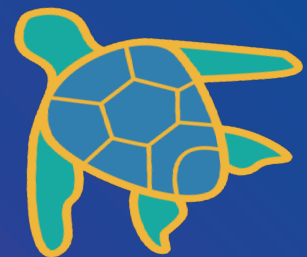


# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CARE-LEAVER EXPERIENCES

Findings from the 2020 CREATE National Survey:  
**Transitioning to Adulthood from Out-of-Home Care:  
Independence or Interdependence?**

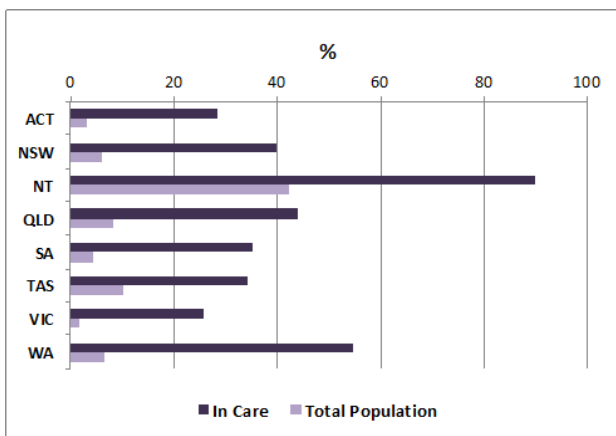
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## THE EXPERIENCE OF TRANSITIONING

What happens when a young person in out-of-home care reaches the age of 18 and they are expected to become independent? In particular, what does this mean for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people who are over-represented in the care population in every state and territory in Australia; representing 40% of the overall out-of-home care population (see Figure 1; AIHW, 2020).

**Figure 1. Comparison of Per Cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People In Out-of-Home Care and in the Total Population**



Note. Percentages in the total population are based on ABS data for children and young people under 19 years. In-care data are based on individuals under 18 years.

Transitioning from care affects young people in different ways. Some may be eager to leave and seek their freedom; others may have already established stable cultural connections with community or kin to guide them through life; while others find themselves completely alone. At a critical time in their lives, when young people are still learning “how to adult” (Female, 20 years), and with many still attending secondary school, they are expected to move on.

### CREATE’S CURRENT PROJECT

In Transitioning to Adulthood from Out-of-Home Care, interviewers spoke with 325 young peo-

ple aged 18 to 25 about transitioning from care, including 72 young First Australians. The report measured outcomes across key life domains (care history and experience; education; employment; finances; accommodation; relationships; health; self-care; life skills; family connection; leaving-care planning; and after care support).

**I was homeless and paying \$80 a week for bus tickets... I'd used the sink and the soap dispenser in the public toilets to wash my clothes, and I still went to school every day without anyone knowing my position. It all got too much... My troubles outweighed my happiness and I became overwhelmed. I had to give up on my education because I could no longer do everything by myself... all I wanted was to complete Year 12.**  
(Male, 21 years)

### AREAS OF CONCERN

A young person’s life outcomes can be adversely affected by their care experience and the experience of leaving care itself. Therefore, while many care leavers displayed remarkable resilience in the face of adversity, they were more disadvantaged across most life domains than young people in the general population (i.e., in finding accommodation and employment, managing finances, maintaining family connections, and managing trauma-related mental health concerns). The key areas where those transitioning (including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people) felt changes could be made to improve the care system are shown in Table 1.

**They took my phone off me and I couldn't contact my family, so I ran away back to my family kind of like the Rabbit Proof Fence.**  
(Female, 19 years)



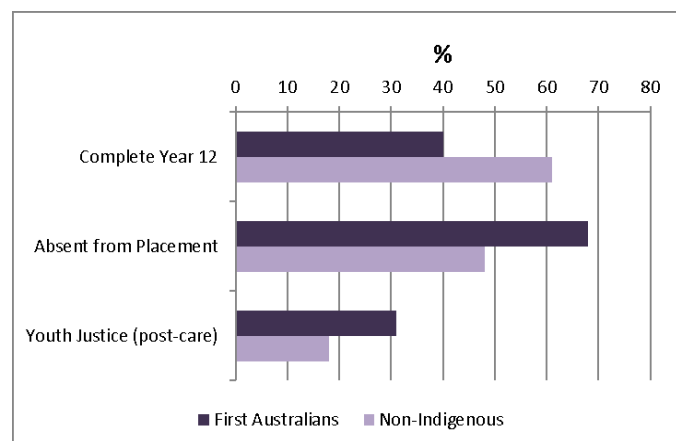
**Table 1. Key Areas for Improvement**

Issue	Number of Comments	% of Young People
More support for leaving care	64	29
Caseworker issues	41	19
Carer issues	34	15
Placement stability and safety	30	14
More involvement in decision-making	27	12
Better communication	17	8
Mental health support	16	7

\*Percentages based on the number of young people who made a comment (n= 221).

Overall, 29% of young people wanted more support for the process of transitioning, while 19% felt that if caseworkers did their job more effectively many of their problems would be resolved. Others hoped that carers could be better prepared for their essential role, that placements could be made safer and more stable, and that the young people themselves would be involved when decisions were made concerning their lives. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people were furthered disadvantaged or over-represented in the areas of education, placement instability, and youth justice compared with their non-Indigenous peers in the survey (see Figure 2):

**Figure 2. Measures on Which First Australian Children and Young People Achieved Poorer Outcomes than their Non-Indigenous Peers**



**Less likely to complete year 12  
(40% vs 61%)**

**More likely to be absent from placements  
(i.e., running away)  
(68% vs 48%)**

**More likely to be involved with youth justice  
(31% vs 18%)**

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

While prevention is always the primary goal of the child protection system, there are situations where young people do come into care. In these instances, it is important that young First Australians are placed according to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle and have the opportunity to be supported to maintain connection with their culture and cultural community (partnership, placement, participation, connection).

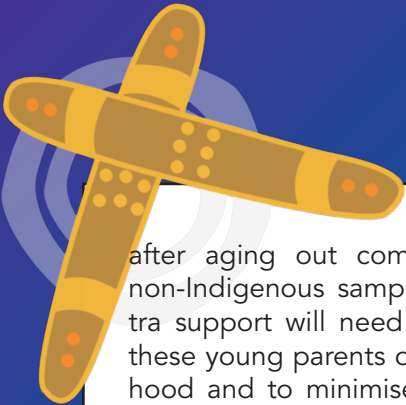
**[The need for] connection to siblings, family and culture.  
(Female, 22 years)**

Cultural support services can be critical in assisting young people to make these connections. Unfortunately, current data show that 80% of respondents did not attempt to access these services.

**80% of respondents did not utilise available cultural support.**

## PARENTAL SUPPORT

This report also showed that 23% of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people became parents while in-care or soon



after aging out compared with 12% of the non-Indigenous sample. This indicates that extra support will need to be provided to assist these young parents on their journey into adulthood and to minimise the likelihood that they might lose their children to the care system.

**23% of the First Australian young people in care (or transitioning from care) were embarking on the journey of parenthood.**

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Young people identified the need for better leaving care planning; culturally appropriate support staff (or staff training); thorough exploration of connection avenues to siblings, family, and culture; addressing youth justice and police involvement; practical support (i.e., with accommodation and budgeting); and a strengths-based therapeutic focus on the individual young person rather than a deficit focus on the welfare context.

**If the child has a culture there needs to be culturally appropriate staff and carers willing to provide the appropriate information...**  
**(Female, 23 years)**

## REFERENCES:

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018). Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/jun-2016>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2020). Child Protection Australia. 2018–2019. Canberra: AIHW.



Acknowledging the artist: Michelle Tyhuis is of Torres Strait Islander descent from Erub (Darnley) Island on her mother's side, and is of Dutch descent from Rijssen in the Netherlands on her father's side. Michelle has been practicing as a contemporary commission-based artist since 2001.



CREATE acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our company is located and where we conduct our business.

We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present, and emerging.

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