

MEDIA RELEASE

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creating a better life
for children and young
people in care

TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSITIONING FROM FOSTER CARE TO SUSTAINED INDEPENDENT LIVING

Each year, over 500 young people leave the Queensland child protection system to live independently. Assistance for these young people often comes from family, carers and community members, as well as government and non-government service providers. However, a number of young people make this transition without any formal or informal support.

Children in foster care are among the most vulnerable and sometimes traumatised young people in the community, but there is no statutory obligation for them to remain in care once they turn 18. As such they face the challenge of transitioning to independent living at very young age, often without the benefit of family or social networks to support them.

The Child Protection Act (1999) under the Charter of Rights, states that young people are entitled to receive appropriate help with their transition from care to independence. This includes help with housing, access to income support, training and education.

Transition to Independence Month (T2I Month) is held from 1 to 30 November each year to focus on how young people are supported to make the journey from the child protection system to independence and to achieve positive life outcomes.

The theme "Road to Independence...Journey to success" promotes the idea that a young person's transition is a journey that evolves with time. The journey for young people to become independent and successful ultimately sets the direction for their transition to adulthood.

A young person's journey from care to independence requires a collaborative approach from everyone supporting them. This is a critical life phase when young people need to be encouraged to aspire and reach their goals.

Caitlin*, 22, spent seven years in care. Like thousands before her, she had to cope with the challenge of finances, education, networking and adult life without the broad spectrum of support experienced by most young Australians. Despite the challenges, she was able to draw on the CREATE Foundation and other networks to pursue tertiary education to become a social worker. Financially it was tough too. "It is a big financial burden on us," Caitlin said. "But I didn't want to be the child that is on welfare her whole life," she said. "I wanted to make a difference and I wanted money and I wanted a nice car, so I achieved it."

CREATE Foundation offers a spectrum of resources and support for young people transitioning to independent living. More details are on their website.

Transition to Independence Month is coordinated by G-Force, a sector-wide working party of the Child Protection Partnership Forum made up of government and non-government organisations including the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, the CREATE Foundation, Foster Care Queensland, PeakCare and the Queensland Family and Child Commission

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*Caitlin (surname withheld) is available for comment, along with other young people with care experience.

Key statistics on the care sector in Australia:

- 46,488 children were in out-of-home care across Australia at 30 June, 2016
- 35% of young people experience homelessness within the first year of leaving care
- 46% of boys with care experience have had contact with the juvenile justice system
- 29% of young people who have experienced out-of-home care are unemployed. 36% of children and young people are split from their brothers and sisters in care
- 35% of young people in care have 5 or more caseworkers during their time in care
- 67% of young people in care are not aware of leaving care plans

For further comment from CREATE's CEO Jacqui Reed and/or a young person with care experience please call Andrea Doney 0402050418 and andrea@admarcoms.com.au

