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| Leaving care; insights from young adults who have left care |
| Helping Carers Helping Kids podcast series for foster carers |

# Leaving care; insights from young adults who have left care

**Leaving care; insights from young adults who have left care** is one of 11 podcasts in the podcast series, Helping Carers Helping Kids. This podcast series provides additional information and insights on a range of topics to help foster carers in their important role.

In this podcast you will hear from Ash, Sammi and Rhianna, three Young Consultants from the CREATE Foundation who share their experiences of leaving care – the good and the not so good. Their insights can help us think about ways we can support our young people better, as they prepare to move out of care.

The podcasts are hosted by writer, producer and comedian Brian Nankervis, who you might know from the SBS music trivia game show RocKwiz.

The podcasts can be accessed at www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/foster care. Below is the transcript of this podcast.

## Brian Nankervis

We acknowledge the Aboriginal people of Victoria, the first nations upon whose land this podcast was produced. We pay respects to elders across Victoria and Australia, both past and present.

Hello, and welcome to helping carers helping kids. I'm Brian Nankervis and I'm here today to talk with three very interesting young people. Ash, Sammi and Rihanna have all had experience of being a young person in out of home care and they’re here today to share their thoughts and ideas with current foster carers.

This podcast is part of a series produced by the Victorian government to support foster carers in their important role. Good morning, you three.

## Young Consultants

Good morning.

**Brian Nankervis**

How are you all?

**Young Consultants**

We’re good.

**Brian Nankervis**

Alright. We might just get each of our young people to introduce themselves, starting with Sammi.

## Sammi

Hi, my name is Sammi. I'm 22. I babysit for a friend, I also want to be a youth worker when I'm older.

**Brian Nankervis**

Perfect. Let’s go and meet Ash.

## Ashley

I'm Ashley. I'm 22. I'm currently studying to be a youth worker. I'm a young consultant at CREATE and I was in care ranging from kinship care, resi-care and foster care.

**Brian Nankervis**

And Rihanna?

## Rihanna

Hi, I'm Rihanna. I'm 24. I'm a full time mummy of two little babas. I'm a young consultant with CREATE and I was in kinship care.

**Brian Nankervis**

Alright. Let’s go back to you, Sammi. Can you tell us a little bit about the CREATE Foundation and the type of support and activities that they provide to young people in care and to those that have left care?

**Sammi**

Well, they support kids in care up to and kids who have left care up to 25. They run lots of different events like community days and sometimes beaches or bowling. They have like Christmas parties and things. We’ve had a lot of opportunities to work on a lot of different things. We’ve done round table resi-meetings where we’ve sat in with the Minister and everything.

**Brian Nankervis**

Wow! How was that?

**Sammi**

It was actually interesting to see how they run things.

**Brian Nankervis**

Yes, so who was the Minister and what were they actually discussing?

**Sammi**

The Minister for Youth, Children and Families, Jenny Mikakos.

**Brian Nankervis**

Yes?

**Sammi**

And they were discussing, I think, at that round table how resi was run and how it needs to be changed and how the resi system isn’t as good as it should be and how they can improve it.

**Brian Nankervis**

And so when you say resi, you mean?

**Sammi**

Residential care, yes.

**Brian Nankervis**

Yes. What about some of the activities that you’ve been involved in with CREATE? Can you give us some examples?

**Sammi**

I sat in on one of the round table residential care meetings, as I said. I’ve also helped run activities at some of their community days. I’ve been involved in their Christmas party last year which was really fun. It was at an indoor trampoline park. I was involved in their Easter party this year, and I was involved obviously in the foster carers manual project.

**Brian Nankervis**

Yes, well we’ll get onto that later. What do you feel you gain from being involved in some of these activities?

**Sammi**

I feel like I actually have a chance to be heard and to maybe help change the system so kids don’t have to go through some of the bad things that a lot of us went through and it’s a good way to, you meet lots of young people from all different types of care and it’s a good way and you know you’re not alone through the things you actually experienced.

**Brian Nankervis**

Thank you, Sammi. Ash, now we know that finding ways to connect with a new child or a young person can be really tricky for carers. From your experience, what are some of the key things that a carer can do early on to build trust with a new child or a young person?

**Ashley**

So, when moving as we’ve, some of us have noticed, it’s a very emotional time of day. You don’t know what’s going on, you don’t know where you’re going. So we often said trying to, if you know we’re coming a week in advance, give us a call. Pick up the phone, hey, how are you doing? I'm such and such, I'm where you’re moving. Can’t wait to meet you. Do you want to go to the park this week? Do you want to go for a coffee? Like something so small just to get to know them. We said while working on the manual when it comes to things like this, even if it’s a really quick move, having a photo in the car where we’re going, so we can associate ourselves with that’s the person that’s going to be greeting me at the door, not some stranger.

Spending time with the young person on arrival, a welcome pack. So we had something as small as knowing what they like – whether they like the smell of lavender and having a lavender body wash in there, or they like Lynx, and having a Lynx deodorant ready, or if you’ve got a younger child coming in, they like Frozen, a Frozen doona cover – like something really small but really simple. Getting to know them in the morning, saying oh, I heard that you like going to McDonalds to have a Happy Meal – we’ll go there tomorrow morning, tomorrow afternoon. And always being ready, remembering that they’re coming from a different situation. They might not have everything they need, being ready the next day to go I noticed that you didn’t have many clothes, let’s go get some clothes. Let’s go shopping and choose what you want to wear.

So just really, really small things. Getting to know them. Try and gain their trust. We know it’s not going to happen overnight, but the effort counts.

**Brian Nankervis**

Am I right in saying that there is an accepted wisdom that there is a three day window?

**Ashley**

Yes, a group of us actually said that. So basically with our three day window we went on to – you’re not going to gain trust in three days. No-one can gain your trust in three days. It’s impossible. But taking the time to let that young person know you’re there, I know you’re going through a lot right now, I'm here. If you want to talk to me, I'm here. I'm waiting for you. I'm not going to push you into talking about this, but if you do need to, I'm here. Let us know, be there, be ready, be supportive.

**Brian Nankervis**

And so what’s the three day arrangement?

**Ashley**

So the three days is you’ve really got three days to grab that young person’s attention. You need to just be there, tell us you’re there. Don’t try and force your way in because we’re going to try and close ourselves off, but let us know that you’re there. It takes three days, and if you don’t try in that three days we lose interest and the placement then can break down.

**Brian Nankervis**

So, Ash, you’ve been through this. Can you tell me about a good example of a carer making sure you felt comfortable?

**Ashley**

A good example is one of the carers that I went with, she’s a lovely lady, she had a daughter, and they had a dance recital on the second day that I was there. And she says to me, she goes, ‘We’ve got the dance recital coming up tomorrow. We’re just wondering if you’d like to come?’ I'm like, ‘That would be great, I love dancing so why not?’ And after that she realised how much I enjoyed the dance recital so she said to me that night when we came home, we were having tea, she goes, ‘I noticed that you enjoyed yourself at the dance recital. How would you like to start some dance classes next week?’ So that was a really good experience. She connected with me in a way that no-one ever had. She knew that, she worked out that that was my way of dealing with things, so I liked to dance myself and that was my way of coping with things. She made that connection and went right, we’re going to do something about it, let’s put you in some dance classes. So ever since then I’ve been dancing.

**Brian Nankervis**

And the dance classes were good?

**Ashley**

They were good. They were fantastic.

**Brian Nankervis**

Perfect. Rihanna, a key transition point for any young person in out-of-home care is when they become old enough to leave care and live independently. What can a carer do to help best prepare a young person to leave when the time comes?

**Rihanna**

Yes, so when I left care, I left with not much knowledge about the world or any skills of like cooking or cleaning or even changing a light bulb, so that was hard, leaving care, having no knowledge of independent living. I struggled a bit at the start, and it would have been so good if I just had someone going here’s some cooking lessons, something so simple that can just provide me the skills to have, just to eat properly, not some takeaway or stuff just straight in the oven, that supports my healthy eating.

I didn’t even know how to make a doctor’s appointment, so having someone that would have taught me how to do simple things like that would have helped so much. I struggled a lot with money, so I had all this money and I was like let’s buy this and that and clothes galore I had, but I didn’t have my bills paid, my rent was late, so a counsellor, like a budget counsellor, that would have supported me through that as well. It was tough trying to connect with people, so if someone just linked me with a service or some groups, that would have helped and we would have made good friendships and everything like that.

**Brian Nankervis**

Can you tell us what resources there are available for this?

**Rihanna**

Yes, so like I said, there’s your community houses for like cooking classes or counselling, that supports people. There’s heaps of different services that if you could get yourself a worker, so your local community centre, they could link you in with a lot of services that would help.

**Brian Nankervis**

I understand that sometimes, despite the best efforts of all those involved, care arrangements may break down, the child or the young person has to be transferred to a new care arrangement. Now this is obviously a difficult time for all involved. Are there words of advice that you could give to carers who may find themselves in that situation? Sammi, start with you?

**Sammi**

It would be, it obviously is very hard on both the carer and the child because obviously as a child coming into a new placement you want it to work, you don’t want to have to move again, and the carer might feel the same – they probably want to, they want to help you and they want it to work out, and sometimes the best things carers can understand is sometimes placements break down and there could be a lot of reasons or that’s just not the right placement. Sometimes placements do break down because it’s not the right placement for the young person.

**Brian Nankervis**

Yes. So what can the carers do to, I suppose, acknowledge that there has been a breakdown, but then move forward effectively?

**Sammi**

They can try, like the best thing they can do is not blame themselves for the breakdown, because the carers, and I’ve seen it, they do do their best to make the placements work. They don’t want them to break down because they know it will be a lot harder on the young person. But a lot of carers, when the placement breaks down, blame themselves I’ve seen, and I don’t think they should, because it’s not always their fault. Sometimes children need specialised carers who know how to deal with certain things.

**Brian Nankervis**

Yes, that’s a really, really good point. Ash, what about you?

**Ashley**

We always go into communication and trust, so if the placement has broken down, me personally would rather someone sit down, sit me down and tell me why. I may not understand what’s going on at the time, I may not understand if I’ve done something wrong or if it’s just because there’s a new young person that needs to come live here and I can’t be here right now. So communicating that, and trust that I’m not going to get angry at you for telling me the truth. If you lie to me I’m going to get more angry, because I’m going to find out in the long run.

**Brian Nankervis**

The truth is everything, pretty much?

**Ashley**

Yes, the truth is everything.

**Brian Nankervis**

Alright. Rihanna?

**Rihanna**

Yes, I agree with Ash on that. The truth is, if you explain to the child the situation with no sugar-coating or everything like that, the child has a more understanding on what’s going on and can cope a little bit better. When the child is going through all these emotions of it’s broken down, obviously there’s a lot of self-blame, because that’s what children do. Just showing them that the next house or place that they’re going to is for them or it’s a good place, and if they want to meet with the carer beforehand of leaving so that the transition is smooth for them and the next carer, so I’m a very visual person so if someone just showed me a photo of the next carer, that would make me be more comfortable to know that, okay, this is my new carer, and it directs me from the situation to the new beginning.

**Brian Nankervis**

You mentioned something before about the child blaming his or herself. This does seem to be a common theme. Why do you think that happens?

**Sammi**

I blame myself when my, I was first moved from my first residential unit and when my kinship placement with my father and his partner, or ex-partner now, broke down because I thought oh, it’s because she, with his partner, I’m like it’s because she doesn’t like me, she hasn’t liked me since I was a child because my behaviour can be hard to handle, and I didn’t understand why my behaviour was hard to handle because my mum hadn’t got me tested for all the things she should have. So we didn’t know that I had ADHD, so my behaviour could be quite erratic at times and a lot of carers found that very hard to handle, and I didn’t know why my, I didn’t know anything about why my behaviour is so bad sometimes, and it really confused me. So I blamed myself, thinking well, why am I so different? Why is it that everyone else can be all normal and concentrate on work, but I can’t? I found it very difficult, and I kind of, like when I found out I had ADHD it made a lot more sense.

**Brian Nankervis**

Alright, last little topic, the Department of Health and Human Services has been working with stakeholders from across the sector to develop a new handbook for foster carers. This handbook will provide guidance and advice for carers in undertaking their role and navigating the out-of-home care system.

Now, I understand that CREATE members have been very involved with that process, including writing the foreword. Tell us how you have enjoyed that method and in fact, I’d love to hear from each of you how the process of writing the foreword actually happened. Let’s start with Rihanna?

**Rihanna**

Yes, so it was an exciting opportunity to get to write, or rewrite the manual. We all loved it. We all jumped on the opportunity and we did a lot of teamwork building to start off with, because a good team is the best place to start. Going through it was amazing, picking out the little bits that we thought were just a bit bland, that needed a bit of humanity and a bit of warmth, as Ash says.

**Brian Nankervis**

Sammi, what was your favourite moment in the process?

**Sammi**

I definitely would say I loved when we were all just coming up with ideas on sticky notes or on the white board, writing them down or writing them down in our books on something and then posting them all up, and then watching how we’d circle the ones that we really thought were the key points and that were most important, and then finding a way to pull it all together, when some of them you’re just like how is this going to make sense? How are we going to make this all make sense? This is too jumbled, and then seeing how well it turned out in the end. That was definitely one of my favourite parts.

**Brian Nankervis**

Ash? What was your favourite part of the process of writing the foreword?

**Ashley**

Of writing the foreword, I think was when we finally got to pull it all together, so we all had all these great ideas and as Rhi just said, which were literally just sticky notes on a white board and there’s a few that were handwritten on the white board with a white board marker that me and Sam had done that morning because we had some people running late. So we were like, oh, we’ll just write something on the board, it will all make sense eventually.

So finally pulling everyone’s ideas together and it finally – as much as we all said we don’t want it to end anymore, you know, this has been our lives for the last couple of weeks, but pulling it all together and going hold on a second, we’ve done something magical, we’ve made something and we’re helping make a difference now, is what – that was my favourite part of the foreword, that was the best part of the foreword, I think. Reading it once me, Michelle and Rhi had finished typing it up on the laptop after lunch, we’d like Wow! Did we really just write this? So it was really good.

**Brian Nankervis**

And what do you hope people would gain from reading the foreword?

**Ashley**

So we always said everything is about feeling welcome and wanted, so we link that to, if anyone has watched Lilo and Stich, there’s a quote that says ‘Ohana, Ohana means family, and family means no-one gets left behind or forgotten.’ So bear in mind that we are all human. We want to feel accepted, we want to feel a part of your family, and if you want to hear, if you want us to hear you, you need to hear us at the same time. It’s not a one-way street. Everything needs to be two ways.

**Brian Nankervis**

And did you learn anything from the process? I’m speaking about your individual journeys here. Did you learn anything?

**Sammi**

I actually learnt that I’m capable of a lot more than I think I am, and that if I put my mind to it I’m capable of a lot more and I’ve realised I’m not as bad as I thought I was at working in a team.

**Brian Nankervis**

That’s good. Ash?

**Ashley**

I learnt, pointed out by the lovely Rhi, that I’m a silent thinker, so I can sit there and listen to everyone debate particular topics and then write a paragraph and then go hold on a second, guys, here’s what you’re saying, this is what you’re saying, but here it is as one. So I was our silent thinker, so I learnt that about myself, that I realised I can actually pick up on what people are saying without saying anything.

**Brian Nankervis**

And Rihanna?

**Rihanna**

Yes, I learnt that warmth is really important to feel, to know that we’re all human and even though it’s a book, we still have emotions and feelings and complications in situations, so to actually learn that we can put our input in and that warmth that goes in there was amazing and that it’s really going to help these foster carers, because it’s real.

**Brian Nankervis**

And what do we want the foster carers to gain from the handbook?

**Rihanna**

The knowledge and skills that they need to provide a safe life, because it’s important that they know that they’re giving these children the start of a start to shine, like a fresh start, because you want these children to shine, so to give them the chance to do that is amazing and even though it is a book, it’s so powerful that it will support them through the whole process.

**Brian Nankervis**

And last question, and this is for all of you, what do you think makes a really, really good carer? Starting with Sammi?

**Sammi**

I have, the key points with carers, as we went over multiple times while pulling together our foreword and going through the parts that we were asked to go through, understanding that sometimes young people have been through different kinds of things and they may not have come from the best situation and they might be scared, showing them that you care and that you’re not going to force them to talk about things they don’t want to. Being there, even just doing small things with them. If they like going to the park or roller skating, take them roller skating, and having plans, that if they have a bad day at school or something, sitting and talking to them, doing something like a board game or art – it does help. The little things you do to make them feel more wanted and accepted, it does help them a lot.

**Brian Nankervis**

Perfect. Ash?

**Ashley**

A really good carer is someone that’s there, someone that takes the time to get to know the young person, so a really good carer is like someone that I had when I was younger. I know you like to dance, let’s do something about that. So finding that one thing and then putting them on the right path to be able to pursue that one thing that they love, getting to know the young person is the biggest thing.

**Brian Nankervis**

And Rihanna?

**Rihanna**

Yes, so communication is a massive part of a good relationship, so communicating with the children and the truth, absolute truth, because sugar-coating or thinking of protecting them is actually harming them, so communication is a big key, and to understand these children are grieving. The smallest things, as we talked about, from a teddy bear to people they love, to family members, to animals, so this is a process that’s so difficult for them, so just be their rock.

**Brian Nankervis**

Rihanna, Ash, Sammi, thank you so much for sharing your stories. We really appreciate it and I’m sure the carers who are listening can take on a lot of this advice and hopefully become better carers.

Is there anything else you’d like to add? Any last-minute thoughts?

**Ashley**

No, I think we got it all.

**Sammi**

Yes, I think so. .

**Rihanna**

Yes, it’s their life. It’s their life. Treat it as precious.

**Brian Nankervis**

Perfect.

## All young adults

Thank you. Thank you.

**Brian Nankervis**

Thank you.

This podcast was developed with the assistance of the CREATE Foundation. Thank you for listening.

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