

MEDIA RELEASE

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creating a better life
for children and young
people in care

WEST AUS YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

DESERVE A PLACE TO CALL HOME TO 21!

CREATE Foundation's commitment to young care leavers remains steadfast and has done for over 12 years of advocating to government to provide options that include young people being able to remain with their existing carers, or in a supported environment till age 21. As a community, we must to rethink our priorities and ensure that the next generation of children and young people with a care experience are supported to transition to independence in a safe and supported manner.

CREATE applauds the McGowan Government's commitment to supporting young care leavers to have a choice to remain with carers or supported environment till 21 years. The McGowan Government state that if re-elected, there will be an investment of \$37.2 million to make the Homestretch program permanent - which supports young people who would exit the state's child protection system when they turn 18 to maintain support to the age of 21.

In Western Australia alone, 4,754⁽¹⁾ children and young people did not sleep in their own home last night and are presently growing up in out-of-home care. Nationally, that number is over 44,906⁽¹⁾ children and young people in care.

Previously, the Homestretch program has been applied as a trial of 15 individuals. The new format would reach 200 people to the age of 21, and include housing guarantees, coaching/mentoring via support people, and a range of supports. Perth resident, Andre, entered out-of-home care at 14, and moved around a lot while growing up. He experienced kinship, foster, residential care, as well as semi-independent living. Now 25 years old, Andre remembers school as one of the few stable places for him while growing up and a place where he felt supported and his needs were catered to. There was a lot of instability growing up and then when he approached 18 years of age, he said: *"I don't remember my leaving care plan. I don't remember seeing it."*

CREATE Foundation is a national peak organisation that advocates on behalf of children and young people with a care experience. CREATE regularly conducts independent consultations with children and young people with a care experience through which CREATE revealed that 35% of young people become homeless within the first 12 months of leaving care, 29% of the same cohort are unemployed and 67% of those in care over 15 years of age are not aware of a "leaving care plan".

CREATE calls for the Homestretch trial to include all young people, including those in residential care, the housing guarantees, coaching/mentoring support for young people, for 18-21-year-olds leaving care they must be picked up intensively and the 15-21-year-olds must be able to access services that complement the existing range of services.

CREATE Foundation's Chief Executive, Ms Jacqui Reed, shared that *"Now is the time to ensure that young people are supported and have options that include remaining in their placement to 21. This is an opportunity for each individual's unique needs to be met as they prepare for*

transitioning to independence, have stability to complete their education and are able to access support in many forms, including through positive adult coaches and mentors in their lives.”

“The Homestretch program must be for all young care leavers, including those in residential care,” added Ms Reed.

For more information please visit the CREATE website at www.create.org.au

For further comment from CREATE’s Chief Executive, Ms Jacqui Reed, and/or a young person with care experience contact Leigh White, CREATE Communications Advisor, via (m) 0431 932 122 or leigh.white@create.org.au

CREATE Foundation is the national consumer body representing the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience (including kinship care, foster care and residential care). CREATE develops policy and research to report on and advocate for a better care system.

Sources:

(1) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). *Child protection Australia 2018-19*. Child Welfare series no. 72. Cat. no. CWS 74. AIHW.

Key statistics on the care sector in Australia:

- 44,906 ⁽¹⁾ children were in out-of-home care across Australia at 30 June 2019 (AIHW 2020)
- 1. Young people in out-of-home care are 16 times more likely to be under a youth justice order than the general population
- 2. 35% of young people experience homelessness within the first year of leaving care
- 3. 46% of males have been involved with the justice system since leaving care
- 4. 29% of young people who have left care or preparing to leave care are unemployed
- 5. 36% children and young people in care do not live with any of their siblings
- 6. 35% of young people in care have five or more caseworkers during their time in care
- 7. 67% of young people in care over the age of 15 are not aware of having a leaving care plan

McDowall, J. J. (2018). *Out-of-home care in Australia: Children and young people’s views after five years of National Standards*. Sydney: CREATE Foundation.

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