



## MEDIA RELEASE

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# NO FAIR GO IN BUDGET FOR CARE LEAVERS' UNIQUE NEEDS

Young people with an out-of-home care experience are entitled to receive the same opportunities to get ahead as their peers who have not been in foster, residential or kinship care, says CREATE Foundation. The latest federal budget places finite criteria around access to supports, excluding the unique and changing circumstances of young out-of-home care leavers (i.e. foster, kinship or residential care).

Evidence shows that *young people leaving care encounter more hurdles* than those in the general population. CREATE's research (2011) revealed that the lack of stability in their young lives has huge flow on effects such as, in the first year of leaving care at 18, **35% experience homelessness, 70% are dependent on social welfare supports** (i.e. Centrelink) for part or all of their income, and **29% are without a job**.

The federal government's proposed changes to the budget risk further hardship for over 39,000 children and young people in care (increasing 9%p.a.). Australia's child population is comprised of 5% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, yet from these children is derived the most significantly over-represented group in the care community, with 34% of all children growing up in out-of-home care identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

State and territory governments also have a lot of work to do to improve outcomes for young people who grow up in care. This means providing stable placements for children and young people when they are in care and then supporting young people transitioning to independence, through ensuring that all 15-17 year olds are involved in transition planning. This plan serves as a roadmap to help in areas such as avoiding homelessness when turning 18 by having a safe and secure place to live, planning to be able to financially support yourself, and having at least one reliable adult you can turn to for help.

CREATE's research indicates that approximately 50% of care leavers have to leave their placement at their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. To successfully transition to independence young people need continued support and removing any Centrelink support from them for six months as they leave school (which can coincide with leaving care) will result in a large proportion being without an income.

Young people being denied an income, and having to plead for a *Special Benefit* or *Emergency Relief* is not a viable solution to the high level of youth unemployment. *Youth Allowance* should remain as a universal safety-net providing young people with some (though limited) financial security while they are supported to find work.

*"As a society, do we not desire equality and a fair go for all? To achieve this we must enable young people with a care experience, who often have overcome traumatic neglect and abuse to have the same supports as their peers,"* said Ms Reed.

*"With this in mind, why would a government suggest being "on and off" support benefits on six month cycles? It makes no sense whatsoever if we want our young people to be engaged and valued members of our*

*community. The proposed changes to 'Youth Allowance' and 'Newstart' send a terrible message to young people that they have not been considered and are left out in the cold."*

18 year old Jake from Brisbane grew up in care and he said, *"There is no consistency with income being given and then taken away. You can't say 'I'll give you income for six months and then take it away'. You'd just set up your place and then have to move when there's no money."*

A significant proportion of children remain in the care of state welfare departments until they turn 18, with over 3,000 15-17 year olds discharged from care (2011-12 figures). But the fact remains that many care leavers, who leave care at 18 years old, unlike most of the population are unsupported without family they can call upon.

*"Even if you can go to your family a lot of them are already struggling financially, so life would be harder for everyone,"* commented Jake.

Without an income, the new co-payment for a visit to the doctor is likely to lead to these young people putting off taking care of their health, or not following up issues requiring blood tests, eye tests and prescriptions due to the extra cost.

Supports which enable young people to complete their education to year 12 must be a priority. However, while some of the education reforms may support more school leavers in the TAFE system, the changes to higher education can only make it more difficult for care leavers to gain a tertiary degree. The impact of increasing the cost of higher education will be disproportionately born by disadvantaged young people, including those with a care experience.

CREATE welcomes continued funding for homelessness and full implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

CREATE Foundation is the peak body representing the voices of all children and young people in out-of-home care. CREATE Foundation relies on community support for its projects. Learn more at [www.create.org.au](http://www.create.org.au)

Jake volunteers his time to support CREATE Foundation's efforts to represent the voices of Australian children and young people with a care experience.

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*Data Source: McDowall, J. J. (2011). Transition-from-care planning in Australia: An evaluation of CREATE's "What's the Plan?" campaign (CREATE Report Card 2011). Sydney: CREATE Foundation.*