

Extended Support

In Western Australia

How can a young person with a care experience be better supported during their transition to adulthood?

For the average young person living with their family, the notion of losing or “leaving care” on their eighteenth birthday is untenable—unless of course it is their choice to do so. Yet, for young people with an out-of-home care experience it is expected.

This consultation, involving 28 young people in OOHC in WA, asked young people between the ages of 14–19 to share their thoughts on what transitioning from care meant to them. This included topics such as transition planning; readiness to “leave care”; likelihood of staying or returning to care; levels of confidence in attaining life skills and achieving life goals; benefits of extended support; challenges associated with extended support; and essential support needs for making informed decisions.

18.5%

had no one discuss with them what would happen after 18

88%

appreciated being able to return to carers as helpful

27%

were unsure of where they would go when care orders expire

56%

said there should be no age limit to receiving care



I don't want to but I think they might put me there. For me, it's a big step up. I already find it nerve racking not living with family. Moving out in a year or two is too much so I try not to think about it. (Female, 16 years)

It doesn't seem very realistic. I probably wouldn't be able to live completely independently. (Male, 15 years)

They could help me. It would give me a few more years to help me figure out what I want to do. (Female, 15 years)

I've been in 70 or 85 placements in the entire time I was in care. It's pretty hard to talk about staying with a carer until 21. If I had had a stable carer, I might think differently ... Right now, I can't wait to get out of the system and live on my own. (Female, 17 years)

You could be okay but then need help. I think it shouldn't matter what age you are, everyone should get support no matter what. (Female, 17 years)

When it comes to independence, it would be good to rip the band-aid off quickly. I'd like to get over with I guess. (Male, 15 years)

I personally know how hard it is to live alone and how much support even I need and so I feel like it would be a lot nicer to have that back-up support ... (Female, 17 years)



Key Messages

- When making decisions about living arrangements, young people nominated close personal relationships (70%); supportive departmental workers (70%); other support services such as Transitional Support Services, CREATE resources; and the Department of Housing (40%); school networks and programs (25%); and mental health professionals (15%) as key avenues of support.
- Developing support networks; housekeeping; and accessing transport and health care were life skills that respondents displayed confidence in. However, finding suitable accommodation, managing money, and getting a job displayed much lower levels of confidence.
- Young people believed they were more likely to succeed in education/training; finding a suitable place to live; and securing a job by the age of 21, if they stayed with a carer.
- Benefits of staying with a carer until 21 included having a stable place to live, with practical, ongoing support (81.8%); relational stability and continuity of care (68.2%); better emotional health and feeling loved, secure, and happy (31.8%); more opportunities to achieve goals such as going to university or saving money (31.8%); and the luxury of “time” to gradually develop a pathway to independence (22.7%).
- The number one reason why young people reported they might be reluctant to stay in an extended support situation was loss of autonomy/lack of privacy (59%). Also, among their concerns, though to a lesser degree, was relationship conflict (23.5%); becoming too dependent on others (23.5%); and carers not being available to continue with extended support (11.8%).

“ Having people around me who are good with money ... like them saving and me seeing their successes with saving. [And] maybe having people around ... and being able to see them do housekeeping (Female, 16 years)

I would have someone who I know really well who would be able to help me. It would be a familiar setting where I feel quite comfortable. If I had to live independently, I might be preoccupied with studying so it would be easier not to have to worry about paying rent or anything like that. (Male, 15 years)

Actions

- Enshrine extended support practice in leaving care law and ensure programs are inclusive and flexible.
- Provide adequate allocation of financial resources.
- Create a robust, whole systems approach to extended care that is supported by ongoing services and mandatory transition plans.
- Implement life skills training and guided practice opportunities.
- Include young people in the reviewing and designing of guidelines for extended support.

Consultation
completed in 2021