

CREATE's Position

Young people preparing to transition into independence from within the care system are among the most vulnerable groups in our society. This transition is a critical and challenging time for young people.

All young people aging out of care in every jurisdiction in Australia are required to have a plan for their future that they have been involved in developing to meet their needs. A clear and well-planned transition process is critical for increasing the likelihood of successfully leaving the out-of-home care system, and also for achieving long-term positive outcomes for young people across all developmental domains once they have transitioned from care.

A key area that transition plans should address is future accommodation for the young person. CREATE advocates for all jurisdictions to adopt consistent support for young people when finding somewhere safe and secure to live after turning 18, whether that be remaining with a carer, in supported housing, or employing a model such as the *Staying Close Service* (UK) to assist those transitioning out of residential care.

Another support for young people aging out of the care system that has been shown nationally and internationally to be effective for achieving a successful transition is access to some form of mentor to support young people in their journey to independence. Such a program should operate in Australia

Young people transitioning should be guaranteed availability of support services until age 25 and should receive tailored help to access services. Transition plans need to include an assessment of need, and mentors can ensure the required assistance is obtained. TILA, provided by the Commonwealth government, is an important resource; its accessibility needs to be simplified (with more responsibility given to the young person), and its amount increased from the 2009 level (\$1500).

Evidence

- Transition to independence is a period of multiple changes for your people from out-of-home care (Munro & Simkiss, 2020) requiring varied support.
- Poor outcomes have been observed consistently for young people transitioning to independence from out-of-home care (Bendeck & Moore, 2022; Stein & Wade, 2021). McDowall (2020) showed that few improvements have been achieved for those

transitioning in Australia over the last 10 years in their preparation for transitioning, finding suitable accommodation, support from caseworkers, employment status, and accessing personal records. Some advances were achieved in education, but still only 57% of respondents completed year 12.

- Regarding transition planning, CREATE's national survey of out-of-home care (McDowall, 2018) reported that 24% of 15–17-year-olds knew about having a plan for their future, and 64% indicated they felt adequately prepared for living independently. These figures compare with 43% and 64% reported in the same year by AIHW (2022). Young people confirm that transitions are not well planned.
- Finding suitable, stable accommodation is an essential stage in a successful transition. Various workers (e.g., Chavulak & Mendes, 2021) have reviewed housing pathways and strategies government could pursue in providing affordable housing for those moving to adulthood from care. Suggestions also included extended support for care placements until the age of 21 (see *CREATE Position Paper: Extending Care to 21*).
- First Nations young people in Australia are more likely to experience homelessness along with other challenges. More culturally appropriate housing services (such as a *Secure Tenancy Guarantee Scheme*) built on enhanced cultural and kinship connections are required (Jau et al., 2022).
- An issue highlighted by Bollinger and Mendes (2021) concerns young people transitioning out of residential care; they are at particular risk in most states in Australia where they are not able to stay in their care placement. These young people could be assisted through a program such as "*Staying Close*" (UK) where they are found accommodation near their care placement so that they have a safe base and their social networks are not disrupted, thereby improving their outcomes in education, employment, and general well-being.
- Young people transitioning benefit universally from supporting relationships with trusted individuals (Katz & Geiger, 2019). Such relationships have been formalised in the UK through the Personal Adviser program that has been so successful it now has been extended to all aging out of care until the age of 25 (Department for Education UK, 2018). Similar mentoring programs have been successfully trialled in Australia (Purtell & Mendes, 2016).

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- The *Transition to Independent Living Allowance* (TILA) is a support provided by the Commonwealth government for those transitioning. The amount available (\$1500.00) has not changed for over 10 years, and reviews show that the scheme is seriously undersubscribed and that access needs to be simplified (Durham & Forace, 2015).
- Young people who are becoming independent need access to a range of support services, not only with housing, but also with their continuing education, employment, and health (particularly mental health) (Bendeck & Moore, 2022). Outcomes can be improved by focusing on “resilience-enabling environments and, crucially, emotionally supportive networks” (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021).

Actions

1. All Governments throughout Australia should provide consistent support for young people transitioning from care until age 25, covering finances, education, training, employment, and social support. with accommodation assistance available until 21 (either in prior placements or for independent living)
2. All state and territory governments must give special consideration to the needs of those transitioning from residential placements, and of First Nations young people, by exploring innovations such as the “*Staying Close*” scheme (UK) and the *Secure Tenancy Guarantee*.
3. Ensure that the development of transition plans involves the young people themselves, and that such plans are relevant to the young person’s needs by addressing housing, finances family contact, and emotional/cultural support.
4. Extend investment in social and support networks by developing a mentor scheme (such as the Personal Adviser model, UK) to connect the young person with caring and trusted people who can provide a continuity of care throughout the young person’s daily life after turning 18 (and until at least 25).
5. Create more culturally appropriate services built on enhanced cultural and kinship connections for First Nations young people with a care experience. Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations (ACCOs) that are now assuming more responsibility for managing care placements for First Nations children will need to be resourced and funded to provide post-care support as well.

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