

GO YOUR OWN WAY

CREATE's resource for young people transitioning from care in Australia: An evaluation

Young Person REPORT

INSIDE

How useful did young people find the GYOW Kit?

Background

What is an evaluation and why did CREATE do one?

Whenever organisations develop something new that is designed to help other people, it is really important that we look at it to see how helpful it really is; this is called an evaluation. CREATE is evaluating our *Go Your Own Way* (the Kit) which was developed to assist young people transitioning from care to independence. The Kit had a bunch of stuff in it including a workbook with checklists for planning, a USB, journal, and compendium, and it was all put together in a really cool bag. CREATE is doing the evaluation to see how useful it was for young people leaving care, and what could be done to make it a better resource in the future.

To do this, CREATE asked almost 400 young people across Australia what they thought about the Kits. This special Report shares some of their responses and the information we collected. Dr Joseph McDowall, who has done loads of research with CREATE, conducted the evaluation (with the help of CREATE staff in all states and territories) and wrote the main report.

How did CREATE do the evaluation?

In 2013, CREATE responded to an initiative proposed in the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children regarding support for young people leaving care. The Kit was developed by CREATE after careful consultation with young people about the different things they would find most useful in a resource like this. The Kits were funded by all state and territory governments and, when developed, were sent to young people who turned 17 years in 2014.

CREATE had a lot of challenges getting information about young people who had received the Kits and it was a really complex process. The evaluation started in February 2016 and took place with young people about six to 12 months after they had left care.

Why did CREATE develop the *Go Your Own Way* Kit as a resource for young people?

At some point in their lives, young people will leave the care of their parents. Often, many years of preparation on the part of parents goes into ensuring that their children

are ready and have the skills to become independent. Many of these young people return home at least once after leaving, and others will require ongoing support and help. This assistance can range from simple advice, regular contact, and occasional financial assistance through to significant life-skills development and support. This can be an exciting time for young people and represents a significant life event for them.

For children and young people leaving care, this level of ongoing support is often not an option available to them. Young people in care, when they reach 18 years,

effectively “age out” of the child protection system that previously supported them. Careful planning should occur to assist and prepare them for this change; however, too often, this is not enough and in many instances, does not occur.

On top of this, children and young people in care, by the very fact of being removed from their birth family, will most likely have experienced some level of trauma that may remain unresolved for many years. They may have experienced isolation from community and family and experience reduced opportunities from being in care.

Results from CREATE's evaluation: What we found...

1961  

Kits were sent out to young people in care across Australia

young people participated in the evaluation about the usefulness of the Kits:

369



only **52%**

said they had received a Kit;



the rest had not

It is in this context that CREATE developed the Kits to assist young people to plan their transition to independence. It covers a range of practical areas that they would need to consider in order to make what could be a difficult time of transition just a little smoother for them.

There were differences between states and territories with regard to who got a Kit, with more than 50% of young people in New South Wales and Queensland receiving one, but fewer than 50% in Victoria and Western Australia.

While one quarter of young people reported having no concerns about leaving care, other young people noted a number of worries that troubled them when leaving care including:

- 18% noted that their primary concern was related to a lack of understanding about financial issues;
- 14% were concerned about housing and where they would live and how to access accommodation;
- 7% were concerned about loneliness; and
- 7% were concerned about their self-maintenance and life skills.

This research indicates that about half of the young people leaving care are not confident about dealing

with financial issues or finding accommodation. In their view, they face deep uncertainty about what the future holds for them. Young people summed up these concerns when they stated:

Leaving care is a very anxious time for young people. Young people need to have all the help they can get. There are many gaps in services; caseworkers appear not to help as much as they can. Services need to be improved and support should be increased.

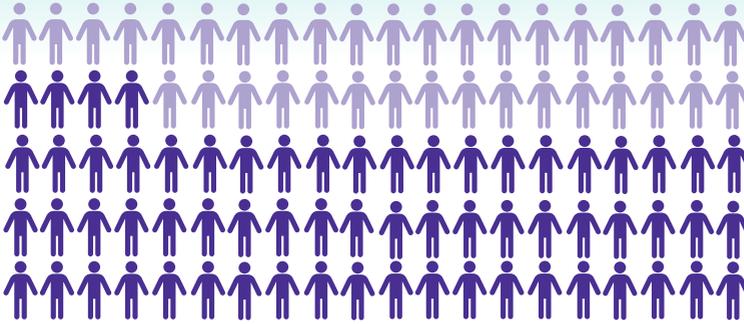
They need to support us more when we turn 18. I had nowhere to go and no one to turn to and I came out of jail – not “in care,” so had no support.

...Leaving care is one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do. Personally, it was very difficult learning to live alone, so I was very lonely. It is really hard to do it alone. I contacted CREATE as a start...

A lot of the above concerns are similar to issues raised by young people leaving their parental care. However, the difference is that those young people are far more likely to have well established and accessible “leaving home” support systems where as young people leaving statutory care often do not have these supports in place.

A real concern for CREATE is that, overall, 64% of the group of young people who left care in 2015 were not locatable. This is not the same as the young people choosing not to engage.

These young people could not be found, and no one was able to provide information on their whereabouts.



64%

Young people who could not be found

Challenges

There were challenges along the way

CREATE experienced significant issues, delays, and inconsistencies in relation to being able to distribute Kits to young people. Some states and territories could not provide CREATE with any contact details for young people, and so CREATE could not control distribution. Others provided details for all young people, but did not identify who received a Kit.

These issues led to a flawed distribution process. While most states and territories say that support is provided to young people until the age of 21 years, and in some cases to 25 years, the "state" does not follow-up young care-leavers to see what their needs are. It is expected that the young people will seek out support if they need it, which can be difficult.

What young people thought of the **Go Your Own Way Kits**

Despite these challenges, the *Go Your Own Way* evaluation demonstrated that the Kits were an effective and useful resource for young people preparing to leave care. CREATE was able to remain in contact with many young people through its own database of clubCREATE members and was able to rely on this in order to contact young people for the evaluation.

So, were there any differences between the experiences of young people who received a Kit, and those who didn't? ***Well, basically yes!*** When we analysed all the numbers, we saw that more of the young people who received a Kit had a transition plan than did those without the Kit. Because of this, they were better prepared for leaving care.

Unfortunately, there are still many young people leaving care without a plan. However, based on what young people said, receiving a Kit helped planning, and led to more face-to-face meetings with caseworkers. While overall, only 42% of young people had a transition plan, 47% of those who received a Kit were in this group compared with 34% of those who didn't get a Kit.

This shows that having a Kit made a big difference to planning for leaving care.

What did young people like about the *Go Your Own Way* Kit?

The Kit contained loads of stuff that young people said was useful, including:

- a workbook;
- a 2GB USB;
- a Journal;
- a Compendium; and
- a Satchel

Of the comments received (from 157 young people) about the Kits, almost half (49%) saw it as useful and had no suggestions for improvements.

No you don't need to improve on anything, it's fantastic.

No. It was great. Read from cover to cover while in rehab. It was motivating for me to focus on achieving something when I got out.

What could make the Kits better?

The other half of the comments did cover ideas that might make the Kit better:

- 12% wanted someone to explain to them what the Kit was for;
- 11 % wanted more fun stuff in the Kit; and
- 9% wanted more storage space in the USB that was included.

When asked to rate the Kit's usefulness as an aid to planning, 28% found it "Quite" or "Very" useful, while another 34% said it was at least "Somewhat" useful. Some young people said that they did not know what to do with the Kits and others found the information overwhelming.

This suggests that some young people were simply given the Kit without any explanation or support. This was not CREATE's aim; CREATE saw the Kits as a way for caseworkers and support people to start having conversations with young people around leaving care and what might be involved in this process. It was an opportunity to start to discuss the young person's needs and develop a leaving care plan.

Add something a bit more exciting, instead of just receiving it and it's full of paperwork; have something fun or inspirational – like a quote of something... something to make you realise that transition is not that scary, maybe something from someone a bit older with care experience?

47%  
of those young people who got a Kit had a Leaving Care Plan

34%  
of those who didn't get a Kit had a Plan.

"I wasn't expecting it. It gave me an idea of what to do and how to go about independence, and what I should keep an eye out for, financially and getting a job."



Transition planning:

Vital for getting ready to Go Your Own Way

Almost half of the young people (49%) had seen their caseworker for support with leaving care between one and four times; however, 20% had not seen their caseworker at all.

Young people told us that there were loads of different people who they asked for support and assistance. The main support came from the young person's carer, followed closely by their caseworker (see Table 1).

Sadly, almost half (47%) said that they had no one to talk to about transitioning out of care. Others pointed out how difficult it was getting in touch with their caseworkers, often due to how busy their caseworkers are.

More meetings, more advice, more warning on how hard it would be to leave care. Advise on housing issues, such as paying a bond.

Attend the appointments she set for us instead of cancelling them, and actually following through on what was recommended.

Table 1: Who Young People Spoke to About Their Go Your Own Way Kits

Person	Number	%*
Carer	48	26
Caseworker	45	25
Another worker	8	4
TFC worker	3	2
Indigenous community member	4	2
Birth parents	5	3
Sister / Brother	10	5
Other family member	11	6
Friends	8	4
Other	14	8
No one	87	47

*Percentages based on n = 184, the number of those receiving a GYOW Kit who provided comments. Multiple choices were allowed.

Where do young people go for support?

As part of this evaluation, young people were asked about where they get support for different things they need help with when leaving care. Young people showed clear differences in who they identify as being able to assist them with particular areas. Young people went to agencies and organisations

for help with housing, education, getting a job, and money. But, if they wanted assistance with life skills or getting personal documents, they would go to particular people they knew for help. When it came to family contact, young people showed that they felt they needed to play a big role and also indicated that they may ask a particular person to help with this important area (see Figure 1).

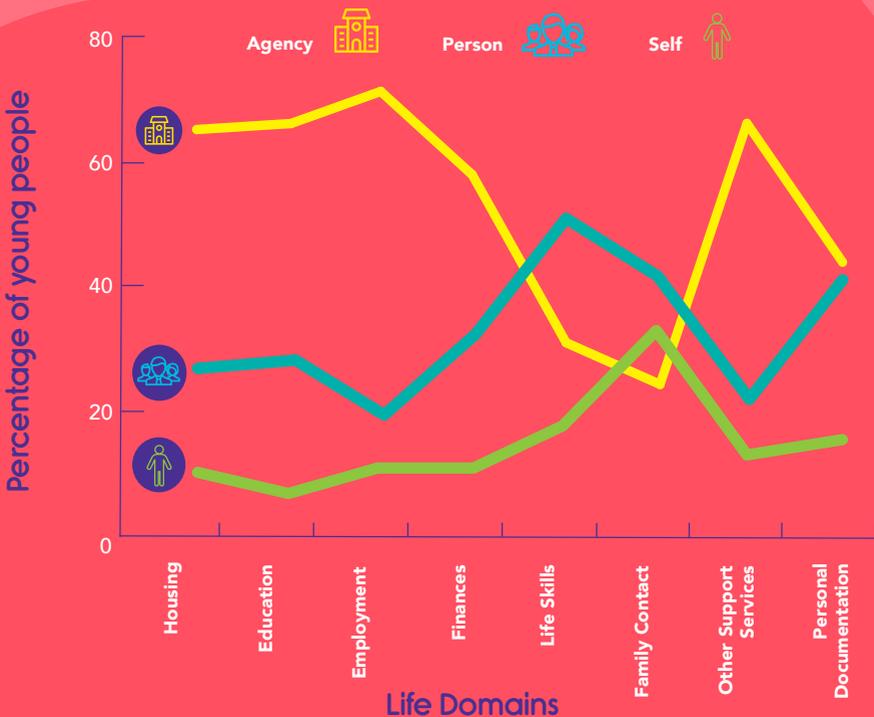


Figure 1: Percentages of young people who indicated they would seek support from specific agencies/organisations, specific people, or would rely on themselves to obtain assistance with life domains.

In addition, young people also noted that they found support with numerous services, including CREATE, which they cited as being helpful for them throughout their transition.

What could caseworkers do better?

Although 38% of young people had no comment when they were asked what caseworkers could have done to improve the planning process, others shared many views on where improvements could be made. Overall, 152 young people commented on 184 different issues. It was great to see that 38% of these responses were that young people said that their treatment while leaving care was fine.

No, she did everything she could, and above!

Other young people were concerned about “general practice” issues, with 42% saying that caseworkers needed to improve in a lot of areas. These included things like returning phone calls; taking more time with young people; involving young people more in meetings; better explanation of options for young people in easy to understand language; keeping appointments, and just spending time talking to young people (building rapport).

Some young people said that they needed help with important case issues, including finding accommodation, finances, study courses, and getting a driver’s license. Another area that young people provided feedback on was the child protection system as a whole, including the importance of having a caseworker at all, and particularly having the same caseworker for a long time; and continuing to support young people over the age of 18 years.

Talk to me more. Prepare me better for the place I live in now. Tell me more about leaving care; should have given me more time, not just a month before my birthday. I would have liked the planning to start sooner.

Table 2 shows what young people said was important for caseworkers to improve their practice.

It was great to see that 38% of these responses were that young people said that their treatment while leaving care was fine.

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Young People Who Suggested the Various Improvements to Caseworker Behaviour Supporting Planning

Improvement	Issue	Number	%
Nothing		69	38
Practice	Involve young people more	19	10
	Communicate in simple language/explain options	16	9
	Start planning earlier	9	5
	Take too long to respond	7	4
	Do what supposed to do	7	4
	Set realistic goals	5	3
	Attend meetings/return calls	4	2
	Build relationships	4	2
	Involve carer more	4	2
	Explain TILA	1	1
	Show respect	1	1
Assistance	Help with accommodation	7	4
	Help with driver's licence	4	2
	Help with education	3	2
	Help with finances	2	1
	Help with documentation	2	1
Systemic	Have a caseworker	6	3
	Continuity of caseworkers	6	3
	Continue support beyond 18 years	2	1
Leave alone		6	3

Outcomes for Young People Leaving Care

Financial support after leaving care

As well as finding somewhere suitable to live after aging out of care, knowing how to support themselves financially, and how to manage their money, are other vital abilities young people must have if they are to transition successfully.

CREATE's evaluation showed that only 25% were already employed, with a job or an apprenticeship. A substantial 45% were receiving or hoping to get youth allowance from Centrelink and a further 5% were hoping to receive a Centrelink top up for their part-time income as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Percentage of young people who reported accessing the specified financial supports post-care.

Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)

Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) is money that the Commonwealth Government provides to support young people leaving care, and it is worth up to \$1500. When young people were asked about their access to TILA, 43% said they had already applied for this support. However, 57% had not, or did not even know what TILA was.

This means it is really important that young people have someone to talk to who can tell them what they are entitled to and how to get support.

Where are young people living after they leave care?

Where young people are going to live when they leave care was a big issue. There was some uncertainty about accommodation, and what they were going to do. Whilst there are quite a few options for young people leaving care, the biggest group (21%) of young people remained with their carer, while 27% lived with relatives (see Figure 3). Males were more likely to stay with carers while females were more likely to be living with their partners.

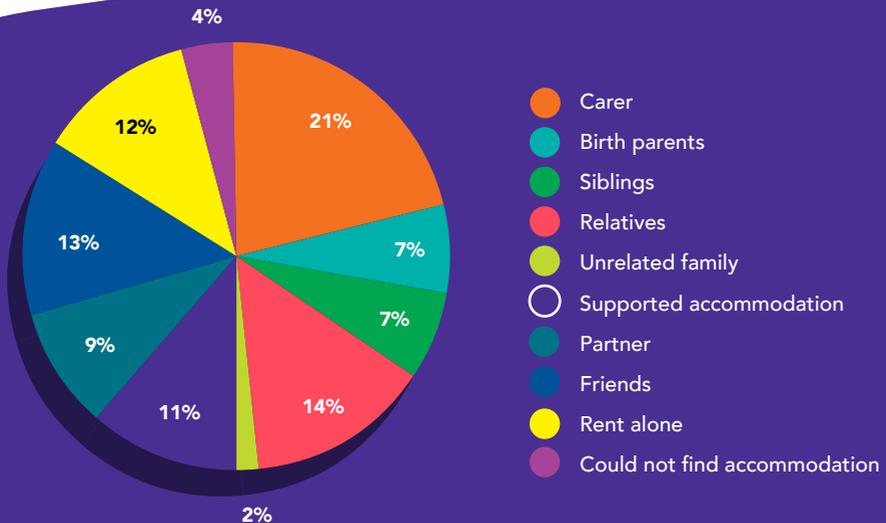


Figure 3: Overall percentage of young people who reported living in the various conditions post-care.

Education levels of young people who have left care

One of the really good things we found in the evaluation was that more young people had completed up to grade 12 level of education (47%) compared with 35% in the *CREATE Transitioning From Care Report Card* we did in 2009. Seventy-one per cent indicated that they intended to continue their education, many with the support of Centrelink's Youth Allowance. The majority of young people (34%) wished to study at TAFE while 20% planned to undertake a university degree (see Table 3).



Table 3: Number and Percentage of Young People Who Intended to Continue Their Education Undertaking the Specified Programs

Study Area	Number	%
Complete secondary school	18	5
Trade apprenticeship	37	10
TAFE Certificate	126	34
University under graduate program	74	20
Online course	5	1
Undecided/No response	109	30
Total	369	100

Recommendations

CREATE's recommendations from the evaluation

1. Given the positive outcomes for young people transitioning from care that resulted from the possession of a Kit, CREATE believes that the Kits should continue to be provided to young people leaving care. CREATE believes that they could be given to young people whenever appropriate within the 15–17 year age range. Early distribution of the Kits would help to extend the time available to caseworkers and young people to start talking and developing leaving-care plans.
2. CREATE believes a more targeted distribution of the Kits should be implemented. The continued contribution of governments to the production of the Kits is welcomed, however there is a need for a more organised distribution to ensure that all eligible young people receive them. This will involve governments sharing non-sensitive contact details with the distributing agencies, and developing innovative methods for ensuring a Kit reaches each eligible young person.
3. It is essential that, after the Kits have been distributed, follow-up contact is made with the young people who received them within one month to explain the contents of the Kit and how it can be used. Governments, non-government organisations, and caseworkers must work together to ensure that young people understand the value of the Kit in planning for transitioning from care.
4. CREATE recommends reviewing the use of the Kit's resources six months after distribution. This can be done through a phone call or text to touch base with the young people and to enquire about their progress with transition planning.
5. CREATE intends to include information about availability and use of the Kits in the training which is conducted in each state and territory with child protection staff. The discussions will focus on the value of this resource in helping to enhance the conversations between caseworkers and young people in the production of transition plans.

6. Because of the collaborative nature of this project, governments are encouraged to promote the use of the Kits within child protection departments using their already established communication systems.
7. CREATE will continue to review and update the Kit incorporating recommendations contained in this report where relevant.

In conducting this evaluation CREATE has gained lots of information and has reviewed Australian and International literature. Based on this, CREATE recommends that all governments (state, territory, and Commonwealth) should get together to:

8. Consider extending the age at which young people leave care up to 21 years across all of Australia. This would allow the leaving care process to be more gradual and allow more time for discussions and planning to occur. Such changes would help to ensure that young people in care receive similar treatment to young people in the general population where their parents continue to support them into their 20s.

9. Develop a national database similar to the *National Youth in Transition Database* that operates in United States of America. This database allows the outcomes for young people to be monitored after they leave care, and would allow for a better understanding of their ongoing needs, so that appropriate supports can be put in place; and
10. Establish a system of continuing support for care leavers, similar to the effective Personal Advisors program in the United Kingdom, and programs already trialed in Australia. These programs provide individual mentoring for young people who have transitioned to help address any of their ongoing needs. The area of Australia the young person lives in will determine the level of ongoing support, and how long it can be maintained. Mentors can be specialist paid staff or significant people (who receive training) from the young person's own social network.

Key Findings

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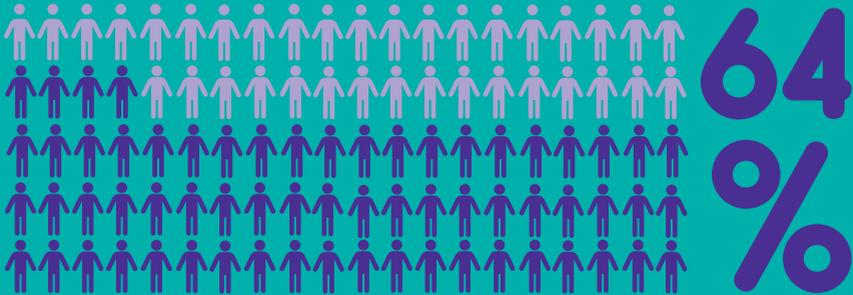
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Young people who had and had not applied for TILA



Young people who could not be found

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CREATE Foundation is the national peak consumer body for children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. We represent the voices of over 43,000 children and young people currently in care, and those who have transitioned from care up to the age of 25. Our vision is that all children and young people with a care experience reach their full potential. Our mission is to create a better life for children and young people in care.



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1800 655 105 is a free-call number that young people in care and their carers can use. However, there may be fees charged if calling from a mobile.