



Response to Issues Paper 10: Advocacy and Support and Therapeutic Treatment Services

*“We don’t want to be treated like Charity cases like we
were as children” - Care Leaver aged 61*



Justice Not Charity

Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) is a national, independent, peak membership body which represents and advocates for people who were raised in Australian and New Zealand orphanages, Children's Homes, foster care and other institutions.

CLAN's objective is to raise community awareness of our issues, and to advocate for a National Independent Redress Scheme (NIRS) for all forms of abuse and neglect. Being raised without your family has lifelong implications that require lifelong support services.

CLAN provides validation, information, understanding and trauma informed support for Care Leavers and their families. CLAN also provides training and awareness of Care Leaver issues to people who work in the field of Aged Care, Prisons, Social Work as well as Government Departments. We also provide support & assistance to individuals to tell their abuse stories to the Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

We also provide our members with a bi-monthly newsletter, access to a Care Leaver focused library, monthly socials in all states of Australia and New Zealand as well as promoting and organising Orphanage & Children's Homes reunions.

Care Leavers Needs and Unmet Needs

CLAN believes that as an organisation who has provided services and support for Care Leavers for the last 15 years, we have a successful organisation that is run for Care Leavers by Care Leavers.

In our experience there are a number of key factors which contribute to determining whether services work for Care Leavers or not.

Firstly, being able to provide Care Leavers with validation and belief is pivotal in creating the right environment for Care Leavers as well as providing them with a trauma informed response. Care Leavers also should be treated with care, commitment and consistency, without workers being condescending or insincere.

Using the welfare model where Care Leavers are made to feel like charity cases when they approach organisations for assistance is detrimental to their wellbeing and also results in the Care Leaver not using the service again. Furthermore, some services have a tendency to treat every Care Leaver as if they suffer with a mental health issue, passing judgement upon a person before they have even disclosed their history. Similarly, due to the issues with authority figures as children, many Care Leavers find it hard to interact with workers who are unnecessarily rigid or authoritative. It is important for all services to understand that not every Care Leaver wants counselling (which most services offer) but may feel they can get more use out of other options like brokerage funding for allied health services. However many services refuse to fund extra sessions for another service even if the Care Leaver is not using other services such as counselling.

Some Care Leavers also take issue with the fact that certain support services are run by past providers of Orphanages, Children's Homes and foster care. Care Leavers feel that they are returning to the abusers in order to access support they are entitled to. Care Leavers feel that many services do not understand the needs of Care Leavers and that Care Leaver views are underrepresented in services. Many Care Leavers also feel annoyed at the division of funds between needs based services like health and medical appointments and entertainment based activities like social outings. Those Care Leavers who do not live close enough to access the actual office of the service often feel isolated and excluded.

Furthermore Care Leavers who live interstate are disadvantaged from accessing and benefiting from the social type activities than those who live locally to the services.

As an organisation that has been constantly evolving since our inception 15 years ago, we have found that many organisations alienate Care Leavers due to their obtuse restrictions or narrow scope of service. CLAN provides a multitude of services and seeks to assist Care Leavers wherever we can even if that means providing a service we haven't provided before, e.g. writing a eulogy for a care leaver whose brother died & grave site reunions.

In the scope of support, advocacy, counselling and case work, CLAN prides itself on flexibility and tailor made supports for the individual Care Leaver. Whilst CLAN does not provide brokerage funding we do indeed strive to perform most other services to the best of our ability. We are constantly adapting, seeking feedback and suggestions from Care Leavers to constantly improve our services.

Care Leavers feel that many Social Workers and Therapists have no limited or no knowledge or training on what it is like to lose your whole family, lose your connection to the community, feel like a second class citizen and to spend your childhood in an orphanage, foster care and other institutions an on top of these issues suffer terrible abuse and neglect.

There are a number of service providers currently operating for Care Leavers with CLAN being one of them. The other services are mainly state based services and National Find and Connect services. The services which Care Leavers currently use and are provided with are counselling, advocacy, support, casework to obtain records and family history information, Royal Commission support (with both preparation of submissions and attending the Royal Commission), brokerage funding for various health and lifestyle costs, some funeral assistance, variety of courses and lifestyle classes.

In a survey conducted by CLAN in 2014 with over 398 participants, the top 8 issues most important to Care Leavers are:

- 1. Redress**
- 2. Medical Expenses**
- 3. Funerals paid for**
- 4. Dental assistance**
- 5. Free Access to Birth Death & Marriage certificates**
- 6. Priority access and assistance with Government Housing**
- 7. Reunion funding to visit family or families graves**
- 8. Payment of headstones for family members who died in 'care'.**

Other issues which came up with importance to Care Leavers included free counselling, travel assistance, more public education and awareness campaigns for the Australian Community, a Gold card to cover health and travel related expenses, free access to education, home care assistance, optical expenses, free access to their own un-redacted State Ward records, Orphanage Files, Child Endowment Records, Family War and Health Records.

Furthermore support for Care Leaver families, and the need for the National Independent Redress Scheme to acknowledge all forms of abuse as well as the forced child labour children did in Orphanages, Children's Homes, Foster Care & Other Institutions.

In addition to this, CLAN believes that other services of great importance are family history services where genealogists are employed to help Care Leavers find their family, photographs or to trace their family history. It is of the utmost importance to Care Leavers that they are able to form identities that they were deprived of as children.

Other services Care Leavers have asked for are support in their elderly years to stay independent to be able to stay in their own homes, A Care Leaver Legal Service, Care Leaver guardianship services, research into Care Leavers, parenting support for younger Care Leavers, and a tick box system for automatic recognition of Care Leaver status on all government forms.

Furthermore, and deserving of attention is the issue of Care Leaver history still being unknown. For many Care Leavers it is the bane of their existence that they constantly have to tell their story to the numerous service providers they encounter. Doctors, Dentists, Psychologists, Counsellors, other medical specialists and allied health specialists, police, politicians, judges, Centrelink, Medicare, and other Government Departments like Housing etc., have limited understanding and awareness of who Care Leavers are and the issues they present with.

It is time that this was rectified and Care Leaver history is made visible in Australia. There are a number of ways in which this can be done, and CLAN endorses all of them:

- Fund and support a travelling orphanage museum
- Make Care Leaver History part of the school curriculum which incorporates a visit to the Orphanage Museum. This is similar to the current incorporation of visits to the various Jewish museums to coincide with Holocaust teachings in the school curriculums.
- Mandatory training about Care Leavers in university curriculums with “Orphans of the living – Growing up in Care in the 20th century” by Joanna Penglase should be required reading for all health, allied health and social and behavioural sciences degrees and Australian history curriculums.
- The FA & CM Apology should be displayed in every elected Member of Parliament’s Office & School.
- Mandatory training about Care Leavers as special needs groups in all Government Departments to increase awareness.
- The introduction of a gold card or similar program which brings about automatic recognition of Care Leavers.

Currently, the biggest issue facing Care Leavers is the inconsistency and the lack of transparency of services. Services in different states are run by different organisations and are therefore funded differently, and also are required to do different things. Even the National Find and Connect services are not funded to provide the same services. Furthermore, something that has caused many Care Leavers to complain is the lack of transparency of the brokerage services.

Many Care Leavers are told different things, and it has never been made clear by any of the state services in printed material what Care Leavers entitlements are. This has caused many to feel as if they are asking for charity, or that the services play favourites. Whilst CLAN understands the logistics of brokerage are difficult, the services need to be more transparent about what they offer so Care Leavers are encouraged and empowered to use the service instead of feeling daunted and discouraged because they feel as if they are asking for a hand out

CLAN knows that a nationally consistent program is what is needed to provide equal treatment for ALL Care Leavers across Australia. CLAN also believes that as we currently provide a National Service we would be the best organisation to keep doing this work. However, it does require adequate funding and proper resourcing to have the right framework for a service like ours.

Barriers to Accessing Services

One of the main barriers to accessing services are geographic considerations. Many Care Leavers live in rural areas, interstate, and others are overseas. Firstly, those who live in rural areas need extra time and resources devoted to them. These Care Leavers are often the most disadvantaged as they lack the many conveniences that those living in metropolitan areas enjoy. Many Care Leavers live lonely isolated lives in small country towns. A lot of them don't mix or trust people in order to use the limited services in rural areas.

As Care Leavers get older and frailer, having people close by becomes more important, but for those living in the country this may not always be a possibility. In fact for these Care Leavers things become much harder as they are also less able to travel the distances they used to. Furthermore, there are a lack of services, both health and social services to assist Care Leavers in rural areas. The services that do exist in these areas may have limited knowledge and understanding about Care Leavers and their issues, however there are no alternatives. Additionally, Care Leavers in rural areas often feel more stigmatised, as being part of a small town there is a tendency for everyone to know each other's business.

For many Care Leavers, the fear of being seen walking into a psychologists or counsellors office is too great as they would be recognised. Many Care Leavers in country areas have a lot of shame and embarrassment about their past and fear that those around them wouldn't understand. It is for these reasons that these Care Leavers need programmes directed solely at them. There needs to be funds and resources set aside for helping and providing outreach to Care Leavers from country areas. This is the only way in the short term that these Care Leavers will receive the support and assistance from specialised services that they truly need. Some CLAN members travel for over three (3) hours to get face to face counselling from CLAN's trauma informed counsellors. Petrol is very expensive and financially it is not viable for these Care Leavers to continue to do this.

Those living interstate from the Orphanage/Home they grew up in also face their own challenges in utilising services. Currently, in addition to CLAN, the states all have their own state based service (bar the Territories who have Find and Connect Services) as well as the Federal Find and Connect Services. Whilst all services can provide assistance and support over the phone for those who live interstate, many of the services they provide are based at their offices in the various cities.

This often leaves those living interstate feeling frustrated and isolated as those living locally to the service seem to benefit more from the service itself. Furthermore, additional supports are not provided to those who live interstate to make up for these disadvantages. Therefore it is often felt by those living interstate (and in rural areas) that the services play favourites with those who live locally, when it is just another barrier to accessing services that can't be overcome.

Whilst the federally funded Find and Connect services are meant to provide a level playing field, once again they are so closely aligned with the state services it is hard to know where one begins and the other ends. There is also the issue of different funding for different States and their Find and Connect Programmes. Which at the heart of it, is a great injustice and inadequacy.

Furthermore there is the issue of Care Leavers being unaware of CLAN or various services which may assist them. Navigating to find a service tends to be a very difficult experience for Care Leavers for a number of reasons;

1. Language used by various organisations such as 'out of home care' or 'child protection' can be confusing or misleading to older Care Leavers. These terms are not understood by older Care Leavers, this is why CLAN ensures we use language which is clearly understood by older Care Leavers such as, 'Child Welfare,' 'State Ward' and 'Orphanage & Children's Homes'.
2. A large Number of Care Leavers will also tend to avoid services who are linked to a Church or Charity due to past experiences of abuse and treatment from their time in Orphanages, Children's Homes, Foster Care & Other Institutions.
3. Referrals. CLAN receives no referrals from services or organisations. Though referrals from the Royal Commission have been constant, with many Care Leavers accessing the support they need successfully. CLAN believes that all State Departments as well as Centrelink, Department of Health, Department of Ageing and Department of Veteran Affairs should be informed of our services and be referring Care Leavers to CLAN.
4. Lastly CLAN's lack of funding has made it very difficult to broadly promote our service. Without the proper funding we cannot advertise or reach out to Care Leavers seeking our support. The majority of the Care Leavers who access CLAN have located the service through word of mouth, interaction with our members at awareness raising events and our website. Unfortunately in order to provide certain services to Care Leavers such as a bi-monthly newsletter, organising social events & reunions, home visits as well as access to our Care Leaver focused library, CLAN has had to charge a yearly fee for a membership. Which causes frustration and anger towards our service.

With increased funding CLAN would be able to provide our all our services free of charge like many other state based services for Care Leavers.

There are also many Care Leavers who live overseas, who are members of CLAN. They reside in NZ, Holland, USA, Canada, Ireland and Germany. Our new name "*Care Leavers Australasia Network*" reflects this new initiative. There is little that these Care Leavers can receive from state based services and Find & Connect services. At CLAN we do our best to provide these members with up to date information, we send our newsletters overseas, and we have also formed a New Zealand chapter of our organisation as there are many Australian Care Leavers who have relocated there.

In this way, these Care Leavers also have access to the social supports that those based in Australia. Nevertheless, it will always be difficult for these Care Leavers to receive the same level of support and service, especially for things such as brokerage, or personal support and advocacy. Perhaps with more funding and resources, packages can be tailor made for outreach to these Care Leavers also.

Furthermore, when speaking about Care Leavers who have moved overseas, there are also those who have done the reverse, and are now living in Australia after growing up in an overseas Orphanage. These Care Leavers, have little support but are also being triggered by the Royal Commission.

CLAN currently has members who we provide a full range of services to who grew up in New Zealand, Polish, Irish, Norwegian and UK Orphanages. This is a group that also needs to be considered, they are Australian citizens in need of help and support.

Other barriers to accessing services are physical, intellectual disabilities, literacy issues as well as mental health issues. Those with disabilities require a greater amount of time and care. For these Care Leavers, accessing any service can be difficult, so it is much more important that groups they are already working with are able to provide information about Care Leaver services like CLAN and facilitate contact.

This means that caseworker services need to be comprehensive to ensure that those who are living with a disability are provided with the best and most informed services for them. Again this means that society as a whole and larger government services need to have a better understanding of Care Leaver issues and the services which are available to assist them. It is much more likely that those with a disability will first have contact with another service such as Centrelink, Job Find agencies and disability support agencies before they come into contact with services like CLAN.

Those with a disability will also require more time with a service once they make contact. This may be simply due to their physical or intellectual condition which may take more time to navigate. Either way, it means that specialised programs may need to be instituted and more funding available to assist those living with disabilities.

There are also many Care Leavers who don't have intellectual disabilities but do have literacy difficulties created from their time in 'care'. At CLAN we do our best to provide our bi-monthly newsletter on a CD for them to listen to, and those we are aware of having difficulties, we phone to give information, and always offer to help with paperwork over the phone or in person. It does provide a barrier though for many of these Care Leavers as many services require paperwork and they feel ashamed to disclose their difficulties. Normalising this for Care Leavers and asking if they require assistance also needs to be focused on.

As previously mentioned, those living with mental health issues may also face more barriers to accessing services. Sometimes simply calling up to speak to a service may be too daunting and overwhelming. The CLAN team are all trauma informed and up to date with the history of care leavers, orphanages, Children's Homes, foster care and mental institutions.

It is a requirement of CLAN that all new employees must read "Orphans of the Living – growing up in care in 20th century Australia" by Joanna Penglase co-founder of CLAN. We at CLAN understand the anger that Care Leavers have with the Churches, Charities and State Governments and we advocate on their behalf to these Institutions.

We respect and treat all care leavers as individuals. Our unique organisation provides "*Care, Commitment and Consistency*" as we understand the shame, stigma and guilt felt by Care Leavers from the legacy of a childhood in the child welfare system.

CLAN is seen as a family as one of our members stated in a recent survey "*I am proud to be a CLAN member. We are like one big family*".

The CLAN team are very knowledgeable on care leaver experiences and can attend to Care Leavers needs in an appropriate manner. Those with mental health issues may also require more outreach work done and may not be able to attend an office as they may have particular fears that stop them from leaving the house or travelling. To assist this group of Care Leavers, CLAN provides a telephone counselling service which has been responded to positively by many Care Leavers.

Lastly, and as touched on before, there needs to be a greater awareness of Care Leaver issues and services. The greatest barrier for most Care Leavers in accessing services is simply the knowledge of what services there are out there to access. CLAN feels that the government needs to devote funds to awareness raising and media campaigns so that Care Leavers are empowered to seek out support and to speak out and become their own best advocate.

Diverse Victims

There is a large contingency of Care Leavers who have in the past, or are currently serving a sentence in a correctional facility. CLAN has long recognised this diverse group, which eventuated in us sending a purposefully designed special edition newsletter and information package to all the prisons in Australia. Since then, CLAN have had a number of inmates join our organisation looking for help and support. We have applied for a number of records for these Care Leavers and we have visited a number of these Care Leavers in prison. CLAN have also conducted some training sessions with prison employees in some of these correctional facilities. In our work with prisons, we have thus far visited the following correctional facilities:

- **Junee**
- **Long Bay**
- **Port Lincoln**
- **Mt Gambier**
- **Lithgow**
- **Goulburn**

CLAN feels strongly that more work needs to be done to support prisoners who are Care Leavers. We are not funded to specifically do outreach work with inmates, but we feel they are a neglected group of Care Leavers who deserve support and advocacy also.

It is for this reason we have tried to educate prisons with information packages and training sessions. Going forward, we believe it is important that all correctional facilities around Australia are given training to respond to the needs of Care Leavers. In particular, we recommend all prison welfare officers, psychologists and caseworkers who are working with inmates should be given mandatory training by CLAN about Care Leavers, their issues, and how best to respond to these.

CLAN also believe that as a course of practice Care Leavers within the prison system should be identified so as to receive the extra support they may be requiring. CLAN also feels that extra funding needs to be focused on outreach to prisons so that organisations like CLAN can assist Care Leavers who are incarcerated to deal with any problems or issues that may have arisen out of their time in 'care'.

Lastly, it is also important that a proper After Care programme is established to assist Care Leavers leaving prison. There was no After Care at all when older Care Leavers left the child welfare system, there needs to be proper After Care for these Care Leavers now. Not only will inmates be dealing with the issues of their childhood, but being in the prison system would create a whole new set of issues that these Care Leavers will need help, and support addressing.

Within the Care Leaver group there are also a number of other diverse victims, many of which we have already spoken about in the previous section regarding barriers to services. Other victims include those with disabilities, literacy difficulties and Care Leavers who live overseas or Care Leavers from overseas who now reside in Australia.

Of course there are the other main groups when speaking about Care Leavers, Such as Indigenous Australians and Child Migrants. These groups are both well-known and recognised in the Australian community and already have specialised services directed to addressing their needs. Whilst CLAN are welcoming of anyone who has been in an Orphanage, Children's Home, Foster Care or other Institution anywhere in the world, we do recognise that these groups have specialised services like Link Up and the Child Migrants Trust which may better serve their needs. It is CLAN's aim to one day have every Care Leaver recognised and understood to the extent that Child Migrants and the Stolen Generation are.

Secondary Victims

On the whole, support services currently do very little for secondary victims. CLAN does attempt to be as inclusive as we can. Currently we offer memberships for secondary victims at a slightly higher cost than primary victims. We offer free and unlimited counselling to secondary victims regardless of whether they are a member or not. Members are welcome to attend all our socials, and we have also held an information/training session for secondary victims to attend run by the Australian Childhood Trauma Group.

It is not quite clear what other services offer to secondary victims, however it is our understanding that there are very limited services available to Care Leavers families. This needs to be rectified, as familial support plays a large role in determining better outcomes for Care Leavers.

It stands to reason then, that the better the secondary victims are supported, the better the outcome for the primary victim also. The greatest barrier at the moment to providing more support for secondary victims is funding.

CLAN believes that we understand the needs of this group to access services and support, however with limited funds, we need to concentrate our assistance on Care Leavers as the primary victim. If adequate funds were designated to assist secondary victims, then a lot more could be done for the intergeneration effects on secondary victims.

Conclusion

There are many factors contributing to the success of service providers, and the willingness of Care Leavers to use these services. It is vital that each Care Leaver is treated as an individual and is assessed on their own merits. Passing judgements and assuming the needs of Care Leavers will go a long way to alienating this special needs group.

Above all there needs to be flexibility when dealing with Care Leavers, as each individual has different needs to the next person, a one size fits all approach is not suitable. A lot more focus needs to be put on those with difficulties accessing services, such as those living in rural areas, and those with physical and intellectual disabilities.

CLAN would also like to see more resources put in to assisting those Care Leavers currently in prison. This has been a project of ours for the last few years now, but without adequate funding to assist this group there is limited work that can be done. It must be remembered that Care Leavers had NO After Care when they left the child welfare system. Those in prison now deserve some assistance in order to improve their lives, address their childhoods and hopefully reduce the recidivism rates in the future.

Lastly, secondary victims i.e. Care Leavers families need to be given more support than they are currently receiving. In giving assistance to secondary victims we are not only helping them but providing a support to primary victims also. Again, with the limited funding that has been designated to Care Leavers, our focus must remain on the primary victims, this is why more funding needs to be allocated to organisations like CLAN, so as to focus specific attention on the families and those close to Care Leavers.

JUSTICE NOT CHARITY - CLAN