Before I begin I wish to acknowledge the land we stand on today, the land of Wurundjeri and pay my respects to elders both past present and emerging, and in particular note that 30% of children and young people residing in out of home care are of Aboriginal descent, and that the reforms I will speak of today are particularly pertinent to this fact.

I also wish to separately acknowledge any care leavers in the room today and acknowledge their experiences both in care and post care, and the person you have become today.
Profound respect to you.

THE FOURTEENTH WINSTON RICKARDS MEMORIAL ORATION

In the role of the parent…raising or managing?

How to turn around the 'post care' life trajectories of Young People raised in State Care

By Paul McDonald
CEO, Anglicare Victoria

It is an honour to present at the Winston Rickards Oration. An individual who had a remarkable impact on the Child and Youth Mental Health system as we know it today.

I have looked back on the previous Orators of the Winston Rickards Oration, and holy moly, I come to this rostrum with some trepidation.

Just in the last 10 orations we have had no less than 6 Professors, 1 Emeritus Professor, (if you don't mind) 1 Commissioner, 1 Federal Court Judge and 3 Doctors.

So before I begin I would like to apologise in advance to the Rickards family, for what you may experience or be expecting. I am not professorial in name or where a gown and wig in my office, but I do hope to speak on matters today that I think Winston Rickards would smile about.

One of the things that that I noticed about Winston Rickards was his unique skill to understand a service system through the eyes of a young person and to shape it according to this sense he had of them.
Tonight I want to talk with you about young people in disadvantaged circumstances and the youth

policy, program design that needs to be shaped around such young people and the sense of who they are being a feature of that policy.

Often policy or methods towards young people by health welfare or social policy can be for them more miss than hit. Just go to any state government youth justice approach, or drug and alcohol approach over the years. Policy that misunderstands the period of youth in question, and fail as they don't quite see the task is engaging a young person and what moves them, before … them with a …

It is a policy art that is dramatically over needed. Part science part art part pragmatism part gut feel and part execution all in one.

I remember when I had started the Youth Substance Abuse Service, Australia's first treatment service specifically for young people with Drug and or Alcohol problems.

As we implemented over 150 youth drug and alcohol workers across the streets of Melbourne, I decided I would get the well known Adolescent Psychiatrist at the time Dr Michael Schwartz, some of you may remember Michael, to address my 150 strong YSAS staff as they were wrestling with the related mental health, drug use and adolescence. Well we all packed ourselves in, all ready to hear the scientific wisdom by this well know Adolescent Psychiatrist, and he says well you are thinking what is my approach my technique my well researched intervention to the adolescent. And so he says, this eminent Psychiatrist, my go to technique is this, and pulls out the Ken Blanchard little booklet of the 'One Minute Manager' and that this is his most effective communication reference book in adolescent psychiatry!

Hilarious, I reckon Winston Rickards would have loved that.

So, I am honoured to be invited to give the 14th Winston Rickards Oration.

Some coming to the event tonight might be going who is this Tosser Paul McDonald CEO of Anglicare Victoria, and being invited to speak at the 14th Oration. Reasonable question, I would be asking the same.

A bit about me first.

Throughout all the roles I have occupied over the decades, whether inside or outside government, or leading national movements,, or operating at the frontline or the backline, or from one on one case work or at CEO levels, I have never been too far away from working amongst young people and the often developmental chaos that the period of youth period is…and in these roles, particularly with those young people that have been dealt a short hand of cards from life, whether through lack of luck or intention, or who have struggled and wrestled with their place in the world, or have who acted reacted or over reacted to the situation they find themselves or running to or from crisis, many on the edges, lurching their way through this period sometimes in impulsive unplanned chaos.

Roles such as first Youth Worker in Katherine NT, or in the slums of Calcutta for a while, or to the St Kilda Crisis Centre, to Youth Substance Abuse, to running Victoria's Child Protection and Youth Justice system to currently one of Australias largest Out of Home Care and Family Welfare agency here in Victoria. All throughout young people have always been great company. Their circumstance their outlook against daunting odds often, their reactions and misactions have always been a source of great professional satisfaction and joy to be around them.

And in recent decades my efforts in particular have been more amongst young people who have been in or grown up in state care.

State Care, where children or young people, or as babies, have been removed from their families by the State, due to concerns for that child's safety or their current welfare or as a result of neglect or abuse being experienced, or as a result of emotional and sometimes physical abandonment.

Whether overseeing the entire Child Protection System, or running large out of home care services or visiting care homes and residential units as I do each and every Monday fortnight for years, talking with the young people and staff who reside within.

From all of the perspectives I have seen how the system we have designed often miss than hits the young person and their needs under their care. The State in their legislated role as Loco Parentis, as it is described in the legislation, in the place of the parent, is tasked with these young people operates as management rather than raising.

Here in Australia, some 55000 babies children and young people bed down in care in Australia, Victoria has some12000 children in care at any point. Whether in a foster care home an authorised kinship placement or in a residential care unit. Tonight for mine I have some 250 babies and toddlers in our care, 230 children to the age of 12, also in our care, and a further 200 young people also in a range of care arrangements.

For some it is a relief to be removed, for others the care received has created opportunities for them in life, and for many, despite best efforts, being in care, can be littered with multiple placements, multiple care workers coming in and out of your life, living with others not of your blood or bond or choice, with times of deep worry or fear, sometimes needing to fend for yourself or suffer for yourself, surviving rather than thriving as a young person in this world.

Without doubt it can be the most challenging of upbringings to have experienced.

Many parts of this system acting with, and in the words of George W Bush 'the soft bigotry of low expectations'. Low expectations, that near enough is good enough, a

paltry of experiences and opportunities, and the lack of importance of what you want to become.

To survive in these settings till your order expires can be the achievement in itself. I am not here tonight to talk in depth about being in care.

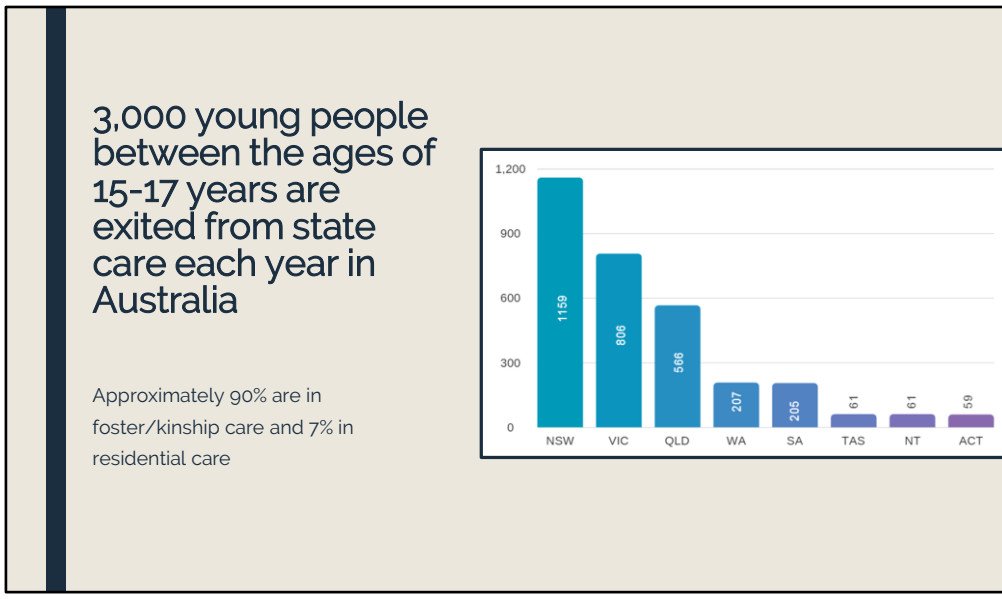
But when it comes to leaving care or when your order expires for many years now, decades in fact, as the system further dismantles the life chances of a young person further, by terminating them from their care before they turn 18 years.

No review of whether you are ready or equipped to have this care terminated, no discretion to appeal for extension of this care, no discussion with you or assessment of you, the care system terminates its responsibilities over you, on a birthdate. The system says to the child, we as your carers are done with you, we will no longer have or provide obligations towards you, even though we were your guardian your carer, your (corporate) parent.

It is of no consequence that you may be looking down the barrel of homelessness on the expiry of your order, or you maybe clinically depressed or self harming, that you may be pregnant with baby due in 6 weeks, you may have court next month, you probably will be not at school and hopelessly unemployed or you could be tackling the demands of year 12, or you are completely bereft of independent means or resources.

Carer payments stop, case worker removed from child, the young person if residing in a residential home is exited, the relationship from the legal guardian is terminated unequivocally.

Nothing had changed the administration of this decision of terminating care at this point of a young persons life, until Home Stretch came along.

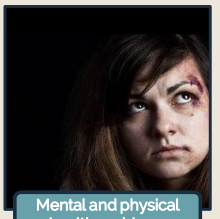


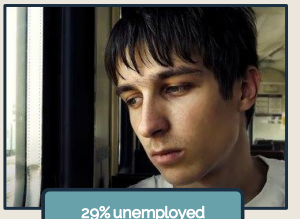
There are about 3000 young people in this country from the 8 different states and territories child welfare jurisdictions are all terminated at this age and stage.

And the results for these young people, is nothing short of catastrophic.

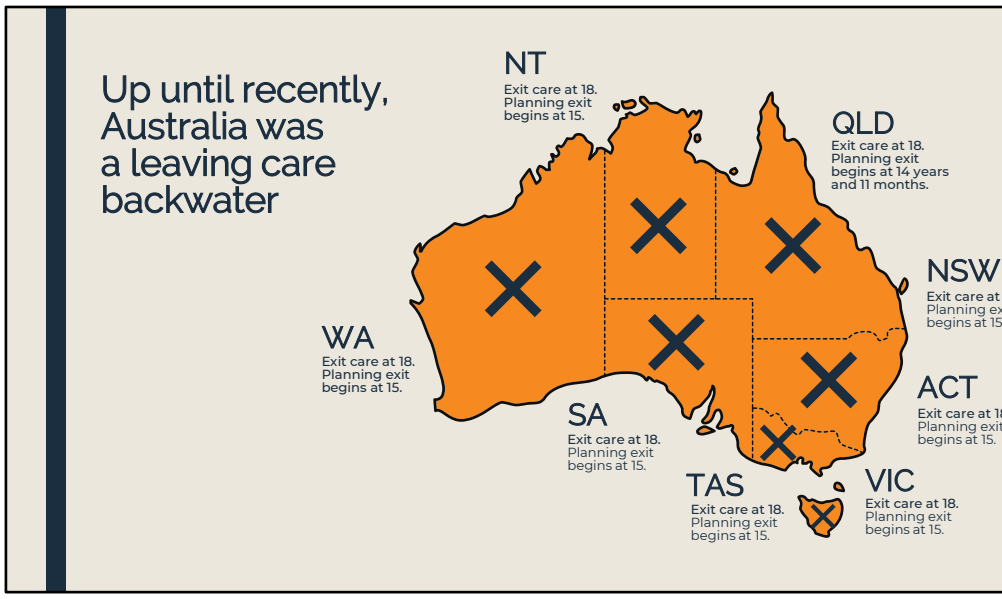
On exit 35% will enter homelessness, 52% will present to an acute mental health service, 44% will be neither in work education or training, 24% will enter into youth justice facility.

Catastrophic outcomes for young people within the first 12 months of their care being terminated at 18





Up to recently, Australia was a leaving care backwater.

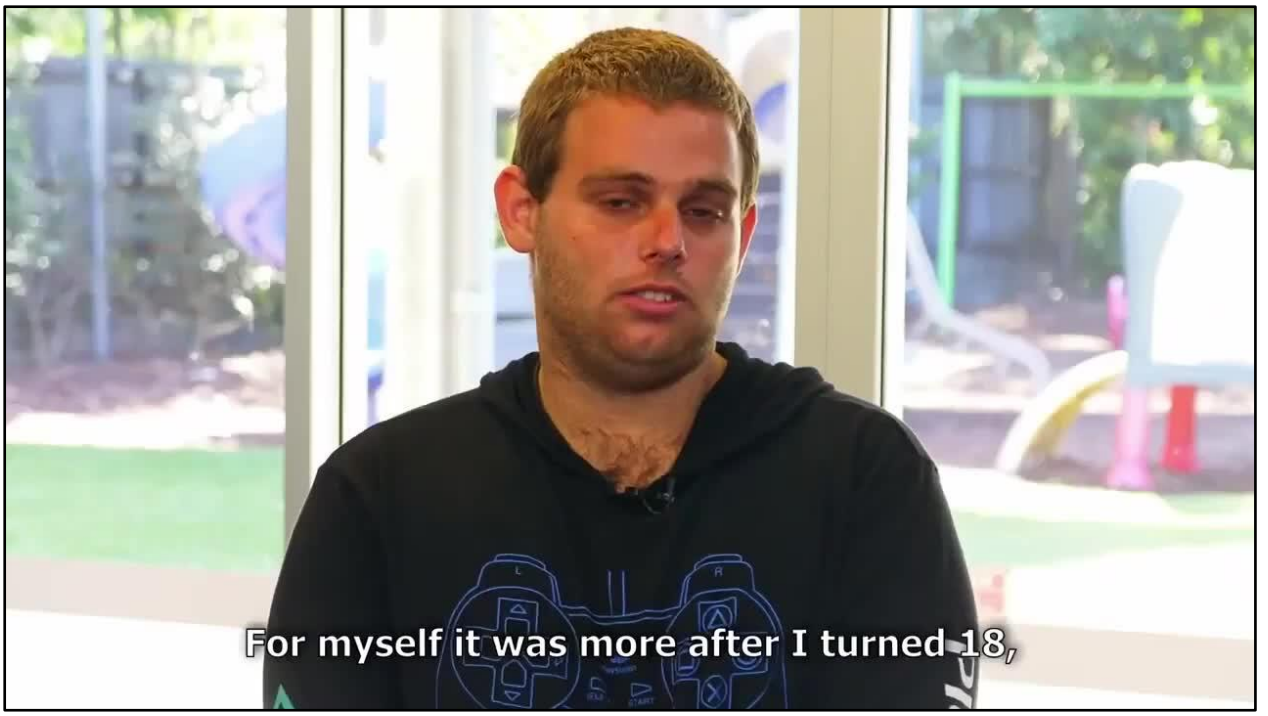


In every state and territory care was terminated in the 16th or 17th year with a requirement of a formal leaving care plan at the age of 15years old.

Now if I asked my 15 year old son at the time, champ I need your plans for when you have to move out, can we go through with you these plans, lets know your thoughts, your options…he would of looked up at me and said, what any other 15 yo boy says at that age with a question like that, that fantastic…is it grunt, is it air release or is it a word… ‘uuuurrrrumph’???

Meet Nana Mac

The care system was like going when to my grandmothers for Sunday night meal as a kid with my parents, that we did on regular weekends.



Lets hear from Clay and his care leaver mates on what it was like for them.

As that young woman explains in the parting sentence. The State exiting me from care was like being orphaned again.

In response I founded a movement called Home Stretch and set about to reform the deeply ingrained practice of terminating care leavers, by obligating Governments to formally support and formally finance a child's needs for a further 3 years from 18 years to 21 years. A movement that attracted over 10,000 members, hundreds of agencies from the community corporate and legal sectors and captured the attention of government and public alike.

It took 8 years to change the minds and hearts of 8 different governments, but by persisting (happily), and holding up a mirror to government in these 8 jurisdictions, all child welfare jurisdictions have announced formal Home Stretch extended care policies to 21 years, in every state and territory at the tune of around $350 million to finance this care and support. There are now 5250 young people enjoying extended care.

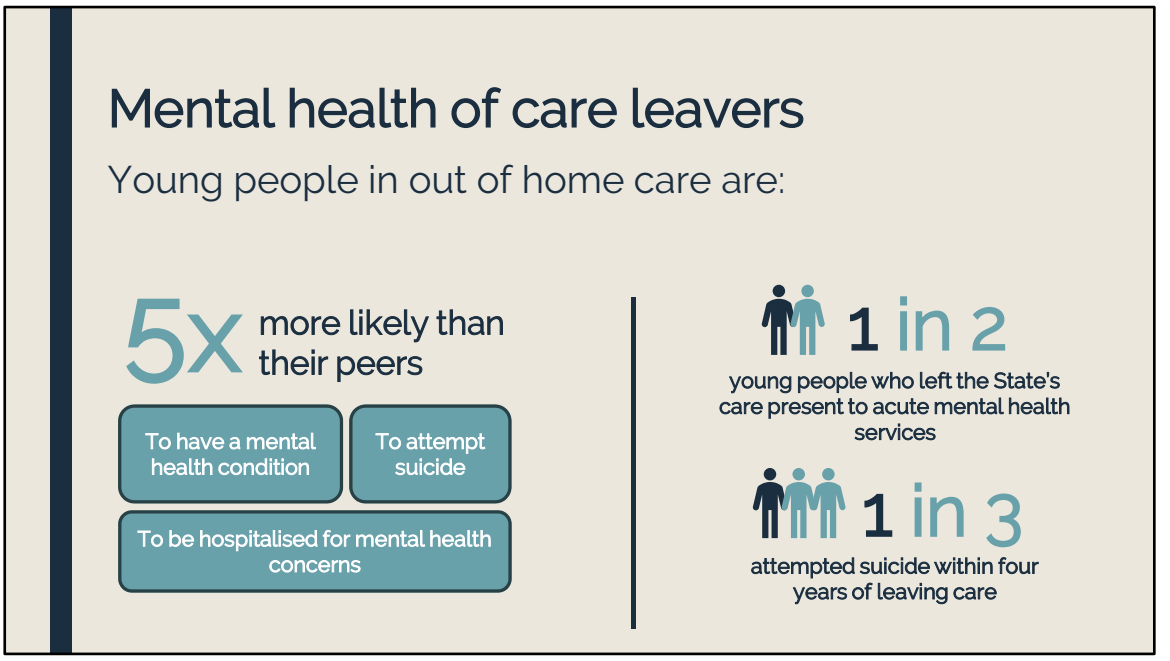
The Home Stretch reform has been described by "as the greatest single child welfare

reform in a generation in Australia".

A simple decision by government, for a simple act, that would have such a profound impact.

In the US they found that by three extra years, homeless rates can be halved, employment and education rates can double, savings in the bank lifted by $404 teenage pregnancies reduced by a third.

The changing of a long standing practice across Australian states and territories may have been small but it touched the hearts and minds of many politicians in the country. Ministers said to me was the most important decision of their entire political career, Others said it was their finest policy achievement, Premier McGowan of Western Australia at his press conference announcing his retirement said, of all the decisions he made as Premier this is the one that stood out for him. Is there something here about changing youth policy effectively?



However, friends, my talk tonight is not about the campaign and what we achieved. That for another time.

My talk tonight is that we are just at the end of the beginning for this highly disadvantaged, overlooked group, and the opportunity now that presents for the state, now that they see their young people who they have formerly cared for. And in so doing, act for them and for their children who will be born to them and preventing them entering care.

Arguably the care leaver is the most disadvantaged youth cohort in Australia bar none.

They are the highest single cohort of homeless youth in the Country registering 63% of homeless youth
They are the highest single cohort detained in youth detention in the country registering 50% of those detained and 64% of those on supervised orders
They are the highest youth cohort for unemployment according to the ABS registering 26%
They are the single largest cohort not to advance past year 10 educationally, registering only 30% of the cohort surpassing year 10

They are the highest group to take their own lives between 18 and 21 registering 7 times more likely than any other 18 to 21 yr old cohort
WHAT non Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cohort has the single highest rates of pregnancy between the ages of 18 and 21

Yet unlike other cohort groups that would come to mind and their likely disadvantage, (ie those from indigenous communities, those who are refugees, or those with disabilities), the term care leaver, or those with a history of residing in state care, is not on our radar as policy makers. In fact, redress policy aside, they are a welfare and social policy blind spot by departments and governments right across the country.

It is within reason to state that those coming out of state care are the most disadvantaged cohort in this country that we never name or mention….till now.

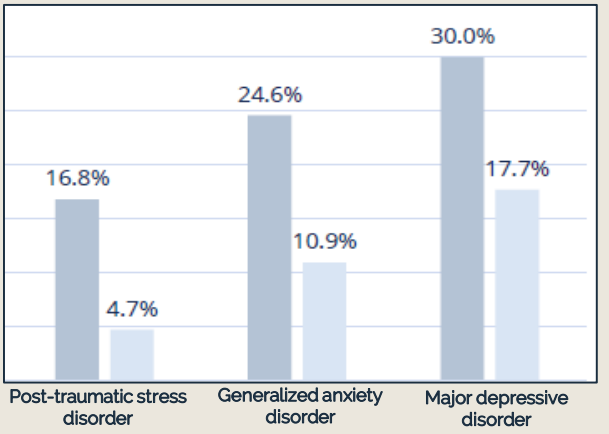
In a recent Deloitte study on the costs of care leavers to Government, commissioned by Home Stretch, Deloitte estimated that this single small cohort, costs the Federal Government in post care costs over 2 billion dollars and for states 600mill.

Deloitte found that these costs were realised within a year … Centrelink payments, homeless youth refuges, hospital admissions, teenage pregnancies, correctional institutions.

Raman in his study of care leavers found that 50% would be homeless a new parent in jail within 12 months of being exited from care. Curtin University in a 2024 study found 36% of the country's care leavers left their care placement into homelessness on the expiry of their order. Swinburne Uni found 63% of youth homeless population were those with histories of care.

Australian Maltreatment Survey

Prevalence of mental health conditions by OOHC experience



So the 18-21 age is a crucial period, for which the parent need to play a role. If one were to ask any parent that has a child between 18 to 21 in their household, as is 85% of 18 to 21 year olds in the country are with one or both parents, are you parenting this age, they would say of course but differently, as the young person explores the independent yet codependent dynamic.

In many of these homes it is likely that the parent will find themselves using their knowledge their contacts, their extended networks, their resources, to assist their son and daughter at this finance poor, high adjustment, discovery period.

And such, the parental actions will take the form of employing their own children, or ringing a friend or family member or neighbour to take their child on for a part time job or a bit of work experience, or leaning on someone in the family circle to connect the child for some mental health support, or buying the computer or the phone or in my instance a large industrial sewing machine. Or in these tight housing times go guarantor for a flat to get them to the front of the affordable housing schmozzle in this country. Me, I have just signed recently for a 5th time as guarantor and I only have two kids.

The parenting role is as important as ever in these 18 to 21 year old years, to make

things happen overtly or covertly, to get them through into adulthood relatively successfully.

So for the young care leaver coming out of state care, extending care support to 21 years has been powerful, but is not the silver bullet. They are still without the limitless social capital a parent can offer, or access to their family network for benefit, so what could the loco parentis role of the State be to those they were the former legal guardian over?

What largesse could be brought to bear by the State for the advantage of the care leaver? What could it look like to replicate the role of parents in this stage of their development?

Overseas, Governments have been moving to playing a preferential role to the children formerly under their care.

They have noted, alarmingly, the mounting downstream costs as a result of a poor state care transition.

In the UK for instance, they found that 40% of those in young adult detention in the country had a care history, and in a further country wide study found that 60% of sex workers had a care history.

In the USA, studies showed that care leavers in many states were driving crack and poverty numbers thus driving new babies coming into care, creating intergenerational demand of Child Protection services.

These down stream costs have led some governments internationally to taking their role as the corporate parent further into the post care support phase, and proactively accessing their powers and services and resources at hand, to enable the care leaver during this post care period.

For instance, the Scottish Government, decided to legislate the role of 'extended

corporate parenting' which introduced new duties and responsibilities for Scottish public bodies defined as corporate parents.

The legislation lays out specific duties and responsibilities toward care leavers up to the age of 26. As it notes in its statement introducing the legislation:

"*A good corporate parent will want the best outcomes for their looked after children, accept responsibility for them, and make their needs a priority" (Scottish Government).*

In the UK, late last year, the UK Government announced that legislation will now be introduced for also addressing the obligation to parent till 21 or 25 :
Government departments and relevant public bodies will be named as corporate parents and will be subject to the proposed corporate parenting responsibilities…The list of corporate parents will be named in legislation, following agreement from other government departments. We expect named government departments to produce three-year plans and reports to set out how they are supporting children in care and care leavers'

As the UK government explain : this is to recognise that these children and young people may not have the family support networks that others rely on throughout their life.

Thus, the Children and Social Work Act (2017) introduced a requirement on local authorities to 'have regard to' a set of corporate parenting principles when exercising functions in relation to children in care and care leavers. This has resulted in numerous and significant improvements, including Council Tax exemptions, free access to leisure services and help with deposits/rent guarantor schemes.

The longer term plan is to extend corporate parenting responsibilities to government departments and relevant public bodies to create a culture change in which and I quote "we realise our shared ambition to support children in care and care leavers. In this role, all "corporate parents" can help to break down barriers to good outcomes for care experienced children and young people in different ways, for example, by: ensuring that relevant policies and services that impact on children in care and care leavers' lives take account of their additional needs and circumstances; taking steps to reduce the stigma or discrimination they face; or providing additional support as a parent or family member might".

"Government departments and relevant public bodies will be named as corporate parents and will be subject to the proposed corporate parenting responsibilities…

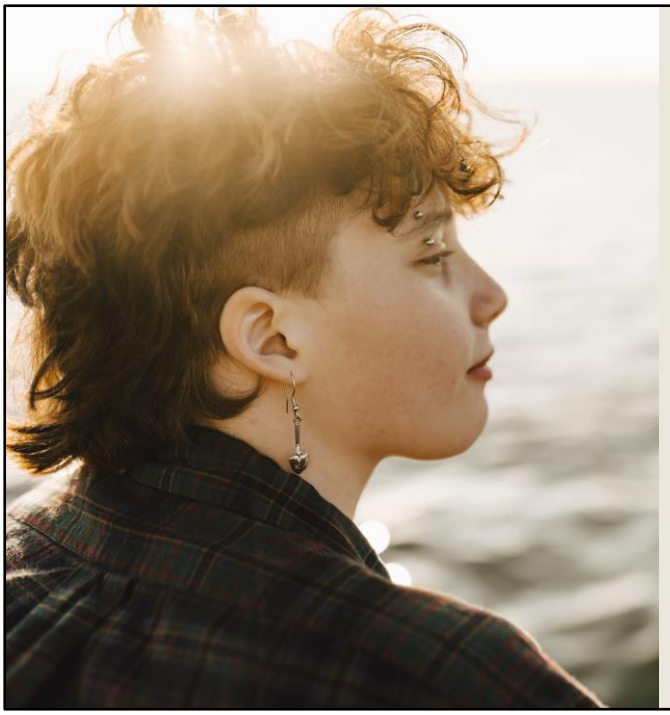
The list of corporate parents will be named in legislation, following agreement from other government departments. We expect named government departments to produce three-year plans and reports to set out how they are supporting children in care and care leavers".

UK Department for Education Report, 2024

I met with the Secretary of Health recently, and I said what are you doing etc etc

And the early signs are positive:

• In England, the proportion of care leavers attending university has increased from 1% to 14% since 2013;
• In Illinois, care leavers are twice as likely to attend university as their care-experienced peers in the neighbouring states that do not provide the same level of support;
• In California, almost 50% of all young people in care are now enrolling in university.
Loco parentis in action at a government level in action.



"make provision for the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual development of the child in the same way as a good parent would".

The Children and Youth Families Act 2005 (10)

Back in Australia
The *Children and Youth and Families Act 2005* (10) obliges the Secretary of the Department to "make provision for the physical intellectual, emotional and spiritual development of the child in the same way as a good parent would."

Further, the Secretary must "work with other government agencies and community services to ensure that children in out of home care receive appropriate educational, health and social opportunities".

If Government were to acknowledge its role as a provider to the children in this post care phase, in order to avoid the severe down stream costs of doing nothing, what could this new world order look like for care leavers in this country?

Governments around the country could follow the UK approach and legislate to recognise the role of the Corporate Parent as a whole-of-government responsibility applying to care leavers until at least age 25.

In so doing the Government could establish mechanisms to ensure that all Departments are meeting their responsibilities as corporate parents, and that the needs of care leavers are considered in policy and program development.

Suggestions on how to achieve these are:

Mandating reporting to Parliament on a two-yearly basis on key outcomes for care leavers across portfolio areas and measures taken to address inequities.

Appointing a Parliamentary Secretary for Care Leavers to oversee whole-of-government policy development and implementation.

Appoint an Advisor to Government for Care Leavers

In the UK they have just appointed a CARE LEAVER Advisor, Mark Riddell a former care leaver to advise the government on this approach.

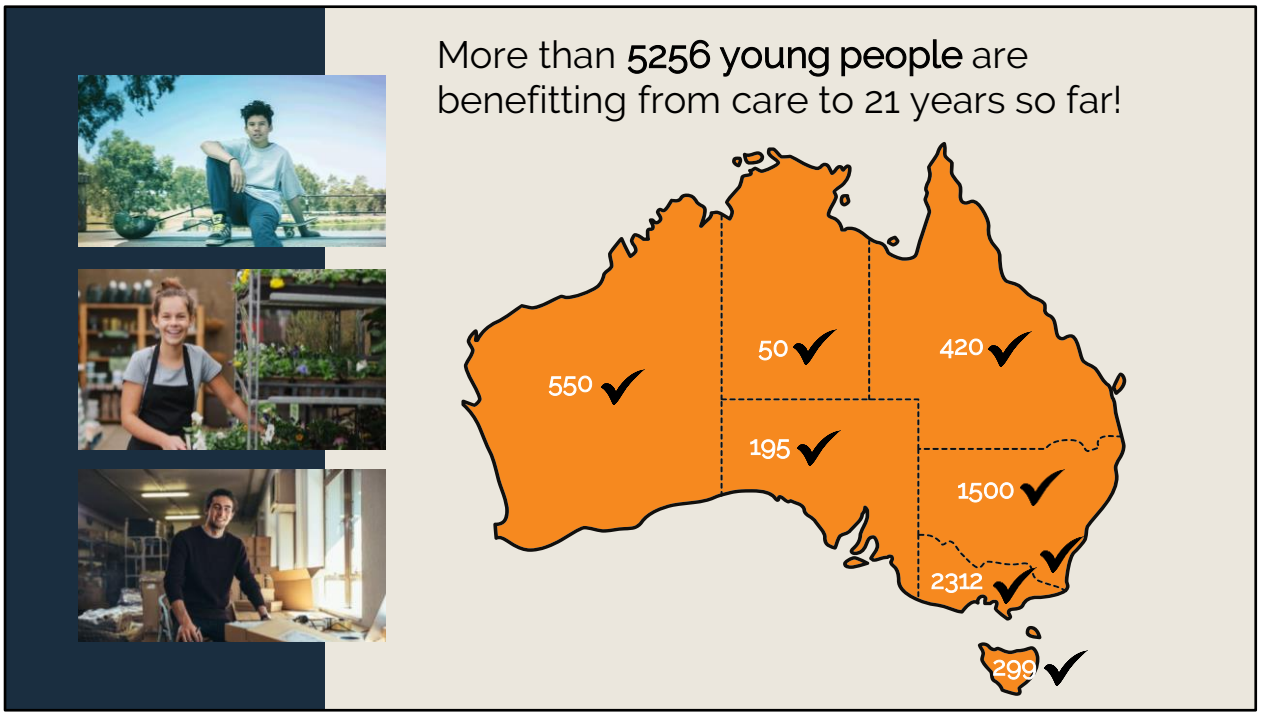
A role that could be similarly introduced in Australia. Its not that we don't have enough Commissioners on other matters? A government Advisor for Care Leavers would go a long way for them.

I am bringing Mark out to Australia in May for the Home Stretch Symposium to hear his role if you wish to hear more directly from him.

Further, the Government could develop a Covenant approach for care leavers similar to the Veterans Covenant in Australia, enabling many Ministers to 'sign up' as the corporate parent to provide subsidised services and prioritisation of care leavers within their portfolios.

This Covenant approach has been in place by by the UK Government, since 2018. It allows government, private and voluntary sector organisations to pledge support to care leavers aged 16-25 years in England through the provision of work experience, apprenticeships and free or discounted goods and services. Some 400 voluntary and corporate have signed the pledge.

And more than 20 government Ministries and Departments have signed up to the Covenant, supported by a cross-government Care Leaver Covenant Board, which meets three times yearly, bringing together leadership from relevant Ministries and Departments to address key barriers facing young care leavers.



Home Stretch commissioned Deloitte to do a further analysis of what Government Federally could do for care leavers in such advantage preferencing. A tier of Government that is slow to see the costs and benefits for itself.

They found a return on investment of 2 dollars to every 1 dollar spent in extras for care leavers.

In practical terms, it would ask to name the care leaver as a priority allocation for the Albanese Big Housing Fund as qualifying for a minimum percentage of stock.

Or a percentage level is set for contractors in the Governments Big Build projects to hire a certain percentage, of those with care leaver histories

All fee waiver all courses undertaken by any care leaver. Here in Australia the Raising Expectations movement have increased positive policies for care leavers in universities from 1% to 14% in some cases. Why would we not wave all academic fees?

Or to provide free internet though the NBN (as per the current policy for families with school aged children) that this is offered to those with care leaving histories for

3 years. Camden Council provides free WiFI to all Care Leavers till 25yo.

Or in the important area of Parenting support provide a Charter by which any new mother can access 12 months support for her and her baby by a range of services, and that Child Protection removal is not the first act of the state but the last behind a series of multiple actions.

Again parts of UK and Europe have government charters just for new expectant mums who were care leavers.

Or government proactive policies or 'pro care leaver' policies that can access
Subsidised or free driving lessons
Free Dental Care
Subsidised Counselling services
Sexual health education
Birthday Allowances
Financial literacy education
All of which is in the parental code of parenting the late teenager.

Through these mechanisms Government can lean into its parental obligations much like parents are leaning into assisting their own 18 to 25 yos in their own homes.

Nothing too out of the ordinary one could suggest.

"The single most significant reform to child welfare in a generation

Former Victorian Treasurer Tim Pallas

Extending Care to 21 "was one of my proudest moments of my time as Premier"

Former WA Premier Mark McGowan's

Introducing universal Home Stretch is my proudest moment as a Minister

Former Victorian Minister for Child Protection

A historic milestone for Queensland

Former Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk

Former SA Minister Rachel Sanderson

Former NSW Minister Natasha MacLaren-Jones

So in closing, when I achieved the Home Stretch reforms of extended care in every state of Australia the press commented at the time that it was "the most significant child welfare reform in a generation".

I was asked at a press conference, what I thought of that compliment. And I said it was a big statement, for such an ordinary shift. Not dissimilar to Neil Armstrongs words. That the success of the Home Stretch reforms, whilst remarkable seems, are to be honest, remarkably ordinary.

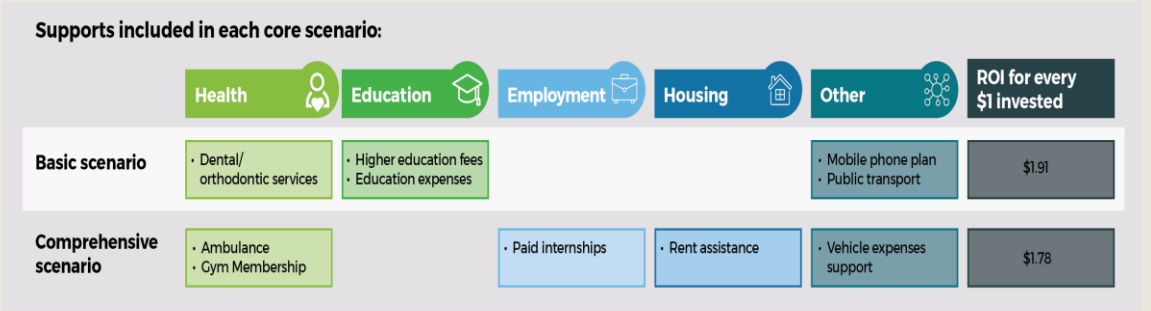
And maybe there is something there for all of us in our toils for young people and their struggles and needs.

Patrick Kavanagh the Irish poet, in his poem titled Advent, had this line. He wrote, 'happiness can be found wherever life pours ordinary plenty". The ordinary plenty of being cared for and resourced you're your early twenties, the ordinary plenty of getting advantage from your parents to make a start in life the ordinary plenty of creating chance and opportunity for young people to prosper.

The Pouring of Ordinary Plenty and the happiness it is seeking to deliver, has been the story of Home Stretch, many … reforms … in housing mental health on

education. And may be the guide for us in how we advance other policies and reforms for disadvantaged young people. I would suspect that Winston Rickards legacy to Mental Health was moved also by pouring ordinary plenty for the young people he saw.

Deloitte Report: Cost benefit analysis of additional supports for care leavers



This framing may sound not that clinical not that expert not that surgical not that scientific…yet such actions have impact that can be extraordinary.

Maybe as professionals or policy makers or politicians or public advocates taking this line of thinking is also a place where reform real advancement in delivery to young people could play.

The introduction of a platform now there for the care leaver through the home stretch reform that Govt have adopted, now stands to remind the parent in question, the state, that the job is not yet done. That the act of raising not managing is the missing piece that government now need to look at in the decision they have made to act in the role of the parent, and for these young people they deserve nothing less after a life time of care.

THANK YOU

By Paul McDonald
CEO, Anglicare Victoria

RESPONSE TO 2025 W RICKARDS MEMORIAL ORATION

By 2024 Orator RUTH WRAITH OAM

Paul, representing the people who are here this evening, who are with us on zoom, and the Rickards family, I thank you for your presentation for the 14th Winston Rickards Oration.

You have clearly and unambiguously presented us with the stark reality of the life situation for the many children and young people who need out of home care.

You have also presented us with hope that the serious and indeed damaging failings of the system for young people exiting care are slowly being recognised and slowly being addressed through Home Stretch and related measures.

I would like to take a moment to place this crucial pioneering initiative in the context of Anglicare's history at the forefront of social awareness and service provision.

Anglicare was formed in 1997 following the amalgamation of three of the state's most experienced child and family welfare agencies: the Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne in 1886 at the time of the1880s depression almost 140 years ago, secondly the Mission of St. James and St.John established in1919 which was the year of the Spanish flu pandemic and a year after the end of World War 1, both with massive loss of life, and two years later in 1921 St. John's Homes for Boys and Girls was founded. Now i**n 2025, Anglicare** Victoria is the State's leading provider of out-of-home care services for children and young people.

I, along with many others with us this evening, have for decades, worked with infants, children, young people and their families and carers, as they struggle to survive, to grow and to flourish despite the systemic odds stacked against them. Many of us have been and remain deeply concerned about the mental health, or should I say 'ill-health' implications for all involved, including the carers.

Paul, among the many important issues you raised, I would like to repeat the situation you described existed pre the introduction of Home Stretch as we all have to be vigilant to ensure that slow slippage and loss of these gains does not happen.

For the young person there was ... quote …

"No review of whether you are ready or equipped to have this care terminated, no discretion to appeal for extension of this care, no discussion with you or assessment of you. The care system terminates its responsibilities over you, on a birthdate. The system says to the child, we as your carers are done with you, we will no longer have or provide obligations towards you, even though we were your guardian, your carer, your (corporate) parent.

It is of no consequence that you may be looking down the barrel of homelessness on the expiry of your order, or you maybe clinically depressed or self harming, that you may be pregnant with baby due in 6 weeks, you may have court next month. You probably will be not

at school and hopelessly unemployed or you could be tackling the demands of year 12, or you are completely bereft of independent means or resources.

Carer payments stop, case worker is removed from the child. The young person if residing in a residential home is exited, the relationship from the legal guardian is terminated unequivocally.

The requirement now, post Home Stretch, is to:

“make provision for the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual development of the child in the same way as a good parent would.”

This leads us to consider and be clear about, in this world of multiple challenges and evolving life styles, ‘what constitutes good parenting’.

The next challenge is to integrate ‘good parenting' into the functions of 'Corporate Parent’ for our young who are in out of home care.

For me one of the challenges inherent in Corporate Parenting is to establish and then ensure the continuity of carer relationships for the infant, child and young person up to and beyond the exit process. To quote Winston Rickards ’There is a child in every adult'

Another challenge is to rank the importance of the mental health of the child or young person with their physical health and also ensure the management and treatment of mental ill health of the young person is of the same quality and timeliness as attention to their physical ill health. This is unequivocally a responsibility of each and every part of the complex out of home care system.

Paul, you quoted George W Bush ‘the soft bigotry of low expectations’.

I am sure people with us this evening would now like to engage in discussion with you about out of home care and the work of Home Stretch, especially in the context of the current climate of ‘low expectations’ for our children and youth that is sadly and unfortunately still endemic in our society .