



Transitioning to Adulthood from Out-of-Home Care:

Independence or Interdependence?

Key Messages

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create
FOUNDATION



About CREATE Foundation

CREATE Foundation is the national consumer body representing the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. We provide programs and services to children and young people with a statutory care experience and develop policy and research to advocate for a better care system.

***Trigger warning: Some information presented in this report may be distressing for some readers.**

For a copy of the full report
*Transitioning to Adulthood from
Out-of-Home Care: Independence
or Interdependence?*
visit [www.create.org.au/
research-and-publications](http://www.create.org.au/research-and-publications)

CREATE acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's first people and traditional custodians of the lands on which our organisation is located. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders past, present, and emerging.

Background

It has been more than ten years since CREATE's first survey exploring young people's transition experiences of leaving care.

Our latest study is an extended version of the 2009 post-care survey allowing CREATE to follow up to see which areas are better, have remained the same, or may have worsened during this time.

We asked young people about key life areas including their care history and experience, education, health and life skills and their experience of leaving care.

This post-care key messages report provides a snapshot of the main findings found in the survey. Further details and information are available in our full report [Transitioning to Adulthood from Out-of-Home Care: Independence or Interdependence?](#)

Participants

CREATE spoke with 325 young people aged 18 to 25 across Australia who had had a care experience

- 57% did the survey online;
- 38% were interviewed by phone;
- 5% were interviewed in-person;
- 14% had a support person with them while completing the survey.

There is no clear pathway to leave care. There is no possible way to plan a secure, safe exit from care [when] you have no idea where you're going until your birthday! I have not been eligible to apply for accommodation through [service], and when I finally was allowed the week before I turned 18, I had to sit through three hours of interviews at three different agencies saying the same stuff and then ended in a refuge. I want to go to university in a few weeks but now I'm homeless.

Female, 18 years

Of the participants:

- Two thirds were female (67%)
- 22% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Fewer than 5% identified as having a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background
- One third identified as living with disability

Care History and Experience

A young person's care history and experience can influence their future life outcomes both during their transition from care and long after they have left.

Stable relationships and environments link to better outcomes for children and young people.

Experiences of instability such as changing placements or schools, or having multiple carers or caseworkers,

can have negative impacts. When these experiences combine with trauma, not having a say or being heard, caseworker issues, and running away, life becomes more complex for the young person.

Participants who lived in residential care or independently were less satisfied with their care journey than those living in kinship or foster care placements.

Young Persons' Issues

- ❑ Few young people were not consulted about any changes to their placement.
- ❑ Of those who attempted to leave their placement, 39% said either nothing changed when they returned, or there was a negative outcome.
- ❑ More than half commented negatively about moving from their placement on a regular basis which highlighted their experiences of disruption, instability and feelings of being unwanted or abandoned.

I had 50 placements over eight years and in no way did that create any stability. And I find it very difficult to accept any form of stability in my adult life today.

Female, 21 years

Recruitment process of caseworkers and carers; need people who do it for the right reasons and do it for empathy. Often your experience will come down to the worker you get.

Female, 22 years

PLACEMENT TYPE (WHILE IN CARE)

FOSTER CARE



RESIDENTIAL CARE



SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION / INDEPENDENT



70%
**NOT
CONSULTED
ABOUT
CHANGES**



33%
**ABSENT
FROM PLACEMENT
ONE WEEK
OR MORE**

Education

Education plays a key role in our life and can affect health, emotional wellbeing, independence, job satisfaction and financial stability.

Young people who experience stable placements and feel supported are better able to finish their schooling and achieve further training or qualifications.

Those who lived in kinship or foster care, or who experienced more stable placements were more likely to finish Year 12.

Common reasons for leaving school early included:

- finding schoolwork too difficult;
- feeling stressed because they were unsupported;
- experiencing changes to their placement or school; or
- because they were excluded, suspended or expelled.

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, I just kept going downhill. My life eventually fell in to turmoil. I wasn't able to keep on top of things. 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. It was really quite sad, because all I wanted was to complete year 12.

Male, 21 years

I'm blessed and very fortunate to have been given all the opportunities and support in my life so far, from my carers, relatives, and school communities. I can only hope that my future in studying and other areas of life can be as fruitful and fulfilling as it has been so far.

Male, 19 years

COMPLETED YEAR 12

57%



CONTINUING STUDY

(YEAR 12, TAFE, UNIVERSITY)

35%



SUPPORT REQUIRED WITH:

Schoolwork
and
homework



Mental
health



Financial Aid
(books, tuition)



Transport



CARERS AND FRIENDS provide
most support outside school

Health and Life Skills

Good health, positive life skills, and supportive social networks are vital for shaping our wellbeing, motivation and ability to thrive independently.

When young people's health and social networks are limited, or if they do not have access to the right supports or mentors to develop independent living skills, they may struggle physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially.

Young people rated their general health as “reasonably good”, but need:

- more help to find and access medical, dental or counselling services;
- more support to meet their basic health needs;
- more information and guidance about nutrition and exercise; and
- practical help to be able to get to appointments.

A big concern is the link between a young person's care experience and their potential involvement with the youth justice system.

Out of 305 respondents who commented about Youth Justice:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were more

involved with the justice system (31%) compared to non-Indigenous young people (18%).

- Those who lived in residential care or independently were more likely to be involved in youth justice (56% in each group) compared to those in home-based placements (25%).
- 14% felt unsupported during their youth-justice involvement.

I need a counsellor. I haven't eaten for the past four days. I only had a coffee. I just can't eat. I'm meant to go to the dentist every month for my braces, but I haven't been in over a year.

Female, 18 years

I think the workers from my placement and child safety could have been a bit more supportive as they just provided transport to and from my youth justice appointment. They never came in and supported me.

Female, 21 years

MENTAL HEALTH



High priority, but continuing support too costly

LIFE SKILLS



CAN HANDLE:
Looking after themselves
(preparing meals, maintaining a home)



NEED HELP:
Budgeting, making friends

INVOLVEMENT WITH YOUTH JUSTICE

(305 RESPONDENTS)

37% WHILE IN CARE

21% SINCE LEAVING CARE

56% IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

25% IN HOME-BASED PLACEMENTS



Leaving Care

Each leaving care experience is unique and is influenced by how prepared and supported a young person feels during their journey to independence.

The National Standards for out-of-home care states transitioning from care planning must begin at 15 years old. This process can have major consequences for a young person's future because it may affect their employment, education, housing, relationships, and both mental and physical health outcomes. The transition should be gradual and not based on a young person's 18th birthday.

Only 36% of respondents had a transition plan, and 39% had been quite involved in its preparation. Health, accommodation, setting up a home, and education were covered well in leaving care plans, however young people wanted more practical support, for example, mentoring where direct assistance could be provided.

Few respondents had accessed available support services during the transition process. One of the difficulties was finding out what

services are available. Housing and accommodation, and after care services were most used by care leavers.

Young people were looking to leave care to have freedom and control over their own lives. However, 40% of care leavers were sad about the loss of support from their caseworkers, carers, and social networks when they leave for independence. Young people were more likely to keep in regular contact with carers than with caseworkers.

It would have been good to have been taught life skills whilst being in care. Stuff like how it is important to wash your uniform regularly for work, and cooking skills, basic car care, general driving information.

Female, 24 years

PREPARATION



NO DISCUSSION ABOUT FUTURE

26%

HAD TRANSITION PLAN

36%

AFTER CARE SUPPORT

Friends were greatest support

Caseworker support critical

PERSONAL DOCUMENTS:

REQUESTED 66%

RECEIVED 42%

TILA:

AWARE OF 62%

APPLIED FOR 43%

TRANSITION EXPERIENCE

SATISFACTION RATING

45/100



Accommodation

A stable place to live long-term enables a young person to grow and pursue job opportunities, further education or training, or to start a family.

Finding and keeping housing is often a key challenge for young people after they leave care, particularly, if there is a lack of suitable preparation, support and financial assistance.

Of the young people who left their placement on turning 18, most moved into supported accommodation, or found their own place to live. However, 19% returned to birth family members, and 17% reported being homeless immediately after leaving care.

I had 12-month youth accommodation arranged where I rented a share house for 12 months with another teenager, and after that was up I found it extremely difficult to find other accommodation because no one wanted to lease accommodation to a teenager that had no parents to sign as a guarantor and especially a child in care that has come into the real estate with a support worker. It was always assumed that I would be wild and party, and trash the house. Which I never did at any stage.

Female, 23 years

Other Issues

- Most young people (88%) were renting or paying board
- 31% would benefit from financial help (e.g., employment assistance, higher Centrelink payments)

Accommodation

49%

**LEFT CARER'S
HOUSEHOLD
AT 18**

36%

**NOT TOLD
ABOUT
LEAVING**

19%

**HAD TIME
TO PREPARE**



WHERE LIVING AFTER CARE



22%

**Supported
Accommodation**



18%

Own House or Flat



19%

Birth Family Members



17%

Homeless (on leaving)

30%

HOMELESS

IN FIRST YEAR AFTER LEAVING CARE



Employment and Finances

An important part of the transition from care is to focus on helping young people become job ready and financially responsible.

Providing young people with the right support and opportunities is essential to develop life skills and get meaningful work experience that they can use in getting a job and in the workplace.

Young people are more likely to have a successful transition to independence and positive life outcomes if they

are employed, know how to manage their money and support themselves financially.

Young people rated finding a job as somewhat difficult. Only 20% had received support to find a job, which they found reasonably helpful.

There were mixed feelings on how young people rated their ability to manage their money. Many said that they needed more support on developing and implementing a budget.

Support them in getting a job as well as Centrelink, and help them manage spending money and saving money, and the difference between the two.

Male, 18 years

Financial counselling is fine—some people need it—but when you do not have enough money to pay bills, then it is not enough to have financial counselling. I pay my bills, but I do not eat.

Female, 24 years

TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON CENTRELINK



SUPPORT THEMSELVES



WORK PLUS CENTRELINK



NO REGULAR,
PAID
EMPLOYMENT
(SINCE LEAVING CARE)

30%



CONTINUING
STUDY

31%

Family Connection

Being able to build and maintain relationships through family connections is important for developing a young person's identity and sense of belonging.

After leaving care, these relationships become even more important in maintaining a young person's support network and sense of stability. They also influence whether a young person is able to return to their family home or continue to stay connected after leaving care.

Young people who become young parents may face further challenges in establishing these connections, particularly for those whose children were taken into care.

[The Department] was not helping. They were doing the opposite. They shouldn't use someone else's childhood against them to affect my parenting. They assume that I am my mother because of my mother's past. They haven't given me any family support, and it's not fair, and it's not understanding or nice. A "mums and baby" service, with a qualified social worker and nurses, around the clock, to tell them how to care for the baby, rather than take the kid. It's financially draining in the courts, and for the family and the services. Obviously, I am going to fight for my kid.

Female, 21 years

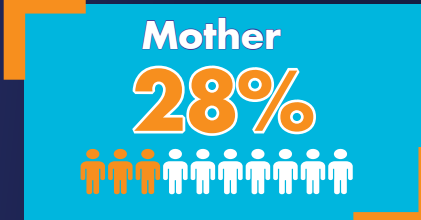
I would just like to have more contact with my little brother in foster care. I have him on Facebook but he doesn't reply. He did at one stage, but he doesn't anymore, so I don't know what is going on with him.

Female, 21 years

LIVING WITH A FAMILY MEMBER



WEEKLY CONTACT WITH FAMILY (LIVING SEPARATELY)



PARENTING



Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Care Leavers

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people continue to be over-represented in the care system.

In light of this, this survey has closely examined the outcomes for care leavers who identify as Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander and compared these results with non-Indigenous care leavers.

In this study, 72 young people identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

I wish I had more support. I was smart and the work was too easy for me, so the work wasn't a problem. I was bullied a lot growing up, so I became a bully to prevent me ever getting hurt again. In doing so it created many problems at school and I was getting suspended a lot and have been expelled from 5 schools. The principals always worked in conjunction with the counsellor and were left under the impression that I was troubled and should be free to break rules and walk out of class it was almost as if no one cared, which I suppose made me act out more, whilst crying for attention.

Aboriginal Male, 21 years

I always went to friends or somewhere else after school and I would stay for as long as I could before being found. I was over being picked up by different people that I didn't know after school, or catching a taxi by myself. I was scared of males so living with different ones all the time, or getting in a taxi driven by a male wasn't an option for me, but no one listened... I would have to go back to wherever they thought appropriate. Usually the police would take me and I would get in trouble but no one understood why I was doing what I was doing. I was always the one at fault.

Aboriginal Female, 23 years

There were **FOUR outcomes** where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people had **significantly different outcomes** when compared with non-Indigenous young people

Less likely to
complete Year 12

40% vs 61%

More likely to have
been **absent from**
their placement

68% vs 48%

More likely to have
been **involved**
with youth justice
after leaving care

31% vs 18%

More likely to
have been **young**
parents

23% vs 12%

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER YOUNG PEOPLE WHO
HAD NOT USED ANY CULTURALLY-
ALIGNED SUPPORT**

80%



Goals for the Future

Goals and aspirations are important for everyone to have in life. For young people in care in particular, having future goals enables them to work towards a life they hope to have after leaving care.

A goal can be based on personal growth, opportunities they would like to have, and hopes for their future life or the broader care population. These discussions should occur during leaving-care planning which usually begins at 15 years old. For a young person's plan to be accurate and useful for their life after care, it must be regularly reviewed to reflect any changes to their goals or wishes.

The top three goals young people in this study wanted were:

1. Get a job
2. Continue with their education
3. Set up their own home.

Other common goals included starting a family, travelling, getting a driver's license and forming friendships.

Young people also expressed their hopes for the care system:

- to be fixed (32%)
- to show more concern for young people and to involve them in decision-making (19%), and
- to provide better leaving-care support (12%).

Communication with the young people is really important, it is their life so allow them to be more involved. The caseworkers and carers should be actively seeking out their involvement. Workers should be bringing up conversations with children and young people about their goals and dreams [and] talking to them about how they can achieve it, at the same time letting the young person know it's not the end of the world if they don't reach all their goals in five years.

Female, 24 years

Then and Now: What has happened in the last ten years?

In the last ten years, many Royal Commissions, inquiries and changes to child protection systems across Australia have occurred in attempts to achieve better outcomes for children and young people in care.

This study provided an opportunity to compare care-leaving experiences in

2009 with 2019 to see whether there have been any improvements.

Across the board, most outcomes were consistently poor; however, there were five main positive changes and one negative change.

These were:

- ❑ **More young people were involved in the developing their leaving care plan**
- ❑ **More care leavers had completed Year 12**
- ❑ **More care leavers were engaged in study**
- ❑ **More care leavers were working part-time**
- ❑ **Fewer young people reported difficulties in obtaining accommodation**
- ❑ **More care leavers were involved with youth justice**

Why is Leaving Care an Issue?

It is time to rethink the idea of “leaving care”.

The findings of this study and the consistently poor outcomes for care leavers globally, show that the current way of thinking is not working.

Leaving care continues to have overwhelmingly negative impacts – for those young people leaving care and on the broader community.

While statutory orders expire at 18 years, the care provided does not have to end.

Young people who have been in the care system are among the most

vulnerable in our community. It is not acceptable that they are expected to be fully independent as soon as they turn 18. They should continue to have support as long as they need it.

A forced transition brings anxiety and uncertainty. Changing our thinking would help to achieve stability, less anxiety, and enable young people to achieve their aspirations in their own time.

It is everyone’s responsibility to ensure that those brought into state care as children do not feel abandoned by their communities as they emerge into adulthood.

For more information:

We spoke to young people about their experiences leaving care. Scan here to listen to their stories, views and experiences in leaving the care system. For more information and to read the full report head to www.create.org.au/research-and-publications





***There is always room
for improvement.
And never forget that
kids are not numbers!
We are people, not
data... Get to know
us personally, cause
reading our file just
doesn't cut it!***

Male, 21 years





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