

Aged Care Diversity Framework

Resource Sheet 12 Care Leavers

Care leavers include older people who lived as children in institutions, orphanages, children's homes, training schools and foster homes as well as unaccompanied child migrants. They are often called 'Forgotten Australians'.

It is estimated that up to 500,000 Australian-born children in the 20th century were placed in care or became state wards. Many were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin removed by Commonwealth and State Governments and church missions, often without parental consent. These children are called the Stolen Generations.

Between 1947 and 1970 over 7,000 children were brought here from the United Kingdom and Malta.

Care leavers were often told that their parents were dead or didn't want them, even though this was false. Care leavers, particularly but not solely, who were raised in institutions were often deprived of love, family contact, educational opportunities and material possessions. Many survived physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Childhood may have been a time of rigid daily routines, poor quality food, menial domestic tasks and demeaning punishments for disobedience. Often they were exited as teenagers without sufficient life skills, resources or post-care support. These burdens are carried for the remainder of their lives.

The long-term impacts vary from person to person. They can include challenges dealing with

bureaucracies and authority figures, an increased risk of homelessness, mental health issues, alcohol and other drug abuse, reluctance to seek support due to past betrayal by caregivers, literacy problems, fear of disclosure about childhood, feelings of abandonment and self-blame, challenges to maintaining loving relationships, poor physical health and heightened anxiety around commonly celebrated events such as birthdays, Christmas and Mother's day.

However, it is important to recognise that older people who are care leavers are also survivors with their own strengths, skills and resilience.

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General Strategies to address access and engagement challenges

- Remember that each individual is unique with different life and survival experiences.
- As care leavers may not disclose their past, do not push disclosure. The establishment of a trusting relationship where the person feels safe and believed, is critical to successful engagement with aged care. This may take some time.
- Notice and respond sensitively to anxious or fearful reactions to perceived authority, bureaucratic approaches and decisions, care arrangements, physical contact between personal care workers and the older person, eating or activities in a group setting, encouragement to do domestic work as a reablement strategy, for example.
- Self-determination and control of care arrangements becomes even more important. Choice of care workers, particularly their gender, is important.
- Be flexible, make changes to agency routines, provide choice in levels of task involvement, provided meals and social activities.
- Respect attachments to belongings. Ask permission before touching or moving them.
- Explain written information, provide help and alternatives with everyday reading tasks (e.g. read newspapers aloud, audio books).

For further information,
see **Sheet 17: Resources**
– **Resource Nos. 1, 4, 7, 10,**
20, 24