

LEAVING CARE PLANS

The Hon. JAN BARHAM [12.11 p.m.]: I seek leave to amend Private Members' Business item No. 4 in the Order of Precedence for today of which I have given notice by omitting "has been no commitment" from paragraph 2 (h), and inserting instead "is a need".

Leave granted.

Accordingly, I move:

1. That this House calls on the Government to fulfil its legislative requirements under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 to provide all care leavers with a leaving care plan.

2. That this House notes:

(a) approximately 1,054 15 to 17 year olds were discharged from out-of-home-care in New South Wales in 2009-10,

(b) CREATE Foundation is the peak body representing the voices of all children and young people in out-of-home care,

(c) the CREATE Foundation have released several reports, specifically:

(i) "Transitioning from Care in Australia: An Evaluation of CREATE's What's the Plan Campaign", 2011,

(ii) "Transitioning From Care: Tracking Process" 2009,

(d) these reports found that:

(i) only 18 per cent of 15 to 17 year olds in New South Wales had a leaving care plan despite it being a legislative requirement as per the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998,

(ii) less than 60 per cent of young people in New South Wales out-of-home-care knew about the access to Transition to Independent Living Allowance,

(iii) 35 per cent of young people become homeless within the first year of leaving care,

(e) young people who experience a 'smooth' transition from care, including access to information, services and support are more likely to achieve financial and emotional stability,

(f) leaving care plans are a way to ensure that these young people have a more satisfactory transition from out-of-home-care into the adult world,

(g) leaving care plans are meant to be developed with the involvement of the young person, the carer and state or agency case workers to cover issues such as the

young person's future housing, education, income and social support, and

(h) despite the Government's stated goals of lowering the uptake of children and young people in care, lowering the incidence of intergenerational out-of-home-care, and lowering the numbers of homelessness, there is a need to increase the numbers of young people informed about leaving care plans and Transition to Independent Living Allowance.

This motion is an acknowledgement of the benefits of supporting young people leaving foster care—one of the most socially disadvantaged groups in our society. The absence of after-care support for young care leavers is a major gap in existing services for children and young people. New South Wales has the highest and one of the fastest-growing rates of children in out-of-home care in Australia. Approximately 18,000 children and young people currently are in care in New South Wales, the majority of whom are in home-based care, including kinship care where they remain living with a relative, and others are in out-of-home care or foster care where they live with an unrelated person or family.

The 2010 report of the Boston Consulting Group predicts that based on today's system, up to 24,000 children in New South Wales may be in care by 2013-14—an increase of 6,000 children. Many factors may contribute to this increase: changes to the child protection system and its ability to respond to children at risk of harm, increasing the length of stay in care due to earlier entry and kinship care, the intergenerational nature of child protection and increased media attention to this issue. Of the 18,000 children and young people in care across this State, about 1,000 reach a forced maturity at 18 years of age and must leave out-of-home care.

The test of a successful out-of-home care service system is its capacity to deliver positive and sustainable outcomes for children and young people. Unless care is taken, the service system has the potential to add to and compound the difficulties for children and young people. It is imperative that the care experience does not cause further damage, harm or disruption to the lives of young people. Leaving care first came to the attention of the public in 1989 when the National Inquiry into Homeless Children found that a large number of homeless young people came from State care backgrounds. Subsequent studies confirmed this; however, no action was taken by the Commonwealth Government to introduce national standards for leaving care services.

Numerous campaigns have been run in New South Wales for leaving care services, which have been driven by a coalition of peak child welfare agencies, such as the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies [ACWA] and the CREATE Foundation. Some State and national reports and inquiries also have been influential in inspiring political and policy debate. However, currently New South Wales remains the only State to have introduced both a legislative and program response for young people leaving care. Section 166 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 states:

- (1) The designated agency having supervisory responsibility for a child or young person must prepare a plan, in consultation with the child or young person, before the child or young person leaves out-of-home care.

(2) A plan is to include reasonable steps that will prepare the child or young person and, if necessary, his or her parents, the authorised carer and others who are significant to the child or young person for the child's or person's leaving out-of-home care.

(3) The designated agency is to implement the plan when the child or young person leaves out-of-home care.

The legislation is specific and in this case needs no amending. It states already what should be happening; young people leaving care should get a plan. But this is not happening at an acceptable rate. This motion seeks the support of the Parliament for the effective implementation of the current legislation, and seeks a commitment from this House that the current delivery of these services is not working well and perhaps requires some new and creative thinking. Perhaps we need to rethink how young people access leaving care plans and how workers engage with young people. Perhaps we need to understand the new tools available through social media. We need also to understand that there are regional differences. Operational plans and how caseworkers interact and support young people will be different in metropolitan, rural and regional areas. These factors need to be considered.

Section 165 outlines the support a leaving care plan must include, such as the provision of information about available resources and services, financial assistance, assistance for obtaining accommodation and setting up house, education and training, finding employment, legal advice, and accessing health services and counselling. These bits of information are vital for young people venturing out into the world often on their own. Additionally, section 165 subsection (4) states:

The Minister may cause to be published guidelines specifying the circumstances in which assistance may be granted under this section.

These ministerial guidelines, which were published in 2008 by the Department of Community Services, acknowledge that the leaving care plan is intended to assist young people leaving statutory out-of-home care to make a positive transition to independent living. As stated in the guidelines, the leaving care plan should include reasonable steps that will prepare the young person for the transition from out-of-home care. These steps are similar to those stated in section 165 of the Act by observing that plans should generally cover accommodation; employment and income support; access to education and training; knowledge and understanding of personal history, including cultural background, which is an important issue; understanding the cultural appropriateness of any information or support provided; contact about family members; independent living; schools; financial management; and health and lifestyle issues. Overall a leaving care plan should ensure that young people are linked to a full range of services and supports and those services recognise the importance of young people leaving care.

On 25 May 2011 I asked the Minister for Finance and Services, representing the Minister for Family and Community Services, a question in relation to the assistance that young people receive as they leave out-of-home care. On 21 June I received a response which directed me to an online resource to be found at www.community.nsw.gov.au. I was referred also to other online resources including Your Next Step, which was described by the Minister as

information for young people leaving care. This resource includes information about the Federal Government's Transition to Independent Living Allowance. Although the provision of such online material may reflect an aspect of the legislative obligations such as providing information, numerous reports such as the CREATE Foundation's 2009 report card and the 2010 report of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs entitled "Transitioning from out-of-home care to independence" found that young people and service providers recommend face-to-face delivery approaches through practical skills programs or mentoring rather than internet-based information packages.

However, what is agreed by all stakeholders, as reflected in the legislation and the ministerial guidelines, is that leaving care plans are important to the wellbeing of young people leaving foster care and all eligible young people should be receiving a plan. The CREATE Foundation 2011, in its evaluation of the What's the Plan? campaign, found that 31.5 per cent of young people received a leaving care plan. For New South Wales this figure becomes only 18 per cent. Many factors help or hinder young people transitioning from care and early intervention is a critical aspect of developing resilience for our young people. I acknowledge that there are factors that affect the delivery of plans and that it is sometimes difficult for caseworkers. They find themselves trying to engage and support young people who lack trust in government, bureaucracy, adults, or anyone in the community. Often these children do not trust society because they have been hurt. Often the children do not use the support that is available; they do not turn up to interviews, follow through or engage at all.

I am not critical of the caseworkers; this is about establishing whether we can we recommit to the principle in the legislation that we do our best for young people in care, rethink the legislation, and find ways to deliver a better service. The motion is about seeking the support of the House, accepting that these guidelines are not working, ensuring that we provide additional support for young people and making them more resilient—a quality that will enable young people and everybody in society to find fulfilment in their lives. This is so much more important for those young care leavers who have often come from disadvantaged backgrounds or experienced adversity. They do not have a family, community or society to back them up so we must offer them our support. Making them more resilient will enable them to overcome the odds, to cope and to recover. Leaving care plans are an essential component in achieving such resilience. The Australian Government recognised the benefits of building resilience and defined it as developing a socially inclusive society. It stated:

... a socially inclusive society is one in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society. Achieving this vision means that all Australians will have the resources, opportunities and capability to learn, work, engage in the community and have a voice.

Young people who have been in foster care have great stories about overcoming adversity. They have a deep sense of themselves and a mature insight into life. Some of this maturity and insight comes from the difficulties they might have experienced whilst in care. However, many young people believe that they were unsupported when it was time to leave out-of-home care. Researchers Cashmore and Paxman, in their 1996 landmark study entitled "Wards leaving care: A longitudinal study", recommend that young people leaving care need much more assistance and support than they are currently receiving. Cashmore and Paxman stated that these young people need to develop more employment and

independent living skills and social and emotional skills before being expected or being able to live independently.

Of the 43 young people interviewed for the study, 42 per cent had been discharged from care before the age of 18; 57 per cent had completed year 10 or less; only 21 per cent were completing or had completed year 12; 64 per cent were unemployed or on sickness or supporting parent benefits; less than 25 per cent were living in a family setting or in independent living accommodation when they were discharged; and 35 per cent were living in youth refuges, short- to medium-term supported accommodation programs or temporarily with friends, often referred to as "couch surfing". Half the group reported experiencing a period of homelessness since leaving care; almost half reported having committed criminal offences since leaving care; and just over one-third of young women had become pregnant or had a child soon after leaving care.

Young people leaving State care were found to fall between the policy safety nets of Australian governments, particularly in the areas of income support, housing, education and training. Across departments, both Federal and State, there is acknowledgement of the need for an out-of-home care system to ensure that children and young people in care have an opportunity to achieve appropriate outcomes in all aspects of their lives, including developmental, health, educational, vocational, financial, recreational, and relationship outcomes. However, Australia's Federal model, whereby child protection is the responsibility of the community service department in each State and Territory, means there is no uniform standard for leaving care. The result in Australia is a patchy response to the needs of young people leaving care. On many occasions the young people leaving care must rely on their carers.

The role of carers is critical to the achievement of placement stability and a successful outcome for children in care. As such, foster parents and other carers require adequate recognition, respect, support and training so that they are sufficiently resourced to perform their role—something that must be acknowledged. What these people do is incredible. Often I have been fortunate to meet with people who tell me, beyond having their own families and children, of the time, energy and support that they give to foster children. They are treasures in our society and must be acknowledged, recognised and supported in this role. In tough economic times it costs them to do that. The role they perform must be respected and supported, which includes financial support. Research has shown that strategies to address these needs must be integrated and supported by theoretical frameworks, principles and processes that ensure that all carers and key stakeholders are respected and arrive at a shared ethos and approach to understanding and responding to the needs of children in care.

Such assistance is intended to support young people in statutory out-of-home care to make a positive transition to independent living. However, even with seemingly explicit legislation in regard to this matter, young people in New South Wales and Australia are leaving care without the necessary basic assistance to ensure they get the best chance when they find themselves as adults surviving on their own. This is why the motion is before the House: to see whether we can make a recommitment and all work together to improve this very important position for young people.

The CREATE Foundation, in its 2011 report entitled "Transitioning from care in Australia: an evaluation of CREATE's What's the Plan? Campaign", concluded that the "abrupt and forced end to the formal support" of these vulnerable young people at 18 years is "unsustainable, both from a human perspective and an economic one". It noted that the long-term financial costs to the community which result from this situation—namely, unemployment, crime, health, and housing and "child protection costs for the intergenerational cycle of care"—are unsustainable. The intergenerational nature of child protection is complicated, and I am loath to suggest that young people have no choice in their life path. However, much research suggests that a young person who has been in care may end up with a child of their own in care. Minister Goward, in her speech to the Sydney Institute on 25 October 2011, addressed the issue of intergenerational care by saying:

Children removed often went on to repeat the cycle of abuse and neglect as parents themselves.

I respect the fact that the Minister is taking this issue very seriously. I have had the pleasure of meeting with the Minister, and I know her commitment in this area is strong. I feel confident that the Government recognises that this is an important issue and that the Minister will be working effectively to try to secure better outcomes. When we see an increase in the 18 per cent of these young people who have a leaving care plan, and have a commitment of the department and the Government that this is a priority, we will see a better society for all.

The New South Wales Ombudsman 2010 final report entitled "Review by the Ombudsman of the planning and support provided by Community Services to a group of young people leaving statutory care", found that many young people leaving State out-of-home care experienced hasty, uneven and condensed transitions to adulthood. Sometimes young people are required to leave regardless of the length of time they have been in their current placement or whether they are ready or prepared for the transition. They have to find somewhere to live, leave school, start tertiary education or get a job, sometimes all at the same time, and, as the studies show, at a much younger age than their peers.

Furthermore, a study by social work researchers and economists Raman, Inder and Forbes in 2005 found that a third of the young people interviewed left care with plans that released them directly into programs for homeless people. The report "No Exits into Homeless", which is part of the New South Wales Government's Homelessness Action Plan, is an important reminder of the perils that can face young people who leave care without proper support. I appeal to all in the House to recognise that this is a very important issue. It is one to which I know the Government is committed. The support of this House I think would help the Government in moving forward on this matter.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA (Parliamentary Secretary) [12.34 p.m.]: Today I speak on this important motion moved by the Hon. Jan Barham. I commend her on her ongoing commitment to young people in out-of-home care in this State. She has been a tireless advocate on their behalf, and she shares this Government's commitment to righting past wrongs and improving our support of adolescents who cannot live safely at home. The Minister for Family and Community Services, the Hon. Pru Goward, has often spoken about the need to do better by adolescent young people in out-of-home care. The Minister is

working extremely hard to improve services for this important group. Honourable members may not be aware that as of 30 June 2011 some 34.3 per cent of the out-of-home care population were adolescents, aged between 12 and 17 years, and thus very vulnerable. For these young people, experiences of abuse and neglect mean they may lack the education, or life skills or emotional resilience critical for their successful transition to independence. So we have a responsibility to give them the best possible start to adulthood.

The law in New South Wales, the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, requires all young people leaving statutory care to have a leaving care plan. This plan usually covers their health, housing, employment and education needs, and how they will be met. Planning must involve the young person, and should commence when he or she turns 15. As the Hon. Jan Barham points out in her motion, the issue at stake is whether this happens for each and every young person leaving care. Well, there are multiple reports to show that it has not. One such report is the NSW Ombudsman's 2010 "Review of a Group of Young People Leaving Statutory Out-of-Home Care". The Ombudsman reported that the ministerial guidelines on provision of services after leaving out-of-home care were not being implemented for all care leavers in New South Wales. A large proportion of young people in the Ombudsman's sample group did not have an endorsed leaving care plan when they exited statutory care.

Similarly, three consecutive CREATE Foundation report cards have consistently found young people transitioning from care in New South Wales and other jurisdictions are exiting care without a leaving care plan in place. The most recent report card found that less than half of the survey respondents from New South Wales had a leaving care plan in place at 17 years of age. This is simply not good enough. I take the opportunity to remind members present that this is not an issue for political point-scoring, and the Government will never make it such. In fact, most of the reports about poor practice for leaving care planning were published under the former Government's watch. It is an issue we must, and will, address.

These young people in care have endured very difficult childhoods, involving physical, sexual or emotional abuse and neglect. That is why it is so important to ensure they have the support and care they need to get their lives back on track. It is why better support for carers and young people transitioning from care to independent living is recognised as a key activity and national priority under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. As part of the national framework, the Department of Family and Community Services is working with non-government partners to prioritise the development of a nationally consistent approach to young people transitioning from care to independence.

I am pleased to report that one of the framework's achievements to date has been an increase in the Transition to Independent Living Allowance for young people leaving care— one-off support from the Australian Government to help young people who are leaving care to meet some of the costs involved in moving to independent living. Similarly, in New South Wales young people leaving statutory out-of-home care are entitled to aftercare support up to 25 years of age from the agency that managed their last out-of-home care placement. These are important achievements, but they are not enough.

The CREATE Foundation's report on Transitioning from Care in Australia highlighted the fact that young people needed to know about these services available to them that could help

them achieve independence. As the Hon. Jan Barham said, less than 60 per cent of the people in the CREATE survey even knew about the allowance. To help overcome this lack of knowledge in New South Wales, the Department of Family and Community Services has developed a resource called Your Next Step, which also provides advice about money and budgeting, about finding housing, about rental agreements, education, employment and health. A second resource, called Leading the Way, is available for authorised carers, designed to support them in teaching life skills and helping to prepare the young person in their care for the transition to independence.

Those resources are available online but were reprinted as recently as June last year. There are also other support services available for young people in New South Wales transitioning from care to independent living. For example, young care leavers with a diagnosed disability are referred to the Ageing, Disability and Home Care Leaving Care Program, which includes ongoing support from Ageing, Disability and Home Care after they have left care.

To avoid disruption during completion of year 12 or other vocational courses, Community Services may continue financial support for a young person's out-of-home care placement if they are studying full-time when they are due to exit care. Community Services also funds specialist after-care services that provide casework assistance with after-care issues such as accommodation, education and training. Why is there such an emphasis on education and training for these young people? CREATE's research shows that young people in out-of-home care are less likely to continue with mainstream education beyond the period of compulsion, are more likely to be older than other young people in their grade level, attend a high number of primary and high schools, and miss substantial periods of school.

Education and training are of absolutely critical importance in achieving better outcomes for young people in care. Too many young people have become homeless when they have left care, running out of money and experiencing higher levels of poverty and disadvantage. Too many young people have not received the educational and training support they need. A 2007 longitudinal study by Cashmore and Paxman reported that only 42 per cent of New South Wales care leavers had completed year 12, compared with 80 per cent of those their age in the general population. Four to five years after leaving care only 25 per cent of study participants were in full-time work, full-time study or combined part-time work and study. That compares with 77 per cent of their age equivalent in the general population.

These poor educational and employment outcomes are related to other well-documented outcomes such as homelessness, poverty, mental health problems, social isolation, instability and involvement in the criminal justice system. We know all too well the sad stories that come out of our constituencies. There can be no doubt that education and training are the pathways to work, to choice and to opportunity. No doubt they are a critical part of breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage. That is why finishing high school or training is a key target of the New South Wales Government's NSW 2021 Plan. Improvements and implementation in a timely fashion are necessary. Reporting back with accountability and transparency to all is also part of our undertaking.

On behalf of the Minister for Family and Community Services I can unreservedly assure the Hon. Jan Barham of this Government's commitment to improving New South Wales' record in this area. I can unreservedly assure her of the unwavering commitment of the Minister for

Family and Community Services to this objective and, more broadly, to a better child protection system in New South Wales. We owe it to these young people and we are determined to deliver. Minister Pru Goward and the Government look forward to continuing to work cooperatively with the Hon. Jan Barham in achieving these shared goals.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH [12.43 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on this motion. I commend the Hon. Jan Barham for moving this motion and I can indicate that we will be supporting the motion as amended. At the outset I would like to advise the House that my wife and I have been foster parents for some 15 years and continue to be so. We have fostered about 30 children. Therefore, a lot of what I will say in the next few minutes I draw from personal experience. Paragraph 1 of the motion calls on the Government to fulfil its legislative requirements under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act. That is self-explanatory: it would be an obligation on behalf of any Minister with that responsibility, and I can guarantee that the Opposition will be ensuring that the Minister of the day will be fulfilling the obligations of that legislative requirement. Paragraph 2 of the motion states:

2. That this House notes:

(a) approximately 1,054 15-17 year olds were discharged from out of home-care in New South Wales in 2009-10,

"Discharged" is quite an aggressive word. For a young person leaving care, being told that he or she is discharged from care has significant connotations in the broader community. I can guarantee that you do not hear 15- to 17-year-olds leaving long-term foster care talking about being discharged from care. One lesson for all of us, particularly those of us in public life, is that we need to be very sensitive to the words that we use when we are talking about impressionable 15- to 17-year-olds who have often come from quite adverse and difficult circumstances in their lives.

Paragraph 2 (b) of the motion notes that the CREATE Foundation is the peak body. I have met with the CREATE Foundation on a few occasions. It is an outstanding peak body which specifically covers the area of foster kids in out-of-home care who are moving from that environment into an environment of independence. I received a little backpack that they put together, which is quite an interesting initiative. The work the foundation does with the funding it gets is outstanding. Much more should be done to assist the CREATE Foundation in its work—assistance not just from Government but from all people. I put on the record that I donate to the CREATE Foundation to assist it in its work.

The CREATE Foundation has released several reports. I encourage all members to read those reports if they have not already done so. The reports include some significant and sobering information about what happens to adolescents when they leave out-of-home care arrangements and move into an independent lifestyle. Paragraph 2 (d) of the motion refers to some of the findings of those reports. The information in paragraph 2 (d) (iii) is staggering: it states that 35 per cent—about a third—of the adolescents who leave out-of-home care and move into independent living finish up homeless within 12 months of leaving care. No-one could be proud of that statistic. We should all work constructively to correct the situation.

There are a number of reasons why adolescents end up homeless after leaving out-of-home care. One reason is that a significant number of them have been physically or mentally

abused or have had significant tragedies in their lives. They move into independent living but they do not have the family or societal structures to support them—those structures have all been fractured and have often disappeared. In some cases, they have had multiple placements in out-of-home care so they have not been able to develop the strong support networks that any adolescent needs. I have an 18-year-old starting university and it is clear that he still needs some parental support.

The Hon. Marie Ficarra: And will for a long time.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: He probably will for a while. He is doing very well. But imagine going through that process without family support—not being able to pick up the phone, or text mum or dad, or call on brothers and sisters to assist you. I suggest that is one of the reasons why 35 per cent of adolescents leaving out-of-home care and the security it provides finish up homeless within 12 months. We should all be working towards rectifying that situation. Young people who experience a smooth transition from care—including access to information, services and support—are more likely to achieve financial and emotional stability.

It is clear that a smooth transition to independent living is vital. I have some experience in developing employment plans and transition plans for people with disabilities. It is unsatisfactory to develop a plan two weeks before the individual leaves the security of out-of-home care. The transition planning should take place when the individual is approximately 15 years old. It can then be reviewed when the individual is around 16 in order to assess whether the plan is still appropriate and whether people are working towards their goals, including educational and support goals.

Important goals also include those aimed at achieving independence such as financial support and management of their funds. The goals can be reviewed at 16 and 17 years of age so that the plan evolves over time. Rather than develop the plan at the end of care when there is minimal time to review it and assess its appropriateness, it should start when someone is approximately 15 years old. That would provide the necessary smooth transition to independent living, which is the ultimate goal for everyone. Paragraph 2 (f) states:

(f) leaving care plans are a way to ensure that these young people have a more satisfactory transition from out-of-home-care into the adult world,

That is self-explanatory. Subparagraph (g) states:

(g) leaving care plans are meant to be developed with the involvement of the young person, the carer and state or agency case workers to cover issues such as the young person's future housing, education, income and social support, and

The most important point in subparagraph (g) is the involvement of the individual. It is essential that the individual for whom the leaving care plan is being developed has a fair degree of involvement and ownership in the plan and is empowered by it. Involving the carer is also an essential element. Regardless of what happens, in most cases the carer or carers will be the point of call if things go askew or fall apart. That is the situation of all children

leaving any family arrangement. Subparagraph (h) has been amended by leave of the House and provides:

(h) despite the Government's stated goals of lowering the uptake of children and young people in care, lowering the incidence of intergenerational out-of-home-care, and lowering the numbers of homelessness, there is a need to increase the numbers of young people informed about leaving care plans and Transition to Independent Living Allowance.

In recent weeks we have heard about the amendments to the foster carers allowance and talk about encouraging young people to take up whatever Federal allowances may be available. That is often slightly more difficult than it sounds for a variety of reasons. There is no one reason why that would be the case: it deals with individuals. Individuals are human beings who by that very nature are different people. Although we have no-one in our home who is about to enter into this phase of life, I found the suggestion offensive from the Minister that foster carers should negotiate some sort of rental arrangement with those in their care. That was a broad statement. Surely the Minister does not believe that can apply in every individual circumstance. Anyone who cares or understands would know that it is not going to be possible in all circumstances. I hope that the Minister has had some time to reflect on those statements and realises in hindsight that for a number of reasons that arrangement is not possible in all situations.

Some good research and articles have been published regarding this issue. I encourage all honourable members to read *The Drum* opinion piece by Philip Mendes, dated 5 September 2011, entitled "Toward better outcomes after out-of-home care". It is an excellent article in which Philip Mendes says:

Young people leaving state out-of-home care are arguably one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society—

I hope we all understand why that is—

Leaving care is formally defined as the cessation of legal responsibility by the state for young people living in out-of-home care. But in practice, leaving care is a major life event and process that involves transitioning from dependence on state accommodation and supports to self-sufficiency.

Philip Mendes goes on to say that one of the main requirements for an effective transition from State out-of-home care to self-sufficiency and independence is "direct family support or other community networks to ease their involvement into independent living". Where does a person without that support turn to if things fall apart? If they have run out of money where do they go to access money? Sometimes people find themselves in situations that they are unable to control. Society can be pretty tough. If a person ends up living on the street because of things such a bullying, where can they turn? How do they access services and what services can they access? These are critical issues about transitioning from out-of-home care to independent living for teenagers in our State. Many people in their late teens are unable to cope in difficult circumstances because they have not had a mentor or familial parent to provide them with the skills needed.

In his outstanding article Philip Mendes talks about what is required. It is not all doom and gloom. There have been instances of foster kids who have moved through the situation to become elite athletes or academics or who have otherwise achieved what we would call remarkable outcomes in society. These successes are due to the services and support those young people had around them. Without those supports such positive outcomes are extremely difficult to achieve. There is a suggestion that leaving care plans should pertain until someone is 21 years of age because there are a number of issues that arise along the way when leaving care and moving to independence. That is not a bad idea. It may need to be thought through a bit more, but in some circumstances a leaving care plan that runs until someone is aged 21 clearly has benefit. We should perhaps discuss that further. It is also important to note that research— [*Time expired.*]

Debate resumed from 16 February 2012.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE [11.45 a.m.]: I make a brief contribution in debate on the motion moved by the Hon. Jan Barham and congratulate her on bringing it to the attention of the House. Members may be aware that I have an ongoing interest in children in out-of-home care, as I have previously been a foster carer for young adolescents who faced the issue of leaving care. This motion which contains some disturbing figures calls on us all to do better. Children who end up in out-of-home care are there through no fault of their own; they are there mostly because their own families have failed them. They are there because of abuse and neglect and they have often been through circumstances that few of us could contemplate. Young people in out-of-home care need additional support. This motion is about the number of children in out-of-home care. Around 1,000 children aged 15 to 17 leave out-of-home care each year. The CREATE Foundation is the peak body that represents the voices of young people and children in out-of-home care. I congratulate the CREATE Foundation and express admiration for the work that it does. The CREATE Foundation has prepared many reports about the situation in which young people find themselves once they leave out-of-home care. This motion is all about CREATE's "Transitioning from Care in Australia" report. Disturbingly, CREATE'S most recent report states that only 18 per cent of those aged 15 to 17 have a leaving care plan, despite it being a legislative requirement for them to have such a plan when they leave care. Less than 60 per cent of those young people knew how to access the Transition to Independent Living Allowance. More disturbingly, but not surprisingly, based on these statistics 35 per cent of young people became homeless within their first year of leaving care.

The experience of young people leaving care is often brutal and they have been through many different placements in the time that they have been in the care of the State. At the age of 18 they find themselves, all of a sudden, no longer living with the foster carers with whom they may or may not have got along. If they are lucky they are found a place to live, for example, a flat, but often that is all the support they receive. They receive no support or advice about how to enrol in TAFE, to return to school or to apply for allowances to which they are entitled. We must do better. It is our responsibility to look after these children, as they have no-one else.

It is very easy to play politics on this issue. I do not seek to do that through this motion but I

place on record my concern about the Government's cuts to foster care allowances. I know that some of those allowances have been reinstated, which is a welcome move, but it is a miserly attempt at saving this State money. These vulnerable children who have been dealt the worst luck in life should not have to cope with even fewer allowances as they get older. I call on the Government to reinstate allowances for foster carers who adopt children. As a transition to leaving care, permanent placements will provide these young people with the best outcome, as they will be attached to a family for life and that family will have an ongoing responsibility for them. Foster families should not be penalised while the Government tries to save a few million dollars.

Leaving care is a tumultuous time for these young people. I wish to place on record some of the comments that have been made by young people who refer to what it is like to be a young person in care. We talk clinically about what these young people are going through and the reports give us clear statistics, but often the voices of these young people are missing. I will quote briefly from the November 2010 report of the CREATE Foundation entitled "What's the Answer?" in which young people were asked to nominate solutions to improve their transitioning to independence from out-of-home care. The report includes the views of young people on how to improve their circumstances. They said:

It was terrible. I was told a week before I turned 18 that I was leaving care.

Kids would get a better education and get better employment if their placements were more stable.

Young people transitioning from care need as much support as possible; everything from finding somewhere to live to what to wear to interviews.

You don't have to start formally planning before 15, but young people should be taught life skills—just like other young people. More life skills training has to happen with carers.

More mandatory training for foster carers. This training would include how to teach young people life skills, and helping to change the culture of foster care from carers seeing their role as a job, to that of a parent.

There are a decreasing number of health services that bulk bill—particularly mental health.

Access to counselling and ongoing mental health support are critical issues for young people in care, many of whom, as I said earlier, would have been subjected to amazing trauma. In care there is ongoing support for specialist services in mental health and counselling but out of care most young people, if they are lucky, find themselves in a flat with no support and no money to continue with the therapeutic services that they need to cope with their trauma. Tania, another Create Foundation case study, said:

As a child or young person in care, you don't really get help unless you ask, or scream for it. But a young person isn't always going to know that counselling may help, or say that they need it. They need to be able to access counselling without

feeling ashamed. This support needs to be thought of as long-term, not something that can fix things in a few weeks or months and it shouldn't stop just because you turn 18 and the community thinks you have become an adult. If you stop counselling it's very hard to pick up again because you have to find a therapist, somehow find the money for it and start again. You have to share your story all over again.

I thank the Hon. Jan Barham for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. I hope all members commit to ensuring that the most vulnerable of kids who find themselves in out-of-home care are given the best support to try to transition into adulthood.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN [11.51 a.m.]: The Christian Democratic Party supports the motion moved by the Hon. Jan Barham. Australian research on the outcomes for young people leaving care demonstrates a desperate need for minimum leaving care standards. Dr Alexandra Osborn and Dr Leah Bromfield, in a briefing paper called "Young People Leaving Care", said:

Research has shown young people do not have the level of support (emotional, social and financial) available to most young people in their transition to adulthood, and that this transition occurs at an earlier age and in a more abrupt manner than young people at the same age in the general population.

As I reflect on programs that invest in the lives of vulnerable young people, Bravehearts comes to mind. When I first came to this place members were gracious enough to listen to me say that it is easier to educate a child than to heal a broken adult. It has always been said, particularly in the health sector, that prevention is better than a cure. It would be a far better to invest in these kids before other things take place in their transition to adulthood.

Christian organisations run many initiatives to assist young people with a leaving care plan. For instance, CatholicCare has a program called Stepping Out, which enables young people with a disability to continue living with their carers after the age of 18. The program aims to increase the long-term safety, welfare and wellbeing of young people with a disability after leaving formal care; provide ongoing support to carers of young people with a disability remaining in their care; assist carers and young persons in achieving goals outlined in the leaving care plans and individual plans; and ensure prompt payment of subsidy to carers and provide additional services such as respite, mentoring and supported holidays.

Anglicare Victoria recently secured funding for a pilot project to work with young people leaving care to help them make the transition with personal support, links to training and employment, financial advice, independent living skills and other practical resources. As noted by the Hon. Jan Barham, the New South Wales government resource "Your Next Step" explains that a leaving care plan is about individuals, what they will be doing after they leave care and what others will do to help them. Caseworkers will assist them to ask themselves important questions such as, "When I leave care where will I be living and who will I live with? Where will my money come from? Will I want counselling or other help to deal with things from my past? Will I want my foster care agency to check on how I am going every now and then?"

The Government is trying to improve services by investment in early intervention services,

social benefit bonds, reforming out-of-home care contracts together with non-government organisations to encourage better outcomes, and setting up specialist adolescent teams around New South Wales to help vulnerable teenagers, but a lot still needs to be done. This initiative will continue to better prepare and support young people in making a smooth transition from out-of-home care to independent living through the provision of public or private accommodation, case management and support services. A community that looks after its young people is headed in the right direction but, sadly, there is never enough money in the bucket to be distributed between all these wonderful initiatives. I commend the motion to the House.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD [11.54 a.m.]: I speak in support of the motion moved by the Hon. Jan Barham. It is appalling that 72 per cent of children living in care in New South Wales do not have a leaving care plan to transition them to self-sufficient independent living. It must be realised that we took the majority of these children away from their families. As a society we said we could do a better job of parenting them. However, given the statistics gathered by the CREATE Foundation, I would argue that the State is sadly lacking in its duty of care. Young people with a background in State care are over-represented in the youth homeless population and represent 31 per cent of the homeless population in the 12 to 24 age group. By allowing these young people to leave care without a plan we are failing to provide life skills for ongoing financial, social and emotional support. As a result, many care leavers face significant barriers to accessing the same educational employment, housing and other developments and transitional opportunities as other young Australians.

Many young people experience foster placement as a haven of stability in which to rebuild their lives after a distressing period in a dysfunctional family. But in the majority of cases they suffer painful separation not only from their parents but also from other siblings and extended networks. I have no doubt that it is a traumatic event for the majority of children to be placed in foster care and, as dysfunctional as their home lives may have been, inevitably there will be problems associated with separation, residential instability and unhappy memories of family life. Children also will often have to change schools and use different transport modes to attend school. All these things will adversely influence their personal development, depriving them of individual and family support and emotional nurturing.

It is an unarguable fact that those children who enter the care system are immediately disadvantaged. Before entering care many will have experienced—and will continue to be traumatised for some time from their experiences—considerable physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect. Some will have experienced all types of abuse. Some will have experienced inadequacies in State care, including constant shifts of placement, carers, schools and, sadly, poor quality caregivers or caseworkers. Often they will have low levels of self-esteem and self-worth.

It is unsustainable to abruptly end care at aged 16 to 18 without the necessary plan to educate and support our youth. Young people leaving care can call on little, if any, direct family support or other community networks to ease their transition into independent living. They are still our moral responsibility. They cannot reasonably be expected to become instant adults. They are coping with leaving school and moving into further education, training or employment all at the same time. These children, who are our responsibility, need to be given the same psychological opportunity and space as all young people to

progressively explore a range of interpersonal and identity issues well into their twenties.

All of us who have transitioned from adolescence to adulthood and who have raised children into adulthood know that adolescence is difficult, and it is understandable that development may be delayed for children who have experienced extensive and often horrendous abuse over many years. Their maturity into adulthood has definitely been affected by the abuse, instability and insecurity they experienced as children. To expect them to become instant adults and to assume all the responsibilities of adulthood is absolutely unreasonable. There is evidence that these young people need our support as a community, and they certainly need the support that the State can offer through government. Associate Professor Philip Mendes, who is the Director of the Social Inclusion and Social Policy Research Unit in the Department of Social Work at Monash University, argues that there are:

... three structural initiatives [that] would add to the capacity of our system to meet the needs of all care leavers.

The first would be the introduction of the Corporate Parenting philosophy, which underpins the UK model of support.

This concept refers to the responsibility of state authorities to introduce policies, structure and roles that actively compensate children and young people in care for their traumatic pre-care experiences, and offer them the same ongoing nurturing and support as typically experienced by their peers who are not in care in order to maximise their ambitions and achievements. It emphasises a share responsibility between different departments such as education, health and child welfare. This means in practice providing them with the best possible placement experiences in terms of stability and supportive relationships until their care order ends, and then continuing to take responsibility for their welfare until they are at least 21 years old. The term "corporate" refers to the fact that organisations are involved in parenting children and young people in care, and the need to ensure that structures are in place to support the individual carers who parent within that system.

Secondly, I would like to see the introduction of a national leaving care framework, similar to that of the UK which could be actioned via the existing national framework for protecting Australia's children. A national framework would arguably address a number of key weaknesses of the existing Australian system such as the wide variation in policy and legislation between the states and territories and even within individual jurisdictions, and the absence of support for young people who shift from one jurisdiction to another.

It would also improve opportunities for national benchmarking, and place pressure on poorer services to improve their standards via the introduction of a Guidance and Regulations document that would clarify the obligations of all service providers to care leavers. It is also evident from the UK experience as reflected in the introduction of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 that national legislation is likely to increase the profile of leaving care and drive improved resourcing and higher quality of service provisions.

Thirdly, we need to establish a National Data Base similar to that of the UK that is freely accessible on the internet which would allow us to monitor the progress of care leavers; measure outcomes in key areas such as education, employment, health, housing, parenthood, substance use, social connections, and involvement in crime; and analyse differences in the effectiveness of various states and territories and NGO policies and programs.

In summary, care authorities should aim to approximate the ongoing and holistic support that responsible parents in the community typically provide to their children after they leave home until at least 25 years. Providing adequate supports for care leavers in Australia is relatively cheap, given the small number of care leavers in any one year, and will provide substantial social and economic gains for both the young people concerned and Australian society more generally.

I believe his arguments are well researched and there are case studies in Australia, the United States of America and Europe that support this model. I note that Victoria has made some progress in recent years by introducing the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, which obliges the State to assist care leavers up to 21 years of age. The Government has established mentoring, post-care support and flexible funding for young people transitioning from care or post-care. This ongoing support, materially and emotionally, can be the main factor in helping young people to overcome traumatic experiences and rebuild their lives.

It is unacceptable that we in New South Wales as the corporate parent are allowing our youth who are leaving care to become homeless within the first year of leaving care. The high proportion of homeless people with foster care backgrounds is evident in most western countries, and it is no different in New South Wales. This is a clear failing of our foster care systems. The vast majority of young people who age out of the foster care system struggle to find housing and jobs and to complete their education. To date, the Minister has shown a poor understanding of the issues facing foster carers and children in out-of-home care. I am pleased that the Government has done a backflip, as it should have, on the issue of the foster carer allowance.

The Minister's performance in the media when she tried to justify denying the foster carers allowance was appalling. To suggest that children over 16 would be able to negotiate with their foster carers to pay rent illustrates that the Minister is out of touch. I commend the shadow Minister, the Hon. Barbara Perry, for working with foster carers groups to highlight the Government's failure on this issue and the fact that it was out of touch. The Hon. Barbara Perry should be commended for forcing the Government to see how heartless it was in its approach. Thankfully, the Government has seen sense and has done a backflip—to be honest, it was a backflip with pike. At least now foster carers will receive the allowance that they should when they provide care on behalf of the State to the most vulnerable people in our community. When we fail to provide the necessary information and support for care leavers and foster carers, we are setting up those young people for a fall. They have little choice but to turn to the streets to survive.

We also need to be aware of the fact that children who have been homeless or who experience multiple episodes of housing instability, such as couch surfing, staying in motels or shuttling between households when they are young, will often mirror that in their own

adulthoods. Many homeless adolescents find that exchanging sex for food, clothing and shelter is their only chance of survival on the streets. In turn, homeless youth are at a greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS or HIV-related illnesses. We have legislation in place but it appears to be let down by failing to follow up on a planned process for the youth when leaving care. Changing the way we deal with those leaving care will benefit not only these young people but also the wider society. We absolutely owe them to do that. I commend the motion to the House, and I commend the Hon. Jan Barham for bringing this matter to the attention of members.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE [12.10 p.m.]: I give my strong support and that of my Greens colleagues to the motion moved by the Hon. Jan Barham. This wonderfully timed motion has done a great deal to highlight a gaping hole in the care that is provided by our State when it assumes, in effect, the position of parenting children in out-of-home care. In particular, I commend the members who have contributed to the debate on this motion. Every one of them strongly supported the motion to put this issue on the political agenda. They spoke about the needs of these vulnerable young people when they leave out-of-home care and the obligation of the government, when a child is taken away from their family, to make sure it steps in and fills the role of the missing parent when that child begins the transition into adulthood. This has been a comprehensive failure in New South Wales.

The statistics in that regard are compelling. In 2009-10—the last year that comprehensive public statistics are available—1,054 15- to 17-year-olds were discharged from out-of-home care in New South Wales. Figures provided in a government report published at the time of the previous government show that 82 per cent of those young people were not given a leaving home care plan, they were not given the basic information about their rights to access benefits at a State and Federal level, and they were not given any guidance about what they could do in their next stage of life when they began the transition to independence.

We know the outcomes of that failure because, again, we have comprehensive reports which show that more than one third or 35 per cent of young people leaving out-of-home care become homeless in the first year. I ask members to pause for a moment and think about that: 400 young people, having left the care of the State, in their first year of their independent life have fallen into homelessness. As the Hon. Helen Westwood said, once these young people fall into homelessness they have appalling health outcomes. They are often preyed upon by others who use them for the purpose of prostitution. They have a significantly higher rate of sexually transmitted diseases, and they have very poor ongoing employment prospects. Indeed, 20 to 28 per cent of males and 36 to almost 40 per cent of females who leave out-of-home care end up the subject of community orders in the criminal justice system.

Governments are concerned about their budgets in the current year. That is as true of the previous Government as it is of this Government. Often, when governments look at these statistics they look carefully at the costs in the current budget year but they fail to recognise the true cost to government if they do not provide funding to young people in these circumstances. One of the most compelling statistics that has been raised in this debate is the lifetime cost difference to the State Government for the care of these young people. It has been estimated that absent intervention, absent State government support, the lifetime

care cost to the New South Wales government of these 1,000-plus children leaving out-of-home care is in the order of \$738,000.

However, the cost of providing the wrap-around model of support services—which is greatly needed and should be the subject of leaving care plans—is only about \$86,000. If State government bit the bullet and spent the money at the time that these young people leave care, the cost to government is about 11 per cent of the cost it otherwise would be if the young people are allowed to leave without care and guidance. Putting aside the issue of moral responsibility for children who were taken away from their parents, even the economic rationalists amongst the Government and Opposition benches would have to welcome the motion moved by the Hon. Jan Barham and realise that caring for children not only improves their lives and our society but in the long term greatly saves dollars and cents in the New South Wales State budget. I commend the motion.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO [12.14 p.m.]: I support the motion of the Hon. Jan Barham on leaving care plans. This very important issue is worthy of debate in this Chamber today because we must realise that young people in care not only are human beings who deserve to be treated appropriately and given every opportunity, but they also are a very valuable human resource for our country. It is a matter of great concern that we are not giving these young people every opportunity to achieve to their maximum potential. Young people who are taken into care usually have come from dysfunctional families and backgrounds. The foster carers who take them into care do their best to ensure that these young children have stability. They act as role models, they teach them values, they provide them with an education and they prepare them for their future life. But the good work of foster carers falls down if these young people do not have an adequate transition plan. They require leaving care plans that link them into community services and supports that they will need.

As I said, generally these young people have come from a disadvantaged background where defeatism is the common attitude at home. As a result of their background, often they are not confident to speak up for their own needs. They are not taught about the requirement to regularly attend school or sporting functions. They come from family homes where they are not taught simple things, such as, balancing the family budget and making sure they have enough money to pay the bills, pay the rent, buy food and use public transport. These young people often do not learn such values from their original family. Whilst foster carers do their best to ensure that the young people are taught these values whilst in foster care, we must be realistic and acknowledge that not every young person in care will be in one placement. They may be in and out of placements from one foster care family to the next and then back to their original family until dysfunction causes them to be removed again.

The background of these young people indicates that they need to be given every support in order to become effective and contributing citizens. They need an extra helping hand and they need structure and certainty. They need that support when they leave care so that they do not fall back into the bad habits they learnt in their original family homes. When these young people are taken from their homes and become wards of the State, we have to say that they are not wards of a government or a bureaucracy; they are, in fact, wards of all of us because we are all members of the community of this State. We all have a personal responsibility to ensure that these children are provided with the resources and support, the education, the care and the certainty that we would expect for our own children. These

children start off at a disadvantage. While most foster carers are very good and try to keep children in care for as long as possible, in the foster care system that does not always happen.

We have to ensure that these young people are given support so that when they leave care they do not end up living on their own resources. When I was at high school there was a young man at the school who was a prefect. We all assumed he was living with his grandparents, for whatever reason; it was never discussed. He had lived with them forever. He had been at primary school with other people I knew. We were absolutely shocked that when he turned 18 and finished high school he was out the door. The foster carers were not being paid to look after him anymore. They literally said, "On your bike." He did not have the resources; he did not have a job. He had been hoping to go to university.

It was one of those situations where friends rallied around. One of our family friends' eldest son had gone to study at university in another State so they had a spare bedroom and this young man moved in there. He got a job but then faced a number of difficulties. When he was given access to his files he found out who his real family were and that he was the only one of a number of children who had been placed in foster care. In fact, his whole family had been living two suburbs away for his entire life and had not bothered to contact him. This young man was given no formal support and as a result his life fell apart. Friends can do so much to try to support someone in those circumstances but unfortunately it was not enough. He ended up in jail and with mental health problems. About 15 years ago he disappeared off the radar and nobody knows where he is anymore.

That probably could have been managed better if there had been a leaving care plan for him. It probably also could have been managed better if other people had been aware of his circumstances and his foster carers had been perhaps a little more humane in the way in which they dealt with the issue of his turning 18 and not attracting payments anymore. That is one example of somebody who was functioning well while in care. As I said, he was a prefect at the local high school and was hoping to go to university. He was well accepted, well behaved and well mannered, but his life fell apart through lack of a leaving care plan—a transition plan to living independently.

Just imagine the circumstances for younger children who have been through that revolving door of foster care and who occasionally go back to their dysfunctional parents. Imagine their lack of internal resources to manage their life when they turn 18 and have to leave care. That is why it is essential that these young people have adequate leaving care plans and that resources are put in place to ensure they have the greatest opportunity to participate to their best in society. While we now accept that anything less than that is not good enough for young people with disabilities, we have to make sure that those same sorts of plans, those same supports and structures, are in place and are effective for young people leaving out-of-home care.

These young people are a resource. We do not know what their potential is, but if we do not give them the opportunity to achieve it we are short-changing not only them but ourselves and our society. It is very important that we provide resources to ensure that leaving care plans are in place. It is important to ensure there is an adequate network of services that provides supports for these people. It is appropriate that this motion is carried without

amendment to show that we all genuinely have an interest in ensuring that young people leaving care are given the opportunities we would expect for our own children.

If members talk to people who provide care and services to young people who are homeless about what these young people need, they will say that they want stability, ordinariness and normality. They want things to be the way they think they are in a normal family. They want to function as responsible members of society. They want some support; they do not want to be 18 years and six weeks and out on their own, wondering what to do and not being sure who to contact if they need help because they do not know how to budget and how to manage for themselves. We cannot be sure that every young person who leaves care knows how to use a washing machine and has appropriate household skills.

These are all things that we equip our own children with. Children who leave functional families have these skills. We cannot be sure that young people leaving care have them. If they do not have them they will not be able to get jobs and they will not know how to sign up for TAFE courses. I know from my own children's experience that enrolling for a TAFE course, attending the college on the right day and taking the right forms and knowing the payment that is required are a bit of a nightmare for well-educated kids who drag their parents along to help them. What sort of support do we give young people leaving care who want to better themselves by undertaking further education?

We have to make sure the investment is made so that young people leaving care can participate fully in society. As I often say, the investment in these sorts of services is paid back tenfold because the cost of a dysfunctional person in society—somebody who is in and out of refuges, in and out of jail, involved in petty crime and all the rest of it—is huge in comparison to the ordinary, run-of-the-mill, round-peg-in-a-round-hole person who goes to work, pays taxes, does not steal and pays their fare on public transport. The investment we make to give young people leaving care the opportunity to become productive in society is worth every single cent. It pays back tenfold. It is not just an economic model that can be used when arguing for Treasury resources to fund services to provide the sorts of supports that are needed; it is also the fact that as human beings we owe it to these young people. As I said, we all are the State and they are State wards. We all have a responsibility.

The Hon. Jan Barham has done us a great service in putting this motion on the *Notice Paper* and facilitating debate on this issue. This is an issue we need to focus on. These young people do not have a voice. They are individuals in foster care. There are advocacy groups and umbrella groups that stand up and speak for them but generally this is a disenfranchised group of young people who are behind the eight ball at the outset. They need our support and interest to enable them to have the best shot they can at a reasonable life. I commend the Hon. Jan Barham for bringing this debate forward and commend the motion to the House. I hope it will be supported.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN [12.27 p.m.]: I will be brief. There is probably not much that I can add personally to this debate except to say that we support the motion and we commend the Hon. Jan Barham for putting it forward. I felt I had to add to the debate following the comments of the Opposition Whip, the Hon. Amanda Fazio, that we all must take responsibility, we are the State. There is no-one else; it is us. It is not the bureaucrats or somebody else, it is us. I have had only a passing need to interact with people in this

particular situation. I have only one example, which is fairly close to my own family.

I agree wholeheartedly with the comments of the Hon. Amanda Fazio. Well cared for, well educated kids with lots of support can have difficulties when they get into that phase when they leave school. They would be about the same age as the people we are talking about. So how does one of these disadvantaged kids stand a snowflake's chance in hell of doing some of the ordinary things that we do not even think twice about, until such time as we have to assist one of our own children to do them? I refer to matters like enrolling for TAFE, getting a job and getting out of bed in the morning when the alarm clock says get up, you have to go to work.

Mr David Shoebridge: Getting a flat.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Getting a flat, or learning how to handle money. It behoves all of us to take on this responsibility and do whatever we can as individuals and as parliamentarians to try to fix the problem. I commend the Hon. Jan Barham for moving this motion, which is wholeheartedly supported by the Shooters and Fishers Party.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM [12.30 p.m.], in reply: I thank all members for their important contributions to debate on this motion. This motion calls on the Government to fulfil its legislated requirements under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998. However, the motion is more than that: it is an acknowledgement of the benefits of, and the need to provide, meaningful support to young people who are leaving care and recognition of the needs of vulnerable people. With the support of the House we are sending a strong message that it is important. I hope that we will encourage the Government to meet that legislative requirement and perhaps consider new initiatives, which can also be presented in the House.

Young people leaving care need independent living skills that include work and training information, and social and emotional skills. Those skills are expected of them before they are able to live independently. Recognising that they can be alone in this difficult transition makes it that much more difficult. We live in a complex world. Recently the Minister stated her commitment to this aspect of leaving care, with the announcement of \$6,000 funding for education and training. This is welcomed and appreciated, and I congratulate the Minister on sending a positive message. I acknowledge the comments of the Hon. Mick Veitch about how powerful language can be in relation to this motion. He said:

One lesson for all of us, particularly those of us in public life, is that we need to be very sensitive to the words that we use.

I have used the word "discharge" in my motion to describe the journey that young people make from care. I thank the Hon. Mick Veitch for raising that point. He has made us all aware of the power of language and how bureaucratic terms can dehumanise the process. I thank all members for their commitment to addressing the disadvantage that affects young people leaving foster care. I thank them for their honesty and for sharing personal stories of caring for foster children or having encountered them. We have been given insight into the reality of foster caring in New South Wales and I feel heartened to hear their stories.

The disadvantage that faces young care leavers is multifaceted but we obviously share values in this area. That is positive because it means that we can work together to fulfil that

responsibility shared by all of us, shared by the State, to make leaving care plans available to all young people. The legislation provides clarity. Now it is clear that the House agrees on the need to revise and update this issue and the reconnection with young people who are affected by it. An increase in the delivery of leaving care plans from the current 18 per cent will be a performance measure of how young people are being served by the State.

This may mean that at budget time an increase in funding is needed. The support of all members of this Chamber will send a strong message to the Government that any budget increase will be supported. The Hon. Paul Green said that this is an investment. The Hon. Amanda Fazio referred to a tenfold return on that investment. They are good figures and we should wholeheartedly support an increase in funding to deliver this outcome. As we have agreed, young people leaving care are at great risk of experiencing negative life outcomes. Research by Osborn and Bromfield "Young People Leaving Care" 2007 stated:

... young people leaving care are at great risk of experiencing negative life outcomes.

Periods of homelessness and committing offences affect close to half of young people after they leave care.

... a third of care leavers left care with a plan that released them into programs for homeless people

A sense of security, stability and social support are strong predictors of better outcomes for young people's long term outcomes after leaving care.

In 2010 the Ombudsman's report entitled "Review by the Ombudsman of the planning support provided by community services to a group of young people leaving statutory care" found that care leavers are more likely than their peers to experience difficulties. In closing, I thank my staff member Ella Buckland for putting so much energy into this motion. I commend the motion to the House. [*Time expired.*]

**Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.
Motion agreed to.**

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

CARERS ALLOWANCE

Question

18th Oct 2011

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services, representing the Minister for Family and Community Services. Will the Minister clarify what savings are anticipated from the removal of the carer allowance paid to parents who adopt children in foster or out-of-home care? How will it affect the number of out-of-home care adoptions?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I thank the member for her question and interest in this area. As the question is detailed, I will refer it for an answer as soon as convenient.

Answer

22nd Nov 2011

On 18 October 2011 the Hon. Jan Barham asked the Minister for Finance and Services, representing the Minister for Family and Community Services, a question without notice regarding the carers allowance. The Minister for Family and Community Services provided the following response:

1. Extensive grandfathering means that expected savings are \$624,000 over four years. Carers who adopt children in their care do so because they love their child and want to make a formal, legal commitment to the child rather than for financial reasons. Adoption confirms that a child or young person is a full member of the family without the need for ongoing involvement from Community Services.

2. International adoptions, which cost couples thousands of dollars and attract no financial support, have over the last decade under Labor been between two and ten times the number of adoptions in out-of-home care.

Increasing adoptions is not about the money, it's about reforming complicated and lengthy processes.

The Liberal and Nationals Government wants to increase adoptions where appropriate. To that end the Government is working to streamline the adoption process by reducing red tape and unnecessary steps that carers currently face when they seek to adopt a child in their care.

HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE

Question

6th September 2011

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Finance and Services, and Minister for the Illawarra, representing the Minister for Family and Community Services. How many young people in New South Wales who are identified as homeless have been in care and how many of those received a leaving care plan?

Answer

6th September 2011

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I thank the Hon. Jan Barham for her question and interest in this important area. I know that she has done a considerable amount of work in relation to these issues and I have taken particular note of her questions in order to answer them appropriately. The New South Wales Government acknowledges the complex challenges and barriers that young people face in accessing and sustaining appropriate accommodation. In 2010-11 the Commonwealth Government and the New South Wales Community Services jointly contributed \$134 million to fund approximately 350 Specialist Homelessness Services to provide accommodation and support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Approximately 39 per cent of the Specialist Homelessness Services in New South Wales are targeted at young people. This equates to approximately 138 youth-focused Specialist Homelessness Services in 2010-11, with funding of approximately \$48.3 million.

In relation to the honourable member's question, I am advised that supported accommodation services currently do not record whether or not clients have been in out-of-home care when they request accommodation and other homelessness services. The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 provides for assistance for young people who are transitioning from out-of-home care to independent living. Assistance can include help to find accommodation, to undertake education and training or to access income support and healthcare. It also may include referrals to counselling services. Transitioning to independence is a key priority area under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, and New South Wales is working closely with the Commonwealth to improve outcomes for young care leavers.

New South Wales is contributing to the planning of a nationally consistent approach to leaving care and a review of the Transition to Independent Living Allowance. Community Services has implemented a case planning framework and electronic templates for case planning and review that will support consistent case planning, including on leaving care. Objectives addressed in the eight measures of wellbeing in the case plan template focus on supporting the young person's successful transition to independent living. A key priority of the New South Wales Homelessness Action Plan is a "no exits into homelessness" policy to ensure that young people leaving out-of-home care have access to long-term supported housing. Community Services is working with non-government organisations to implement

the Homelessness Action Plan. It leads 32 projects targeting specific client groups. This includes assisting Aboriginal young people leaving out-of-home care to successfully transition to independent living, preventing their homelessness.

LEAVING CARE PLANS

Question

22nd June 2011

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services. I refer to a question I asked on 25 May 2011 regarding leaving care plans and an answer that was received yesterday. I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that the answer tabled yesterday did not address the question I asked, which was: What percentage of children and young people in the care of the Minister has leaving care plans? The answer tabled yesterday does not address that issue; therefore the Minister for Community Services has not answered the question. Will the Minister follow this up and make sure that I get an answer to the question.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: The process is that we take a question on notice, we refer it to the other Minister and we get an answer from the other Minister. That is what I have done.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I ask the Minister a supplementary question. Is it acceptable that a Minister from the other House does not give the Minister in this House an answer that is directed to the question that I asked?

The PRESIDENT: Order! I rule that the supplementary question is out of order because it asks the Minister for an opinion.

NO ANSWER

KINSHIP CARE

Question

31st May 2011

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services, representing the Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Women. Will the Minister advise the House how many children are in kinship care in New South Wales? What percentage of children in out-of-home care does this number represent?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I thank the Hon. Jan Barham for another detailed and very interesting question. I will refer it to the Minister for an answer. I look forward to reading the answer as much as the member does.

Answer

21st June 2011

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: On 31 May 2011 the Hon. Jan Barham asked me in my capacity as the Minister representing the Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Women a question without notice regarding kinship care. The Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Women has provided the following response:

1. As at 30 June 2010, there were 8,844 children and young people in out-of-home care placed in relative and kinship care.
2. This represents 50.8 per cent of all children and young people in out-of-home care as at 30 June 2010.

LEAVING CARE PLANS

Question

25th May 2011

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services, representing the Minister for Family and Community Services. Will the Minister advise what percentage of children and young people in the care of the Minister have leaving care plans? Do all leaving care plans make provision for care leavers to be assisted in applying for the Federal Government transition to independent living allowance?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Once again I thank the honourable member—are you honourable?

The Hon. Jan Barham: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I like the honourable Greens. Actually, I am really pleased to see that they have got over their little rebirthing period when they stopped wearing ties and there were two factions. This is an important and detailed question and I will refer it to the Minister and obtain an answer as soon as I can.

Answer

21st June 2011

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: On 25 May 2011 the Hon. Jan Barham asked me in my capacity as the Minister representing the Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Women a question without notice regarding leaving care plans. The Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Women has provided the following response:

1. The O'Farrell Stoner Government supports leaving care planning for children and young people. Currently, planning for some children and young people may be more involved than for others based on individuals' circumstances and needs. More information about leaving care planning can be found at www.community.nsw.gov.au.

2. Leaving care planning for young people leaving care with a goal of independent living is undertaken in consultation with the young person, to meet their needs given their particular circumstances. This work usually commences when they turn 15 years of age to allow them to prepare for this important event. Where appropriate for the young person, assistance in applying for Transition to Independent Living Allowance would be included in the Leaving Care plan.

In late 2010 two resources with information on leaving care for young people and carers were developed and distributed:

- Your Next Step: Information for young people leaving care is to assist young people. This resource includes information about the Federal Government's Transition to Independent

Living Allowance.

- Carers of young people leaving care are given a resource *Leading the Way: Preparing young people for leaving care A Guide for Carers*. This resource includes tips to help the carer prepare the young person, as well as a guide on entitlements including the Transition to Independent Living Allowance.