking:

- + Section 3: Theoretical framework
- + Section 4: Moving to an Advantaged Thinking approach

Part III: Empowering Young People to Thrive – explores the techniques employed by practitioners to empower young people to identify what they want for their futures and how they can move towards achieving their goals and realising their aspirations:

- + Section 5: Young people at the centre
- + Section 6: Practice techniques
- + Section 7: Core components of the practice model

Part IV: Operational Elements of the Practice Model – details how Better Futures service providers and practitioners work with young people and their supports, including Victoria's care services, and the Advantaged Thinking planning resources available to them and to the young people with whom they work.

- + Section 8: Operationalising the practice model
- + Section 9: Phases of the practice model
- + Section 10: Planning resources

Appendices

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Figure 2: Operational elements of the Better Futures practice model







PART I INTRODUCTION

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- + Victorian policy and reform context
- + Strengthening Leaving Care and Post Care services in Victoria

SECTION 2: BETTER FUTURES EXPLAINED

- + What is Better Futures
- + Better Futures practice approach
- + What is Advantaged Thinking

SECTION 1

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

VICTORIAN POLICY AND REFORM CONTEXT

Every year, around 500 Victorian young people aged between 16 and 18 years transition from care to independent living.¹ Young people exit from a variety of settings including foster, kinship and residential care. Transitioning from care can be a challenging experience, with many young people reporting a sense of ‘abandonment, anxiety and fear’ as they prepare to leave.² Compared with those who are supported by their family and have strong personal networks, young people transitioning from care can experience limited social, family and peer assistance on their journey to independence. Without consistent person-centred support, they are more likely to encounter difficulties in completing their education, maintaining or even accessing employment, and securing safe and ongoing housing. Young people in this situation are also more vulnerable to the impacts of structural, social and economic barriers such as high unemployment and low availability of affordable and appropriate housing options.³ As a result, many experience a higher risk of mental and physical health issues, substance dependency, homelessness and engagement with the criminal justice system.⁴

STRENGTHENING LEAVING CARE AND POST CARE SERVICES IN VICTORIA

The Roadmap for Reform⁵ sets out the Victorian Government’s long-term vision for strengthening care services and improving life outcomes for children and young people. One of its key priorities is to assist young people to achieve successful, fulfilling and independent lives as they transition from care, with a strong focus on positive economic, personal, social and housing outcomes. In 2018, the Victorian Government committed funding for Home Stretch, extending care to the age of 21 for approximately 250 young people transitioning from foster, kinship and residential care.⁶

In announcing funding of \$11.6 million to roll out Home Stretch over five years, the Government aim is for young people in its care services to make a more gradual and supported transition to independent living. Through Home Stretch, young people, in consultation with their kinship and foster carers, will have the option of remaining with their carer up to the age of 21 years, supported by an allowance for housing costs. Home Stretch will be delivered via Better Futures, which rolled out across the State in early November 2019 as part of the development of a more consolidated, streamlined and easy-to-navigate system.

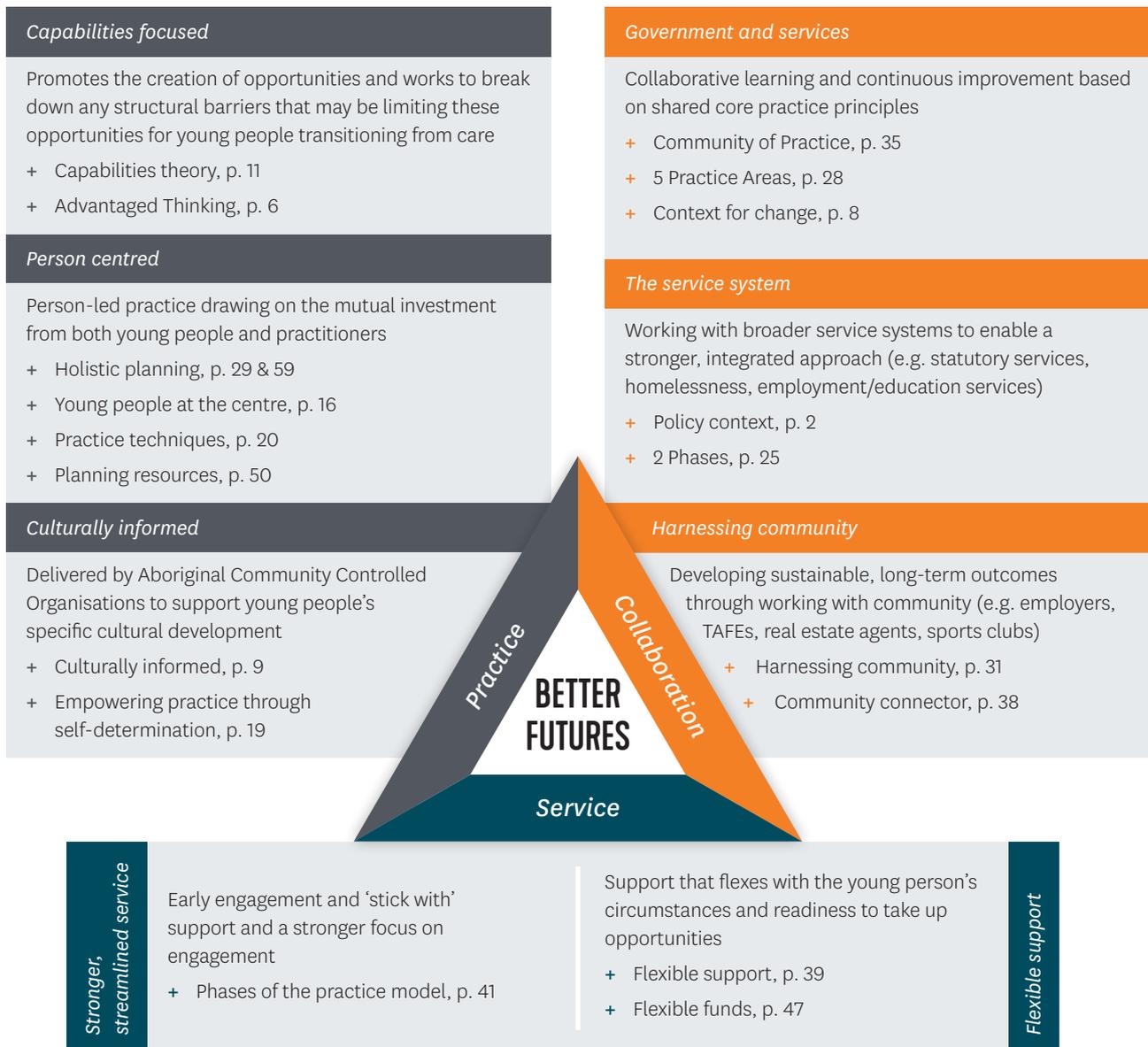
Better Futures offers a new way of working with young people and their support networks, including case managers and care teams, throughout their transition from care. It aims to engage early with young people, supporting them to have an active voice in their transition planning, and providing individualised supports across a range of life domains including education, housing and living skills, health and wellbeing, employment as well as developing broader connections in the community.

SECTION 2 BETTER FUTURES EXPLAINED

WHAT IS BETTER FUTURES

Developed by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services in consultation with the sector, Better Futures is a new practice model guided by this Framework to support young people transitioning from care. For young people to develop skills, networks and capabilities towards sustainable independence they need access to community assets, institutions, services and people within the community who value their individual qualities, experiences and preferences. They also need access to supportive professionals who can help them to see opportunities and work towards their aspirations. As such, this Framework looks at the various aspects of support needed as they relate to practice, collaboration and the service delivery outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Better Futures practice model



Vision

Better Futures will assist young people transitioning from care:

- + to become **independent yet connected** adults
- + to **determine who they are and what they want to do** in the future
- + to **establish a sustainable livelihood** (secure housing, income on which they can live, manage health and wellbeing, key living skills)
- + to develop the **capacity to thrive**.

Improved outcomes

With the benefits of consistent and holistic support to connect to community and build stronger relationships and networks, young people accessing Better Futures can expect the following outcomes:

- + improved family, cultural and social connections, and community engagement
- + better access to, and uptake of, education and employment opportunities
- + realistic and achievable housing options
- + improved access to, and retention rates for, housing
- + augmented independent living skills such as budgeting and living with others
- + better mental, physical and emotional health
- + enhanced connections to culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- + to be seen as valued community members with no contact or reduced contact with the youth justice system
- + to receive assistance from informed and responsive communities that continue to open doors to new opportunities for young people
- + a positive experience of Better Futures as a viable and sustainable future-focused program that retains quality staff and improves outcomes for young people.

Eligibility

In Victoria, the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* (Section 16) establishes a responsibility for the Secretary to provide or arrange the provision of services to assist in supporting a person under the age of 21 years to gain the capacity to make the transition to independent living where:

- + the Secretary has had parental responsibility for the person; and
- + on the Secretary's responsibility ending, the person is of an age, or intends, to live independently.

Young people in foster, kinship and residential care are eligible for Better Futures if they are subject to a family reunification order, a care by Secretary order or a long-term care order on or after their sixteenth birthday. Following cessation of their order, young people can receive support up until 21 years of age. Young people on permanent care orders, interim accommodation orders and family preservation orders are not eligible for Better Futures.

BETTER FUTURES PRACTICE APPROACH

Advantaged Thinking

An Advantaged Thinking approach is about working with young people to develop and invest in their talents and aspirations, thereby enabling them to thrive, rather than focusing solely on their immediate needs. It promotes the creation of opportunities and works to break down any structural barriers that may be limiting those opportunities for young people. Advantaged Thinking is explained in more detail in Section 4.

Holistic, self-directed planning across 5 Offers

Offering person-centered and directed planning and support across all aspects of young people's lives encourages a sense of agency in their decision making about the future. These are focused around the 5 Offers – in Education, Employment, Housing and Living Skills, Health and Wellbeing, and Connections (social, family, civic, cultural, religious).

Streamlined service and flexible support

Simplifying and enhancing access to services through an early referral to Better Futures at 15 years and 9 months, and providing levels of support capable of flexing up and down to match each young person's circumstances, motivations and challenges.

Early engagement and 'stick-with' support

Early engagement with young people prior to their transition from care enables Better Futures Development Coaches to 'stick with' those young people on their journey to adulthood by offering coaching, guidance and support over a sustained period.

Harnessing community effort

Connecting with community members, and leveraging key partnerships across local communities, businesses, services, government and philanthropic organisations, provides young people with the opportunities, networks and resources they need to build sustainable livelihoods.

Community of Practice for collaborative learning and continuous improvement

Bringing practitioners and partners together to review, improve and refine practice and implementation learnings, to identify systemic challenges and to enhance sectoral capacity for innovative service development and design ensures that knowledge is developed and shared.

Culturally informed

Building on a culturally informed approach that is delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations supports young people's self-determination and cultural development.

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WHAT IS ADVANTAGED THINKING

While building the skills and talents of individuals is important, it is equally critical to invest in sourcing the opportunities, networks and resources that young people need if they are to use their skills and talents effectively. In the Better Futures practice model, we use the Advantaged Thinking practice approach to direct the way we work with the young people.

Originally developed for the UK Foyer movement,⁷ Advantaged Thinking is not simply a strengths-based approach focusing solely on the individual. It combines individual with structural approaches to change, understanding that how we view and value young people in our wider society influences the way we work with them, which in turn influences their ability to access opportunities and resources. While disadvantaged or deficit thinking defines people by their problems, and subsequently builds services based on managing these problems, Advantaged Thinking takes a different focus. It instead acknowledges the challenges but focuses on each young person's innate skills and talents and then invests in these talents appropriately. It emphasises that young people have a vital contribution to make to the social and economic life of society, but can only succeed if they have access to the opportunities and networks that facilitate their participation.

An Advantaged Thinking approach, therefore, implies a shift both in how the government and the community sectors invest in young people, and how employers and the community perceive their capacity to contribute to this investment. Rather than primarily investing in young people's problems, i.e. focusing on crisis intervention and needs-based solutions, we should invest instead in building their abilities (for individual as well as social good). We also need to develop young people's assets and co-create solutions – real jobs, real education and real community connections – for them to achieve independent adulthood.

Fundamentally, then, the Advantaged Thinking approach challenges us to re-think:

- + the way we view young people experiencing disadvantage;
- + the activities and approaches we use when working with them;
- + the way we develop those diverse groups of people who are, or will be engaged in, promoting and enabling young people to reach their potential;
- + how we speak about young people, and the use of positive rather than deficit language; and
- + how we involve young people in developing their own solutions and improving the way we work with them.



PART II **BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

SECTION 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- + 'Instant adulthood'
- + Smooth and volatile housing pathways
- + Stable connectedness
- + A culturally informed service
- + Reframing 'casework' and 'case management'

SECTION 4: MOVING TO AN ADVANTAGED THINKING APPROACH

- + Capabilities
- + Inclusive growth
- + Social capital

SECTION 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

GO TO

‘INSTANT ADULTHOOD’

While the transition to adulthood was once a linear process – from school to work followed by family formation – today it can involve multiple discrete but interlinked pathways weaving across education, housing, health and parenting. The transition may also involve ‘backtracking’ on one or more pathways, such as returning to the family home or disengaging temporarily from education. As young people navigate their journey to adulthood, many remain living in their familial homes and/or receive ongoing support from their families and networks well into their twenties.

By contrast, currently young people in care services transition to independence on or before their eighteenth birthday. The result is often a ‘compressed and accelerated’ path to independent adulthood⁸ in which these young people become responsible for achieving economic engagement, accessing and maintaining housing, forming and maintaining social relationships, and looking after themselves on their own.

The challenges experienced by young people transitioning from care services can be grouped into five outcome areas – personal, social, housing, economic and educational – all of which are critical for a successful transition to independent living. (NB: these outcome areas form the basis for holistic planning as outlined in Section 7). Although the journey to independence of each of these young people is unique, the literature⁹ indicates three common experiences:

- 1 Young people transitioning from care services who have had a positive experience and developed resilience often transition later, via a gradual and planned approach.
- 2 Those who transition early and experience placement instability are more likely to experience problems or difficulties Post Care, including periods of homelessness and unemployment.
- 3 The most disadvantaged group are those who have had early damaging family experiences that neither the care services or later support were able to help them overcome. This group is even more likely to experience unemployment and homelessness and be socially isolated than the previous group.¹⁰

These three experiences provide an insight into the diversity of the transition experience, and the challenges involved in attaining a state of readiness for independence.

SMOOTH AND VOLATILE HOUSING PATHWAYS

Improving housing pathways and outcomes for young people transitioning from care services is a critical component of improving life outcomes. Johnson et al. explain the imperative for this as being ‘two-fold’: that stable housing not only positively affects other life outcomes, but that improving housing outcomes for young people bypasses some of the moral and policy challenges created when they become ‘wards of the State’.¹¹ As these young people experience limited family support, they are often positioned at a heightened risk of homelessness in the period directly after leaving care services.¹² For this reason, Better Futures is designed to provide ongoing support for young people up to the age of 21 years.

In researching the experiences of young people transitioning from care services nationwide, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute identified two distinctive housing pathways – smooth and volatile.¹³ Smooth housing pathways include:

- + fewer placements;
- + a feeling of safety while in care;
- + experiencing the transition at an older age; and
- + a personal involvement in planning the transition to Post Care.

▶ [SECTION 7](#) p. 29

Volatile housing pathways include:

- + a higher number of in care placements;
- + experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse prior to or while in care;
- + transitioning from care services at a younger age; and
- + not having transition plans in place.

Although the two pathways are simplifications of the true diversity experienced by young people, common barriers and opportunities enable these generalised groupings. The study highlighted that while accessing and maintaining housing are critical components for a smooth transition, reliable and sustainable social relationships are equally important.¹⁴

Clearly, positive experiences of care services directly correlate with positive outcomes for young people during and after they transition to independence. Thus, it is vital they have access to a full range of opportunities – such as stable social relationships and sustained engagement with education and or employment – to foster smooth pathways.

STABLE CONNECTEDNESS

Young people's relationships with those who value and support them are known to have a positive effect on their wellbeing. These relationships build self-esteem and motivate young people to engage not just with friends, family and colleagues but also with the broader community.¹⁵ Young people who have the support of, and are connected to, their family tend to have strong social networks of supportive adults, peers and community members. Those transitioning from care services are more likely to have limited social networks, and many experience fragmented family relationships.

Securing a long-term placement, or 75 per cent of time with one carer,¹⁶ and having a strong relationship with a key support worker help to establish protective factors in the forming of other social and personal connections. As many young people transitioning from care services return to their family of origin post care, the positive impact of having stable placements and support in reconnecting with families of origin is also emphasised across the literature.¹⁷ In many cases, family contact while in care can positively influence the transition to independence, although in some cases this is not possible.

In the absence of family and support networks, young people require assistance in developing and maintaining their own connections and networks. Acknowledging that many experience social isolation and loneliness during their transition, Propp, Ortega and NewHeart emphasise the need to build their 'interdependence' as opposed to their 'independence'.¹⁸

A CULTURALLY INFORMED SERVICE

Aboriginal people are significantly overrepresented in care services across the nation. Recent data reveal that they are 10 times more likely than non-Aboriginal young people to be placed in care,¹⁹ with one in six Aboriginal children or young people having experienced care services.²⁰ Although these interventions are targeted at addressing their immediate safety, they can also have much broader implications for young people's social and cultural wellbeing.

For Aboriginal young people, a strong sense of connection to family, community, Country and culture can be fundamental to supporting their safety and identity, and is positively correlated with smooth post care transitions. Mendes, Saunders and Baidawi found that Aboriginal young people also frequently occupy care-giving roles for their own children as well as for siblings and extended family, both as they prepare to leave care services and in the Post Care phase.²¹ Cultural connectedness supports resilience, identity development and social connectedness, which is especially important when young people are facing the pressures of transitioning from care services and being a care-giver.

The importance of culturally informed care has been formally recognised through the establishment of the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care directives.²² These outline why Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are best placed to work with young people's families, communities and other professionals in providing a culturally informed service based on self-determination principles for those transitioning from care services. They are also informed by a holistic approach to health:

Aboriginal health means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total well-being of their Community. It is a whole-of-life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life.²³

This perspective differs from the implicit values of the broader social services system which typically

... directs support at individual people or family units and fails to take into account the broader sharing of resources and responsibilities in Indigenous culture as well as cultural obligations to visit, care for and farewell family and community members sometimes located far away.²⁴

It is of paramount importance that mainstream services and providers are aware of this individualist approach and work to ensure that their own practice is inclusive and culturally safe so they do not unintentionally limit Aboriginal people's right to lead healthy, connected and meaningful lives (for more on culturally informed practice, see 'Empowering practice through self-determination' in Section 5).

REFRAMING 'CASEWORK' AND 'CASE MANAGEMENT'

Language used by services and practitioners can sometimes inadvertently de-personalise working relationships with people accessing social services. Young people consistently report they do not wish to be referred to as 'a case'. 'Casework' and 'case management' also typically refer to individually focused work within social services. Rubin provides a broad definition of case management within the social service context as 'an approach to service delivery that attempts to ensure that clients with complex, multiple problems and disabilities, receive all the services they need in a timely and appropriate fashion'.²⁵ This definition recognises that people with complex and multiple needs are likely to be receiving support from a range of service providers and that this requires coordination.

Other definitions note that casework generally involves the following common stages: assessment; monitoring; referral; coordination; and direct service delivery.²⁶ There is, however, growing criticism of case management approaches or, more specifically, how they are practised, particularly the way they tend to define, focus on and invest in people's problems rather than their potential. Their individualisation of clients also makes them an inefficient way of dealing with structural challenges such as poverty and homelessness.²⁷ Providing coordination across a service system that does not provide adequate access to housing or entry-level employment, for example, does nothing to increase the number of services available or to reduce structural inequalities; it can instead serve to entrench welfare dependence.

Better Futures Development Coaches can work across these service systems while offering young people access to consistent and holistic support after they leave care services. The Better Futures practice model provides Development Coaches with a range of resources and techniques including coaching, aspiration mapping, youth-directed goal setting, and investment in opportunities tailored to young people's interests and goals rather than just focusing on their needs or problems. It also explicitly promotes practice approaches such as the Campaign and harnessing community through 5 Key Partnerships, which are specifically focused on promoting structural change by garnering investment not only from services but from the whole community – including business, government, services and philanthropy – to create greater access to resources, networks and opportunities for young people.

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▶ [THE CAMPAIGN](#) p. 28

▶ [5 KEY PARTNERSHIPS](#) p. 31

SECTION 4

MOVING TO AN ADVANTAGED THINKING APPROACH

Advantaged Thinking represents a paradigm shift in the way we think about and respond to young people experiencing disadvantage. It is a shift away from deficit, disadvantaged or problem-saturated thinking towards Advantaged Thinking and acting. It is focused on identifying, developing and, most importantly, investing in the skills, capabilities and assets of young people so they can establish sustainable livelihoods beyond the service system.

A number of key ideas, theories and frameworks are driving this emerging paradigm shift, and have broadly informed the Better Futures practice model. These ideas also align with and underpin the BSL's adaptation of the UK Foyer Federation's Advantaged Thinking²⁸ to a range of youth transitions programs.²⁹ Some of the key ideas and frameworks across these programs include:

- + capabilities
- + inclusive growth
- + social capital.

These broad ideas, briefly outlined in this Section, provide the theoretical and practical underpinnings for the Better Futures practice model. Together they inspire a way of working with young people that recognises their:

- + vital role in social and economic life
- + individual capacity
- + right to access opportunities and social networks that facilitate their social and economic participation
- + rights, responsibilities and commitments to themselves and the wider community
- + sense of belonging
- + personal agency or capacity to make decisions on their own and other's behalf.

CAPABILITIES

Policy and programmatic sectors are increasingly looking to the capabilities approach as a way of providing more productive and effective responses to address complex social issues.³⁰ Developed almost 20 years ago by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the approach identifies and 'valorises' people's fundamental capabilities; put simply, it is an approach that focuses on what people can be, rather than on their limitations or problems.

Sen's capabilities framework was based on the understanding that the freedom to achieve wellbeing is a moral right and is understood in terms of people's opportunities for doing and being what they have reason to value. In Sen's words, capabilities are 'the substantive freedoms [a person] enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value'.³¹

The capabilities approach considers both an individual's capacity to access and develop specific functionings (such as learning to ride a bicycle), while also taking into account the broader structures that enable them to access resources and opportunities (cycling, with access to a bicycle).³²

Nussbaum subsequently critiqued and modified Sen's approach, emphasising that people's actual capacity to express, show or realise these capabilities is affected by their life circumstances or context. For Nussbaum then, it is not good enough to focus on what people can be, on their potential. We must also focus on what people can do, on the quality of life that they are actually able to achieve: 'When comparing societies and assessing them for their basic decency or justice what is important is what each person is able to do, and to be'.³³

Nussbaum analyses this quality of life in terms of functionings – states of being – and capabilities – a set of valuable functionings to which a person has effective access. A person's capability represents the effective freedom of an individual to choose between different functioning combinations, the effective freedom to choose between different ways of living.

In relation to Better Futures, this approach highlights that without effective access to opportunities and resources, young people transitioning from care services are effectively denied the freedom to develop their capabilities for economic and social participation. Unlike their peers living in supportive and resourced home environments, many are denied the freedom to choose between different ways of living.

Implicit in the capabilities approach is the recognition that diverse effort across multiple sectors – not simply service providers and government – is critical. Thus, contributions from education providers, employers and health professionals are the key to quality training and education, 'real-world' experiences and specialised support.

INCLUSIVE GROWTH

This emphasis on recognition and investment in the development of people's capabilities, as outlined by Sen and Nussbaum, is reinforced by the theory of inclusive growth. Proponents of this approach argue that social inequality not only creates individual and social costs – thereby 'breeding social resentment and political instability by stifling some people's economic mobility' – but, importantly, that it 'also [has] negative impacts on economic performance'.³⁴

In short, they argue that economic growth, social development and inclusion should go hand in hand, because strong social foundations underpin a robust economy and promote individual wellbeing and economic growth. This, in turn, supports the social foundations of a society. Thus, addressing inequality through policies, institutions and effective governance systems can result in a more efficient economy and pave the way for a society and its individual members truly to thrive.³⁵

When applied to young people participating in Better Futures, an inclusive growth approach to economic development prioritises investment in targeted education, preventive health measures, housing opportunities, and job creation infrastructure and programs. Engaging them in meaningful training, education and employment not only promotes economic productivity and provides businesses with job-ready labour, but also benefits the young people themselves.³⁶ By investing in their abilities, rather than supporting them to manage their problems, we are investing in the future prosperity of the community as a whole.

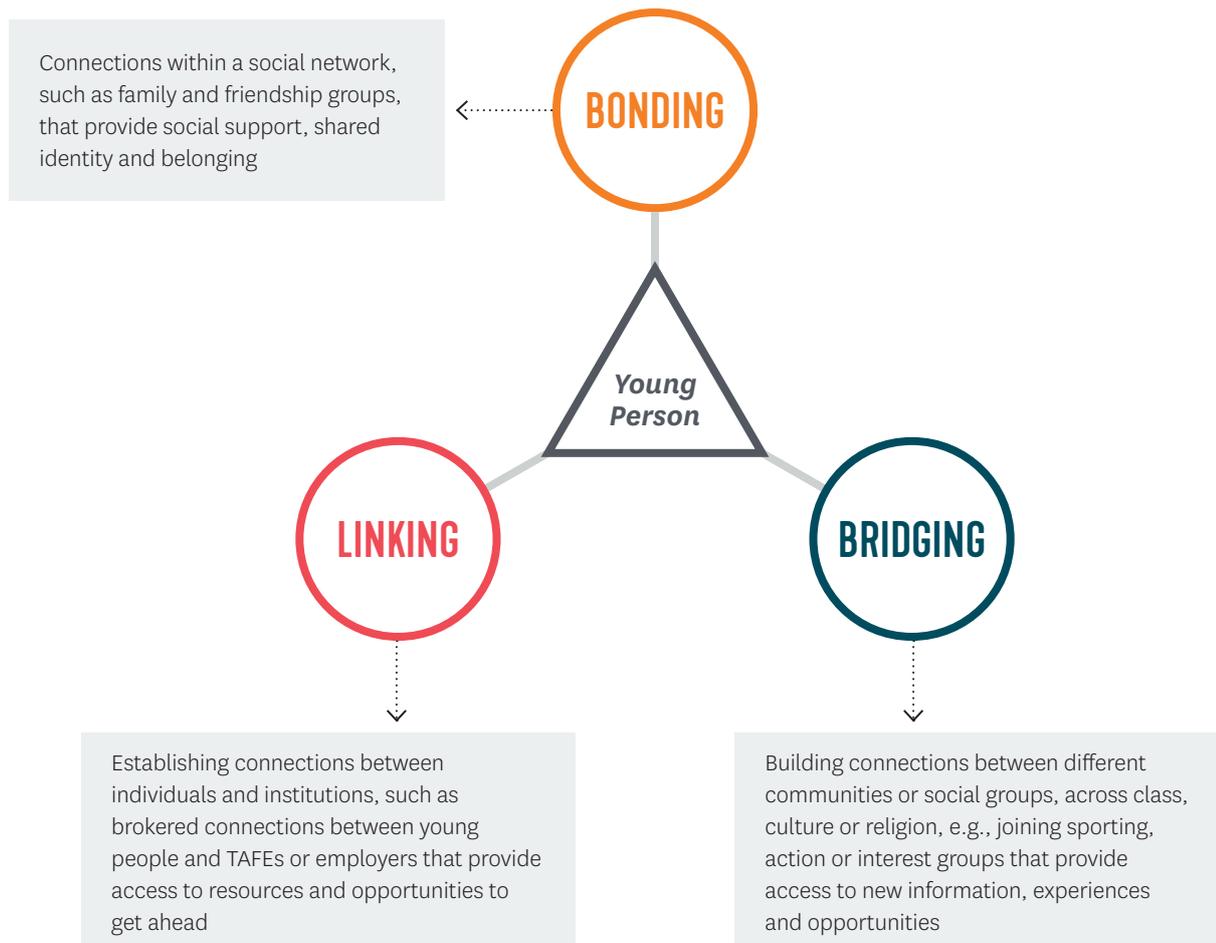
SOCIAL CAPITAL

Colin Falconer defines social capital simply as the resources provided to an individual through the social networks they hold. He notes that: 'Social capital is widely perceived as a means to understand how we engage as citizens (Putnam 2000), how we secure economic gains (Sobel 2002), and how communities develop (Gittell & Vidal 1998)'.³⁷

Three dimensions of social capital are commonly distinguished – bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital involves trust and reciprocity in social networks within a community of people who are 'similar'; bridging social capital refers to networks that are established across diverse communities; and linking social capital refers to connections between individuals and institutions of authority. All three are important for the construction of a civil society and individual health and wellbeing – bonding social capital for social support and solidarity, and bridging and linking for providing resources, opportunities and links to institutions and systems that aid 'getting ahead'.³⁸

To build sustainable livelihoods young people experiencing disadvantage need access to, or the opportunities to develop, all three forms of social capital, which Better Futures provides. However, to build independent yet connected lives they also need to be recognised, and to recognise themselves, as part of the community with rights and responsibilities to themselves and to others – to see themselves as capable of acting and participating on their own and on other's behalf.

Figure 4: The three forms of social capital needed for building sustainable livelihoods







PART III

EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THRIVE

SECTION 5: YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE

- + Young people's paths to independence
- + From surviving to thriving
- + Where young people are at
- + Readiness and flexible support
- + Empowering practice through self-determination

SECTION 6: PRACTICE TECHNIQUES

- + Coaching
- + Personal planning and support
- + Assertive outreach
- + Experiential learning
- + Group work activities
- + Participatory and empowering practice
- + Peer initiatives

SECTION 7: CORE COMPONENTS OF THE PRACTICE MODEL

- + Service
 - 2 Phases
- + Practice
 - 5 Practice Areas
 - 5 Offers
- + Collaboration
 - 5 key Partnerships
 - Community of Practice

SECTION 5

YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PATHS TO INDEPENDENCE

Young people take diverse pathways into adulthood; they do not necessarily take a linear or prescriptive trajectory that meets definitive milestones along the way. Whatever path they take, the development of a positive and 'stable enough' sense of self, combined with a positive asset base of skills, resources and opportunities is key to young people making a positive transition to independent adulthood.³⁹ Negotiating relationships, developing life and independent living skills, understanding one's sexual identity and creating a set of values are all part of this journey.

The Better Futures practice model is designed to enable young people to develop this 'stable enough' sense of self and assist them:

- + to become independent yet connected adults
- + to determine who they are and what they want to do in the future
- + to realise they are capable of establishing a sustainable livelihood – secure housing, income on which they can live independently, managed health and wellbeing, key living skills
- + to develop the capacity to flourish/thrive.

FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

In contrast to traditional community development models, the sustainable livelihood approach focuses not on framing people as 'vulnerable', or 'in need', but rather, on recognising that people in poverty are 'active agents of change' who make rational choices and decisions about their lives.⁴⁰ At its centre, the approach aims to shift the narrative around poverty, and to create opportunities for people to be heard, to influence policy, and to be respected and included in decision making that affects their livelihoods.

As mentioned in the previous Section, most service systems seeking to help young people experiencing disadvantage have traditionally operated from a deficit approach, focusing on risks and needs and creating systems that can specifically address these. This has often had the unintended consequence of further marginalising people by embedding them within systems separate from the mainstream.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Ladder⁴¹ provides a way of thinking about and responding to people experiencing disadvantage that focuses on identifying, developing and, most importantly, investing in the skills, capabilities and assets of these people so that they can establish sustainable livelihoods. The Better Futures practice model reflects four distinct levels from the Sustainable Livelihoods Ladder, which symbolise young people's journey from surviving to thriving based on a combination of their motivations, challenges and circumstances. Better Futures also uses the ladder as a conceptual tool for Development Coaches to support young people to reflect on their current livelihood and to consider the capabilities, resources and networks (personal and professional) they require to access a *good life*.

This process directs Better Futures service providers to harness meaningful resources and opportunities that support young people to thrive. Furthermore, a sustainable livelihoods approach provides a way of thinking about resilience in the form of young people's capacity to cope with, and recover from, stress or shock.⁴²

Table 1: From surviving to thriving

LIVELIHOOD	CAPABILITIES	IMPACT
Surviving	Dependent livelihood Day-to-day sustainability	Everything is a struggle A life defined by deficit Inadequate resources and supports available Focus on the past and present – not planning for or imagining a future that is different to the life they have at present Crisis interventions
Coping	Semi-dependent livelihood Short-term sustainability Managing problems	Things are okay, but unlikely to get much better in the future A life limited by deficit Precarious resources and supports available Focus on the past and present – not planning or imagining a future that is different to the life they have at present
Building	Semi-autonomous livelihood Mid-term sustainability Overcoming challenges and focusing on positives and capabilities	Things are beginning to improve A life moving from deficit to asset Access to resources and supports Focus on the present and future Planning for and imagining a future that is different to the life they have at present
Moving to sustainable, connected independence		
Thriving	Autonomous livelihood Long-term sustainability Focus on positives, talents and capabilities Personal networks and supportive informal relationships	The individual is in a strong situation and can recover from shocks A life defined by asset Well-established resources and support systems developed Independent yet connected adults Focus on the present and especially the future Planning for and imagining a future that is fulfilling and sustainable

WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AT

To assist young people to navigate through these levels of livelihood – from surviving towards thriving – Better Futures starts with where they are currently at. The approach strives to enable them to identify who they are now, who they want to be in the future, and what they want to do, and need to do, to attain their goals.

Better Futures Development Coaches then work with young people to nurture their capabilities:

- + to overcome any limiting mindsets
- + to build aspiration and achievement
- + to grow existing strengths and nurture talents.

Through delivery of the 5 Offers, young people are able to identify and develop the capabilities that will enable them to thrive and to build an independent livelihood.

READINESS AND FLEXIBLE SUPPORT

As they transition to independence and are exposed to different opportunities and challenges, young people are likely to move up and down through different stages of the Sustainable Livelihoods Ladder. By offering flexible levels of support, Better Futures is able to tailor support according to what they are ready for and interested in engaging with at any given time, rather than focusing only on addressing challenges or crises.

Better Futures Development Coaches determine readiness through coaching young people to identify their interests and aspirations across a range of pathways. This process allows them:

- + to explore where they are at
- + to tune in to their aspirations, motivations *and* challenges.

It also allows Development Coaches to tailor opportunities and activities that:

- + have the potential to open up new possibilities for young people
- + can help them to develop and explore their aspirations for the future.

Challenges are addressed, not as a precondition of further engagement in Better Futures, but rather as part of the pathway to achieving self-directed goals. Having agency over their pathway is critical to promoting young people's agency – to think and act on their own behalf – and also to moving closer to being ready for sustainable and connected independence.

The Better Futures practice model also enables Development Coaches:

- + to 'stick with' or journey with young people through to independent adulthood
- + to coach, guide and support them over a sustained period
- + to provide intensive support when young people need or are ready for it
- + to offer, where more appropriate, light-touch support and access to services, opportunities or brokerage.

EMPOWERING PRACTICE THROUGH SELF-DETERMINATION

On entering care services young people, particularly those who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, often face a level of separation from their culture, history and Country. The way they express their relationship with these aspects of their lives may vary widely. Self-determination, however, is key to recognising the fundamental right of young people to choose, define and develop these relationships.

Self-determination means Aboriginal people and their communities make decisions, have a voice and lead on their own terms and use their own cultural values, models, paradigms and ways of working.⁴³

The development of the Better Futures practice model has been informed by ongoing consultation with Victorian ACCOs⁴⁴ to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people the opportunity to connect with culturally relevant experiences, individuals, communities and services across all areas of their life. Local ACCOs play an important role in delivering Better Futures by ensuring that young people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander have every opportunity to access culturally safe spaces and people, and receive culturally aware practice. The importance of this approach is well encapsulated by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency or VACCA:

Children can become invisible, their voice unheard, when our work is crises driven and our focus is on carers and parents... (o)ur practice needs to value their contribution to understanding their own experiences and determining the course of their own lives.

Aboriginal children are part of families and communities that have historically not had a voice and continue to be denied the right to self-determination... The experience Aboriginal children have with you – your ability to engage with them, build trust and act wisely on what they say – will directly impact on their self esteem, identity and capacity to develop a proud and loud Aboriginal voice.⁴⁵

SECTION 6

PRACTICE TECHNIQUES

In recognising that young people are the specialists in their own life story, key to engaging with them hinges on opening the conversation and prioritising an understanding of where they are at in their journey. Such an approach can enable young people, in the first instance, to navigate Better Futures, participate across the 5 Offers and go on to build sustainable livelihoods.

Empowering young people to understand their own sense of self – and to access the resources, opportunities and people to help them expand their skills and capabilities – is pivotal to them building a sustainable livelihood. Outlined here is a range of techniques that Better Futures Development Coaches will need to employ and tailor to each person's specific circumstances, needs and aspirations. What is implicit in all of these techniques is the ethos of reciprocity and the empowerment of young people as active agents in defining their own future.

Relationships and positive interactions can be transformative and can inspire, motivate and enable young people to build their capabilities and reach their life goals. The techniques used will depend on:

- + which method will best support an individual's goals and circumstances
- + the purpose of the interaction
- + the people (staff/volunteers/external agencies) involved in the interaction
- + the expected longevity of the interaction
- + the skills and experience of the people involved.

Thus, Development Coaches will also work as personal planners and group workers at different times and, as such, may employ a wide range of methods. These can and should be supported by existing best practice techniques that the workforce may already be equipped with such as positive psychology, mindfulness, narrative-based approaches, motivational interviewing, solutions-focused therapy and trauma-informed practice .

COACHING

Better Futures employs an innovative coaching approach to working with young people. The role of Development Coaches is relational, solution focused and goal oriented to support young people to become independent yet connected adults. Such an approach provides them with a conceptual framework and a range of planning resources and techniques to use with young people at different points within the life-cycle of the coaching relationship – from setting up personal coaching sessions to identifying and working with any limiting beliefs.

In particular, the coaching approach aims:

- + to build young people's personal and social capabilities
- + to foster agency through the use of evidence-informed planning resources and techniques.

In this relationship, young people are seen as capable, creative and the experts on their own life who can both analyse their current situation and determine their goals. The coaching conversation is predominantly future focused and motivational so as to assist them to set goals and determine a way forward to achieve them. By adopting a coaching rather than a case management approach to our work with young people, we are making a direct investment in their individual talents and skills, as opposed to investing in 'fixing' their perceived deficits.

GO TO

▶ [TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE APPENDIX 4](#) p. 64

▶ [MY VOICE PLANNING RESOURCES](#) p. 50

In addition, coaching is focused on a clear set of objectives and goals, which means that once these are achieved the relationship/agreement between the Development Coach and the person being coached is able to come to a natural ending. Coaching is task oriented and it is the Development Coach's role:

- + to recognise and improve young people's skills, abilities and/or knowledge
- + to have expectations, and make demands, of them
- + to motivate them and facilitate further opportunities for their skills development.

PERSONAL PLANNING AND SUPPORT

Better Futures works with young people to plan, facilitate and coordinate their access to resources, opportunities, networks and personal support. By pointing them in the right direction and facilitating their connections with key services, resources and opportunities, Development Coaches work with, rather than for, young people to progress their learning goals and objectives. They also work with them on achieving their individual goals across the 5 Offers of Education, Housing and Living Skills, Health and Wellbeing, Employment and Connections. There may be a coordination function within this role, but primarily the Development Coach is there to provide personal support and planning assistance.

This practice model is greatly influenced by positive psychology and mindfulness, which means that our focus is on:

- + reducing distress through enhancing self-awareness
- + understanding our choices and decisions and clarifying our goals
- + making sense of and coming to terms with past traumatic experiences
- + taking responsibility for our own lives
- + working in the 'here and now'.

Key to the positive psychology approach is the understanding 'that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves and to enhance their experiences of love, work and play'.⁴⁶

At its core, Better Futures aims to equip young people with the skills to flourish and thrive rather than simply to cope or survive. As such, it takes a proactive and preventive, rather than a reactive, approach to health and wellbeing, and attempts to equip young people with the skills to respond, and act constructively, to mental health challenges.

ASSERTIVE OUTREACH

Assertive outreach is a technique used with those who are eligible for, but not actively engaging with or seeking access to, services. This approach 'recognises the many barriers vulnerable and disconnected young people face when accessing services', including 'a lack of confidence, limited resources, a sense of powerlessness or language and cultural barriers',⁴⁷ as well as a limited knowledge of available services and how and where to access them.

While assertive outreach varies between settings, it generally contains at least some of the following key features:

- + a proactive and streamlined service delivery that seeks out and offers services to those who are not actively seeking them;
- + flexible service outreach in public, youth-friendly locations or, more generally, the capacity to meet or travel with young people to places where they feel comfortable rather than in designated service settings; and
- + a number of both individual and connected services that range from meeting immediate needs to ongoing assistance and support.

Better Futures Development Coaches will initiate contact and work with young people:

- + to 'find' or identify all those eligible for services;
- + to ensure their awareness of what is on offer; and
- + to establish a relationship, or at least familiarity, with the range of available services.

Assertive outreach will also enable Development Coaches to keep in contact with those young people no longer actively engaged with the service by providing them with light-touch support and follow up. This will not only allow for earlier intervention but should also reduce young people's need for, and/or frequency of, support when they are in the 'surviving' zone on the Sustainable Livelihoods Ladder.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning is a technique that locates young people in environments where they are able to apply knowledge to real-world problems and scenarios.⁴⁸ It provides a supportive environment for those with experience of care services to engage with opportunities and become confident enough to take the crucial steps needed towards independence. By providing a tactile method to learn through 'concrete experiences' in the 'here and now',⁴⁹ it allows young people:

- + to test assumptions around goals and aspirations;
- + to make clear and personal observations about their own performance;
- + to be supported and instructed, and later encouraged, to reflect and actively experiment; and
- + to re-assess their pathways or to move ahead with greater conviction and motivation.

The experiential loop is often referred to as 'learning through reflection and doing'⁵⁰ and is sensitive to the hands on learners who have typically struggled with more mainstream approaches to learning,

GROUP WORK ACTIVITIES

The importance of group work as a key technique in working with young people is widely recognised. These type of sessions encourage discussion and free expression of opinion, thereby leading young people to discover their aptitudes, talents, weaknesses and strengths. The group and the facilitator can recognise leaders and enhance their capabilities through activities such as speaking up, mobilising, organising and planning.⁵¹ It can also bring about changes and development in 'skills, knowledge, attitudes and values'.⁵²

Group work is a collaborative platform in which providers can deliver activities directed towards building young people's skills, capabilities and opportunities, with the sessions organised and customised to align with common interests or developmental needs. One-on-one guidance and planning alongside group activities allows those involved to continue exploring and working on their individual goals in a confidential setting.

This approach recognises that collaboration offers a pooling of expertise and resources within service delivery, which further aids the creation of sustainable outcomes. This is especially so for those who may have experienced disengagement from education and other mainstream opportunities or social isolation.

GO TO

▶ SUSTAINABLE
LIVELIHOODS
LADDER p. 17

PARTICIPATORY AND EMPOWERING PRACTICE

Participatory and empowering practice promotes young people with lived experience as valuable assets. It supports their unique contribution and draws on their innate wisdom, interests, knowledge and readiness to be involved in discussions, events and opportunities. Young people who have experienced care services are often passionate advocates for improving services and can hold the potential to unlock innovative practice and operational solutions. This can be fostered internally within organisations, as well as be supported by any number of specialist services and bodies available in Victoria.⁵³

‘How we involve people’ – Advantaged Thinking services see young people as an opportunity. They believe that the experiences which have challenged young people also offer their own set of insights and qualities that can shape a positive future. Which is why it is essential, and not just a matter of enlightened youth work practice, to involve (as well as support) young people in both creating the solutions to their lives and offering their expertise to assist others.⁵⁴

PEER INITIATIVES

All young people are equipped with talents, skills and interests and they also benefit from helping others.⁵⁵ Better Futures focuses on creating opportunities to develop peer-led initiatives that will shift attitudes towards young people from being welfare recipients to active members in the community with something to offer others. The benefits of this approach for young people include the enhanced self-esteem that comes from learning they have something to offer, a sense of control that can be empowering and a feeling of social usefulness. This is consistent with the evidence that those involved as peer ‘helpers’ tend to enjoy higher self-esteem than those who are helped by them, although these young people also gain from the interaction but to a lesser degree. As Kohler and Strain found 30 years ago:

‘Peer-led initiatives can increase young people’s self esteem and their sense of effectiveness and control in their lives.’⁵⁶

SECTION 7

CORE COMPONENTS OF THE PRACTICE MODEL

Advantaged Thinking is the DNA of the Better Futures practice model (see figure 5), a way of thinking that permeates all aspects of our work. The approach enables young people to achieve sustainable livelihoods by focusing on, and harnessing their talents, skills and abilities. It calls for an investment in young people's capabilities rather than a focus on solving their problems. Advantaged Thinking is embedded throughout all aspects of the Better Futures practice model, which comprises 2 Phases, 5 Offers, 5 Practice Areas underpinned by 5 Key Partnerships and sustained by the Community of Practice, as outlined here.

Figure 5: Better Futures practice model



SERVICE

2 Phases, p. 25

Working collaboratively In Care and providing active engagement Post Care

PRACTICE

5 Practice Areas, p. 26

Each of these areas offer a lens to review, develop and promote best practice

5 Offers, p. 29

Person-centred, holistic planning for connected independence

COLLABORATION

5 Key Partnerships, p. 31

Establishing diverse, strong and effective community connections and partnerships

Community of Practice, p. 33

A forum to share, review, refine and evidence practice

SERVICE

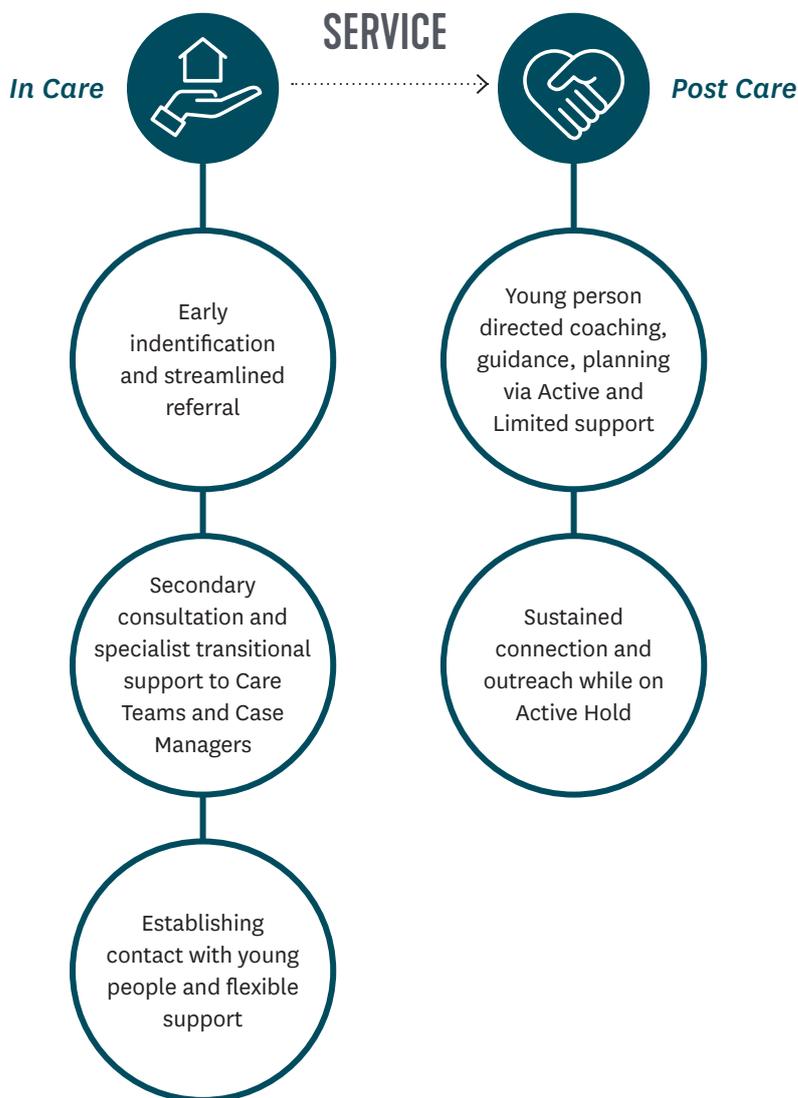
2 Phases

There are two broad phases to the Better Futures practice model – In Care and Post Care. Both phases contain critical activities that foster collaborative and inclusive practices supporting young people transitioning from care. Although Better Futures offers a consistent practice model to all eligible young people, the active role that Development Coaches provide may vary based on the circumstances and co-existing supports. The phases provide a way to locate practices, activities, planning resources, levels of support and partnerships across the life course of the service. Further information about the phases and activities within them are stepped out in Section 9.

GO TO

▶ [SECTION 9](#) p. 41

Figure 6: The 2 phases of Better Futures



PRACTICE



5 Practice Areas

The Better Futures practice model utilises the Advantaged Thinking approach as a new way of thinking about how to enable people, especially those experiencing disadvantage and social exclusion, to establish sustainable livelihoods. Advantaged Thinking asserts that rather than investing in these young people's problems, the community needs to redirect investment towards building their abilities, and harnessing them for personal as well as social good.

As such Advantaged Thinking identifies 5 Practice Areas – Places, People, Opportunities, the Deal and the Campaign – that embed Advantaged Thinking in Better Futures. These, along with the practice principles, are stepped out in Figure 7 here and explained in more detail in Appendix 1.

► [PRACTICE PRINCIPLE REFLECTIVE CHECKLISTS APPENDIX 1](#) p. 54

Figure 7: 5 Practice Areas of Advantaged Thinking



Place

Key question: *What inspires and makes young people to feel like they belong?*

Creating, and supporting access to, living and learning environments and a culture that is inspiring connects young people to real-world opportunities and enables their talents to thrive.

The places and spaces in which we learn and develop can affect the way we feel about ourselves, the people around us and the world in general. The levels of motivation and inspiration we derive from place should not be underestimated. The Advantaged Thinking approach focuses on creating places and environments that inspire and challenge, and that create belonging while nurturing talent, resilience, determination and courage.

When we think about place in the context of Better Futures delivery, there are three main areas of focus:

- + Better Futures operational sites
- + community spaces
- + a young person's residence.

People

Key question: *Which individuals enable young people to succeed?*

Better Futures connects young people to community members and networks to enable, coach and mentor them to succeed and to build a sustainable livelihood. To achieve their potential, they need to be surrounded by people who believe in them and empower them. The successful delivery of Better Futures is contingent on a mix of paid staff and volunteers, mentors and education or industry experts. When we think about people in the context of Better Futures delivery, there are three main areas of focus:

- + young people
- + staff, mentors and Development Coaches
- + community connections.

To deliver Better Futures, the multidisciplinary staff and volunteer team will have a range of talents, skills, training and life experiences. Better Futures Development Coaches will be entrepreneurial with the capacity to source opportunities, networks and resources from the community. Importantly, they will hold strong beliefs in the abilities and capacity of young people to change their circumstances and to build sustainable livelihoods.

Opportunities

Key question: *What enables young people to identify and promote their talents?*

For young people to dream and hold high aspirations they need to know of, and have access to, opportunities, resources and networks that can promote and develop their talents. In relation to Better Futures there are three key areas of opportunity:

- + access – to educational, employment and public institutions and organisations
- + resources – physical, financial, social and cultural
- + networks – mentors, community connections, peers and public services.

The Deal

Key question: *What grows young people's understanding of, and gives them a real stake in, society?*

The Deal as an ethos is expressed throughout delivery of Better Futures. It is designed to prepare young people for the real world and the expectations associated with sustaining an independent livelihood.

Within Better Futures, the ethos of the Deal is embodied in a number of ways. It works to give young people more control by enabling them to understand:

- + what they are committing to
- + what is on offer to them
- + how they can be involved in tailoring the approach
- + how they can grow through the process to reach a more sustainable and positive adulthood
- + how they can evidence their achievements.

The Deal is also explicitly established and communicated through an agreement outlining the specifics in engaging with the Better Futures service, along with its shared values, principles and expectations. It sets up an agreement that clearly articulates the active role young people play in decision making, developing plans and engaging with activities. Better Futures is responsible for promoting a safe and secure environment that gives young people access to opportunities, resources and networks to enable them to use their talents and develop a sustainable livelihood.

The Campaign

Key question: *Who advocates for young people to be recognised as individuals with talent?*

The Campaign ultimately aims for high-level policy and public shifts in thinking about young people, away from a deficit model and towards a society in which young people can turn their talents into viable assets. It focuses on:

- + changing community perceptions
- + demonstrating that young people have talent that can be nurtured
- + collaborating with community services, government and mainstream institutions to create structural change.

The means of developing and delivering on a Campaign include mentoring young people to become advocates for change. This can be done through:

- + using positive language and focusing on success, especially through publicity and media
- + developing practice planning resources with an Advantaged Thinking sensibility
- + focusing on specific policy change on issues affecting young people
- + investing in young people's talents.

5 Offers

Through a range of techniques, Better Futures enables a solid platform from which young people independently begin to navigate their own personal development journeys. Our practice model aims to provide a launch-pad from which young people can engage with holistic planning across a range of life areas or pathway 'offerings', known in Better Futures as the 5 Offers:



EDUCATION



**HOUSING AND
LIVING SKILLS**



**HEALTH AND
WELLBEING**



EMPLOYMENT



CONNECTIONS

Grounded in research and practice evidence, their inclusion and development in the Better Futures practice model highlights the important role of these 5 Offers in facilitating young people's successful transition to adulthood. Together the Offers create a holistic framework to engage in transition planning, goal setting and accessing opportunities thereby enabling young people:

- + to develop their talents, skills and qualifications to further personal goals and build foundations for a sustainable livelihood;
- + to accumulate contacts and access networks that build their social capital and social connection; and
- + to develop the skills and capacities to thrive.

Here we step out the rationale and evidence supporting each of these 5 Offers, all of which are critical to developing young people's capacity to achieve sustainable, connected independence. For further information about using the 5 Offers and their associated planning resources see Section 10.

Education

Education is at the heart of the Offers as we know that young people who leave school early are three times more likely to experience social exclusion than those who have completed Year 12.⁵⁷ A recent Victorian study found that only 25 per cent of surveyed young people transitioning from care had completed Year 12, and 26 per cent had not completed Year 10.⁵⁸

*... many children and young people entering [out-of-home care] are already educationally disadvantaged by demographic factors such as low socio-economic status and regional and/or Indigenous backgrounds. This background can be exacerbated by later in-care experiences such as placement instability or lack of support for completing education.*⁵⁹

The Education Offer is designed to enable young people to engage positively and participate in an education pathway that can lead to meaningful work. The Offer begins with recognition of prior or informal learning, affirmation of skills, talents and aspirations and support with accessing, enrolling and/or sustaining engagement with training or education consistent with the agreed goals.

Housing and Living Skills

The Housing and Living Skills Offer acknowledges that stable housing is crucial for good health and wellbeing.⁶⁰ This is evidenced by research examining the negative impacts that precarious housing can have on both physical and mental health. The key elements of inadequate housing are:

- + poor housing hardware and amenity, such as low-quality (e.g. leaking, damp, etc.) and unsafe (e.g. low security, inadequate wiring) houses
- + not enough space, where a household's capacity to control or contain what occurs is restricted (e.g. overcrowding)
- + poor location, due to an unsafe or under-resourced neighbourhood that restricts the household or person's access to social connections
- + unaffordable rents and house prices
- + insecure tenure.

▶ [SECTION 10](#) p. 49

As such, the provision of adequate housing can be considered a preventative health intervention,⁶¹ as can developing the skills to access and sustain adequate housing. By maximising their education and training opportunities young people have the potential to increase their earnings, which will limit the ill-effects of precarious housing. Through the Housing and Living Skills offer, young people will be supported to develop the knowledge and skills required to access and maintain a range of housing options, as well as key living skills such as financial literacy, legal rights and obligations, cooking and self-care.

Health and Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing are foregrounded as we know they are critical to education and employment pathways. For Johanna Wyn, Director of the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne:

... education and health systems are most closely associated with young people's wellbeing, along with families and young people themselves, neither system 'owns' wellbeing. Because neither system provides a basis for a systematic approach to young people's wellbeing, young people's wellbeing slips through. It is lost somewhere in between, an individual responsibility of young people and their families.⁶²

Through the Health and Wellbeing Offer, Better Futures aims to support young people to access, engage in and develop the skills needed to build positive physical, mental and emotional health and to prioritise wellbeing as an over-arching, coordinated part of the Offers.

Employment

All young people experience the increased challenges and risks associated with transitioning from education to work in the modern economy, with youth unemployment more than double the overall rate.⁶³ Many are able to navigate this transition successfully with the financial and emotional support of their family. For young people In Care, however, the supports within their natural social ecology have often been disrupted. Placement moves during their time In Care can result in disjointed or broken links with education, which affects their level of education attainment and ultimately impacts on their ability to access the labour market.

... care leavers do not always have reliable family support with which they can supplement their low incomes. As a result, unemployment or a low income can have serious consequences for their ability to maintain secure and stable housing, to engage in further education or to maintain their physical or mental health.⁶⁴

The Employment Offer provides consistent, sustained support for young people so they can remain focused on their career goals and access the resources needed to achieve them.

Connections

For young people to hold high aspirations and achieve their goals, they need to know of and have access to diverse, 'real-world' and mainstream opportunities beyond the service system. These opportunities are usually accessed through extended family networks and provide access to cultural links, education support, career guidance and modelling and employment experiences and connections. For young people leaving care services, the availability of opportunities to engage in civic society are far more limited than for those whose primary supports are their families. As they transition from care to independence, young people are often forced to prioritise general survival over participation in the broader social and economic life of their community. Communities can also lack understanding of difficulties faced by individuals and stigmatise or discriminate against people with additional demands on their physical, emotional and mental health.

The Connections Offer focuses on improving young people's social capital and fostering opportunities for civic participation through developing personal relationships as well as social, cultural and economic networks. Relationships with people who value and support you are known to have a positive effect on wellbeing by building self-esteem and motivation to engage with others and the broader community. Although existing relationships with family members can often be linked to trauma, the likelihood of young people returning to these settings highlights the necessity of facilitating connections with kin where appropriate.

*Social exclusion can be defined as the systematic exclusion of people from full participation in economic and social life, in areas such as employment, community services, housing, social relationships or citizenship. It can mean, for example, being unable to afford a visit to the dentist, to find decent housing, to get a job, to upgrade skills, or lacking family and other supports to provide care when a serious illness strikes.*⁶⁵

Furthermore, the Connections Offer builds young people's networks, including those that enhance their social ties and enable them to connect to the community, engage with culture and access employment and other opportunities. It also helps to create positive purpose by providing opportunities for them to value and engage in activities for the benefit of others. Positive purpose has been linked with improved physical and psychological health outcomes including greater life satisfaction, higher self-esteem, optimism and positive emotion, and resilience, coping and grit.

COLLABORATION



Better Futures moves away from a mindset focused on single handedly dealing with all the problems facing young people and towards one that seeks to collaborate with them in identifying assets within the community with which to build and develop sustainable outcomes.

5 Key Partnerships

Diverse, strong and effective community connections and partnerships are essential for the practice model to deliver real-world opportunities to young people. This requires an agreement between the local Better Futures service provider and its mainstream partners – in business, government, services, community and philanthropy – to collaborate in the development and shared delivery of services and outcomes. Partnerships should also span strategic, long-term relationships as well as those that are opportunistic or seek to address the specific requirements of individual young people.

Real-world opportunities are usually accessed through people's connection to family members or community – opportunities that are often denied to those reliant on care services. Harnessing community effort through these 5 Key Partnerships is a way for service providers to access a range of real-world opportunities for young people. It also provides a mechanism for valuing the expertise, knowledge and existing work of the community, and to build on, rather than duplicate, community assets. Key partnerships could, for example, be utilised to deliver coaching, mentoring, tutoring, work-related opportunities including work experience, careers advice or job contacts, as well as access to social, community and cultural networks. Harnessing community is recognised as critical to the practice model and, as such, is enhanced through locally specific Better Futures Community Connectors (for details see Section 8).

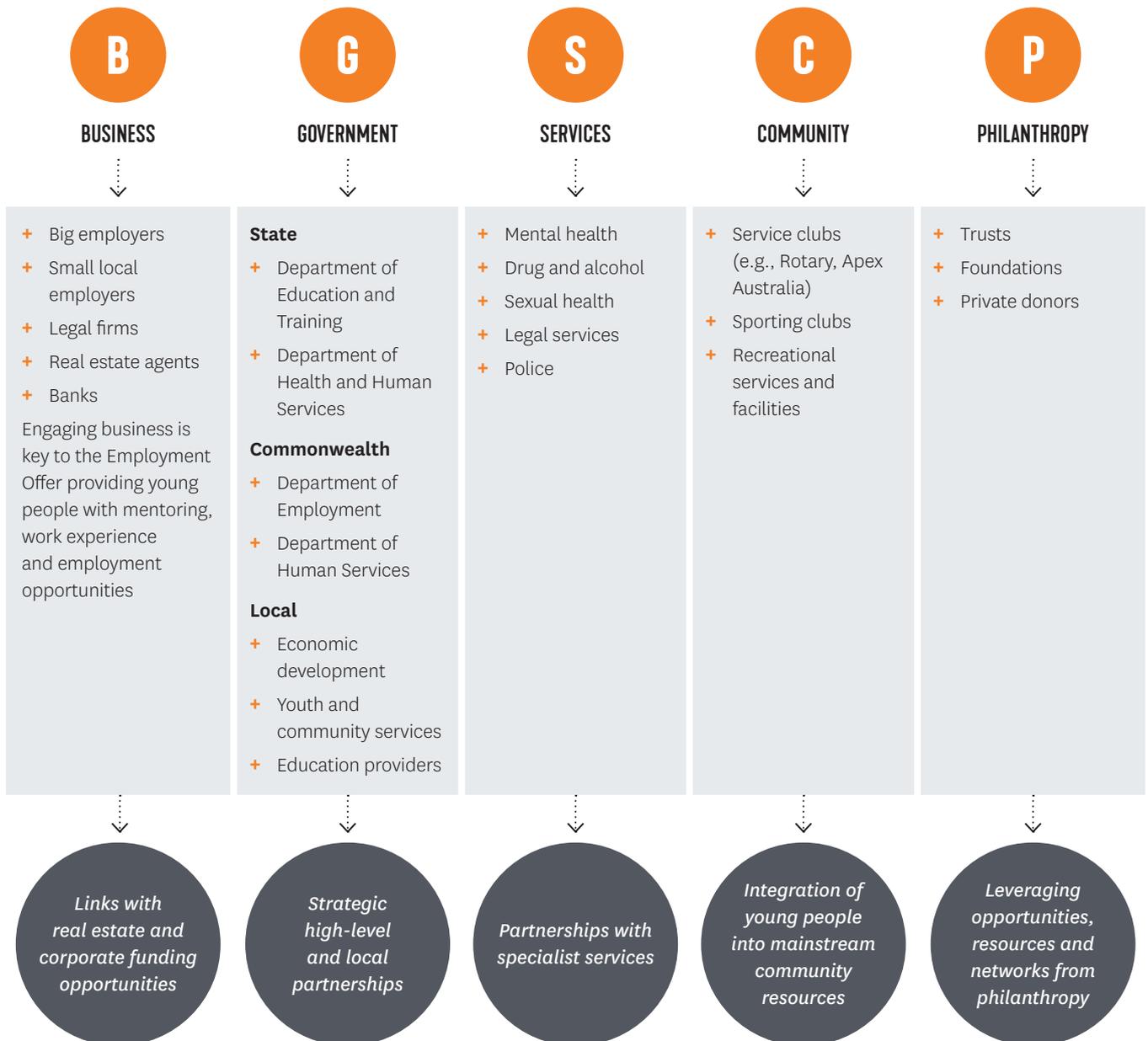
By working in this way Better Futures aims:

- + to foster a sense of community ownership relating to issues confronting young people transitioning from care services
- + to develop community agency and accountability in how these issues are addressed
- + to promote a shift in the way the community values young people, from passive service recipients to valuable and contributing members of their community
- + to build sustainable pathways by mobilising community resources and contributions that will provide young people with opportunities, networks and local support.

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▶ [SECTION 8](#) p. 38

Figure 8: The 5 Key Partnerships



Community of Practice

A Community of Practice (CoP) offers a network and structure for providers and key stakeholders to share, collaborate and advocate for change. It provides a platform that promotes learning through:

- + an exchange of practice-based expertise
- + sharing of situated or place-based knowledge and implementation learnings
- + establishing practice reflection and continuous improvement mechanisms
- + embedding monitoring and evaluation processes in service delivery to inform practice and ongoing service improvement.

The intention of this type of collaborative learning is to share and build knowledge and enhance sectoral capacity for innovative service development and design. The CoP provides a mechanism to share, review, improve and refine the delivery of Better Futures. It also works to ensure that the integrity of the Advantaged Thinking approach is maintained and improved across sites, and that current and proposed practices and approaches are best placed to meet their intended objectives and outcomes. It also helps to build the capacity of providers to work more collaboratively, both with each other and with other local agencies and community groups, to facilitate the development of more effective ways of working.

In this way, the Better Futures CoP will harness community effort as well as the available expertise at a State level:

- + to share, refine and enhance practice
- + to build community networks and resources
- + to work closely with government, business and communities to improve our offer to young people
- + to identify what works and advocate for change
- + to provide opportunities for professional development.





PART IV

OPERATIONAL ELEMENTS OF THE PRACTICE MODEL

SECTION 8: OPERATIONALISING THE PRACTICE MODEL

- + Staffing
- + Flexible support

SECTION 9: PHASES OF THE PRACTICE MODEL

- + In Care
- + Post Care
- + Flexible funds

SECTION 10: BETTER FUTURES PLANNING

- + Planning
- + 5 Offers
- + My Voice planning resources

SECTION 8

OPERATIONALISING THE PRACTICE MODEL

STAFFING

The successful delivery of Better Futures is contingent on a mix of paid multidisciplinary staff and a volunteer team with talents, skills, training and life experiences sourced from the community providing a broad range of appropriate opportunities, networks and resources for young people. Importantly, they hold a strong belief in the abilities and capacity of young people to change their circumstances and build sustainable livelihoods. In doing so, we have moved from a case management approach that ‘manages’ their ‘cases’ to a development coaching approach that works with them to identify their goals and aspirations and investing in pathways to achieve them. At the heart of this staffing model lies consistent, sustained support from Development Coaches that is based on the personal understanding and trust they have developed with young people.

Better Futures staff teams will have, or be able to draw on networks that have, the following professional capabilities:

- + Leadership – to inspire young people, other staff and external partners.
- + Coaching ability – to deliver on the Better Futures practice model’s distinctive Advantaged Thinking approach, and to facilitate future-focused, aspirational and goal-oriented relationships with young people.
- + Service knowledge – to develop collaborative partnerships with other services, share knowledge and promote a young person-centered approach.
- + Education experience – to give young people the language, literacy, numeracy and practical support they need to navigate appropriate pathways within the education sector.
- + Health and wellbeing expertise – to work with young people to set positive health and wellbeing goals, to navigate the specific needs of those with complex challenges and to facilitate referrals to relevant specialists.
- + Networking and entrepreneurial skills – to establish, facilitate and leverage community networks, opportunities and resources for young people.
- + Career development experience – to provide quality, knowledgeable vocational guidance and support that will enable young people to achieve their career goals.

Managers/Team Leaders

Managers and Team Leaders need to inspire, and be innovative, entrepreneurial and policy minded. They should be able to build and lead a team, advocate, and engage with the media, external services, community and business. They also need to provide mentoring, coaching and leadership to staff, volunteers and young people, liaise with various stakeholders, and oversee the development of planning resources. This includes training in advocacy skills, sourcing appropriate training for staff, and advocating at a broader level for structural change. This position is key to embedding the Advantaged Thinking approach through practice reflection.

Development Coaches

The role of the Development Coach, a new role in the sector, is broad in scope and draws on a range of adolescent and transitional systems-related skills and knowledge. Development Coaches are experts in youth engagement as well as specialists in local and broader systems, resources and opportunities supporting transition. While young people are with care services, Development Coaches work collaboratively with Case Managers and other professionals, providing secondary consultation and supporting plans to be future focused. The role also enables them to engage directly with young people while they are still In Care to inform them about the service, build rapport and assist with accessing opportunities in line with their goals and interests. Once they transition from care, the Development Coach's role will likely evolve into that of a central point of support, in which they provide consistent support, informed coordination and streamlined navigation of relevant Commonwealth, State and community resources and services.

This way of working enables a sustainable relationship to be developed between individual Development Coaches and young people,⁶⁶ and gives them the time, trust and knowledge needed to address more complex underlying barriers that may be blocking them from progressing. It has proven to be foundational in building young people's 'capacity to transition to independence and reduce their reliance on welfare and other services.'⁶⁷

Better Futures has adopted this approach, in partnership with flexible and sustained service delivery, to offer young people relationship-based support from initial engagement to when they turn 21 years. This includes the following activities and services:

- + meeting with Case Managers and attending care teams with a focus on identifying young people's capabilities, interests and talents, and aligning plans, opportunities and resources accordingly
- + supporting Case Managers and care teams to embed a youth-participatory approach and include youth voice in planning
- + working with young people to identify their aspirations and coaching them to set short-term and long-term goals
- + holistic and culturally informed person-centred planning with flexible levels of support
- + assisting young people to access flexible funding, support and guidance.

The benefits and positive outcomes of this approach include:

- + developing healthy relationships and mutual trust thereby allowing young people to be more motivated and future oriented;
- + the potential to engage with young people before they transition from care services, and provide continuous support into Post Care, leading to better outcomes as they become independent;
- + providing support across a longer service timeframe,⁶⁸ thereby improving young people's education, training and employment outcomes;
- + holistic, tailored, person-centred planning and support, which enables Development Coaches to identify and address multiple underlying barriers; and
- + an investment in young people's potential rather than focusing on, and defining them by, their past traumas and current challenges.

Community Connectors

Better Futures has introduced a new role, the focus of which is to link young people in with the community. Community Connectors broker access to mainstream opportunities, networks and resources for young people transitioning from care, so they can build enabling connections that will support their transition to independence. This includes both developing new opportunities and leveraging existing local partnerships that span government, business, community services, philanthropy and education providers. The focus of these partnerships will be to identify service gaps and create practical, place-based solutions for young people transitioning from care.

Although Better Futures Development Coaches will continue to play a vital role in identifying and sourcing opportunities in the local community for young people, the Community Connector will focus more specifically on harnessing, addressing and bridging some of the barriers and gaps in opportunities for this cohort. Resourcing locally based Community Connectors will also ensure that Better Futures builds on the assets and strengths of the local community while also building its capacity to contribute to local solutions.

The activities of Community Connectors include direct engagement and capacity strengthening within the local community, such as:

- + Leveraging existing local networks and resources, and brokering new relationships within the community (government, community, business, philanthropic) to create diverse and sustainable pathways and opportunities for young people leaving care services.
- + Sharing local expertise and knowledge with Better Futures Development Coaches to assist matching a young person to opportunities.
- + Promoting young people as assets within the local area and sharing/raising awareness about what young people and community are achieving together (i.e., capture local stories of community activity and share these with others to provide inspiration and demonstrate what is possible).
- + Sourcing opportunities to connect young people to community mentors who can help them explore their personal and professional aspirations and provide them with guidance, support and encouragement in line with their identified goals; also support mentors to connect with young people.
- + Sharing learnings, resources and practice by contributing to the local Community of Practice, attending Better Futures local governance meetings and linking in with similar initiatives.

Community Connectors could also take a more strategic approach to harnessing community using place-based partnerships. These activities include:

- + Bringing together key stakeholders within the community to create new opportunities and sustainable pathways for young people transitioning from care services.
- + Investigating and undertaking 'real-time' mapping of existing services and opportunities available to young people and identifying any gaps in the local area.
- + Fostering a sense of community ownership around issues confronting young people with experience of care services and developing community accountability to create practical, place-based solutions.
- + Promoting a shift in the way that community values these young people – from service recipients to valuable members of the community.

Further information on the purpose, role and responsibilities of Community Connectors can be found in the DHHS Community Connections Practice Advice.

DHHS COMMUNITY
CONNECTIONS PRACTICE
ADVICE

<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

FLEXIBLE SUPPORT

Better Futures offers flexible levels of support to accommodate changes in young people's circumstances and their increasing or decreasing need for assistance or readiness to engage with opportunities. The level of support offered is dependent upon the circumstances of the young person and the capacity of the provider to meet demand. These levels, which relate to the number of hours that service providers invest in supporting young people around their motivations and challenges, require regular monitoring and review. Support available through Better Futures is also provided in the context of the young person's current care status – either when the young person is still In Care OR when they have transitioned from care (Post Care phase).

Better Futures offers flexible levels of support to accommodate changes in young people's circumstances and their need for assistance or readiness to engage with opportunities. These levels relate to supporting young people around their motivations and challenges. As a young person's circumstances change so too does the ability of the service provider to flex up or down to meet these changes.

Better Futures encourages young people to have a voice in determining the level of support they require. This is initially enabled through coaching young people to identify their 'readiness' to take up different levels of opportunities based on their motivations and challenges. They are also encouraged to review their progress by engaging in the Where Am I Now plan, and to identify future opportunities and goals using Next Steps. These planning resources empower young people to inform any decisions regarding how much support they require. Service providers may draw on this information to manage their resources when reviewing 'case-loads' through operational functions such as supervision or team meetings.

Support is categorised across the following three levels – Active Support, Limited Support and Active Hold.

Active Support

Active Support is typically provided to young people who:

- + are preparing to transition from care in the six months before their order ends; or
- + have transitioned from care and don't have other supports in place.

This includes sustained or more intensive support, such as facilitating access to specialist health services or supporting young people to work towards goals such as preparing for educational engagement.

Limited Support

Limited Support is likely to be provided to young people who have transitioned from care, have formal or informal support in place, but still require access to flexible funding, information, referral and advice and/or assistance to address short-term needs or to meet their goals. This could include support in finding a mentor or community group or in accessing funding to set up or sustain housing. In some circumstances, a young person may require limited support from Better Futures while still In Care.

Rose (17) is in foster care and is moving to independent living on her 18th birthday. Rose's foster family will keep in touch with her and be an important source of guidance and support. However, Rose also requires support from Better Futures to access flexible funding to purchase furniture and bedding for the property she is moving into with a school friend and to settle in to this new independent living arrangement.

After six weeks, Rose has bought her new furniture, settled in well to her new property, and visits her former foster family once per week for dinner. Rose and her Development Coach do not identify any further needs and so Rose is placed on Active Hold, with a quarterly check-in to see how she is going.

GO TO

BETTER FUTURES PRACTICE ADVICE: LEVELS OF SUPPORT

<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

▶ [READINESS](#) p. 18

▶ [WHERE AM I NOW PLAN](#) p. 50

▶ [NEXT STEPS](#) p. 51

BETTER FUTURES PRACTICE ADVICE: LEVELS OF SUPPORT

<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

Active Hold

Active Hold is typically provided to young people while they are In Care (from 16 years of age) who:

- + are supported by a Case Manager and care team and are progressing well or those who have left care and are achieving their transition goals; or
- + choose not to engage with the Better Futures service.

Young people receiving Active Hold support are contacted at least quarterly by their Development Coach to check in on their circumstances.

Active Hold is a function that is also used when the Better Futures provider, due to demand, does not have the capacity to offer more intensive support. When this happens, the Development Coach will provide clear communication to the Case Manager (where applicable) and to the young person about the level of support they can offer. In circumstances where the young person has left care and the Better Futures provider does not have capacity to deliver more support, the Development Coach will discuss with the young person the level of contact and support available and encourage them to make contact if their circumstances change.

Sarah (15 years and 9 months) is working closely with her alcohol and other drugs (AOD) worker to address her substance use. She is well supported by staff from her residential unit and her contracted Case Manager, who has referred her to Better Futures where she has been placed on Active Hold.

The Better Futures Development Coach provides secondary consultation to Sarah's care team and passes on the details of a flexible learning option to support Sarah to re-engage in her secondary education from which she recently disengaged. Prior to her AOD issues, Sarah was passionate about horses. Her Development Coach establishes contact with a local equine facility and arranges some voluntary shifts for her, with a view to potentially securing some part-time work. The AOD worker, Case Manager and care team then take a lead role in supporting Sarah to access these opportunities, and the Development Coach touches base every quarter to see how her goals are progressing.

GO TO

BETTER FUTURES
PRACTICE ADVICE:
LEVELS OF SUPPORT

<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

SECTION 9 PHASES OF THE PRACTICE MODEL

GO TO

This Section outlines the operational elements of the Better Futures practice model, which are separated into two phases:

- + In Care – designed to support young people who are still under a statutory order.
- + Post Care – designed to support, coach and guide young people after the end of their order.

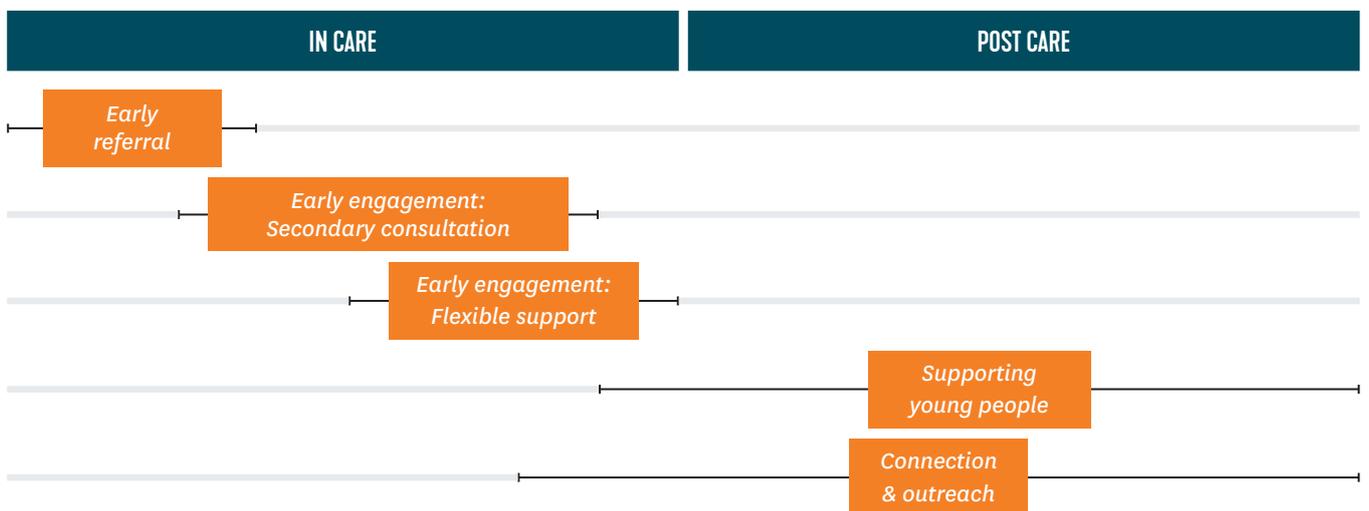
It steps out the purpose of each phase and the key activities and planning resources available to guide practice. More details on planning resources can be found in Section 10 and in Appendix 2.

- ▶ [SECTION 10](#) p. 50
- ▶ [APPENDIX 2](#) p. 58

Figure 9: Phases of service

15 yr. 9 mo.

21 y.o.



IN CARE

This phase refers to those young people who are still on a statutory order. Activities in this phase include determining eligibility for Better Futures, supporting preparation, collaboration and planning, developing rapport prior to transition and providing young people with streamlined access to the service once their order has ended. While young people are In Care, the Case Manager is responsible for their care plan directions and support needs. This includes supporting them to plan and prepare for their transition from care services and complete the 15 + Care and Transition Plan and, where relevant, a cultural plan.

*The preparation for young people transitioning from care to independence is a critical part of young people's case planning as outlined in the **Victorian Child Protection Manual – Leaving Care Advice**. The case manager leads the transition planning process, with all care team members sharing responsibility for preparing the young person to transition to independence. For more information on case planning for young people aged 15 years plus, refer to Document ID number 1114, version 2, March 2016 in the Child Protection Manual available at: <https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/>.*

Better Futures Development Coaches are not responsible for transition planning, although they can support Case Managers, care teams, carers and other workers with transition support. They do this by offering specialist knowledge about systems and community to help young people navigate the opportunities available to them.

Development Coaches typically play an auxiliary role in planning with young people while they are living in care, but their direct engagement with them will typically increase approximately six months prior to their order ceasing unless special considerations apply (see Flexible support for young people). This could involve supporting a young person to have an active voice in their transition planning and introducing the My Voice planning resources to help young people identify goals and opportunities for independence. It is also important to ensure that young people have up-to-date and relevant information about Better Futures and how to access support when required.

The In Care phase is comprised of two key elements:

- + Early Referral
- + Early Engagement.

Early Referral

Early identification of all potential young people currently In Care, and those who are nearing eligibility for Better Futures, through the following procedures:

ACTIVITIES AND STEPS FOR CASE MANAGERS	NOTES
+ The Child Protection case manager or contracted Case Manager determines a young person is eligible for a referral to Better Futures at 15 years and 9 months .	+ Depending on Better Futures local area implementation arrangements referrals are accepted on CRISSP.
+ Case Managers should discuss a Better Futures referral with the young person so they are engaged with the process and provide their verbal consent. However, where consent cannot be obtained for practical reasons, referral to Better Futures should still proceed.	+ Better Futures nominated provider or sole provider in receipt of a referral/s undertakes an initial screening to determine the next appropriate response by the Better Futures service.
+ The Case Manager generates a Referral for Service on the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) to the relevant Better Futures provider who accepts the referral on the Client Relationship Information System for Service Providers (CRISSP).	+ Better Futures provider initiates contact with the referrer within five working days to advise of Better Futures allocation and prioritisation processes.
+ Aboriginal young people are referred to the relevant ACCO delivering Better Futures by the Child Protection Case Manager or care services contracted Case Manager, or the ACCO Case Manager.	+ Young people identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander are referred, as a first option, to an appropriate ACCO delivering Better Futures.
	+ Further information on eligibility can be found in Section 2 or in the Better Futures Operational Guide.
	+ Where young people have specifically instructed Better Futures staff not to contact them, service providers will need to consider the best response.

GO TO

▶ [FLEXIBLE SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE DURING IN CARE PHASES](#) p. 44

BETTER FUTURES PRACTICE ADVICE: ALLOCATION AND PRIORITISATION

<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

▶ [SECTION 2](#) p. 4

BETTER FUTURES PRACTICE ADVICE: ELIGIBILITY AND REFERRAL

<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

Early Engagement

While young people are In Care, all Better Futures activity comes under Early Engagement. This includes:

- + secondary consultation and capacity building with Case Managers, carers and care teams; and
- + flexible levels of support for young people six months before they transition from care and, in limited circumstances, for other young people still In Care.

Secondary consultation and capacity building

The primary function of Better Futures Development Coaches is working with Case Managers, other practitioners and carers while young people are still In Care to support them to have a say in their transitional planning, and to promote a focus on future planning that includes young people's interests, goals and aspirations.

KEY ACTIVITIES	NOTES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Provide information on Better Futures and how to access support when required. + Share techniques and strategies to improve young people's participation and voice in their transition planning and care team meetings. + Support Case Managers and care teams to promote conversation and planning around young people's interests, talents, skills and capabilities. + Share knowledge and information relating to opportunities for young people to connect to the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + During secondary consultation, Development Coaches should not be involved in dialogue, planning or activities that focus on crisis or care-specific needs unless it can be linked with a young person's interests, goals and aspirations. + Development Coaches are specialists in youth participation techniques and strategies and can provide advice accordingly. + Development Coaches are equipped with information, networks, resources and local opportunities for young people across the 5 Offers. These Offers align with the 7 LAC domains (see next note) as outlined in Figure 10, and can be used to inform care and transition planning. + Looking After Children (LAC) is an outcomes-focused approach for collaboratively providing good care for children placed in care. In Victoria, LAC provides the practice framework for considering how each child's needs will be met while that child is with care services.

Figure 10: Better Futures alignment with the Looking After Children (LAC) domains

LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) DOMAINS	BETTER FUTURES SERVICE OFFER
Health	Health and Wellbeing Offer
Emotional and Behavioural Development	
Education	Education Offer
Social Presentation	Employment Offer
Family and Social Relationships	Connections Offer
Identity	
Self Care Skills	Housing and Living Skills Offer

Flexible support for young people during In Care phase

While young people are In Care, Better Futures Development Coaches should primarily seek to establish rapport, promote the service and explore opportunities with them before their order ends. In most instances, these young people will receive Active Hold support, with their Better Futures Development Coach making contact with them on a quarterly basis to check on how their preparation for transition is going. As young people approach their transition from care services (approximately six months prior to cessation of their order), their circumstances are reviewed and the level of support from Better Futures may increase. Young people may receive active or limited support at this time to help them participate more fully in their future planning and to assist them to develop networks, relationships and community connections outside the care system.

In limited circumstances, young people may receive Active Support from Better Futures Development Coaches while still In Care. This is likely to occur when young people require additional support to re-engage with education, training and/or employment, or to support community connections where assessment shows that a young person is at risk of social isolation upon leaving care. ACCOs delivering Better Futures may choose to engage earlier with those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to support their connection to culture and community.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- + Provide information about Better Futures and support access by the young person.
- + Engage with them in relation to their interests and talents.
- + Facilitate goal planning and access to related opportunities and resources.
- + Support them to participate in care-based planning and care teams.

NOTES

- + This is a good time to introduce young people to practices central to the Better Futures practice model, such as coaching and vision mapping (see Section 6) and Better Futures planning resources.
- + Early engagement is initiated as young people prepare to transition from care, typically six months prior to the end of their order. Direct engagement with young people is possible earlier in line with the Better Futures practice advice.
- + Development Coaches may choose to employ any of the Better Futures planning resources or start to engage the young people with the Initial Readiness process.

BY THE END OF THE IN CARE PHASE, YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGED WITH BETTER FUTURES WILL

- + Have played an active role in developing a plan for their future.
- + Have a clear understanding of the processes and available supports leading up to their transition from statutory services.
- + Have received information on the services available through Better Futures at the end of their order.
- + Be offered opportunities to engage with a Better Futures Development Coach and access opportunities relating to their goals.

GO TO

BETTER FUTURES
PRACTICE ADVICE:
LEVELS OF SUPPORT

BETTER FUTURES
PRACTICE ADVICE:
ALLOCATION AND
PRIORITISATION

<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

▶ [SECTION 6](#) p. 20

▶ [MY VISION](#) p. 50

▶ [INITIAL READINESS & MY VISION](#) p. 50

POST CARE

Better Futures provides young people with a continuum of support as they transition from care, based on the foundational work established through secondary consultation and early engagement while In Care. Development Coaches are able to 'flex up' and offer a key role in supporting, coaching and guiding young people at the end of their order (see Section 6 , practice techniques). Young people on Active Hold are contacted for a check-in prior to transitioning from care. Those opting to engage with Better Futures will be offered flexible levels of support that are customised to their individual motivations, challenges and circumstances.

The Post Care phase is comprised of two elements:

- + Supporting young people – by providing them with either Active or Limited Support
- + Connection and outreach – aimed at those on Active Hold.

Supporting young people

For many young people transitioning from care, the process of establishing and sustaining independence requires a period of intensified activity and support. In the Post Care phase, Better Futures Development Coaches can provide young people with guidance and support to co-develop plans and access further opportunities and networks with a view to establishing a sustainable livelihood beyond the service systems. This could include providing Active Support – to secure sustainable housing, to build education training or work skills and/or to facilitate access to specialist health services – or Limited Support in the form of information, advice or referrals to maintain or stabilise housing.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- + Complete the Initial Readiness form and Initial Fit assessment (This should be done within the first month of a young person's engagement with Better Futures in the Post Care phase).
- + Support young people to develop a Vision plan for their future.
- + Co-develop plans and activities relating to opportunities or resources as well as arising needs.
- + Support young people to engage with new opportunities, networks or social connections.
- + Facilitate regular opportunities to reflect on activities and review goals and pathways.

PLANNING RESOURCES

- + Initial Readiness form
- + Initial Fit assessment
- + Vision plan
- + The Deal
- + Where Am I Now plan
- + Connections plan
- + Other complementary planning resources as outlined in My Voice.

NOTES

- + Young people may move in and out of different levels of support within Better Futures until their 21st birthday
- + The Initial Readiness form and Initial Fit assessment help to identify young people's readiness to engage with opportunities as well as to make an initial assessment of the support level they require. These forms may be completed over a number of sessions and should be done while simultaneously building rapport
- + Levels of support should be reviewed by Development Coaches, other practitioners and service providers during supervision or planning meetings, a process that young people can help to inform through engaging with the Where Am I Now plan.
- + There is not one single Better Futures support plan, but rather a range of planning resources that support Development Coaches to ensure that young people's voices are directing their planning and support needs. Services and practitioners can also chose to employ other resources to complement the Better Futures My Voice planning resources, which are outlined in Appendix 2.

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▶ [SECTION 6](#) p. 20

▶ [MY VOICE PLANNING RESOURCES](#) p. 50

▶ [INITIAL READINESS FORM](#) p. 50

▶ [INITIAL FIT ASSESSMENT](#) p. 50

▶ [WHERE AM I NOW PLAN](#) p. 50

▶ [APPENDIX 2](#) p. 58

Connection and outreach

Historically, when transitioning from care services many young people were unaware of the Post Care support available to them or they lost connection with service providers. Better Futures mitigates this issue by capturing a snapshot of all eligible young people through the Early Referral process and continuing to maintain contact with them until the age of 21. It also ensures that service providers regularly and assertively reach out to check-in with those on Active Hold. Not only does this approach promote earlier interventions but it also encourages more proactive work around identifying and supporting young people to engage with opportunities that will enable them to thrive.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- + Updating and communicating with Case Managers prior to the closure of an order when young people are on active hold.
- + Contacting all young people upon closure of their order to inform them about Better Futures and other services and resources that are available to them.
- + Quarterly check-ins for all young people on active hold in Post Care.

NOTES

- + Access to Better Futures support may be subject to service capacity.
- + Development Coaches should make contact with young people on Active Hold before their order finishes.
- + Information about levels of support can be found in Section 8 and in the DHHS Practice Advice.

BY THE END OF THE POST CARE PHASE, YOUNG PEOPLE ACTIVELY ENGAGED WITH BETTER FUTURES WILL

- + Be informed of services, opportunities and resources available to them.
- + Have established stronger connections to personal and professional networks.
- + Have co-developed plans and be engaged with pathways to a sustainable future.
- + Accessed resources and opportunities in line with their goals.

GO TO

► [FLEXIBLE SUPPORT](#)
p. 39

BETTER FUTURES
PRACTICE ADVICE:
LEVELS OF SUPPORT
<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

FLEXIBLE FUNDS

The Better Futures practice model includes access to flexible funding that both attends to young people's immediate challenges and enables them to develop their capabilities. There are two ways to invest in people:

- + resourcing basic needs aimed at supporting young people to survive or cope with their circumstances; and
- + investing in capabilities and opportunities that enable young people to thrive.

Access to flexible funding ensures that Better Futures practice adheres to the principles of Advantaged Thinking, and that investments are made in young people with the aim of brokering opportunities, networks and resources that are likely both to develop their capabilities and to deliver sustainable outcomes.

In Care

When young people are In Care, Child Protection client expenses cover basic needs such as clothing, toiletries, medical and dental expenses until a young person's order expires. Better Futures flexible funding may assist with building community connections and supporting personal and vocational development in line with young people's goals for independence.

Post Care

When young people are no longer connected to care services, Better Futures funding may also extend to basic needs that were previously the responsibility of Child Protection. Further details for application processes are provided in the Better Futures Flexible Funding Practice Advice.

Planning resources such as Vision, Connections or Next Steps may help young people to identify the opportunities or resources they need to support them achieve their goals. The Something-for-Something proposal also supports them to apply for more flexible use of funds by asking for an investment back from them. This may be in the form of a mutual contribution or by offering something that draws on their unique talents and skills that will benefit others.

GO TO

BETTER FUTURES FLEXIBLE FUNDING PRACTICE ADVICE

<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

- ▶ [MY VOICE PLANNING
RESOURCES](#) p. 50–52
- ▶ [SOMETHING-
FOR-SOMETHING
PROPOSAL](#) p. 52

SECTION 10

BETTER FUTURES PLANNING

PLANNING

Better Futures has a focus on recognising and promoting young peoples' individual talents, skills and attributes and then supporting them to develop goals and move towards their aspirations.

Research tells us that to reach our goals and live a balanced life, it is important to be achieving positive things in five areas of our lives:

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

In Better Futures, the planning and support presented to young people to achieve their goals in these areas are called Offers, which are stepped out in this Section.

Often young people are doing really well in one area – attending school or going to the gym regularly – but not so well in others – they might not be able to find a job or are having relationship problems. Sometimes they might know what they want to do or achieve, but don't know how to get there.

Often, a goal can only be achieved with a little bit (or a lot!) of sacrifice and a change to our habits and/or ways of thinking. We need to remind ourselves of why we want to achieve our goal, and what changes and actions need to be taken to get there.

Better Futures is all about collaborating with young people to set goals that are meaningful, and then taking steps towards achieving them. To help them reach their goals the Development Coach will spend time with each of the young people who are actively engaged with the service and coach and support them:

- + to develop a vision – find out what is important to them and why;
- + to identify talents and skills, including in areas they would like to develop further;
- + to connect with experts and people in the community who align with their goals or interests, such as teachers, specialists, professionals, creative mentors, tutors and social networks; and
- + to participate in informal opportunities, like leading or joining a social group or event, and plan to access more formalised opportunities such as work experience, internship or mentoring.

Advantaged Thinking emphasises what people can do rather than what they can't do. This builds young people's capacity to make positive decisions in their lives, to think and act on their own behalf. It is reflected in the language that we use when having conversations with young people and also in the language we use to describe them.

5 OFFERS

Although interconnected, each of the 5 Offers has clearly articulated goals, training, activities, opportunities, networks and resources. Young people can access, engage in, develop and tailor these Offers to suit their needs and aspirations over their time both in and following care. This also enables a flexible approach to planning that allows young people to maintain momentum or interest in some Offers while temporarily placing less emphasis on other areas. For example, someone may be unable to progress education and training goals while receiving specialist mental health or therapeutic support, but can continue planning to live independently and be involved in living skills activities.

Education

The Education Offer is designed to build young people's aspirations and motivation to engage with education. Through providing access to opportunities that recognise and foster their interests, young people are supported to co-design meaningful and sustainable education pathways. For example, they could be supported to explore courses and education settings that are relevant to their goals, receive assistance with enrolment processes and/or access flexible funding that will support participation such as funding for fees, materials or a lap top.

Housing and Living Skills

The Housing and Living Skills Offer is designed both to develop young people's knowledge and skills in preparation for their transition from care, and to continue maintaining and managing their residency once independent. For example, as part of their planning for connected independence Better Futures could provide young people with access to opportunities to develop living skills such as cooking or budgeting or to flexible funds that will enable them to use housing and legal services. Young people could also be supported to prepare and apply for stepping-stone housing options (such as Lead Tenant or Transitional Housing Management Program), as well as more long-term private residential options. Support could also include access to funds to assist with housing establishment.

Health and Wellbeing

The Health and Wellbeing Offer is designed to enable young people to thrive by providing them with the opportunity to develop understanding, knowledge and skills relating to good physical and psychological health. Better Futures supports young people to build positive emotional experiences and respond to negative experiences in a healthy way. The Offer spans individual coaching, training and group activities (see Section 6) as well as support to access to specialist health services when required. For example, Better Futures providers could deliver group work or link young people into existing workshops on topics such as personal presentation, mindfulness or healthy eating and cooking, or facilitate access to existing programs such as Headspace, QUIT or AOD programs or services. Partnerships with mainstream and specialist health and wellbeing providers are critical to its success.

Employment

The Employment Offer is designed to enable young people to build a pathway to employment. It does this by tailoring employment opportunities that are consistent with their age, developmental stage and experience of work. These opportunities include engagement in taster courses, work experience and volunteer positions, through to part-time and full-time work. Development Coaches could support young people to prepare a resumé, apply for jobs or help broker connections to work experience or volunteer opportunities. This may include meeting with potential employers, linking with local councils or industry groups and attending local job fairs or careers expos at TAFE or universities with other young people. It could also include giving guidance and support to someone who has just started working, including providing advice about dress codes, communicating with employers or negotiating around hours. Workplace mentoring of young people, along with links to employers and networks, are critical to the success of this Offer.

GO TO

▶ [SECTION 6
PRACTICE
TECHNIQUES](#) p. 20

Connections

The Connections Offer provides opportunities for young people to develop their social, emotional and communication skills, and thriving social relationships and networks including with friends, mentors, family and cultural links (if appropriate). This could include providing funding and support to join a local sporting group, attend social events or access family therapy services. The Offer also focuses on participating in local activities and become active and valuable members of their community. For example, Development Coaches could support young people to campaign around an issue or cause that is important to them, to develop and/or participate in community events such as cultural celebrations, or to undertake other forms of volunteering such as helping out at a local soup kitchen. The Offer is founded on the understanding that developing strong personal relationships, as well as a positive purpose in life, helps young people build the self-belief and skills necessary to achieve and sustain connected yet independent lives into the future.

MY VOICE PLANNING RESOURCES

Outlined below is the Better Futures 'My Voice' core and complementary planning resources that support the Advantaged Thinking approach; all planning resources described here are stepped out in detail in Appendix 2. My Voice resources capture those key elements from coaching conversations that provide an alternative way to typical case management practices. This approach supports young people to take the driver's seat when developing, exploring and experimenting with opportunities based on their aspirations and intrinsic motivations. The intention of these resources is to support young people to make plans based on what they want to *do* and who they want to be. For this reason, we encourage them either to be completed or co-developed with the young person.

Sound youth engagement techniques and the Advantaged Thinking approach lead the work with young people. My Voice planning simply creates a way to ensure that the service involves young people in decision making and honours them as the author of their story

Core planning resources

My Voice core planning resources are aimed at instilling the voice of young people into practice and planning for their future. Utilising these core planning resources is part of the Better Futures service requirement.

Initial Readiness form

Initial Readiness supports a way of working that allows young people to identify where they think they are at. It also assists Development Coaches to assess someone's readiness to take up different levels of opportunities and activities, and together touch on a range of life areas and explore relevant motivations and challenges. This form is intended to be completed within the first month of a young person's active engagement in the Post Care phase.

Initial Fit assessment

This interactive PDF is used to interpret the information captured in the Initial Readiness form and aids the assessment of initial support levels. It is the only resource that is not for use by young people, but rather is generated by the Development Coach. The Initial Fit assessment automatically calculates the level of support and engagement a young person needs based on an assessment of their circumstances, motivations and challenges. The final result of this process enables service providers to adjust the outcome based on other knowledge or intuition.

My Vision

This resource promotes a conversation with young people about future aspirations and blue-sky thinking, and develops a holistic vision for their future. It gives them an opportunity to identify broad planning goals across the 5 Offers and enables a conversation that lays the foundation for further goal setting and planning.

GO TO

▶ [APPENDIX 2](#) p. 58

▶ [INITIAL READINESS FORM](#) p. 58

▶ [INITIAL FIT ASSESSMENT](#) p. 58

▶ [MY VISION](#) p. 59

The Deal

Central to Advantaged Thinking practice, the Deal fosters shared ownership of the planning, opportunities and services that constitute Better Futures. It speaks to mutual investment and mutual gain and the steps that all parties need to take to achieve these. When a Development Coach facilitates the entry of a young person into a form of social 'contract' with Better Futures, it instils a relationship of reciprocity and equality with the program itself.

While the Deal is imbued throughout all of our practice, it should be introduced early, preferably with reference to an individual's aspirations, interests or goals, as it asks for agreement as to when they are ready to engage in the program.

Where Am I Now?

This resource not only provides an easy visual tracking of, and reflection on, a young person's overall progress to independence, but celebrates their achievements as well.

Connections

For young people to develop a thriving and sustainable livelihood they need to be connected to people and opportunities beyond the service system. This resource guides our practice towards developing broader community connections while also supporting young people to capture contacts and resources along the way. This, along with all Better Futures planning resources, should be informed by and led by young people.

Complementary planning resources

My Voice complementary planning resources offer an extension of the options available to young people focused on supporting them to articulate and achieve their goals, hold high aspirations and take up new levels of opportunities. They provide additional planning resources to assemble a broad picture of young people's interests and talents. These can be used flexibly to add on or swap out as appropriate to individual circumstances.

Initial Readiness Mind Map

The Initial Readiness Mind Map offers a more informal or creative way to capture the information for the Initial Readiness form. It allows young people to engage in a conversation without the structure of the Initial Readiness form and gives them space to communicate more organically or creatively.

Next Steps

Next Steps assists in creating an action plan, which can be related to young people's goals and interests or respond to immediate needs. The agreed plan steps out the roles and accountabilities of the Development Coach and the young people as well as mapping any broader networks of support.

Informal Learning Mind Map

The Informal learning Mind Map assists in the recognition of informal learning and affirms talents and skills. This process is intended to be conversational in nature between Development Coaches and young people. It can be used as a way of getting to know young people better, support their development, build their confidence or facilitate a process around developing a resumé.

Deciding on my goals

This simple process helps young people to reflect on their aspirations, vision and progress, and to organise what is most and least important and/or urgent to them. It maintains an empowering tone that allows young people to set the agenda.

GO TO

- ▶ [THE DEAL](#) p. 59

- ▶ [WHERE AM I NOW?](#) p. 59

- ▶ [CONNECTIONS](#) p. 60

- ▶ [INITIAL READINESS MIND MAP](#) p. 60

- ▶ [NEXT STEPS](#) p. 60

- ▶ [INFORMAL LEARNING MIND MAP](#) p. 61

- ▶ [DECIDING ON MY GOALS](#) p. 61

Something-for-Something proposal

Young people have a right to believe they can access support, opportunities and resources beyond just their basic needs. Something-for-Something asks them to showcase their skills and talents in return for an investment into their future. This process promotes reciprocity and giving back to the community, while also developing young people's capacities and sense of personal of worth by asking them to 'pass it on'.

Reflection

This process promotes the recognition of achievements and affirmation of skills as well as providing an opportunity to reflect on the direction of goals and pathways based on actual experiences. This planning resource is best used after engaging with an opportunity or experience and should foster a constructive dialogue about the next steps.

Address Book

This resource contains information that supports connected independence. The Address Book assists young people in developing a personal contact list of networks across life domains and services that will remain available to them beyond the Better Futures active service timeframe. It may also include online supports like mindfulness apps, podcasts, inspirational speakers and videos.

GO TO

- ▶ [SOMETHING-FOR-SOMETHING PROPOSAL](#) p. 61
- ▶ [REFLECTION](#) p. 62
- ▶ [ADDRESS BOOK](#) p. 62





APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES OF THE 5 PRACTICE AREAS

GO TO

▶ [SECTION 7](#) p. 28

Advantaged Thinking is put into practice through 5 Practice Areas – Place, People, Opportunities, the Deal and the Campaign – which were briefly outlined in Section 7. Here we step out the main principles and practices that embed Advantaged Thinking in the Better Futures practice model through these 5 Practice Areas, along with checklists on the practice principles.

PLACE

Better Futures aims to connect young people with places that inspire them. Proximity to other services, groups and leisure facilities is central to the development of partnerships and networks, as it provides access to mainstream services, employers, education and courses. It also embeds both the program and the young people within their community.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

CHECKLIST

Creates spaces where young people can experience inspiration, a sense of belonging and motivation

- Are walls being used to display and/or create art?
- Are the colour schemes bright and uplifting?
- Does the imagery inspire?
- Is there scope to get involved in designing the space?
- Does the building have spaces in which young people enjoy meeting?

Prioritises engagement with employment, education and life-long learning

- Is there streamlined access to employment, educational, mentoring and volunteering opportunities?
- Is the location close to transport, amenities, educational facilities and business opportunities?
- Is the promotional literature on display geared towards aspiration rather than managing risk?
- Is the activity timetable visible and reflective of the interests of young people?
- Are there spaces in which they can learn, interact and share ideas peer-to-peer?

Fosters authentic, transparent relationships between staff and young people

- Are shared spaces comfortable and inviting?
- Does the space create opportunities for both incidental and intentional conversation and interaction?
- Are all opportunities to share space between young people and staff maximised?

Illustrates and reflects that young people are valued and respected

- Are staff able and encouraged to share spaces, to have lunch and work alongside young people?
- Does the design and decoration of the space reflect an attitude that young people are trusted with the space, rather than one of risk management?

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES**CHECKLIST**

Facilitates access to a range of places and spaces in the community

- Are high-level partnerships brokered at a level to facilitate streamlined access?
- Are targeted community members, businesses and educational institutions encouraged to have a presence in Better Futures?
- Are young people encouraged and supported to access mainstream opportunities?

Enables greater reach for young people through the use of digital media

- Can staff use social media to reach young people?
- Are digital mediums used to engage and interact with them where possible and appropriate?

PEOPLE

Young people from care services often lack personal and professional connections. To achieve their potential, they need to be surrounded by people – community members, employers and staff – who believe that all young people are talented and valuable members of the community capable of acting on their own and on behalf of others.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES**CHECKLIST**

Inspires and challenges young people to achieve and promotes aspirations

- Are all planning resources and processes we use, geared toward empowering young people to make decisions and reach self-determined goals?
- Are teams matching people and opportunities to raise young people's expectations and increase their choices?

Promotes the voice, integration and participation of young people

- Are young people engaged as leaders and experts in parts of the program?
- Are they encouraged to be guest speakers and to communicate their own lived experience and advocate for the changes they see as necessary?

Fosters authentic, transparent relationships between staff and young people

- Have Better Futures staff discussed what this means in their context and how they ensure that hierarchical relationships are limited?
- Are staff practised in slipping in and out of roles to suit the scenario?
- Is coaching practice used to create equal and non-judgmental relationships between staff and young people?

Enables young people to make positive change in their lives

- Are staff also engaging in coaching conversations that unpick limiting mindsets to enable change?
- Can staff describe and explain the Advantaged Thinking approach?
- Are all staff clear on their roles?
- Do staff use Advantaged Thinking language?
- Can staff clearly explain what they expect of young people and why?
- Are the diverse skills, life experience and expertise of staff being used to full advantage in Better Futures?
- Are staff trained in coaching?
- Are staff aware of when they should use coaching, personal planning and support and group work techniques to the best advantage of young people?

Builds young people's networks and Address Book of contacts

- Are young people coached, upskilled and enabled to grow their contacts?
- When they engage with new people, places and experiences are they coached to optimise their opportunity to build these contacts or networks?

OPPORTUNITIES

For young people to hold high aspirations and achieve their goals they need to know about, and have access to, the diverse opportunities available to them. A critical part of the Advantaged Thinking approach is brokering these opportunities – through access to mentors, work placements, quality mainstream education, interactions with inspirational people, and participation in peer education and social campaigns – and matching them with young people’s aspirations.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

CHECKLIST

Inspires and challenges young people to achieve and promotes talent building

- Are young people building their Address Book of contacts?
- Are they developing a map of formal and informal relationships that will continue to promote opportunities beyond the service system?

Prioritises engagement with employment, education and life-long learning

- Does the Better Futures service provider have partnerships with local education institutions, community health services, council, youth services, leisure facilities, local business and employment services?
- Are mentoring opportunities brokered?
- Are interactive ways of working on literacy resourced within Better Futures?
- Are young people encouraged and resourced to take up volunteering or other civic opportunities?
- Are they encouraged and supported into these opportunities as a way of building their skills?
- Are staff ensuring that young people are linked with opportunities that inspire them?

THE DEAL

The Deal fosters a shared ownership of the planning, opportunities and services that constitute Better Futures. Getting young people to enter into a form of social ‘contract’, using the Something-for-Something proposal, instils a relationship of reciprocity and equality between them and the program itself. The Deal is a mutual investment for mutual gain and details the steps needed to assist young people to realise their individual goals and aspirations.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

CHECKLIST

Recognises and promotes the rights and responsibilities of all who engage with Better Futures

- Is the Deal agreement signed off on and revisited during a young person’s time in Better Futures?
- Are staff living the Deal by sourcing opportunities aligned to the talents and dreams of young people?
- Are young people living their side of the Deal by engaging with the opportunities?
- Are all parties signing off on agreements and tasks associated with the 5 Offers?
- Is the Deal lived through actions and use of language (e.g. ensuring that actions and agreements are shared)?

Empowers young people and staff by embedding reciprocity

- Are young people and teams living the Deal, by sharing responsibility and holding each other to account for agreements made?
- Are young people supported to run some activities?

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES**CHECKLIST**

Fosters authentic, transparent relationships between staff and young people

- Are staff facilitating an environment to ensure young people have self-determination over their goals?
- Is the Something-for-Something proposal used for accessing financial support?

Enables young people to make positive changes in their lives

- If a dependency mindset was evidenced has this changed?
- Are resources in place to measure progress and reward young people in meeting their goals?
- Are they resourced to meet their side of the Deal?

THE CAMPAIGN

The Campaign outlines an agenda for government, services and the broader community to change the way we look at, understand, think and talk about young people. It focuses on changing the sector's perceptions, where needed, by demonstrating that all people have abilities that can be nurtured, by promoting young people's talents and by providing them with an opportunity to have a voice and influence. It also proactively influences other service providers and the wider community to focus on young people's capabilities rather than their deficits.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES**CHECKLIST**

Empowers young people to become advocates

- Are young people involved in designing aspects of the program (e.g., in training materials such as videos, as guest speakers) and as organisers?

Values young people as assets to society

- Are they supported to engage with opportunities to advocate for change (e.g. participating in a Youth Advisory Group or the CREATE Foundation)
- Are young people front and centre of any advocacy campaign?

Recognises and promotes young people's talents, skills and capabilities

- Is there a campaign within Better Futures to challenge needs-based policy and provision and espouse the Advantaged Thinking approach?

Promotes the voice, integration and participation of young people

- Are young people acting as peer leaders and having their experience of Better Futures valued by their continued inclusion?
- Are they trained to respond to the media?
- Is their voice promoted in media campaigns in a way that is in line with Advantaged Thinking, rather than using charitable/deficit-based approaches?

Acknowledges that access to education and employment is critical to change

- Are Better Futures staff working with education institutions, employers and community-based organisations, such as sporting clubs, to facilitate young people's access and pathways to mainstream opportunities therein?

Advocates for change based on the way in which we work, and provides a framework to do this

- Do Better Futures providers have agreements that create structural buy-in from institutions to Better Futures (this may include joint practice models, co-location agreements, etc.)?

APPENDIX 2

OVERVIEW OF THE MY VOICE PLANNING RESOURCES

CORE PLANNING RESOURCES

INITIAL READINESS

Task	Development Coach, young person and support person (if available) engage with the Initial Readiness process
Purpose	<p>Young person identifies where they think they are at</p> <p>Establish a dialogue about individual talents, interests and aspirations</p>
Rationale	<p>The Initial Readiness conversation is designed to position young people at the core centre of the process</p> <p>This process is designed to be collaborative and conversational. The method of collecting information allows flexibility to enable the best mode of communication</p> <p>The questions speak to the young person's strengths, motivations and challenges</p> <p>Early identification of opportunities to engage with young people in line with their aspirations or interests</p> <p>This process may take more than one conversation to complete depending on the young person's capacity to engage</p>
Who	<p>Young person</p> <p>Development Coach</p> <p>Support person (optional)</p>
Task	Initial Fit assessment
Purpose	<p>Assessment based on questions weighted towards challenges and motivations that enable the identification of initial level of support</p> <p>To be completed within one month of active engagement with the young person in the Post Care phase</p>
Who	<p>Development Coach</p> <p>Better Futures Team Leader (sign off)</p>

THE DEAL

Task	Discuss, agree and sign the Deal
Purpose	<p>The Deal is a reciprocal agreement between Better Futures Development Coach and the young person, which sets out the expectations of both</p> <p>The Deal sets the scene for engagement and ensures that both the young person and the Development Coach agree on their key responsibilities</p>
Rationale	<p>The Deal lists 8 agreements that clearly outline the expectations around meeting key parts of the Offer</p> <p>Each point allows the young person to contribute to what they will bring to the table in response to the Offer</p> <p>It outlines expectations of both the Development Coach and the young person – What you can expect of us and what we expect of you</p> <p>Both the young person and the Development Coach sign the Deal in agreement</p> <p>The Better Futures Team Leader or Manager also signs the template to demonstrate commitment to the Deal at an organisational level</p>
Who	<p>Young person</p> <p>Development Coach</p> <p>Better Futures Team Leader/Manager (optional)</p>

MY VISION

Task	Young people complete the Vision Map
Purpose	To assist young people to identify a range of aspirations to develop a holistic vision for their future
Rationale	<p>The resource introduces planning across the 5 Offers</p> <p>This process enables a person-centred conversation and lays the foundation for further goal-setting and planning</p>
Who	<p>Young person</p> <p>Development Coach</p>

WHERE AM I NOW

Task	Young person identifies their progress on the Independence Map
Purpose	To provide a visual way for young people to reflect on their current circumstances and track it in relation to their overall progress towards independence
Rationale	<p>The Independence Map is a visual plan that provides a snapshot of a young person's progress towards their goals and aspirations across the 5 Offers</p> <p>This plan helps to reflect on progress as well as to identify areas that may require more attention</p>
Who	<p>Young person</p> <p>Development Coach</p>

CONNECTIONS

Task	To establish peer and community supports
Purpose	To connect young people with opportunities beyond the service system
Rationale	Developing strong relationships with peers and wider community connections while building a range of contacts and resources Opportunities to practise skills in developing a thriving and sustainable livelihood
Who	Young person Development Coach

COMPLEMENTARY PLANNING RESOURCES

INITIAL READINESS MIND MAP

Task	Development Coach and young person complete a Mind Map
Purpose	To allow the young person to engage in a conversation that will capture information to complete a Readiness form
Rationale	This resource introduces planning across the 5 Offers This process enables a person-centred conversation and lays the foundation for further goal-setting and planning
Who	Young person Development Coach

NEXT STEPS

Task	Young people create an Action Plan
Purpose	To assist in turning opportunities into an Action Plan that is developmental and future focused. Opportunities could include having immediate support to achieve a goal or to request support for a specific need
Rationale	The Action Plan can be related to goals, an interest or immediate need, and steps out the roles and responsibilities of the Development Coach and the young person as well as mapping broader networks of support It maintains an empowering tone that allows the young person to set the agenda
Who	Young person Development Coach

INFORMAL LEARNING MIND MAP

Task	Young people complete the Informal Learning Mind Map with Development Coach
Purpose	To reflect on a young person's formal and informal learning and existing skills To recognise skills and affirm capabilities
Rationale	This process recognises a young person's capabilities and sets an Advantaged Thinking tone for future engagement The questions facilitate positive reflection on prior experiences and lay the foundation for goal setting
Who	Young person Development Coach

DECIDING ON MY GOALS

Task	Young people prioritise the 5 Offers
Purpose	To help young people reflect on their aspirations, vision and progress by organising the 5 Offers from the most to least important/urgent
Rationale	This resource assists young people to narrow their focus and enables them to identify a starting point to initiate goal setting It maintains a tone that empowers them and allows them to set the agenda
Who	Young person Development Coach

SOMETHING-FOR-SOMETHING PROPOSAL

Task	Accessing support for a need
Purpose	To enable young people to submit a proposal whereby they offer to 'pay something forward' in exchange for resources that may not be closely aligned with a core goal
Rationale	This opportunity further embeds the Deal and the culture of reciprocity that is integral to developing connected independence The process promotes reciprocity and giving back to the community
Who	Young person Development Coach

REFLECTION

Task	Young people undertake a reflective practice after engaging with an activity, experience or taster
-------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Purpose	To use actual experiences as a basis to review and develop planning and future pathways
----------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Rationale	Reflection is a key stage in learning and development
------------------	-------------------------------------------------------

Young people link their interests and aspirations to activities, experience and tasters, and to reflect on these to assist motivation and the development of goal-setting

Who	Young person
------------	--------------

Development Coach

ADDRESS BOOK

Task	Young people regularly collect contacts and update information
-------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------

Purpose	The Address Book gives young people access to, and ownership of, their contacts and opportunities
----------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

This resource contains a database of information that will support connected independence

Rationale	The Address Book develops a personal contact list of networks across the 5 Offers that will remain available to young people beyond the reach of services
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A copy will be held by the Better Futures Development Coach who will provide additional copies as requested or required

The Development Coach will support and encourage young people to establish and maintain contact with their networks

Who	Young person
------------	--------------

Development Coach

Mentor

APPENDIX 3 TEMPLATES FOR PLANNING RESOURCES

INITIAL READINESS FORM

Date received | / / | Date r

PERSONAL DETAILS

Given name |
Date of birth | / / | Age |
Address |
Phone | | Email |
Country of birth |

How would you describe your current residency status?

Australian
 Permanent resident
 Temporary resident (please explain) |
 Other (please specify) |

Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander

INITIAL FIT TOOL

Participant's given name | Participant's family name |
Participant's date of birth |
Date Initial Fit assessed |

ABOUT THE INITIAL

The Initial Fit tool assesses the level of participant upon entry into the Better Futures program by measuring their motivations across five domains. This assessment is only valid within one month of engaging with the program.

There are 3 sections to this tool:

- 1 Initial Readiness Assessment
- 2 Compile Results
- 3 Initial Assessment of Level of Support

INITIAL READINESS

Directions

- Use the headings on the table
- Use the letter designation C or D
- The key symbols are C – Challenge

EMPLOYMENT

C Challenge - highest level

1. University, TAFE, apprenticeship
 2. Year 10 or 11, Foundation
 3. Year 9 or earlier

WHERE AM I NOW?

Name |

Motivation

1 Don't know yet 2 Ready to explore 3 Trying stuff and getting involved 4 Motivated and on track

Date | / /

● Education ● Employment ● Health & Wellbeing ● Connections ● Housing & Living

NB: This diagram, and the accompanying table outlining the Context and Capabilities represented by the numbers within it, has been informed by the Outcomes Star model www.outcomesstar.org.au

CONNECTIONS

Select Service Offer

Education Employment

Aspirations/Goals

People, services or information I draw on for support?

Phone: | Email: |
Phone: | Email: |
Phone: | Email: |

MY VISION

Name |

EDUCATION **CONNECTIONS**

EMPLOYMENT **HEALTH & WELLBEING**

HOUSING & LIVING SKILLS

Date entered | / / | Date entered | / / |
Date entered | / / | Date entered | / / |

APPENDIX 4

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

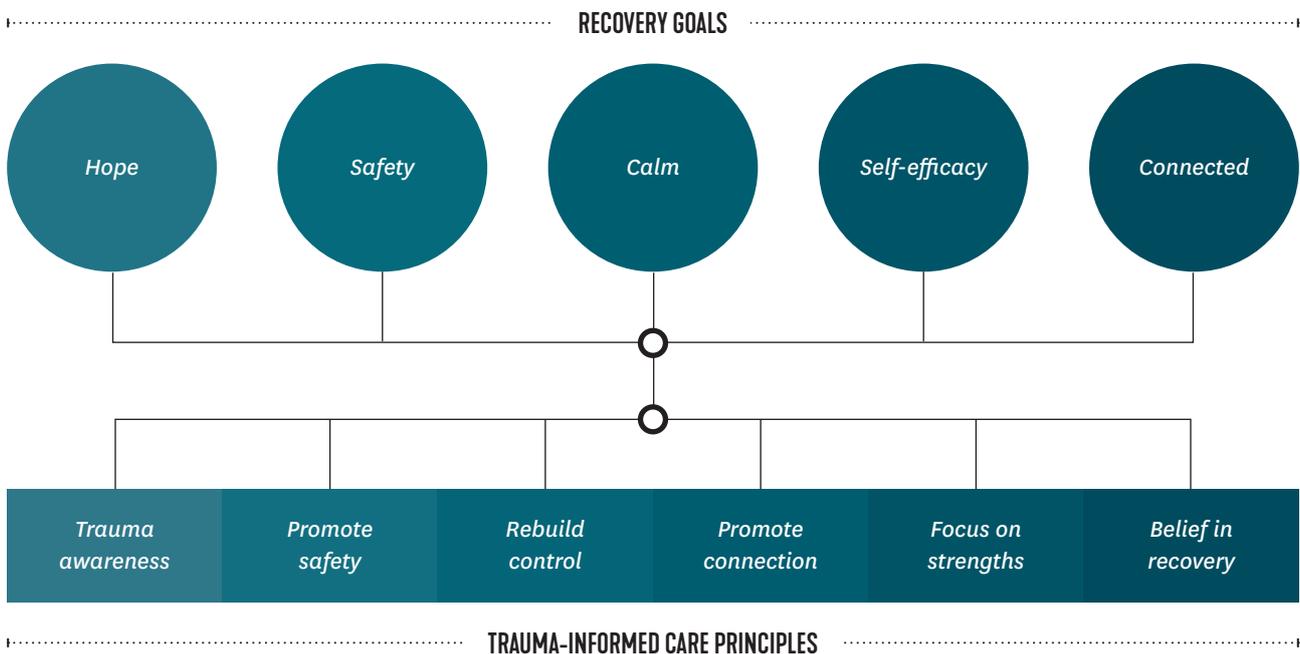
Many young people coming through care services have been exposed to threatening events or situations that cause emotional or physical damage.⁶⁹ Sometimes the serious nature of these experiences overwhelms their ability to cope causing a prolonged alarm reaction.⁷⁰ The enduring and broad-ranging symptoms caused by these events are known as trauma.

Many Better Futures staff have been trained in trauma-informed practice, which is helping them to recognise the signs of particular behaviour, habits and practices with reference to trauma, and to offer the young person involved emotionally safe ways of working to assist in their recovery. The Advantaged Thinking approach, coaching techniques and person-centred resources offer a clear way of working with young people that support the recovery goals connected to trauma-informed practice principles.

Trauma-informed care is a strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.⁷¹

Figure 11: A model for trauma-informed care⁷²

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



The Department of Health and Human Services' *Framework for Trauma-Informed Practice* states:

A trauma-informed approach upholds the safety, dignity and wellbeing of both people using and people delivering services. It is supported through policies, principles and practices at practitioner, service and system levels that centre on empathy and reflection; that seek to understand, rather than pathologise; and that recognise people as experts in their own lives. Working with, rather than working for, is a key tenet of a trauma-informed approach.

TRADITIONAL

TRAUMA INFORMED

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

The development of the *Framework for Trauma-Informed Practice* prioritises the voice of lived experience. It seeks to build enhanced and consistent ways of working with people experiencing trauma across child and family services, including family violence services.

APPENDIX 5

SPEAR BETTER FUTURES DESIGN YARNS: KEY THEMES

The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services developed a design model that advances the self-determining capabilities of clients. It does this by drawing on their voice in the design of policies and services that affect them. Its methodology was created as part of the Children and Families Reform project and gave rise to a series of design yarns with Aboriginal clients and workforce that aimed to reflect more accurately the voice of Aboriginal communities in key reform pieces.

In 2018, three separate design yarns were conducted across the Better Futures trial sites, with the following key objectives:

- 1 Develop design yarns with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Better Futures workforce to develop insights on what works for clients, including culturally safe access and practice approaches.

- 2 Develop and facilitate four design yarns and one storyboarding session.
- 3 Deliver final, high-level themes handover session with DHHS client and Brotherhood of St Laurence (engaged to develop Practice Framework).
- 4 A future State storyboard for depicting a Better Futures client journey informed by Aboriginal voice (i.e., Aboriginal workforce, carers, clients and community).

A Better Futures storyboard was created based on the design statements across these yarns, as shown here.

Aboriginal children and young people want to self-determine and self-manage their futures. What is required by the workforce to achieve this?

Connect



Aboriginal young person is connected with a BF worker in a culturally safe and secure environment.

Time and space is given to the young person to tell their story.



The BF worker is reliable, consistent, honest and warm.

The young person feels confident that their worker will 'be there' for them and that they can rely on them.

Understand



Time is spent understanding the young person's aspirations, needs and concerns.

BF worker seeks the young person's views about their culture and how they view themselves in relation to their culture.

A comprehensive and holistic needs assessment is undertaken.

Link-up



The young person is assisted with their immediate practical needs.

They have opportunity to choose from a range of supports.



The young person is linked in with a cultural mentor and is actively supported to learn about their cultural identity. A broad range of cultural activities are offered to the young person to help them feel connected to their culture and community.

Empower



Young person is supported to set goals, dream big and explore their education and employment pathways. They are encouraged to take charge of their lives through the support of mentors and significant others.

BF worker and young person work collaboratively and the young person feels respected and leads decisions that affect them.

Healing & Growth



BF worker uses strengths based practices to build the young person's life skills, knowledge and confidence.



BF worker supports young person to develop healthy relationships with individuals and groups.

Thriving



Young person has a strong sense of identity and belonging, they know who they are and where they have come from.

They are healthy, self-determining and connected to family and culture.



ENDNOTES

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